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ASTON UNIVERSITY

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A COLLECTIVIST HIGH POWER DISTANCE
CULTURE**

OLUWASANMI ADEGBAJU
Doctor of Philosophy

October 2017

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Oluwasanmi Adegbaaju asserts his moral right to be identified as the author of this thesis

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THESIS SUMMARY

Most of the theoretical conclusions on employee engagement (EE) emerge from research conducted in the West, where the national culture (NC) is characterised by lower power distance and individualism. It is imperative to extend the literature to accommodate more findings from different context where little research has been done (Bailey et al., 2017). In response to the call, this research sets out to explore nature of EE in an African context where the NC is mainly characterised by high power distance and collectivism.

Firstly, this research attempts to answer whether NC influences organisational culture (OC); and if it does, to what extent does NC influences OC? The question is important; if NC does not influence OC, then relevant OC models relating to EE developed in the West can be directly implemented in organisations of different cultural context. Secondly, this study seeks to understand the influence of leadership in the relationship between NC and EE. Thirdly, this research attempts to understand extent to which organisational interventions reduce aspect of the NC that impedes emergence of intended OC, which in turn influences EE.

Following qualitative methodology, participant observation and semi-structured interview are used to collect data in two insurance companies in Nigeria, with these organisations theoretically rendering themselves suitable for comparative case study.

The research argues a constant and natural flux of national cultural elements to establish themselves in every social structure and interaction. However, the extent to which NC influences OC is dependent on the awareness level of top management in knowing the aspects of NC that can help to enhance or impede development of the intended OC. Through reciprocation of relevant behaviours, leadership reduces the influence of high power distance values on EE. The cumulative effects of certain interventions reduce high power distance while increase collectivist values of NC in the organisations.

Key words: Employee Engagement, National Culture, Power Distance, Collectivism

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“Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be shaken but endures forever” Psalm 125: 1

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale for the Research

In most organisations, major decisions are made at the upper echelon of organisation; however, the information needed for the decision making, issues that lead to the decisions and successful implementation of the decisions do not reside at the top level of the organisation. It takes successful interdependent chains of roles and responsibilities for an organisation to remain in existence. While top executives keep an oversight of wide range of organisational activities, the lower employees turn the screws, meet the customers more, keep ears on the ground, provide environmental intelligence and feed back to the managers on potential issues or opportunities for the organisation; thus, the essence of effective employee engagement in organisations.

Effective cost positioning and product differentiation can be sources of an organisation's competitive advantage (Porter, 1985); however, it is people that determine the organisation's efficiency and come up with innovative ways to help their company differentiate products and services. Besides, the study of employee engagement becomes even more relevant in the time when there is significant decline in engaged employees across the world (Shuck et al., 2011). According to Gallup (2017), 66% of employees in the United States are disengaged in their work while the figure is 85% worldwide. Mapping the cost of disengaged employees as at 2013, it is estimated that employee disengagement in United States alone costs between U.S. \$450 billion to \$550 billion in lost productivity per year (Sorenson and Garman, 2013). Moreover, employee engagement is argued to be a key determinant of individual and organisational performance (Macey et al., 2009; Mone and London, 2010); engaged employees are able to identify threats and opportunities for their organisations (Gast

and Zannini, 2012); and help in shaping plausible meanings of strategic issues through collective sensemaking (Sonenshein and Dholakia, 2012).

Based on its early conceptualisation, employee engagement is defined as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 694). Afterwards, there have been several definitions of the concept in relation to burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 1997), satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002), job demands and resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008) and social exchanges (Saks, 2006). Job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and intention to quit are the consequences of employee engagement. On the other hand, job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice and distributive justice have been highlighted in the literature as the antecedents of employee engagement (Saks, 2006).

While the antecedents of employee engagement have been identified, the context in which they are enabled have largely been ignored (Truss et al. 2013; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Keenoy, 2014). It is proposed that “we need to pay more attention to the broader contextual organizational factors that impact on engagement” (Bakker et al., 2011: 23). It is further argued that “the focus on antecedents in isolation of these contexts has generally obscured the degree to which management’s ability to deliver engagement is influenced by a number of contingent factors” (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013: 2671). Considering that employees see their relationships with the organisation through their managers and superiors, the role of leadership on employee engagement becomes very important. As a result, it is proposed that “we need to more fully understand the influence that transformational and empowering leadership has on engagement” (Bakker et al., 2011: 23). Besides, in relation to methodological approach, extant literature on employee engagement has been mainly quantitative; accordingly, “much of the literature has focused on testing psychological models” (Bailey et al., 2015:

46) rather conducting exploratory studies to uncover insights that are difficult to express in statistical data but can be observed in implicit actions and interactions of the employees and their managers.

1.2 National culture as a Contextual Factor

A wider contextual factor on employee engagement is the potential influence of national culture. Countries and regions have different cultures as a result of their identity, values and institutions (Hofstede, 2010). Based on these differences, Hofstede (2010) highlights dimensions at which national culture is studied: power distance, individualism/collectivism, femininity/masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-/short-term orientation, and indulgence/restraint. While other dimensions are important, the more striking dimensions are power distance and individualism/collectivism as these are highly related (Hofstede, 2010). Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful of organisations accept unequal distribution of power in their communities; individualism is the extent at which each individual acts in their own interest while collectivism is the extent at which individuals are integrated into cohesive in-groups (Hofstede, 2010). Furthermore, cultural research acknowledges Western countries to be characterised by low power distance and individualism; while African countries are characterised by high power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 2010; House et al., 2004).

The main rationale for this research is centred on the need to explore the phenomenon of employee engagement in different context. Bearing in mind that major theories on employee engagement are from research conducted in the western countries (Rothmann, 2014; Deci et al., 2001; Shimazu et al., 2010), this research aims to contribute to the discourse on how external context of an organisation influences employee engagement. Therefore, the interest to explore employee engagement in a

different cultural context leads the researcher to consider an African country. It is argued that an extension of employee engagement research to other cultural contexts will help to understand the conditions in which certain factors hold and in general, how engagement can be cultivated in a wide variety of settings (Klassen et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2015; Rothmann, 2014).

1.3 Context of the study: Nigeria

Specifically, Nigeria is used as context for the study. Nigeria is a West African country of diverse sub-cultures with a population of over 186 million and more than 250 ethnic groups. There are over 500 indigenous languages; the three main languages are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (Falola, 2001). And as it is, one in every four Africans is a Nigerian and the country got its independence from the British in 1960. Although, there are several sub-cultures in the country based on different ethnic backgrounds; yet, they are variants of the national culture of high power distance and collectivism. The social dynamics in Nigeria is one where individuals in families and communities provide social support for one another, with more emphasis on collective achievements over individual success; hence, the tendency to be associated with one group or the other (Ahiauzu, 1989). In terms of power distribution, African societies are hierarchical; the relationship between leader and subordinate tends to be paternalistic (Jones et al., 1995; Blunt and Jones, 1997) which potentially has an implication on the relationship between manager and lower employee in an organisation. Despite the variations of Nigerian national culture across its sub-cultures, one characteristic that appears common is the use of honorific ascribed to individuals particularly in positions of power (Ndibe, 2014). Such individuals prefer to be called by their titles e.g. Chief, Dr., Sir, Ma etc. Sometimes, when titles are not used, the individuals are annoyed because the titles are to highlight who is superior among others (Chidebell, 2013; Opata and Asogwa, 2017).

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

Considering the difference in cultural context between African nations and the West, the broad aim of this research is to gain insights into the nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. The aim of this research is also informed by the call to understand better the influence of leadership on engagement and conduct exploratory study rather than test existing psychological models in a different context. As a result, the research objectives are to examine a) how key national values shape the organisational culture, which eventually informs the nature of employee engagement; b) the role of leadership in carving out intended organisational culture; and c) the effectiveness of organisational interventions for employee engagement.

1.5 Research Questions

In relation to extant literature on employee engagement, the following are the research questions for this study:

To what extent does national culture influence employee engagement?

How does leadership influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement?

To what extent do organisational interventions reduce the aspect of the national culture that impedes the emergence of intended organisational culture?

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter one presents the rationale of the research, the research aims and objectives, and the outline of the thesis

Chapter two to four present an extensive review of extant literature on employee engagement and national culture, with emphasis on the dimensions of power distance and collectivism. More specifically, the chapter also presents review of the scanty literature on employee engagement and the national culture in Nigeria.

Chapter five discusses the research methodology, which is influenced by interpretivist philosophy. Also, it presents detail explanation of the research design and methods used to collect the data. At the same time, it discusses the process of data analysis, measures taken to ensure the integrity of the data and how ethical concerns are addressed.

Chapter six and seven present the result of data analysis. Specifically, chapter six and seven present the findings from NSC Insurance OSC Insurance respectively.

Chapter eight presents discussion of the findings. It starts by comparing the findings from the two cases; considering the similarities and differences between them. It proceeds to present detailed discussion in relation to extant literature; in order to offer theoretical contributions to the body of knowledge on employee engagement.

Chapter nine is the conclusion; presenting how the research objectives are met. Implications and limitation of the study are also presented while recommendations are highlighted for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Employee Engagement

Introduction

Towards addressing the research questions, this chapter starts by reviewing different definitions presented on the subject and followed by reviewing existing theories of and views on employee engagement while considering relevant empirical studies from the past to present. The chapter further presents literature review on the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement.

2.1 Concept of Employee Engagement

Despite its relevance, the employee engagement in academic research is still at developing stage (Saks 2014); “given that the concept has a fairly brief history and a substantial portion of this research has been grounded in theories of burnout and employee well-being” (Rich et al., 2010: 617). There are several overlapping definitions of the concept which has resulted in having no universal definition currently. The numerous definitions have come from different cadres – from academic researchers to practitioners, with different lenses at which they view employee engagement. The confusion as a result of not having universally accepted definition can be attributed to the 'bottom-up' manner in which the engagement notion has quickly evolved within the practitioner community” (Macey and Schneider, 2008: 3). Further to this, employee engagement as a concept has been used interchangeably for commitment, motivation, involvement, satisfaction etc from both academic researchers and practitioners (Schaufeli, 2013; Macey & Schneider, 2008). For example, Towers Watson – a consultancy firm defines employee engagement as “as employees’ commitment to the organisation and willingness to give extra effort to their employer” (Brown, 2013: 1). The

concept has even been criticised by some as being no more than old wine in new bottles (Jeung, 2011).

However, extant literature shows there are four major views of employee engagement: (i) Kahn's (1990) need-satisfying approach; (ii) Maslach et al.'s (2001) burnout-antithesis approach (iii) Harter et al.'s (2002) satisfaction-engagement approach; and (iv) Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach.

2.1.1 Kahn's (1990) Need-Satisfying Approach

Kahn's perspective of employee engagement is influenced by Goffman's work – *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*; suggesting that human's attachment and detachment to their roles is dependent on the individual's interaction during momentary face-to-face encounters with others (Goffman, 1959). Kahn's (1990) ethnographic work focuses on how people's experience of themselves and their work contexts influence moments of personal engagement and disengagement. It is argued that people's self-adjustment in their roles through 'pulls and pushes' is the way they cope with both internal ambivalences and external conditions; thus personal work engagement (Kahn, 1990). It is further posited that "people can use varying degrees of their selves physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform, even as they maintain the integrity of the boundaries between who they are and the roles they occupy" (Kahn, 1990: 692). These varying degrees of self-in-role are calibrated between personal engagement and personal disengagement.

Personal engagement

Personal engagement is defined as "simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to

others, personal presence (physical, cognitive, and emotional), and active, full role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 700). The argument is that people have dimensions in which they express themselves and the dimension in which an individual expresses him/herself at a given time is subjected to underlying conditions that surround his/her role. This implies that certain dimension exhibited by an employee at an organisation is likely to be different when he/she works in another organisation. Accordingly, an employee is engaged when he/she is “psychologically present, fully there, attentive, feeling, connected, integrated, and focused in their role performances” (Rich et. al., 2010: 619). Furthermore, in order for an employee to fully engaged, there is need for a full expression of self which implies a preferred dimension of self is “to display real identity, thoughts and feelings” without fear of repercussion of authority at work (Kahn, 1990: 700).

Personal disengagement

On the other hand, personal disengagement is “the simultaneous withdrawal and defence of a person's preferred self in behaviours that promote a lack of connections, physical, cognitive, and emotional absence, and passive, incomplete role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 701). This implies that disengaged employee put in less effort to his task and carry out barely minimum work because there is removal of “personal, internal energies from physical, cognitive, and emotional labours” as a result of withdrawal of preferred dimensions (Kahn, 1990: 701). The self removal can be seen as a separation of self from role; performing tasks at a distance from their preferred selves through either suppression or evacuation of their expressive and energetic selves. In other words, personal disengagement from work can be an act of self-defence, “to hide true identity, thoughts, and feelings during role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 701).

The Three Psychological States

Kahn (1990) posited three psychological conditions that shape how individuals engage in their roles; these are meaningfulness, safety and availability. In any given role, individuals ask themselves three questions upon which determine how they personally engage or disengage: “(1) how meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance; (2) how safe is it to do so?; and (3) how available am I to do so?” (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 83).

Psychological Meaningfulness

Psychological meaningfulness is seen as “sense of return on investments of self in role performance”; with the individuals asking themselves whether it is worthwhile to bring themselves into a performance (Kahn, 1990: 705). Individuals experience meaningfulness when they feel valued and worthwhile with a derived perception that they are not taken for granted; rather, contributing and making difference in their areas of work (Schwartz, 2012; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014). On the other hand, lack of meaningfulness is linked to the feeling that little is asked or expected from self; with little leeway given to express self in role performance and not enough avenues to receive such opportunities (Kahn and Fellows, 2012). It is argued that the absence of feeling that one’s physical, cognitive or emotional energies worth it can result in disengagement from one’s role (Aktouf, 1992). It is also contended that the impact felt on meaningfulness as a result of nature of employee relationship with others in the organisation is undervalued; arguing that work relationships are implicit factors in “how much room people have to give or to receive in work role performance or able to wield influence” (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 83).

Rich et al. (2010) relate the importance of value congruence with psychological meaningfulness; arguing that when individuals believe their personal values are congruent with set of values expected by their employers, they find their roles meaningful therefore willing to engage more. The statistical findings cited by Kahn (1990) show that individuals are more engaged in their work in situations characterised with more psychological meaningfulness. Similarly, employees are able to attain psychological meaningfulness when they feel more respected, valued and treated with dignity in their organisations (May et al., 2004).

According to Kahn (1990), three factors influence psychological meaningfulness: task characteristics, role characteristics, and work interactions.

Task characteristics

In relation to task characteristics, a rich job role has positive influence on psychological meaningfulness; Kahn (1990: 704) put forward that roles which are “challenging, clearly delineated, varied, creative, and somewhat autonomous” are more likely to experience psychological meaningfulness. Also, meaningful tasks are more stimulating because they demanded not only routine skills; but employees are able to be part of ad hoc tasks giving them both sense of competence from their routine and growth of new skills. Furthermore, employees derive sense of ownership of work because meaningful tasks allow the employee to take certain initiatives and decisions on their own (Hackman and Oldham, 1980). This sense of ownership from meaningful tasks is because “such tasks were neither so tightly linked to nor so controlled by others that people performing them needed to constantly look for direction” (Kahn, 1990: 706). The employees with meaningful tasks are seen by their superiors to be knowledgeable and have good judgement to make right decisions and take appropriate actions on the work that is assigned to them.

Role Characteristics

It is argued that role characteristics influence the sense of psychological meaningfulness. These are indicated in the identity that the role carries (Kahn, 1990). This implies that if an employee sees his/her role to have respectable identity, he/she will find the job more meaningful; on the contrary, the role is seen as less meaningful if the employee sees the role to have low respectable identity. Moreover, roles carry influence. It is argued that “people search for ways to feel important and special, particularly since they generally feel powerless in the world as a whole”; as a result, individuals gain sense of meaningfulness when they occupy positions that come with power and influence to make direct impact in their organisations and beyond (Kahn, 1990: 706). On the other hand, roles that are perceived to have less influence or power are considered to have less sense of meaningfulness to the employees.

Work interactions and Relational dimensions of meaningfulness

There is sense of meaningfulness when employee tasks include interactions with other colleagues and clients; the interaction is seen to promote dignity, self-appreciation and sense of worthiness (Kahn, 1990). Employees derive sense of meaningfulness through interpersonal interactions when they are not treated as just role occupiers but as humans who happen to occupy the roles (Hochschild, 1983).

While Kahn (1990) sees psychological meaningfulness as a feeling that one's physical, cognitive or emotional energy matters, Kahn and Heaphy (2014) suggest that relationships are significant ways through which individuals derive meaningfulness. As a result, there are two ways relationships shape sense of meaningfulness and personal engagement: i) deep sense of purpose and ii) heightened belongingness.

Deepened Purposes

Purpose of work is a key source of psychological meaningfulness. Accordingly, it is argued that “when people occupy roles and perform tasks that culminate in purposes that they define as important, above and beyond instrumental rewards, they are more likely to define their work as meaningful” (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 84). It is further put forward that individuals will commit to a course that make them feel that they are a part of enterprises larger than themselves i.e. when they feel connected with other individual to pursue it together. In organisation, this implies that psychological meaningfulness is attained when an employee is able to get the sense that his/her work matters to the bigger objective of the company. Kahn and Heaphy (2014) further suggest three contexts that enable deepen purposes and meaningfulness to occur: i) groups and teams; ii) leader–follower relations; and iii) relations with beneficiaries.

Groups and teams

Group and teams stand as gatherings where individuals can achieve meaningfulness as a result of interdependency of members on one another; making input of each person appears enlarged and enlivened (Senge, 1990). At the same time, individuals can feel detached and lose sense of meaningfulness when their groups or teams have no clear missions, weak leadership, political manoeuvrings and subsequent lack of resources, unworked differences and unmanageable conflicts (Smith and Berg, 1987). Psychological meaningfulness is enhanced within groups when the individuals interact frequently in sharing information, influencing group decisions and providing mutual support for themselves (Richardson and West, 2010). Furthermore, in an engaged team, the members derive sense of meaningfulness as a result of their achievements and the excitement of collectively coming together for the next challenge (Leavitt and Lipman-Blumen, 1995).

Leader-follower relations

It is argued that individuals attain more psychological meaningfulness as their work purposes are enlarged when they are attached to their leaders and buy into the missions which the leaders aimed to achieve (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014). Also, the meaningfulness is attained as a result of favourable treatment and positive exchanges between the leaders and followers (Martin et al., 2016). Moreover, when leaders challenge, intellectually stimulate, inspire and influence their followers, they promote in the followers relationships that connect deeply with the leaders themselves and other individuals (Bass, 1990; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014).

Relations with beneficiaries

Individuals attain psychological meaningfulness when they feel or see the end result of their efforts. According to Grant (2007), employees see their jobs more meaningful and are motivated as a result, when their jobs are designed in a way that they have contact with the beneficiaries of their work. The individual opportunity to see direct impact of one's work causes the need in the individual to do more. It further put forward that "the more frequent, extended, physically proximate, expressive, and broad the contact with beneficiaries [of their work], the more meaningful the contact is to employees" (Grant, 2007: 398). Interestingly, individuals can somewhat influence their level of meaningfulness derived from their work by altering the amount of interactions they have with other while on the jobs. According to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), there are three elements of job crafting; i) task boundaries; ii) cognitive tasks boundaries; and iii) relational boundaries. It is argued that altering any of the elements means changing the level of psychological meaningfulness of the individual. Therefore, the meaningfulness of an individual's work is "a product of their relations with both those who benefit from that work and those who confirm its importance" (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 85).

Heightened belongingness

As argued by Kahn and Heaphy (2014), the second way relationships shape sense of meaningfulness is through heightened belongingness. Relationships deepen and affirm meaningfulness of work through process of social identification whereby individuals' preferred identities are confirmed and highlighted by the participation in desirable relationships (Bartel, 2001). Therefore, meaningfulness is heightened "by the extent to which their roles enable people to see themselves in preferred ways routinely confirmed by others' positive reactions" (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 85). Block (2008) takes it further to argue that social identification does not only uphold the preferred identities of the individuals, there is a feel of belongingness to their community. This implies that when employees are able to exhibit their preferred identities without potential repercussions at work, they feel the sense of belonging to the organisations. Furthermore, Rosso et al. (2010) argue further that when employees feel supported through interpersonal connection with their managers, they develop sense of belongingness which induces meaningfulness of their work. In regards to interpersonal connections with other, Kahn and Heaphy (2014) highlight three dimensions that create high-quality connections. First, *positive regard*, in which an individual accepts another's self in a positive way. The second dimension is *felt mutuality*, in which individuals are being fully met and engaged with by the other person in the interaction. The third is *capacities* which relate to the extent individuals can process and constructively express their emotions, both positively and negatively that foster genuine intimacy.

Furthermore, compassion at work is also a mechanism by which individuals feel sense of meaningfulness through heightened belongingness. It is argued that the act of physically and emotionally caring for other makes the individuals feel connected to others which can be in the context of leaders and followers (Kahn, 2001), peers and work groups (Lawrence and Maitlis, 2012) and organizational communities (Dutton et al., 2006). It is posited that "compassionate acts bridge gulfs between people, reaching

out to attach and hold them within the bounds of a caring relationship or social system”; and when employees feel the compassion from others, there is heightened belongingness and the psychological meaningfulness to their work is increased (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 86).

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the “sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career” which is based on interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process and organisational norms (Kahn, 1990: 708). Employees feel safe when they perceive they will not face repercussion for expressing themselves in the workplace (May et al., 2004); thus, psychological safety is important in organisations as it determines extent to which employees collaborate to achieve shared objectives (Edmondson, 2004). Furthermore, psychological safety has been linked to extent to which employees share information and knowledge (Collins and Smith 2006); take initiatives in their organisations for new products and services (Baer and Frese 2003) and voice out the opinions and suggesting ideas on improving organisational processes (Detert and Burris 2007). The findings of Carmeli et al. (2012) suggest that psychological safety of the individuals helps organisations learn from failed strategic initiatives when there is relational context of trust in the organisations.

With the importance of psychological safety in mind, the ability and willingness for employees to express themselves vary in how they voice their concerns on organisational issues, engage in difficult conversations with others and are part of discussions that are of conflicting views with the management; as a result, voice as a tool is seen as part of engagement (Beugre, 2010). Kahn and Heaphy (2014) link psychological safety with work contexts such as nature of groups and teams and

varying degree of closeness with leaders and colleagues, as they determine how freely individuals are able to express themselves.

Kahn (1990) highlights factors that influence psychological safety as: interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process, and organisational norms.

Interpersonal relationships

Relationships among colleagues that are supportive and trusting promote psychological safety (Kahn, 1990) and the bases of the trust can be either cognitive or affective. Cognitive-based trust relates to the reliability and dependability of others; and affective-based trust based on emotional attachment with others (McAllister, 1995). The findings from empirical study involving 128 students show affective-based trust induces the feelings of vitality which has impact on the level of the employee involvement at their creative work (Kark and Carmeli, 2009). Similarly, Gong et al.'s (2012) data analysis of 190 employee-manager pairs in a Taiwanese retail chain shows proactive employees seek informational resources through interactions with others; in turn, information exchange fosters the development of trust relationships that foster psychological safety for creative work. According to Kahn (1992), when trust is formed in any relationship, the individuals are more able to be authentic and put themselves forward to engage more. According to the Edmondson's (1999) study on a manufacturing team, once employees perceive that their team is safe for interpersonal risk taking, they engage more in dialogues which are needed for them to individually and collectively learn about the team. Furthermore, when employees feel they can trust their team members, they challenge status quo and offer ways to improve processes and outcomes in their organisation (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). However, when superiors are present, it is argued that relationships are potentially more stifling and threatening than relationships among peers. A research findings show "people are quicker to withdraw from potential

conflict with members of higher echelons than they are to withdraw from conflicts with members of their own echelon” (Kahn, 1990: 709).

Other factors that influence psychological safety as argued by Kahn (1990) include:

Group and Intergroup Dynamics: various informal roles that individuals take up are said to influence psychological safety and the unconscious play of the informal roles inform the conscious workings of the group.

Management style and process: Supportive, resilient and descriptive management improve psychological safety. Management style is said to dictate the degree of openness and supportiveness as the leaders reinforce members’ behaviours based on the way they translate system demands in their organisations. Furthermore, supportive managerial environment gives employees to experiment, fail and learn, without fear of repercussions; however, “managerial reluctance to loosen their control sent a message that their employees were not to be trusted and should fear overstepping their boundaries” (Kahn, 1990, 711). It is argued further that the fear of consequence of experimenting is compounded if the managers are unpredictable, inconsistent or hypocritical.

Organisational Norms

Psychological safety relates to role performances that were visible within the boundaries of organisational norms which are shared expectation regarding how organisational members should conduct themselves (Hackman and Oldman 1986). The organisational members feel safer when they maintain the appropriate ways of working and behave within the boundary of expected norms of their organisations, than those who stray outside the protective boundaries. As a result, psychological safety is about the employee’s need to trust their working environment and reasonably understand what is expected of them in their roles (Shuck et al., 2011).

Psychological Availability

Psychological availability is the “sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances” (Kahn, 1990: 714); capturing how individuals perceive themselves to be confident of coping with technical and social demands of their work (Li and Tan, 2013). It is also seen as the employee’s feeling of having the right tools to complete their work which could be tangible resources such as supplies, sufficient budget, and manpower to complete a task (Harter et al., 2002; Wagner and Harter, 2006). Given that personal resources are finite, it implies individuals have to channel these resources rightly to their work; otherwise, they will not be psychologically available for engagement. It posited that “employees whose attentions are largely occupied by distractions are unable to gather the necessary energy to focus on work and therefore are deprived of the confidence that they can sufficiently handle work demands” (Li and Tan, 2013: 410). The findings from Kahn’s studies indicate four types of distractions that influence psychological availability: depletion of physical energy, depletion of emotional energy, individual insecurity and outside lives.

Depletion of physical energy: personal engagement requires physical energy and readiness; as suggested in the studies of nonverbal role performances, the lack of physical energy is strongly linked to personal disengagement (Goffman, 1961).

Depletion of emotional energy: psychological availability is linked to the extent of emotional capacity an individual has to empathise with and connect to others (Kahn, 1992). The notion is that employing and expressing self in a role requires substantial level of emotional energy (Hochschild, 1983); however, individuals tend to withdraw themselves when they are emotionally overwhelmed as a result, protect themselves from further exposure to the emotional situation (Kahn, 2005). However, the lack of not being able to protect themselves from further exposure result to depersonalisation which accumulate to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) and the ‘closing off’ of self from others is

the retreat strategy to the authentic self, which implies a withdrawal from the role performance (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014). Research on trauma shows the victims become unavailable to others and themselves when keep the painful emotions of the trauma within themselves (Herman, 1992). Frost (2003) finds out that when managers provide relational supports to their employees, giving them right context to express their frustrations, such employees are more psychologically available in the organisations. Similarly, the research with employees in five Australian telephone call centres indicates higher employee absence rate is associated to emotional exhaustion (Deery et al., 2002).

Individual Insecurity: psychological availability relates to how secure individuals feel about their work and their status. According to Gustafson and Cooper (1985), when individuals feel more secure about themselves, they express themselves more with and to others. In organisations, supervisors are a big source of social uncertainty for employees when trust is not established between them (Whitener et al., 1998). It is posited that “employees who trust their supervisor would therefore not have to devote unnecessary resources toward defending against their supervisor and hence would be more confident of their abilities to cope with both social and task demands” (Li and Tan: 2013, 411). Carmeli et al. (2010) argue that employees feel more psychologically safe and they will take risks and express themselves more when they perceive that their managers exhibit inclusive leadership behaviours. Similarly, when managers create an environment that reduces insecurity, the employees are more available and ready to channel their energies and resources to become creative in the organisation (Binyamin and Carmeli, 2010). Therefore, insecurity is negatively associated with psychological availability; “in uncertain and stressful situations, psychological availability plunges, because the individual directs energies toward finding certainty and a feeling of security” (Binyamin and Carmeli, 2010: 1006).

Outside life: the outside lives of employees have the potential of distracting from being psychologically available at their organisations. From resource drain perspective, when employees are part of outside lives such as volunteering activities, school, social clubs, etc, the time demands for these activities hit into the finite personal resources needed to perform their roles in the workplace (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Research on work-family relationship shows that when organisational members are too absorbed in non-work related roles, they are less psychologically available at work (Hall & Richter, 1989).

In summary, centred to Kahn's conceptualisation of engagement is the notion that employee engagement is an internal state of the mind which is mainly affected by external forces to the employee; the forces such as nature of the tasks, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process, resources available etc (Shuck et al., 2011). Primarily, Kahn (1990) highlighted three psychological conditions that shape how individuals engage in their roles: meaningfulness, safety and availability. Before personal engagement, individuals ask themselves three questions upon which determine how they personally engage or disengage: "(1) how meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this performance; (2) how safe is it to do so?; and (3) how available am I to do so? (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 83). It is even argued that Kahn's (1990) concept of engagement represents "a more comprehensive description of the investment of one's affective, behavioural, and cognitive energies at work, and, in so doing, represents a more holistic view of the investment of one's self as compared to other conceptualizations of engagement" (Barrick et al., 2015: 113). However, it is worth noting at this juncture that reference has not been made to factor in how customs, ideas and social behaviour of a society plays any role in employee engagement.

2.1.2 Harter et al.'s (2002) Satisfaction-Engagement Approach

Harter et al. (2002) use data held at the Gallup Organisation on 7,939 business units across multiple industries to study employee engagement with emphasis on expected

satisfaction of the employees at their workplace. Their findings show that employee engagement has positive relationship with business unit outcomes such as customer satisfaction, profit, productivity, and turnover (Harter et al., 2002). Thus, employee engagement “refers to an individual’s involvement and satisfaction with as well as enthusiasm for work” (Harter, et al., 2002: 269). Luthans and Peterson (2002) extend the work of Harter et al. (2002) by considering relationship between employee engagement and managerial self-efficacy; their findings show positive relationship between manager self-efficacy and employee engagement. Thus, it summarised that “the most profitable work units of companies have people doing what they do best, with people they like, and with a strong sense of psychological ownership” (Luthans and Peterson, 2002: 376). However, there appears to be overlap of well-known constructs like job involvement and job satisfaction in the engagement definition by Gallup Organisation (Schaufeli, 2013).

With the Gallup Organisation research, Harter et al. (2003) further posited four antecedent elements necessary for engagement in any organisations. First, it is argued there must be clarity of expectations to and from the supervisors; with basic materials and equipment provided. Absence of these resources implies negative emotions such as boredom or resentment; instead of focusing on how to help organisation succeed, employees will divert their emotional energy on surviving (Harter et al., 2003). Second, employee must have the perception that they are contributing to their organisations which should come in the form frequent and immediate recognition of good work. However, it is important for managers to understand that the feeling of being cared about has differently meaning to individuals. Third, the employees should feel a sense of belonging to something beyond themselves. It is put forward that the interest of the employees can be enlivened and their scope of thinking and acting are broadened when their opinions are heard and they are involved in decision making (Harter et al., 2003). Fourth, employees should have the sense that there are opportunities for them to grow and progress in their organisations.

However, some researchers have highlighted that the instrument used, known as Gallup Workforce Audit (GWA) focuses on antecedents of personal job satisfaction and other affective constructs which can be seen as pre-conditions for engagement (Shuck, 2011). Despite, the twelve items that made up GWA are accepted to reflect the three psychological conditions that shape how individuals engage in their roles (Avery et al., 2007).

2.1.3 Maslach and Leiter (1997) Burnout-Antithesis Approach

Another view of employee engagement is from burnout research whereby employee engagement is seen as the antithesis to burnout; arguing that “burnout is always more likely when there is a major mismatch between the nature of the job and the nature of the person who does the job” (Maslach and Leiter, 1997: 9). Seen as “energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness”, it is posited that engagement is characterised by the opposite dimensions of burnout i.e. energy, involvement, and efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001: 416). According to Maslach and Leiter (2008: 498), when individuals are involved in prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressor on their job, they experience “feelings of being overextended and depleted of one’s emotional and physical resources”. Exhaustion at the job leads to negative response in the form of callousness or excessive detachment from one’s work, showing a strong link between exhaustion and cynicism (Leiter and Maslach, 2016). Meanwhile, inefficacy as a dimension of burnout relates with the evaluation of self with the “feelings of incompetence and a lack of achievement and productivity in work” and it is as a result of either exhaustion or cynicism or combination of both (Leiter and Maslach, 2004:93). However, inefficacy is also argued to be an independent dimension to exhaustion and cynicism; where inefficacy is as result of inadequacy of relevant resources for work (Leiter, 1993).

Areas of work life and engagement/burnout

Considering the three dimensions of burnout, six organisational antecedents are identified for burnout; the low levels on each of the antecedents indicates job-person mismatch and the persistent of the phenomenon leads to low level employee engagement or burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). The antecedents are workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values. **Workload** relates with the job demands; and there is overload when job demands exceed human limits. Similarly, there is work overload when individuals have to do too much with too few resources within too little time (Leiter and Maslach, 2004). The research with resident doctors indicates that work overload and high fatigue are significant risk factors for burnout (Dyrbye et al. 2014). **Control** relates with role clarity; when there is clear understanding of expectations and responsibilities, employees experience less stress with greater level of perceived work autonomy (Leiter and Maslach 1999). It is argued that “a sense of efficacy is unlikely to occur when workers are feeling buffeted by circumstances or powerful people within the organization” (Leiter and Maslach, 2004: 97). **Reward**, which can be monetary, social and intrinsic, refers to the recognition associated with the actual time and effort invested in work; where lack of recognition is linked with the risk of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2008). **Community** relates with supportive system within the organisation and refers to the quality of social interaction at work which includes issues of conflicts, closeness, mutual support and teamwork quality. It posited that “people thrive in community and function best when they share praise, comfort, happiness, and humour with people they like and respect”; implying that social support is associated with engagement (Leiter and Maslach, 2004: 98). **Fairness** is the extent to which trust, openness and respect are upheld in the organisation. It implies that when employees perceive fairness from their managers and colleagues, they engage more and experience less burnout (Leiter and Harvie, 1998). **Values** relates to the compatibility of the organisational and employee expectations. There is employee

engagement in situations where expectations of both organisation and employees are in congruence.

At this juncture, it worth noting that community as an area of work life in the burnout literature is not extended to outer community; therefore, influence of non-work community is not considered as an element that can lead to engagement or burnout.

2.1.4 Schaufeli et al's (2002) view on engagement and burnout

Considering the main perspective of Maslach and Leiter's (1997) approach is that engagement is opposite of burnout, it is critiqued that engagement and burnout are separate constructs; "sharing about one-quarter to one-third of their variance" (Schaufeli et al., 2002: 87). It is also contended that out of the three dimensions of burnout – exhaustion, cynicism and efficacy, only efficacy has a link with engagement. Efficacy is further argued to develop independently from exhaustion and cynicism; therefore, engagement should be studied and operationalised in its own right (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Schaufeli et al. (2002: 74) define employee engagement as "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption". Vigor is seen as the willingness to invest effort in one's job; dedication as strong involvement in one's work with a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge; and absorption, as pleasant state of total immersion in one's work " (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Schaufeli et al. (2002) differentiate their view from Kahn's (1990) need-satisfying approach. Instead of the momentary state argument of engagement that "people are constantly bringing in and leaving out various depths of their selves during the course of their work days" (Kahn, 1990: 693), it is argued that "engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour" (Schaufeli et al., 2002: 74).

However, the works of Maslach et al. (2001) and Schaufeli et al. (2002) have been critiqued to lack the cognitive engagement processes conceptualised by Kahn (1990) (Rich et al., 2010); their works only focus on emotional and physical absence of burnout (Shuck et al., 2011). Also, Saks (2006) contends that Kahn's (1990) and burnout approaches on engagement do not account for the reason individuals respond to the psychological conditions differently.

2.1.5 Job Demands-Resources Model

A more recent construct that considers occupational stress in regards to burnout literature is job demands-resources model, JD-R model. It is theorised that burnout is due to high job demands that result in work exhaustion and employee disengagement is as a result of lack of job resources; thus, job demands–resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Job demands refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Demerouti, and Bakker, 2007: 312). And through burnout, excessive job demands lead to impeded workability (Siebt et al., 2009), poor performance (Taris, 2006), low organizational commitment (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004) and sickness absence (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2005). Examples of job demands include work overload, job insecurity, role ambiguity, time pressure, and role conflict.

On the other hand, job resources refer to “those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that are either/or: i) functional in achieving work goals; ii) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; iii) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (Demerouti, and Bakker, 2007: 312). Through work engagement, job resources can result in outcomes such as extra-role behaviour, organisational commitment, work performance, intention to stay (Van

den Broeck et al., 2013). Job resources include supervisor and co-worker support, autonomy, feedback, pay, career opportunities, role clarity, job security. Job resources are extended to personal resources, which are argued to further predict high work engagement. The personal resources include characteristics such as resilience, self-efficacy, optimism and self-esteem (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Bakker and Demerouti, 2008).

Leaders and their relevant leadership styles are recognised as resources (Breevaart et al., 2014); even though, the leaders manage “the allocation and impact of job demands and job resources on their followers” (Schaufeli, 2015: 447). Demerouti et al. (2012) highlight the positive link of feedback from supervisors and employees’ ‘flow’ - an engrossing and enjoyable experience at work. Also, strong identification of employee with their managers and organisation as a result of authentic leadership, is said to promote employee engagement (Giallonardo et al., 2010).

The premise of JD-R model is that cumulative impact of job resources has motivational potential that can lead to an increase engagement level among the employees concurrently reducing burnout and arguably, job resources help employees to cope with the job demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). As a result, when employees have few resources for their job, it is observed that there is strong effect of job demands on exhaustion; similarly, when employees encounter many job demands, the effect of job resources on cynicism is strong (Bakker et al., 2003; Schaufeli and Taris, 2014).

However, it is argued that job demands and job resources are narrow and limited approach to employee engagement (Saks, 2014) as it does not include all relevant predictors of employee engagement (Crawford et al., 2010). Although, it is not disputed that the more resources available to employees, the more engaged they will become; however, JD-R model does not highlight the resources that are most important for engagement as well as when and why they are relevant to engagement (Saks and Gruman, 2014).

2.1.6 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Centred to employee engagement in any organisation is relationship management between employees and employer or employee and their leaders; thus, the understanding of and motivation for social exchange between the two parties become important. The early development of SET was supported by the works of Homans (1958, 1961), Emerson (1972), Blau (1964) and Emerson (1972). Homans (1961) views exchanges from basic economic principles around costs and rewards, where cost refers to alternative activities or opportunities forgone by the parties involved; therefore, the behaviour each party exhibits in an exchange is based on the payoffs. However, this perspective of exchange has been criticised as too reductionist and that it undermines the interplay of institutional forces as well as the emerging social processes and structures from the interactions (Sawyer, 2001).

Blau (1964) takes the study of exchange further from economic perspective, drawing importance to social context in which exchanges occur. Accordingly, social exchange refers to “voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (Blau, 1964: 91); and “the basic and most crucial distinction is that social exchange entails unspecified obligations” (Blau, 1964: 93). From SET perspective, individuals do not necessarily attain or interested in maximum rewards and minimum costs, but seek reciprocity and fairness in their relationships with one another towards achieving interdependency (Stafford, 2008). Furthermore, Blau (1964) posited that inequality and power distribution are emergent properties of a given social exchange; when a party is more in control of highly valued resources, the other party is socially indebted to them. From power-dependency theory, Emerson (1972) argues a social exchange involves mutual dependence whereby basis of power of a party resides in other party’s dependence. It is further posited that when a party’s power is equal to the other, there is a balanced relationship. According to Cook and Emerson (1978), the position of parties in a network of exchange determines the

power dynamics which presents itself in the way rewards are distributed in a social network.

While their works on exchange are based on the principle of rewards and costs, Homans' (1961) and Blau's (1964) views on the motivation for exchange are different. It is believed that past behaviour of actors in an exchange potentially determines the future outcomes; assuming that people will repeat behaviours that gave them rewards in the past and avoid the costly ones; and, the more common the reward, the less valuable it becomes (Homans, 1961). From Blau's view, there is general expectation of reward in an exchange; however, the nature of reward is not known in advance (Blau, 1986).

One of the principles of SET is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and mutual commitment; however, before this can be established both parties are guided by certain rules of exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). When rules of exchange are abided by, the individuals have sense of obligation to reciprocate (Gouldner, 1960). Accordingly, "the need to reciprocate for benefits received in order to continue receiving them serves as a 'starting mechanism' of social interaction and group structure" (Blau, 1964:92). However, in the first instance, a party must be willing to be vulnerable to the actions of the other, with expectations that the other party will fulfil their obligations of the relationship (Redmond, 2015; Mayer et al., 1995).

According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), there are three different types of reciprocity: (i) reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges, (ii) reciprocity as a folk belief, and (iii) reciprocity as a moral norm. It is argued that either complete independence or complete dependence implies a social exchange but interdependence because it is bidirectional and involves mutual arrangements, with an individual's action contingent on another's behaviour. Reciprocity as a folk belief relates with the notion that in life, individuals eventually get what they deserve based on their actions. With reciprocity as a folk belief, it is believed all exchanges will reach a fair equilibrium and the parties involved will get their appropriate rewards or punishments.

Similarly, reciprocity as a moral norm relates with expectations by one party to other based on shared cultural practices or perspectives.

SET in an Organisation

In relevance to workplace, employees form relationships in their organisations because of two reasons; economic and social (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Blau, 1964). Economic exchange relationships are usually short term, quid pro quo transactions and which involve pecuniary rewards (Blau, 1964) while social exchange relationships are often long term; they involve “less tangible and perhaps more symbolic or socio-emotional resources, such as recognition or esteem” (Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002: 926) and tend to engender feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust (Blau, 1964). While economic exchange relationship is primarily based on contractual obligations, it is argued that individuals in social exchange relationships strongly identify with themselves and are more likely to make sacrifice and incur costs for the benefit of other individuals (Blau, 1964; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002). This implies employees feel obligated to reciprocate through their level of engagement at work, if they see themselves benefited from the employer’s implicit promises, discretionary and benevolent actions (Aryee et al. 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Coyle-Shapiro and Neuman, 2004).

With a longitudinal survey of 1400 public sector employees and 84 managers, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2002) study the reciprocal influence that exists between employee and employer. The findings show that employees reciprocate the perceived employer fulfilment of obligation by subconsciously modifying their obligations to the employer and fulfilling them in order to have a balanced relationship. Furthermore, the findings also reveal that employer finds themselves in a position to reciprocate when employees fulfil their obligations; thus making the norm of reciprocity bi-directional. In an ongoing exchange relationship, it is posited that “one party’s perceptions of the other party’s obligations is influenced by the behaviour (fulfilment of obligations) of each party”

(Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2002: 83). This confirms the argument that “employees with stronger exchange ideologies vary their work effort in accordance with how favourably they are treated by the organization and the benefits they receive from it” (Jones, 2010: 862). However, an inequitable employee-employer relationship occurs when an employee fulfils his or her employment obligation in terms of job demands, but does not receive appropriate job resources in return (Rousseau, 1995).

Relating SET to employment exchange further, psychological contract fulfilment is seen as important as it “reflects employee beliefs, expectations and perceptions about the extent to which mutual obligations (implicit promises) between an employee and employer have been satisfied” (Birtch et al., 2015: 1). From this view, organisations that invest in training and development programmes for their employees tend to receive desired work-related attitudes and behaviours from the employees (Parzefall and Salin 2010; Setton et al., 1996; Aryee et al. 2002). While an employee considers the organisation as a single entity with which he/she has employment relationship, it is contended that “since the organization is made up of many individuals, the employee does not have a relationship with one individual representing the ‘organization’ that is comparable to the relationship with a leader”; rather the feelings of obligation “are based on a history of organizational decisions, some of which were made by an individual employee’s immediate supervisor . . . generating feelings of obligation toward the organization as a whole” (Wayne et al., 1997: 85). This suggests the level of an employee obligation to their organisation is not only based on their relationship with the immediate superior but experience accumulated from direct and indirect relationships with different individuals in the organisation.

Considering employee-employer relationship, Tsui et al. (1997) developed a 2x2 typology strategies based on the types of resources exchanged. Employer resources are seen in terms of short-term versus long-term rewards while employee resources are typified as short-term contributions versus unspecified, broad and open-ended

contributions. As a result, four types of relationships emerge: (a) quasi-spot (resembling pure economic exchange), (b) mutual investment (resembling social exchange), (c) underinvestment (where the employee provides symbolic resources, but is awarded short-term rewards), and (d) overinvestment (where the employee provides particular resources, but is awarded long-term rewards) (Tsui et al., 1997; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This implies that in as much as social exchange is meant to be interdependence where mutual and complementary arrangements are involved (Molm, 1994), the individuals with more alternative opportunities can become less committed to their relationships; however, the partner with few alternative opportunities tend to be more dependent on and committed to the exchange relation” (Blau, 1964: 99). As a result, employee – manager/organisation relationship is said to be influence by the dynamics of social exchange in their organisations (Saks, 2006).

2.1.6.1 Saks’ (2006) social exchange model of Employee engagement

Linking social exchange theory with employee engagement, Saks (2006) argues individuals repay their organisation through their level of engagement at work; as a result, “employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees and in response to the resources they receive from their organization” (Saks, 2006: 603). According to Saks (2006), the cognitive, emotional and physical resources necessary for work engagement (Kahn, 1990) and relevant conditions to prevent burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) are understood as economic and socioemotional exchange resources. There is sense of obligation to bring self into role performance when the resources are received from the organisation; on the contrary, failure on the side of the organisation to provide the resources results in disengagement from role. Therefore, “the amount of cognitive, emotional, and physical resources that an individual is prepared to devote in the performance of one’s work roles is contingent on the economic and socioemotional resources received from the organization (Saks, 2006: 603).

From the view of Saks (2006), previous research on employee engagement only focused on a broad form of engagement however, there are two types of employee engagement: job and organisational engagements. It is further posited that the antecedents and consequences of engagement depends on the type being studied. Despite the similarities to other constructs in literature, employee engagement is different from organisational commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Leveraging on Kahn's (1990) and Maslach et al.'s (2001) models, it is argued that while both indicate the psychological conditions for engagement, there was not full explanation why individuals engagement will vary. However, consistent with Robinson et al. (2004), it is posited that employee engagement is a two-way relationship between the employee and employer; and "rules of exchange usually involve reciprocity or repayment rules such that the actions of one party lead to a response or actions by the other party" (Saks, 2006: 603). As a result, employee's level of engagement will vary in response to the organisational resources available to them.

The empirical study of 102 employees working in a variety of jobs and organisations reveals that the relationships between job and organization engagement with the antecedents and consequences differed in a number of ways suggesting that the psychological conditions that lead to job and organization engagements as well as the consequences are not the same (Saks, 2006). Perceived organizational support has direct relationship with both job and organisation engagement. While job characteristics predict job engagement, procedural justice predicts organisation engagement. Distributive justice refers to "one's perception of the fairness of decision outcomes while procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the means and processes used to determine the amount and distribution of resources" (Saks, 2006: 606). Also, employee's attitudes, intentions and behaviours are related to job and organisation engagement. Furthermore, the findings reveal that job satisfaction, organizational

commitment, intention to quit, and organizational citizenship behaviour directed (OCBO) have outcome relationship with job and organisation engagement.



Figure 1.1: A model of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (Saks, 2006)

Extending Sak's (2006) framework, Macey and Schneider (2008) propose three types of engagement: (i) psychological state engagement; (ii) behavioural engagement; and (iii) trait engagement. It is posited that nature of work (i.e. challenging, autonomy and variety levels of job) and leadership through trust are antecedents for employee engagement; arguing that "feelings of trust mediate the relationship between leadership behaviour and behavioural engagement" (Macey and Schneider, 2008: 22). It is further argued that leaders are critical elements of the work context in giving clear expectations and recognising and rewarding the employees fairly (Christian et al., 2011; Macey and Schneider, 2008; Breevaart et al., 2014).

Among the suggestions for future research is the need "to flesh out the types of factors that are most important for engagement" in different context such as the type of job, organisation or group (Saks, 2006: 613). Also, there is a call for future research to explore the interventions that could be employed to induce employee engagement. Accordingly, "future research might investigate the extent to which interventions can create a sense of obligation that leads individuals to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement...given the increasing interest on the part of organizations to improve employee engagement and address the 'engagement-gap.'" (Saks, 2006: 614). Further

call is proposed to explore “the most effective programs and interventions for improving employee engagement” (Saks and Gruman, 2014: 178).

2.2 Criticism of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement as a distinct construct in literature has been criticised as an ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Jeung, 2011). It is argued that engagement as a concept may be nothing more than a fad; stating that it fails to “meet many of the common criteria for positive organizational practice, i.e. theoretical, valid, unique, state-like, and positive” (Wefald and Downey, 2009: 141). Newman et al. (2011) contend that the scholarly literature named employee engagement commits jangle fallacy; whereby similar constructs measuring like nomological networks are labelled uniquely different from one another. It is further suggested that engagement construct is similar to job-related attitudes and debated whether engagement provides further revelatory knowledge beyond knowledge from existing and well-researched constructs like job involvement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Newman et al., 2011; Harrison et al. 2006). Pugh and Dietz (2008) doubt whether employee engagement can be assessed individually; Meyer and Gagne (2008) believe engagement as a concept lacks comprehensive framework for research.

Nevertheless, some research has provided empirical evidence to proof that employee engagement is a distinct construct and worthy to be explored further. It is stated that “engagement contains many of the elements of both organizational commitment and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, OCB but is by no means a perfect match with either. In addition, neither commitment nor OCB reflect sufficiently two aspects of engagement - its two-way nature and the extent to which engage employees are expected to have an element of business awareness” (Robinson et al., 2004: 8). Saks (2006) argues that organisational commitment is different from engagement as it is only about individual’s attitude and attachment towards their work and organisation. It is

contended further that “engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles” (Saks, 2006: 602). In addition, OCB is argued to involve voluntary and informal behaviour that can help work colleagues and the organisation; however, engagement relates to individual’s role performance (Saks, 2006). At the same time, the meta-analysis shows that engagement also predicts extra-role performance, “because they are able to ‘free up’ resources by accomplishing goals and performing their tasks efficiently, enabling them to pursue activities that are not part of their job descriptions” (Christian et al., 2011: 120). Also, engaged employees consider all aspects of work to be part of their domain; as a result, they do not see taking up task outside their roles as an extra-role (Christian et al., 2011).

Job involvement is seen as cognitive state regarding one’s job (May et al. 2004; Kanungo, 1982); and affective commitment relates to the individual affective attachment to their organisations as a result of shared values and interest (Christian et al., 2011). However, engagement is about how individuals see their roles (Maslach et al., 2001) and is the total employment of oneself; that is the combination of emotional, cognitive and physical self into a role (May et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2010). Moreover, job involvement relates to need satisfying abilities of the job which is tied to self-image (May et al., 2004); job satisfaction refers to “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experience” (Locke, 1976: 1300); and intrinsic motivation is about “the desire to exert effort a task in the absence of external constraints or contingencies” (Rich et al., 2010: 618). However, engagement differs from job involvement, job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation because it reflects an energetic drive instead of the feeling of being satiated (Schaufeli, 2013). While considering the involvement, satisfaction and intrinsic motivation as constructs, and studying their influence on performance, it is argued that none of them provide aggregate explanation, but engagement concept which “accounts for the simultaneous investment of available energies into a work role”,...”provides a more comprehensive explanation for job

performance” (Rich et al., 2010: 618). Significantly, it is therefore stated that engagement is best described “as a multidimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual’s physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance” (Rich et al., 2010: 619).

2.3 Antecedents of Engagement

Several individual studies have highlighted antecedents of engagement (Wollard and Shuck, 2011; Saks, 2006; Rich et al., 2010; Shuck, et al., 2011). However, the synthesis of one hundred and fifty-five empirical studies show antecedents of engagement can be grouped under five main headings; i) individual psychological states, ii) experienced job-design-related factors, iii) perceived leadership and management, iv) individual perceptions of organizational and team factors, and v) organizational interventions or activities (Bailey et. al., 2015; 2017).

2.3.1 Individual psychological states

Kahn (1990) emphasises the importance of psychological states on individuals on their level of engagement with their work; Demerouti and Bakker (2007) also incorporate personal resources into job demands-resources model. As influence on engagement, four major positive psychological individual resources are indicated; these are hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism (Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014).

Self-efficacy is “an individual’s convictions (or confidence) about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (Stajkovic and Luthans, 1998: 66). In reference to social cognitive theory, individuals with high level of self-efficacy are self-starters who believe they possess “to produce the desired effects by their own actions, to be motivated to act, to persevere in the face of difficulties, and to

be resilient in the face of adversity” (Del Líbano et al., 2012: 689). Employees with self-efficacy are intrinsically motivated and likely self-initiated to pursue their goals which imply higher level of engagement and performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). Furthermore, the resources-experiences-demands model which considers personal resources, posits that employees use their work self-efficacy to determine their social and work environment (Salanova et al., 2009). It is also suggested that one’s company can influence one’s self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1994), peer association promotes self-efficacy in the direction of mutual interest, as they influence the development and validation of self-efficacy. This implies that when individuals see others similar to themselves in playing roles successfully, they also tend to build similar level of self-efficacy. However, over-confidence as a result of self-efficacy increases the possibility of making cognitive errors (Vancouver, et al., 2002).

According to Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny (2014), self-efficacy can promote employee engagement for several reasons. First, higher level employee engagement is achieved when the employees perceive their personal abilities and resources match the challenges of given roles. Second, efficacy can enhance the dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption; because individuals with strong self-efficacy are energetic and persistent in pursuing their goals. Third, through four distinct mechanism of task mastery, vicarious learning (learning from relevant role models), social persuasion and encouragement, and physiological and psychological arousal, employees keep building their self-efficacy. At the same time, task mastery can make work enjoyable to engage in, greater dedication can be achieved as a result of vicarious learning and social persuasion while physiological and psychological arousal can in turn promote vigor and energy, making the employee physically, cognitively and affectively available.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as “the positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce’ back from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002: 702). A resilient individual continues to move forward even in the face of uncertainty about the future (Sweetman and Luthans, 2010). To ascertain an individual is resilient, he/she must have faced certain level of threat and the must be managed in a positive way (Masten, 2001). Similar to self-efficacy, resilient can promote engagement by enhancing vigor and dedication. As a result of resilience, employees are able to go through and overcome setbacks; they remain engaged with their jobs where less resilient individuals experience burnout (Bakker et al., 2005; Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014).

Optimism and Hope

Optimism is associated with overall positive outlook and explanatory style of events (Luthans et al., 2004). An optimist attributes to internal strengths and permanent and pervasive causes; while he/she attributes failure to external factors that are not permanent in nature (Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014) while believing that good things will come to them (Carver et al, 2005). In relation to engagement, high optimistic individuals believe they are in control of their lives and expect themselves to succeed in their roles however tough it is (Sweetman and Luthans, 2010). However, the caveat still remains with optimistic individuals in that they attribute failure to external circumstance; which implies they may refuse to be accountable of faults as result of their not being effective at work (Avey et al. (2008). However, due to their positive outlook, optimistic individual are psychologically available; and their optimism can increase vigor (Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014).

Similar to optimism, hope is “a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (1) agency (goal-directed energy) and (2) pathways (planning to meet goals)” (Synder et al., 1991: 287). In order to achieve hope, individuals need to have agency and the pathway to achieve the goal; absence of these components implies lost hope (Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014). According to Sweetman and Luthans (2010), more energy and cognitive resources are harnessed when an individual is hopeful; therefore, hope can be linked to vigor and dedication.

2.3.2 Experienced job-design-related factors

Job design is argued to foster employee well-being and engagement (Parker and Wall, 1998; Bakker and Demerouti, 2013). Job design is seen as “the process of putting together a range of tasks, duties and responsibilities to create a composite for individuals to undertake in their work and to regard as their own. It is crucial: not only is it the basis of individual satisfaction and achievement at work, it is necessary to get the job done efficiently, economically, reliably and safely” (Torrington et al., 2011: 84).

The job characteristics model (JCM) identifies five job characteristics: autonomy, task variety, feedback, identity and significance; it is theorised that existence of these features enable the development of internal motivation in the employees, which eventually leads to better performance in their roles (Hackman and Oldman, 1980). A meta-analysis in reference to JCM shows that all the five job characteristics have strong link with job satisfaction, organisational commitment, internal work motivation, and growth satisfaction (Humphrey, et al. 2007); therefore, it is posited that effective job design facilitates employee engagement (Christian et al., 2011).

The research conducted with employees from four Dutch service organisations indicates that job characteristics such as performance feedback, supervisory coaching and social support have positive relationship with employee engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker,

2004). Similarly, Hakanen et al., (2006) find employee engagement to have positive relationship with supervisory support, job control, social climate, innovative climate and information. Furthermore, multi-level modelling on data from 482 service employees and customers in 66 retail stores shows that feedback from supervisors is positively related with employee engage; however, supervisory support does not (Menguc et al., 2013). This indicates that employees see perceived autonomy as important because it helps to exhibit and build their desired individual psychological states of self-efficacy and resilience. In terms of social interaction, supervisory support is seen to have positive effect on employee engagement (Menguc et al., 2013). Also, control, rewards and recognition, worklife experiences, particularly and value fit are found to predict employee engagement (Koyuncu, et al., 2006). In summary, when jobs are designed to incorporate many of these characteristics, the results from the above and others shows high employee engagement is possible.

2.3.3 Perceived Leadership and Management

While there are many factors that affect the development of employee engagement in an organisation, leadership has great influence on these factors (Mester et al., 2003; Shuck and Herd, 2012). According to Yukl (1998), leadership relates with intentional influence by a leader over an individual or a group to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation. Burns (1978) defines leadership as the process of inducing followers to pursue certain goals that represent the values, aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers. In relation to attitudes and behaviours of employees, “leaders make the difference between work as a mundane grind, devoid of meaning and purpose, and work as an enriching and fulfilling experience that provides an essential source of identity which infuses all aspects of being” (Soane, 2014: 150). They are important for removing constraints that can prevent the employees to absorb themselves in to their work (Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009). According to Detert

and Burris (2007), behaviour of the leader influences employee voice behaviour in two ways. First, leaders are the main recipient of employee voice behaviour; because to speak up in an organisation implies sharing one's idea with someone perceived to be in position of authority to commit organisational resources to the issue raised. Second, leaders have the power to punish and reward employees; therefore, leaders use this power to influence the employee voice behaviour.

Yet, there is tension in leadership which dictates the extent at which employees engage in their work. Alfes and Langner (2017) consider the dilemma leaders face in practice, in engaging employees effectively for organisational success. First, leadership in organisations consider whether to centralise decision-making within few top executives or get the employees participate with the opportunities to voice their opinions on organisational issues. Second, the leaders deliberate extent to which the employees are trusted as against monitored to get work done without diverting or misusing organisational resources. Third, leadership sees to resolve the extent at which employees are given flexibility and allowed to use their initiatives as against giving explicit instructions. Flexibility is argued to give employees the opportunity to shape their roles and environments; enhancing employee self-efficacy and psychological ownership. At the same time, it is crucial for leaders to provide clear direction, avoid role ambiguity which can lead to burnout and ensure work procedures align with the organisation's vision.

Styles of Leadership

For over 3 decades, there has been a lot of research on leadership and different approaches of leadership have been discussed which are based on traits (Johnson et al., 1998; Zaccaro, 2007), skills (Mumford et al., 2000) behaviours (Davis and Luthans, 1979), and situations (Fiedler, 1971; Hersey and Blanchard, 1988). As a result, literature identifies different types of leadership such as transformational leadership, transactional

leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, adaptive leadership, autocratic leadership, Laissez-faire leadership (Northhouse, 2016). While these styles of leadership overlap in some areas, this study limits its review of literature to transformational and autocratic leaderships because of the clear distinctions between them to understand employee-leader relationship in high power distance culture.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is style of leadership that lays emphasis on the charismatic and affective elements of a leader (Northhouse, 2016, Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bryman, 1992). For example, a transformational leader possesses the gift of charisma to challenge the status quo, rally people around and take personal risks to achieve their goals (Youssef-Morgan and Bockorny, 2014). Similarly, this leadership style concerns itself with paying closer attention to follower's needs and ensuring the needs are met while encouraging them to take on more responsibilities in order to attain their full potential (Zhu et al., 2009; Avolio, 1999). It involves "an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them" (Northhouse, 2016:161). While transactional leadership focuses explicitly on the exchanges between leaders and their followers; transformational leadership raises the relationship to one that is sensitive to motivation and morality in both the leader and followers (Zhu et al., 2011). Thus, it is argued that laissez-faire, transactional and transformational leaderships are orderly on a single continuum (Bass, 1985; Yammarino, 1993).

Specifically, transformational leaders lead in four ways: inspirational motivation, idealised influence, individual consideration, and intellectual motivation. It is believed

that when a leader demonstrates the four dimensions of transformational leadership together, employee engagement tends to improve (Raja, 2012).

Inspirational motivation. Transformational leaders raise the follower's emotional commitment level, inspire them to set high standard goals and reach milestones never thought reachable (Shuck and Herd, 2012); which involve rightly articulating a vision in a way that inspire and appeal to the followers (Bono and Judge, 2003). Furthermore, leaders using inspirational motivation instil confidence in their followers and ensure to clearly communicate expectations that the followers can meet (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Antonakis, 2011; Bass, 1985). Accordingly, it is believed that leader's inspirational motivation has most effect on the employees' emotional engagement "by helping employees feel excitement (cognitive and emotional engagement) about the challenging goals and vision that the leader is communicating" (Shuck and Herd, 2012:170).

Idealised influence. By exhibiting high standard of moral and ethical conduct, the transformational leaders gain followers' trust, respect, collective sense of mission and willingness to transcend self-interest; as a result, the leaders become role models (Bass, 1985). The behaviour is demonstrated in taking a stand on difficult issues and laying emphasis on purpose and values (Bass et al., 2003). With idealised influence, transformational leader indicate to the followers the willingness to make personal sacrifices in order to attain the team's objectives.

Individual consideration. Transformational leaders provide supports to their followers and attend to their needs; by recognising individual uniqueness and treating the followers as individuals rather than as part of a group. In order to pay particular attention to the individual's needs, transformational leader creates a supportive climate where individuals can be heard; in particular, they provide environment where followers can speak up without getting punished (Bass and Avolio, 1997). With individual consideration, transformational leaders are able to build mutual trust with their employees, which in turn enhances employee engagement (Lee et al., 2017).

Intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders have set of behaviours and attributes which seek different perspectives, as a result, get others involved when solving problems. They encourage the followers to be independent thinkers and challenge status quo (Schmitt et al., 2016; Bass and Riggio, 2006). Furthermore, transformational leaders look for avenues to challenge beliefs and values of the followers in order for them to be innovative in the work engagement. According to Sosik (2006), through inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders challenge the followers' way of working to create and adopt innovative methods.

A research by Walumbwa et al. (2011) involving 426 employees and 75 immediate supervisors, shed light on the influence transformational leadership behaviours on the employee's ability to be creative, innovative and inspiring. The findings show leader's behaviours and employee relational identification with the supervisor are positively related, which in turn predicted an increase level of employee self-efficacy. It is concluded that greater sense of relational identification is developed through provision of opportunities to learn, regular feedback on assigned work and delegation of duties, and by challenging the followers to come up with new and innovative ideas (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

While research have shown transformational leadership is positively associated with task performance and organisational citizen behaviour (Kovjanic et al., 2013), it is suggested that the extent of these positive outcomes is based on the follower's personal experience and interpretation of the leader's behaviours (Wang et al., 2005). In the Chinese context, it is found out that transformational leadership and work engagement are positively related, with employees' perception of person-job fit partially influencing the relationship (Bui et al., 2017). Tims et al. (2011) study the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement; it is found out that boost in employees' optimism through transformational leadership leads to more work engagement. Similarly, the research involving 140 followers and their 48 supervisors in

South Africa indicates that follower characteristics moderate the positive relationship between transformational leadership and follower work engagement (Zhu et al., 2009).

However, the experience and perception of the followers are based on the emotional intelligence of the leader (Shuck and Herd, 2012). Emotional intelligence refers to the “ability to engage in sophisticated information processing about one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behaviour” (Mayer et al., 2008: 503). Relating the four domains of emotional intelligence to leadership, first, a leader must have *self-awareness*, “the ability to recognize and understand . . . moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effects on others” (Goleman, 1998: 88). Second, *self-management*, “ability to control ... emotions and act with honesty and integrity in reliable and adaptable ways” (Goleman, et al., 2002: 49). Third, *social awareness*, it refers to the ability to sense the emotional tone of the organisation and employees that make up the organisation (Goleman et al., 2002). Fourth, *relationship management*, it relates to the management of other people’s emotions.

Leader-Employee Relationship

In reference to leader-member exchange (LMX) which considers the quality of relationships between leaders and their, an employee will perceive good leadership as one with high degrees of interactions trust and support between the leader and the followers while perceived weak leadership has low degrees of interaction, trust and support (Dienesch and Liden, 1986). This implies high quality LMX “promotes psychological safety precisely because it embodies the supportive, connected, and trusting relationships individuals need to bring their full selves into role performances without fear of negative consequences (Crawford et al., 2014: 64). Reference to social exchange theory which emphasises on the nature of social reciprocation between individuals (Blau, 1964), the level of employee engagement reaches deeper when the

employees can perceive reciprocity of their respect, trust and obligation to their leaders (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). It is argued further that low-quality LMX relationships are based on economic exchanges, exchanges based on contractual obligation of the employees to the employer (Erdogan et al., 2006). On the other hand, high-quality LMX exchanges contractual obligations to relationships based on trust, mutual obligation and mutual respect (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995); involving both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards (Epitropaki and Martin, 2005). Accordingly, it is suggested that the type of LMX relationship that emerges depends on “the result of a series of role making episodes in which leaders express their expectations and employees show the degree to which they are able and willing to live up to these expectations” (Breevaart et al., 2015: 755).

The research into antecedents and consequences of LMX relationships suggests that the quality of LMX relationships is influenced by leaders’ use of contingent reward behaviour, transformational leadership and expectations of follower success; where contingent reward behaviour involves provision of feedback, rewards and recognition for accomplishments, and clarification of task requirements (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Moreover, leader expectation of follower success serves as self-fulfilling prophecy which enhances the follower self-efficacy, and in turn improves work engagement.

Two studies conducted in the United States and Germany with physicians show high LMX is positively associated with engagement (Hornung et al., 2010). On the study of supervisors’ leadership style on employees’ daily work engagement, the findings of Tims et al. (2011) show supervisors with transformational leadership style are able to enhance the subordinates’ work engagement through the mediation of personal resources such as self-efficacy and optimism. Similarly, a quantitative study involving 847 Dutch police officers indicates that employees in high-quality LMX relationships work in a more resourceful work environment, in terms of social support and developmental opportunities, and such relationships themselves initiate a motivational process which enhances work engagement (Breevaart et al., 2015). Meta-analysis of

the relationship of the Ohio State leadership behaviour, two behaviours are highlighted: consideration and initiating structure (Judge et al., 2004). Consideration is “the degree to which a leader shows concern and respect for followers, looks out for their welfare, and expresses appreciation and support”; and initiating structure is “the degree to which a leader defines and organizes his role and the roles of followers, is oriented toward goal attainment, and establishes well-defined patterns and channels of communication” (Judge et al., 2004: 36). It is found out that consideration is highly related to follower satisfaction, motivation and effectiveness.

Autocratic Leadership

The concept of autocratic leadership is characterised by centralisation of decision-making and concentration of power in organisations (Foels et al., 2000); autocratic leaders seek the subordinates’ compliance in how problems are solved (Bass, 1990) through which the leader is in control of their employees’ activities and without considering their input (Sauer, 2011). Autocrats lay emphasis on employee’s obedience, loyalty and strict adherence to roles while they take full responsibilities of decision-making in the organisation (Bass and Bass, 2008).

The leadership behaviours they exhibit include telling the subordinates what to do, ordering them around and making decisions autonomously (De Hoogh and Den Hartog, 2009). The autocratic leaders’ source of power is rather in the positions they occupy which give them control over information, resources and rewards, physical work environment and punishment in their organisations (Yukl and Falbe, 1991). Similarly, autocratic leadership is seen to be effective where the leaders have superior information to make informed decision on organisational issues (Sauer, 2011; Bass and Bass, 2008).

However, it is worth noting that complexity and uncertainty of many business environments, and bounded rationality experience by the leaders make it argument to seek other organisational members' support in information gathering and analysis. Autocratic leadership is seen to negatively affect group stability and effectiveness (Van Vugt et al., 2004), climate within the group and feeling of being content and happy (Bass, 1990). Thus, "people do not favour autocratic leaders because these leader types do not motivate followers to exhibit loyalty and dedication toward the leader and the group" (De Cremer, 2006: 81).

From social hierarchy models, the functional role of an autocratic leader can extend to create a strong structural cohesion among individuals and teams within their organisation (Moody and White, 2003; Halevy et al., 2011); thereby satisfying psychological safety (Tiedens et al., 2007) and facilitate higher cooperation and performance (Keltner et al., 2008; Brown and Leigh, 1996; Bass and Bass, 2008). Furthermore, there is clear line of responsibilities and accountability; thus, role expectations of individuals seem clearer as a result of hierarchical power structure of autocratic leadership (Cooper and Withey, 2009). This implies organisational will have low level of burnout because there is less role conflict and ambiguity (Biddle, 1986). Findings from a study of 60 retail outlets (225 employees and their managers) in the financial services industry show autocratic leadership can foster psychological safety when the team members accept the leadership style; however, where there are power struggles within the team or with the autocratic leader, psychological safety and team performance are impaired (De Hoogh et al., 2015). This expressly indicates power dynamics in organisations has key role in employee engagement (Anderson and Brown, 2010).

2.3.4 Individual perceptions of organizational and team factors

Employee's view of their organisation influences their level of engagement. Organisational support refers employees' perception regarding the degree to which the organisation values their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Through the interactions with the organisation, colleagues and supervisors, employee's perception is built and become strong (Crawford et al., 2014); and according to Kahn (1990), perceived organisation support increases the employee's confidence and enables employee's flexibility to be self-driven and take risk without fear of being punished if it goes wrong. In instances perceived organisational support is high, the employee feels obligated to see into the well-being of the organisation in doing all they can to make the organisation succeed, in the principle of employee reciprocity to their organisation (Rhoades et al., 2001). The meta-analytic review of seventy studies on perceived organisational support shows that perceived organisational support is related fairness, supervisor support, and organizational rewards and job conditions (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

Fairness

Procedural justice relates with fairness and is reflected in organisation's policies and practices, concerning the process resources distribution among employees (Greenberg, 1990; Kurtessis et al., 2017). It is posited that fairness in the decision on resource distribution has strong effect on perceived organisational support (Shore and Shore, 1995). It can be noted whether there is adequate notice before decisions are implemented and employee input in the decision process (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Moreover, distributive justice pertains with employee's perception on fairness in the distribution of outcomes or decisions (Saks, 2006). Colquitt's (2001) findings on organisational justice show employee's perception of justice in their organisation is positively related to job satisfaction and organisational commitment; and Sak (2006) finds that procedural justice predicts organisational engagement.

Supervisor Support

Perceived supervisor support refers to “employees’ view that their supervisor values their contributions and cares about their well-being” (Kurtessis et al., 2017: 1860). It is further posited that supportive supervisors is positively related to employee’s perceived organisational support. Supportive top managers facilitate better communication between different departments, superior decision making and ensure richer resources among the employees (Thomas et al., 2009). It is argued that “because supervisors act as agents of the organization, having responsibility for directing and evaluating subordinates’ performance, employees view their supervisor’s favourable or unfavourable orientation toward them as indicative of the organization’s support” (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002: 700). Similarly, it is found that when supervisors actively invite and appreciate employees for their contributions, the engagement level of the employee increases (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006).

Rewards and Recognition

Rewards and recognition refer to “the formal pay and benefits received as compensation associated with a job, as well as the informal praise and appreciation given by supervisors, co-workers and customers approving of one’s work” (Crawford et al., 2014: 61). They are seen as return on investment of effort put into work; as such, employees are likely to engage at work based on the perceived amount of rewards and recognition they are likely to get (Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1990). Rewards and recognition are beyond financial prizes; but it is a combination of pay, praise from supervisors, promotions and being publicly recognised for one’s effort (Saks, 2006). In a study conducted with 805 teachers in Finland, it is found that informal appreciation is positively related to vigor, dedication and absorption (Bakker et al., 2007). Lack of rewards and recognitions lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) and it is argued that

rewards based on collective performance are likely to create the feeling of ownership, cooperation and commitment among the employees (Bartol and Srivastava, 2002).

Workplace Climate

Workplace climate generally refer to the perception of the employees regarding their work environment which comprises organisational, social and situational elements (Crawford et al., 2014; Glick, 1985). It is posited that climates of organisations “emerge out of the naturally occurring interactions of people” (Schneider et al., 1980: 254); and their sources are attributed to “ a) common exposure of organizational members to the same objective structural characteristics; b) selection, attraction, and attrition of organizational members, resulting in a homogeneous set of members; and c) social interaction leading to shared meanings” (Glick, 1985: 604). Workplace is argued to facilitate psychological safety because organisational expectations and norms are clearer to the employees (Kahn, 1990); as a result, organisational members are able to know their boundaries and consequences regarding the set of behaviours that are allowed and disallowed (Crawford et al., 2014). The findings of Salanova et al. (2005) on front 114 desks and restaurant employees at a hotel show the service climate is positively related to employee engagement. Similarly, it is found that supportive and encouraging work climate is linked with engagement of fast-food workers (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009b) and dentists (Gorter et al., 2008).

2.3.5 Organizational interventions or activities

Organisational interventions are also regarded as a form of employee engagement antecedent. Certain intentional practices and human resource management strategy can facilitate employee engagement. However so far, there is yet to be in-depth understanding about how organisational intervention can stimulate employee

engagement (Albrecht 2010; Shuck and Wollard 2010); which “may be due to relative homogeneity in the methods employed in extant research, with quantitative studies constituting an overwhelming majority” (Reissner and Pagan, 2013: 2741). Nevertheless, using management communication activities as an organisational intervention, the qualitative study in a UK public – private partnership organization shows that the managers use both directive and discursive communication styles to create a work climate in which the employees are willing to engage. Also, there is positive response from the employees to the communication strategy which the management employed as the employees feel valued and involved in the broader organisational decisions (Reissner and Pagan, 2013). However, it is maintained that the influence of organisational interventions is under-researched and represents an important gap in knowledge; “only a small number of studies have thus far examined organisational interventions or activities as potential antecedents of engagement” (Bailey et al., 2017: 44).

2.4 ‘Soft’ and ‘Hard’ Approaches to Employee Engagement

Similarly, organisational approach to employee engagement can influence engagement levels among the employees; and two management approaches are identified: ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013). ‘Soft’ and ‘hard’ approaches are originally from human resource management (HRM) literature which is related to direct and indirect control of human resources (Sambrook, 2012). ‘Hard’ HRM approach emphasises “the quantitative, calculative and business-strategic aspects of managing the headcounts resource in as ‘rational’ a way as for any other economic factor” (Storey, 1989: 8). On the other hand, ‘soft’ approach finds its root in human relations with emphasis on communication, motivation and leadership (Storey, 1989). Accordingly, “organizations which approach employee engagement as a ‘soft’ target tend to conceive of employee engagement itself as a positive outcome and do not focus on productivity as the primary

goal” (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013: 2673). The ‘hard’ approach to employee engagement is narrowly and instrumentally focused on employee productivity and organisational performance objectives whereas individual employees’ experiences at work is the focus for ‘soft’ engagement approach (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013). In relation to HRM, ‘soft’ approach considers meaningful job designs and democratic forms of managing, learning and working towards enhancing employee engagement and business performance (Harter et al., 2002; Sambrook, 2012). Centred to these two approaches is the argument that the contextual contingencies can enable or hinder management ability to deliver employee engagement

2.5 Employee Engagement in a Cultural Context

In very recent time, there has been growing argument that engagement field has only concerned itself with micro-level attitudinal variables of what it means to be engaged in one’s role (Bailey et al., 2017) and a need to expand the concept beyond it. It was stated that most of the research on engagement “that has hitherto taken place within the psychology field has focused on micro-level attitudinal variables, ‘being’ engaged, and has not yet considered how senior managers and HRM professionals go about developing and seeking to embed engagement programmes, ‘doing’ engagement, nor has it sought to evaluate employees’ lived experience of these” (Truss et al., 2013: 2664). Engagement has moved beyond Kahn’s (1990) personal engagement, it is crucial for HRM professionals, line and senior managers work together to form a virtuous cycle to ensure employees demonstrate organisational citizen behaviours, thus engagement as management practice (Alfes, et al., 2013; Jenkins and Delbridge 2013; Bailey et al., 2017).

Taking for example the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, engagement requires vigour (in form of work related energy and mental resilience), dedication – having pride in work and being highly involved in work and absorption – extent at which individual is focused

(Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). This view still lays emphasis on the relationship between individual and their work; so, “the consensus at the moment is that engagement relates specifically to the feelings, cognitions and behaviours that individuals experience and enact in relation to their specific job’ (Truss et al., 2012: 224). Moving beyond employee engagement as study of individual and their work, “practical challenges in delivering employee engagement through a more critical and contextualized approach” need to be considered (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013: 2671).

Much of the views of engagement have their roots in positive psychology; they failed “to recognize the social, economic and political conditions that contribute to and contain powerlessness in the workplace’ (Fineman, 2006: 277). Rothman (2014) contends that the extent to which current employee engagement research is applicable in other cultures with economic systems, governments and cultural values different from those in the West. It is argued that “as is the case with other research on motivational processes in work organisations, most studies regarding employee engagement have been conducted in the United States, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Studies have mainly been done in countries that have democratic governments, privately owned companies and a relatively strong emphasis on individualism” (Rothman, 2014: 164).

From a broader view, Arnett (2008: 610) argues that psychological research published in the American Psychological Association focuses too narrowly on less than 5% of the world’s population with the assumption that “people anywhere can be taken to represent people everywhere and that the cultural context of their lives can be safely ignored”. In response to Arnett (2008), Klassen et al., (2012) examine the validity of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale by exploring measurement invariance and the relationship of the teachers’ engagement with their job satisfaction and quitting intention from two different cultures; Western culture - Australia and Canada, and non-Western cultures – China (Hong Kong), Indonesia, and Oman. The findings confirm Arnett’s (2008)

argument and show that “the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale needs further development before its use can be supported in further cross-cultural research”; which emphasises the need to understand employee engagement across national and cultural boundaries (Klassen et al., 2012: 318).

While validity of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, UWES across cultures is being re-evaluated for understanding employee engagement, much of literature on employee engagement is quantitative, using UWES as the instrument (Bailey et al., 2015, 2017). Profoundly, an extensive literature review on employee engagement shows 86% of extant studies used UWES; arguing “an over-reliance on quantitative, cross sectional, and self-report studies within the field” rather than conducting exploratory studies to uncover insights that can only be observed in implicit actions and interactions of the employees and their managers (Bailey et al., 2015: 32).

Similarly, Bakker, et al. (2011: 4) argue for the need to pay more attention to the broader contextual organisational factors; contending that “social context is crucial and may set the stage for a climate for engagement with an important role for management”. For example, the influence of power and politics appears not to have been considered; as a result, it is argued that “additional theoretical insights from organizational sociological perspectives that reflect considerations of power and politics would further enrich our understanding of engagement” (Bailey et al., 2017: 37). There is similar conclusion that “many psychological studies de-contextualize employee engagement from their organizational settings” and “there is an opportunity for further academic exploration into the ability of management to promote a supportive organizational environment and how this is influenced by a range of contingent features (Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013: 2673).

2.7 Etic and Emic Approaches

Given the argument that the study of employee engagement needs to be understood in relation to culture, Cheung et al. (2011) present three approaches to study culture-influenced concepts: etic, emic, and etic-emic approaches. In relation to employee engagement, etic approach aims at addressing the universality of the constructs that constitute employee engagement. Accordingly, “the main strengths of the etic approach are the large empirical database that has been built up and the sound methodological basis for its studies” (Cheung et al., 2011: 2). Furthermore, the approach is pivoted on comparability of the established variables; evaluating whether the imported instrument measures similar constructs across cultures.

On the other hand, emic approach is sensitive to family, social, cultural and ecological context; as a result, they are incorporated in research design (Cheung et al., 2011). In relation to employee engagement, emic approach considers in-depth analysis of the constructs given the specific cultural context. Thus, “cultural variables such as the world view of participants, acculturation level and racial identity, might influence the assessment of a construct” (Rothmann, 2014: 165). Furthermore, emic analysis focuses on a single culture and study behaviour of interest using descriptive and qualitative methods (Rothmann, 2014). Emic researcher develops their theories bottom-up based on local phenomena and experiences from the culture (Cheung et al., 2011).

However, Cheung et al., (2011) suggest the combination of etic and emic approaches for rigour and cultural sensitivity. Employee engagement needs to be understood both from universal view as well as the perspective of each culture; therefore, “the cultural context of employee engagement has to be unpacked in a given society to fully understand the measurement of engagement in that society” (Rothmann, 2014: 166). This is because individuals may have different meanings for a given construct due to context (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). For example, it found out personal modesty is

a key social value in East Asian societies such as Japan, with the view that “one should not boast about one’s success or declare too loudly one’s wellbeing”; however, this perspective of success appears contrary to the North Americans’ (Matthews, 2012: 301).

Conclusion

This chapter has presented literature review on employee engagement by considering relevant definitions, theories and research findings on the subject. Among others, centred to this literature review is the call to extend the study of employee engagement to other contexts and explore the influence of organisational intervention in enhancing the nature of employee engagement. As a result, the next chapter presents review of literature on national culture.

CHAPTER THREE

National Culture

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on national culture. It starts by reviewing the background concept of culture; subsequently moves on to dwell on national culture. The models of national culture as found in the literature are reviewed; namely Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Value Dimensions, Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner's 7 Cultural Dimensions and Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions. Similarities and differences among these models are discussed; the chapter further reviews literature on power distance and collectivism extensively. The implications and relevance of the cultural dimensions on employee engagement are discussed.

3.1 Concept of National Culture

There have been several definitions of national culture; however underpinning the variations is the acknowledgement that culture as concept is a set of shared values, beliefs and expected behaviours (Morgan, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2004). Fundamentally, "culture is a shared meaning system" (Shweder and LeVine, 1984: 110). Culture is complex because some aspects of it are implicit while others are explicit; which are usually explained in terms of behaviours, norms, values and basic assumptions (Groeschl and Doherty, 2000). The implicit nature of culture is in form of ideologies, shared values, beliefs and basic assumptions (Sackmann, 1992; Jermier et al., 1991); the explicit nature are in the form of observable artefacts; for example, symbols, language, norms and practices (Hofstede, 2001; Karahanna et al., 2005). Similarly, culture is like onion with different layers; manifesting itself in symbols, heroes, rituals and values. Core of the culture i.e. values, stays firms and shape symbols, heroes and rituals (Hofstede, 2001; Fang, 2010). However, differentiating between

national culture and organisation culture, it is argued that cultural differences at national level are mostly resides in values, while they are in practices at organisational level (Hofstede, 1991).

Accordingly, culture defined as “a basic set of assumptions that defines for us what we pay attention to, what things mean, and how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions to take in various kinds of situations” (Schein 1992: 22). As it is seen as a basic set of assumption that defines individuals, it is also as “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede, 2001: 5). Using the analogy of how computers are programmed, it is argued that the source of an individual’s mental programme can be traced to the social environment he/she grows up. People pick life experiences starting from their family to neighbourhood and to outer community. People develop their mental software as a result of their experience; and the mental software is the culture (Hofstede, 2005). Culture dictates what we pay attention to, what we value and how we act (Trompenaars, 1993) and helps to set a group’s behavioural standards (Singelis and Brown, 1995). At the same time, it also seen as “an integrated system of learned behaviour pattern that are distinguishing characteristics of the members of any given society” (Czinkota and Ronkainen: 2007: 54).

Underlying the various definitions of culture across the literature is values as the central theme (Schein, 1992; Schwartz, 1994; Kluckhohn, 1962). According to Schwartz (1994: 20), values transcend specific circumstances, guide “selection or evaluation of behaviour, people and events”; helping group of individuals to determine what is important to them at a given point in time, which implies that values are trans-situational. The relative importance place on a value tends to change over time (Jackson and Schuler (1985); pointing towards the conclusion that culture is not static, it is constantly evolving (Schein, 1995). Ultimately, most scholars of culture agree that culture is

learned, shared, symbolic, adaptive, trans-generational and patterned (Luthans and Doh, 2012).

3.2 Influence of National Culture on Organisational Culture

Some studies acknowledge the influence of national culture on organisational culture. Hofstede (2001) argues that the attitudes and behaviours of employees are hugely influenced by their national culture. They argue further that that management is 'culturally dependent'; "if we see what effective organizations in different cultures have done, we recognize that their leaders did adapt foreign management ideas to local cultures" (Hofstede, 1983: 88). According to GLOBE project (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) which explores culture in sixty-two societies, it is concluded that culture of an organisation mirrors the country in which they exist (House et al., 2004). As a result, national culture is argued to have influence in how managers interpret their roles (Mead, 2002); more importantly, national culture determines how individuals respond to issues and information available for decision making (Triandis, 1972).

It is argued that employees can resist management initiatives when they clash with their cultural values; as a result, "attention to, and respect for, differences in cultural values remains a high priority for international managers" (Kirkman and Shapiro, 2001: 565). For example, it is claimed that vertical collectivism and particularistic social relations in China and Russia facilitate greater level of social interactions among the organisational members which enable knowledge sharing (Michailova and Hutchings, 2006). Furthermore, national culture is contended to affect aggregate level of entrepreneurship (Hayton et al., 2002). Shane (1993) finds out that uncertainty avoidance and power distance are negatively related with innovation, while individualism has positive relationship with innovation. Cultural differences is argued to have impact on management activities; affecting leadership style, organizational design characteristics,

motivation, communication, people's expectations of work design and rewards etc (Nicholls et al. 1999).

Despite the argument regarding nature of national culture, the extent to which it influences organisational culture is questioned. John (2006: 396) believes that the context in which an organisation exists provides both situational opportunities and constraints that affect organisational behaviour; in essence, "national culture constrains variation in organizational cultures". Gerhart and Fang (2005) conduct a re-analysis of Hofstede's original research, showing only a small percentage (2 – 4%) of the national culture is accounted for individual cultural values and differences in organisations account for more variance in cultural values than differences in countries. Although, Martin et al. (1983) maintain that values that appear to be unique to an organisation are actually similar across other organisations in the same industries. Nonetheless, re-analysis of the Chatman and Jehn's (1994) work shows that differences in organisations account for more culture variance than the difference in industries (Gerhart, 2008). It is argued further that "the degree to which within-country variance in culture is restricted relative to between-country variance is a question of statistical effect size magnitude for country" (Gerhart, 2008: 244). Considering institutional theory and resource based view, it is concluded that culture is one of the contextual factors which influence organisational culture; as a result, "in countries that have looser cultures, there should be more room for organizations to be distinctive and to find employees that fit that distinctive model" (Gerhart, 2008: 246).

Bhaskaran and Sukumaran (2007) find out that other contextual factors such as legal, economic and regulatory context of organisations have greater influence on organisation's values, orientations and practices than the national culture of the owners and managers. In support with the view that "there are many varieties of collectivism as there are collectivistic cultures (Triandis, 2001: 909), it is further argued that "although there are significant differences in the culture across different nationality-based

business entities, the differences are not readily apparent because the cultural differences represent a seamless mixing and matching of different values, beliefs, orientations and practices” (Bhaskaran and Sukumaran, 2007: 65).

3.3 Models of National Culture

Culture is a set of shared values, beliefs and expected behaviours (Morgan, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2004); however, dimensions help to observe and examine the similarities and differences between culture of a group and another (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005). In this section, the three major and prevalent frameworks for understanding dimension variations across cultures (Ahlstrom and Bruton, 2010; Adler, 2007) are discussed.

3.3.1 Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck’s Value Orientations

According to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck model (1961), there are five value orientations. Underlying these orientations is the argument that all human societies must answer a limited number of universal problems and there are limited and known value-based solutions; however, each culture has its preference for the solutions (Maznevski et al., 2002).

1. Human Nature: the dimension refers to the belief that the fundamental nature of people is essentially evil or good.
2. Man-Nature: this refers to the human relationship with nature; with the belief about the need to control nature. There is culture variations based on the extent to which individuals believe they should control the nature, humans should submit to nature or be in harmony with the nature.

3. Time: it is about the preference whether human decisions should be guided by tradition (past), immediate needs and circumstances, or anticipated future needs and circumstances
4. Activity: it relates with human preference on the prioritisation of their activities. Some cultures belief humans should focus on living in the moment; another believe in striving toward becoming a better self; while others believe in doing – focusing on goals and accomplishments.
5. Relational: this relates with the nature of relationships to others which can be individualistic, collective or linear. Relationship is individualistic when it is believed that one's responsibility is first to oneself before next individual and achievements are based on one's efforts. Linear preference places emphasis on hierarchy with the view that those that occupy higher status in the hierarchy have power over and responsibility for those lower. Collective view places preference over group; however, the individuals should have equal status

3.3.2 Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner's 7 Cultural Dimensions

Similar to Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) view, it is argued that "every culture distinguishes itself from others by the specific solutions it chooses to certain problems that reveal themselves as dilemmas" (Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner, 2011: 13). In studying the solutions that different cultures choose to universal problems, Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner (2011) identify seven dimensions of culture.

1) Universalism versus Particularism: this cultural dimension considers the priority between rules and relationship. Universalism is rule-based and tends to "imply equality in the sense that all persons falling under the rule should be treated the same" (Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner, 2011: 36); with tendency no to give exceptions, as it might weaken the rule. As a result, individuals in universalist society tend to see codes, standards and rules more important than relationships. In contrast, particularism

considers exceptions to rule; in passing their judgement, particularist thinks along love and hatred regarding another individual.

2) Individualism versus Communitarianism: Individualism places more importance to individual than group. Individualists believe in equating their achievements to the efforts put into their responsibilities; with the “assumptions that the contribution of any one member to a common task is easily distinguishable and that no serious problems arise from singling him or her out for praise” (Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner, 2011: 55). However, in a communitarian culture, the group is considered to be more important than the individuals. The responsibilities of the individuals are to uphold the integrity and ensure the wellness of the group. Also, there is sense of safety as a result of individual's loyalty to the group.

3) Specific versus Diffuse: this dimension refers to the degree of one's involvement in relationships; “when the whole person is involved in a business relationship, there is a real and personal contact, instead of the specific relationship prescribed by a contract” (Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner, 2011: 14). Therefore, the dimension can be seen as the extent to which an individual brings his whole self to a role. Individuals in a specific culture, as much as possible, separate work life from personal life. However, individuals in a diffuse culture have blurry lines between different areas of their lives. There is overlap between private and professional relations with the view that personal connections breed trust which lead to healthy business relationships.

4) Affectivity versus Neutrality: this relates with whether the nature of interactions should express emotions or be objective and detached. In neutral cultures, the individuals believe in emotions should be suppressed and “the assumption is that we should resemble our machines in order to operate them more efficiently”; however in an affective culture, “loud laughter, banging your fist on the table, or leaving a conference room in anger during a negotiation is all part of business (Trompenaars and Hapden-

Turner, 2011: 14). In general, while individuals in affective culture express their feelings, counterparts in neutral culture subdue theirs'.

5) Inner-Directed versus Outer-Directed: this relates to the extent to which individuals are in control of their environment and circumstances. Inner-directed individuals believe that with acquisition of right knowledge, they can be in control of issues in their lives. However, outer-directed individuals align themselves with external force in order to cope with their circumstances; and they attribute failure to external factors that are beyond their control.

6) Achievement versus Ascription: in an achievement-oriented culture, individuals are judged on their based on their achievements; and the level of their achievements dictates their statuses in the community. On the other hand in an ascription culture, individuals attain their statuses by the virtue of age, class, gender, education, social connections etc. Furthermore, the use of titles is seen as important to signify one's status in an ascription culture; however, in achievement-oriented culture, the use of titles is minimised.

7) Sequential Time versus Synchronic Time: in a sequential time culture, the present is most important events as a result, emphasis is put on effective planning and punctuality. Conversely, past, present and future are seen as interlocked periods; thus, individuals tend to do several projects at once.

3.3.3 Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions

The Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions appears to be most widely accepted and frequently cited model, as it is argued to be the most extensive research on cultural dimensions across nations (Fang 2010; Ahlstrom and Bruton 2010; Triandis, 2004). Hofstede's (1980) conclusion of survey analysis of over 110,000 questionnaires of IBM staff in over 50 countries reveals there are four cultural dimensions. Moreover, fifth

(Hofstede, 2001) and sixth dimensions were added (Hofstede et. al., 2010). The six cultural dimensions are: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long Term versus Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint. Central to Hofstede's view on management is that it cannot be culturally independent from the culture it finds itself. National culture which an individual acquires from "their earliest youth onwards, are much deeper rooted in the human mind than occupational cultures acquired at school, or than organizational cultures acquired on the job" (Hofstede, 2011: 3).

Uncertainty Avoidance

This relates with ways individuals in different culture handle uncertainty. It is inevitable that all humans have the anxiety of what will happen in the next moment; however, individuals in different cultures see this issue in different way. Uncertainty avoidance refers to a society's tolerance for ambiguity and indicates the "extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations" (Hofstede, 2011: 10). The essence of uncertainty is based on feeling and it is subjective experience; and "feelings of uncertainty not only are just personal but may also be partly shared with other members of one's society" (Hofstede, 2005: 165). Therefore, extent to which an individual have uncertainty feeling about the future can be traced to other members of his/her society; as uncertainty feelings are acquired and learnt. It is further argued that "the ways individual cope with uncertainty are "transferred and reinforced through basic institutions like the family, the school and the state" (Hofstede, 2005: 166). This implies that employees in high uncertainty avoidance culture are characterised to have high level of anxiety as they feel threatened by uncertainty; as a result, they will prefer to keep quiet on organisational issues if their silence will guarantee them safety in terms of employee. In contrast, employees in low uncertainty avoidance culture are more comfortable taking risks to speak out and let their views

known to their managers (Rothmann, 2014). Unlike employees in high avoidance culture, employees in low uncertainty avoidance culture are more ready to change their jobs if they are not satisfied with the nature of their work (Hofstede, 2005). Based on the analysis, Nigeria is classified as a high uncertainty culture.

Masculinity versus Femininity

This is related to the division of emotional gender roles between women and men. Accordingly, a society is inherently masculine “when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life”. And a society is called feminine “when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 140). High earnings, recognition, opportunity for advancement to higher-level jobs and challenging roles are associated to masculinity; while femininity is linked with caring, supports and social-environment oriented roles.

Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation

This relates to the choice of focus for people's efforts: the present, the future or the past. Long-term oriented cultures anticipate for future rewards; as a result, they embrace future-oriented behaviours such as investing in the future, planning and delaying gratification (Hofstede, 2005; House et al., 2002). In contrast, short-term oriented cultures are inclined to the “fostering of virtues related to the past and present – in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of ‘face’ and fulfilling social obligations” (Hofstede, 2005: 210). On the other hand, persistence, ordering relationships by status and having a sense of shame are the values associated with long-term oriented cultures (Rothmann, 2014).

Indulgence versus Restraint: relates to the gratification versus control of basic human desires related to enjoying life (Hofstede, 2011). Indulgence refers to the tendency to “allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede, 2010: 281). Restraint refers to the conviction that such gratification needs to be controlled and regulated by strict social norms. Societies with indulgence-oriented culture, there are range of alternatives; while restraint-oriented culture maintains strong values of group organisation, permanence, durability, formality and solidarity (Hofstede, 2010).

Individualism versus Collectivism:

Collectivism is the degree at which individuals in a society are integrated into groups while individualism is the opposite (Hofstede, 2011). In a collectivist culture, the definition of family reaches beyond the parents and children; it extends grandparents, aunts, uncles, servants etc. As a result, collectivism pertains to “societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 2011: 92). In contrast, individualism places emphasis on independence and self-interest (Green et al., 2005; Taras et al., 2012). It is a loosely knit social framework where individual interests have high priority to the interest of others; everyone is responsible for their own welfare (Rothmann, 2014). Employees in an individualist culture see having the personal time as important; also, they appreciate jobs that give freedom to adopt their own approach to work and embrace challenging roles that can single them out for rewards once accomplished (Hofstede, 2011). The work goals of employee in a collectivist culture are generally to have adequate training to improve their skills, good physical working environment and be able to deploy their skills and abilities fully on the job. There is an emphasis on relationships with sense of

commitment to one's group towards social harmony in a collectivist culture; and the behaviours of each individual in the group are highly influenced by group's set standards (Triandis, 2004). United States and Great Britain occupy the first and third positions of the countries on the high-end of individualism; having scores of 91 and 89 respectively. However, Nigeria (in West Africa) is highly collectivist with the score of 20 on the individualism index (Hofstede, 2010).

It is noted that a given society has individuals with different personal values; implying that they can score either high on individualist and collectivist values, high on one and low on other, or low on both. However, the variations among individuals in the same culture do not generally change the average inclination of the national culture (Hofstede, 2010). It is further argued that for example, "in societies in which people on average hold more collectivist values, they also on average hold less on individualist values. The institutions of such societies assume that people are primarily collectivist. Therefore, at the society (or country) level, individualism and collectivism appear as opposite poles of one dimension" (Hofstede, 2010: 102).

In relevance to employee engagement, employees in an individualist culture are expected to act in their own interests; they are expected to organised themselves in a way that their interests and company's interest match. Conversely, since the priority is the group rather than individual in a collectivist culture, the employers hire individuals who belong to their in-group and will be loyal to uphold the interests of the group even if it is not in the interests of the individuals (Hofstede, 2010; Scarborough, 2001). Based on this argument, it implies that there is likelihood of higher employee disengagement in a collectivist culture where the interests of the employees are not put as priority and they are expected to adhere to the social norms and structure even if they have different preference.

In terms of hiring, collectivist-oriented organisations consider in-group, with preference to recruit their relatives; first of that relatives of the employers, then relatives of other

employed individuals in the company. Hiring relatives is argued to reduce risks in a collectivist-oriented culture, as it is believed that relatives will be more loyal and concerned about the reputation of the organisation (Hofstede, 2010). In view of this, it is more likely that there are better candidates that could be hired into roles if 'out-group' are considered. Therefore, it is expected of an incompetent employee to struggle in the role, which may lead to fatigue and eventually exhaustion – a dimension of burnout, which is an antithesis of engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002). However, in individualist culture, working with relatives is considered unacceptable as it can create nepotism and conflict of interest at work (Hofstede, 2010). Also, in collectivist culture, personal relationship takes priority at work over the tasks to be done; however, it is contrary in individualist culture.

Power Distance

Power dynamics in an organisation is arguably fundamental to all relationships and affect organisational processes and outcome (Daniels and Greguras, 2014; Javidan and House, 2001; Keltner et al., 2003). In any context, power can be: coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent (Carl et al., 2004). Coercive power rests on application or threat of application of physical harm or punishment; reward power relates with using praise, friendliness, increased pay, promotion etc to gain control. Legitimate power is as a result of position an individual occupies within a formal hierarchy; expert power is control gained due to technical expertise or special knowledge; and referent power is the power bestowed to an individual by the followers as a result of the desire to identify, emulate and internalise the values of the superior (Carl et al., 2004).

Power distance is defined as “the degree of inequality in power between a less power Individual (I) and a more powerful Other (O), in which I and O belong to the same (loosely or tightly knit) social system (Mulder, 1977: 90). It is also “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and

expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2011: 9). It relates with income inequality, political freedom, corruption and the human development index (Taras et al., 2012). Schwartz (1999) sees the dimension as hierarchy–egalitarianism, which is the extent to which individuals are expected to seek the welfare of and depend on others for the preservation of the social fabric. One end of the pole is to have hierarchical system whereby “people are socialised and sanctioned to comply with the obligations and rules attached to their roles”; and with acceptance of an unequal distribution of power, roles and resources (Schwartz, 1999: 27). The other end of the pole is egalitarianism, a system that induces individuals to see themselves as equal; also, the individuals “are socialised to internalise a commitment to voluntary cooperation with others and to feel concern for everyone’s welfare” (Schwartz, 1999: 28).

Measurement of Power Distance

In order to capture the nature of power distance in each country, employees are asked to answer three questions which would determine the power distance index. The employees are asked 1) the frequency at which they were afraid to express disagreement with their managers; 2) their perception of the manager’s actual decision-making style; and 3) their preference for the manager’s decision-making style (Hofstede, 2010). To an extent, these questions have conceptual links with employee engagement in terms of their involvement in decisions and being able speak up on organisational issues that affect them. According to the power distance index calculation, out of the 76 countries that participated in the survey, West Africa has high power distance culture and it is ranked number 17. United States and Great Britain are ranked 60 and 66 respectively, making them to be defined as low power distance cultures.

GLOBE's measurement of Power Distance

GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) is an organisation of more than 200 researchers from 62 countries, dedicated to the study of culture, leadership and organisational effectiveness. Power distance cultural dimension is "the degree to which members of an organisation or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally" (House et al., 2004: 537). GLOBE measures power distance on societal and organisational levels with two constructs: As Is (practices) and Should Be (Values). Between scale 1 and 7

As Is questions are

a) In this society, followers are expected to:

obey their leader without question

Question their leaders when in disagreement

b) In this society, power is:

Concentrated at the top

Shared throughout the society

Should Be questions are

a) I believe that follower should:

Obey their leader without question

Question their leader when in

disagreement

b) I believe that power should be:

Concentrated at the top

Shared throughout the society

In the ranking, Nigeria is ranked 2nd on the power distance index, out 62 societies that participated in the research; as a result, the findings is consistent with Hofstede's (2010) that Nigeria is classified as high power distance culture. The GLOBE Power Distance

practices measure “is correlated positively with Hofstede’s measure in all the four studies, and the correlation is significant in all studies) (House et al., 2004: 543).

Power Distance Difference among Countries: Roots in the Family

“Culture is learned in that it is acquired from our social environment so early that we are usually unaware of its influence” (Nicholls et al. 1999: 15). This indicates everyone starts to get culturally programmed to a set of dimensions after birth. In a high power distance culture, the children are expected to be obedient to their parents and adults who do not have to be members of their family. Sometimes, “there is even an order of authority among the children themselves, with younger children being expected to yield to older children” (Hofstede, 2010: 67). In high power distance culture, respect for parents and elders are seen as a good virtue; it is believed that when the children grow up, they will be treated in like manner. As a result, young persons give deferential treatment to adults. However, in a low power distance culture, children are treated equal as adult. Children are allowed to have opinions of their own which may be contradictory to their parents. They are expected to speak up on issues that concern them. Accordingly, “behaviour toward others is not dependent on the other’s age or status; formal respect and deference are seldom shown” (Hofstede, 2010: 67). Considering the two polar ends of power distance, it is noted that there are variations from one family to another; but, this does not change an outlook of a national culture (Hofstede, 2010).

Power Distance at School

Individuals further develop cultural programming at schools. In a high power distance culture, the inequality seen parent-child relationship is said to broaden in teacher-child relationship and the sense of dependency on adult increase (Hofstede, 2010). The teachers are treated with respected and the children are fearful of them. The teachers

outline the intellectual paths and are supposed to be strict. More importantly, the students are not supposed to speak until they are authorised, as all communication is initiated by the teachers and “the teachers are never publicly contradicted or criticised and are treated with deference even outside school” (Hofstede, 2010: 69).

In low power distance culture, the equal rights from parent-child relationship is extended to teacher-child relationship. The educational system is student centred; and the students are supposed to decide their own intellectual paths while the teachers guide them. Students can initiate communication and they can ask questions or voice their concerns at any time in the class. The students can express their dissatisfaction, criticisms and disagreement openly in front of the teacher. Ultimately, effective learning in low power distance culture “depends very much on whether the supposed two-way communication between students and teacher is, indeed established” (Hofstede, 2010: 70). The eventual difference is students in low power distance grow to become independent and learn to take initiatives while students in high power distance culture tend to look for supports from others.

Power Distance and the State

In addition to the character of power distance in family and education system, subordinates in high power distance believe skills, wealth, power and status should go together (Hofstede et al., 2010); perceiving superiority with power; those with less power accept their places in the hierarchy, trust their leaders, defer judgments to the superiors (Kirkman et al., 2009). Also, the subordinates are generally submissive, loyal, and obedient to their leaders (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994). However, individuals in low power distance culture value being treated fairly while those in high power distance environment seek goodwill of their leaders (Tyler et al., 2000). Also, when leaders delegate more responsibility and autonomy to subordinates, there is more positive impact on sense of belonging and self-esteem of employees in low power distance

culture than those in high power distance culture (Daniels and Greguras, 2014; Chen and Aryee, 2007). Accordingly, the unequal distribution of power in a society characterised by high power distance is not only due to exertion of power by the leaders but also an unquestionable endorsement of the inequality by the followers (Hofstede et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2007).

Larger Power Distance	Small Power Distance
Hierarchy in organisations reflects existential inequality between higher and lower levels.	Hierarchy in organisations means an inequality an inequality of roles, established for convenience
Centralisation is popular	Decentralisation is popular
Managers rely on superiors and on formal rules	Managers rely on their own experience and on subordinates
Subordinates expect to be told what to do	Subordinates expect to be consulted
There are more supervisory personnel	There are fewer supervisory personnel
The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat, or 'good father'	The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat
Subordinate-superior relations are emotional	Subordinate-superior relations are pragmatic
Privileges and status symbols are normal and popular	Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon

Table 1: Key Differences Between Small- and Large-Power Distance in The Workplace (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Power Distance in the Workplace

Individuals tend to carry over their social beliefs, values and practices to the organisations (Meyer and Rowan, 1977); as a result, "in general, organisations tend to mirror the culture of power distance practices and values in their society so that they can gain legitimacy and also appeal to the people from their host societies" (House et al, 2004: 534). The similar nature of parent-child and teacher-child relationships pervades into organisations and informs boss-subordinate relationships.

In a high power distance culture, bosses and superiors tend to see themselves as unequal. Organisations are hierarchical in nature and power are centralised to the few individuals at the top, which influence participative decision making (Daniel and

Greguras, 2014; Hofstede, 2010). Furthermore, in terms of communication, contacts are usually made by the superiors and the subordinates are expected to be told what to do.

Since individuals with power are seen to be superior and elite in high power distance culture, their subordinates accept their place in the hierarchy, submit to the directives of the superiors and defer judgements to them (Kirkman et al., 2009; Bochner and Hesketh, 1994). This implies that lower employees are unable to take initiatives on their own as they are used to taking orders from the bosses. And since they are not used to exercising decision-making and problem-solving skills, it is likely they are unable to contribute more meaningfully to organisational issues. Furthermore, high power distance is said to be more task-oriented and less people-oriented (Bochner and Hesketh, 1994); since “high power distance cultures initiate structure for task completion and retain the social distance inherent in hierarchical relationships” (Daniel and Greguras, 2014: 1205). In contrast, superior and subordinate see themselves as equal in a lower power distance culture, “the hierarchy system is just an inequality of roles, established for convenience, and roles may be changed so that someone who today is my subordinate may tomorrow be my boss” (Hofstede, 2010: 74). There are no special car park, cafeteria and restrooms for the superiors; everyone uses the same facilities. In making decisions, the subordinates are often consulted, although accept the superior’s the final judgement; they are allowed to have different opinions and speak up on matters that concern them (Hofstede, 2001).

The quantitative study of 163 supervisor-subordinate pairs from mainland China indicates the relationships between perceived organisational support and job commitment and organisational citizenship are influenced by power distance; the relationships are weakened in a high power distance culture, and stronger in a low power distance culture (Farh et al., 2007). While using Schwartz’s (1994) hierarchy-egalitarianism cultural dimension, it is also found the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance is stronger with low power distance and weaker with

high power distance; although, no difference is observed when Hofstede's constructs is used (Ng et al., 2009). Matsumoto's (1990) study on facial expressions of emotions, when comparing Japanese and American shows that it is more acceptable in high power distance culture for higher-status individuals to express negative emotions (e.g. anger) towards lower-status individuals; as it is a way of maintaining the power distance. And as a sign to maintain their lower status, the lower-status individuals show positive emotions when relating to the superiors. However, in lower power distance culture, lower-status individuals display more negative emotions to higher status individuals and more positive emotions to lower-status individuals. Similarly, insults from higher-status individual to a lower-status individual lead to less anger in high power distance culture, since power is linked with title and power inequality is expected and accepted (Grandey et al., 2010).

In attempt to interpret justice motives in the context of national culture, the meta-analytic findings of data from 190,000 employees in 32 countries indicate the perceptions of justice is weak in high power distance culture and strong in low power distance culture, as the subordinates are unable or lack the power to challenge the superiors' views, thus, tend to accept the judgement of their managers (Shao et al., 2013). On leadership, it is argued that "the effect of transformational leadership on team potency was moderated by team power distance and team collectivism, such that higher power distance teams and more collectivistic teams exhibited stronger positive effects of transformational leadership on team potency" (Schaubroeck et al., 2007: 1020). This indicates good leadership in a high power distance culture can be of a great advantage to organisation; not only will there be effective coordination of organisational activities, the employees are likely to commit more into organisation's objectives when they perceive fairness from the leadership.

Criticism of Hofstede's model of culture

Despite, Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been criticised on the extent to which the study is generalizable (McSweeney, 2002). The extent to which people that participated in the survey could represent the entire population of their countries is questioned; it is stated that some countries were represented by less than one hundred respondents (Taras et al., 2012). Besides the whole research is based on employees in an American company – IBM; considering that IBM has a strong organisational culture which may influence the perception of the employees towards their jobs (Jaeger, 1983). However, it is contended that if indeed the strong organisational culture of IBM influenced the responses of the employee, “then one would have expected national differences within that multinational firm (IBM) to be reduced” (Jaeger, 1986: 180). The Hofstede's findings from 116,000 surveys from employees in 72 countries of the same organisational culture (IBM) rather confirm the influence of national culture on organisations; despite strong culture at IBM, the variations in national cultural dimensions from one country to another have influence on the cultural mix of each IBM office.

It is argued that “highly educated well-paid IBM employees' ability to represent the general population likely differs from country to country, with the discrepancy probably being greater, for example, in the Third World nations . . . than in industrialized Western nations” (Schwartz, 1994: 91). Considering that the original data was collected between 1967 and 1973, it is further criticised whether the cultural variations at the time can be used to suggest the cultural dimensions in different countries, in the current world (Taras et al., 2012). In addition, Hofstede's cultural dimensions fail to recognise diversity and variants within each culture i.e. sub-cultures and ethnicity (Nasif et al., 1991; Dorfman and Howell, 1988; Huczynski and Buchanan, 2007). Hofstede's work is argued as bipolarised and having static vision of culture; it fails to recognised we are in “the age of globalisation and the Internet when cultural learning takes place not just longitudinally from one's own ancestors within one's own cultural group but all dimensionally from

different nations, cultures, and peoples in an increasingly borderless and wireless workplace, marketplace, and cyberspace” (Fang, 2011: 2). In response, it is acknowledged that the increase in education level has decreased power distance scores; however, it is argued that countries can all have moved towards lower power distance levels “without changes in their mutual ranking” (Hofstede et al., 2010: 87). It is further concluded that the variations of power distance in nations are “likely to survive at least for some centuries...and presumed cultural melting-pot process is still very far away, if it will ever happen” (Hofstede et al, 2010: 88).

It is worth noting that even cultural dimensions are changing from one nation to another, the current employee age group can be argued to be between 25 years and 60 years. Therefore, it can be contended that the mental programme of the employees rooted in and developed from their early interactions with their family members; and extended to teacher - child dependency relationship at school, still hold strong in their current lives and reflect in their relationships at workplace.

Comparison of Cultural Models

It is worth noting that in terms of number of countries in culture studies, Hofstede’s work involved highest number of countries; covering 72 countries with 116,000 surveys from 88,000 IBM employees (Hofstede, 2001). The study Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner’s model is based on 55000 respondents from more than 60 countries (Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner, 2011); while GLOBE’s framework is based on questionnaire responses from 17000 managers from 62 countries (House et al., 2004). The dimensions by GLOBE are highly related with Hofstede’s power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions; although, GLOBE split collectivism into institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism, and masculinity-femininity into assertiveness and gender egalitarianism. The two independent dimensions by Trompenaar’s work are related with Hofstede’s individualism-collectivism and power

distance; besides, it is claimed their work “has no peer-reviewed academic publications (Hofstede, 2010: 43). The work of Schwartz (1994, 1999), whose hierarchy–egalitarianism is close to power distance cultural dimension, only has South Africa and Zimbabwe to represent Africa.

3.3.4 African Communitarianism: Ubuntu Construct

Western management theories and concepts have increasingly dominated the thinking of academics and managers in Africa; however, appropriateness of these theories in the context is yet to be rightly substantiated (Gbadamosi, 2003). The cultural dimensions from the widely accepted and cited models have successfully classified most African countries as high power distance and collectivist culture. Yet, some African anthropologists believe these dimensions do not rightly indicate cultural mix of African communities. It is stated that “from a simplistic point of view, using Hofstede’s (1980) value dimension of Power Distance and an assumption that African cultures are somewhat high on this dimension (which can itself be doubted) it could be surmised that these forms of participative management may be discordant with said African cultures” (Jackson, 2015: 81).

According to Hofstede (2010), sub-Sahara African culture is collectivist in nature; however, the definition of collectivism is important. As presented in a section above, collectivism pertains to “societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 2011: 92). This indicates there is tendency of allegiance to an in-group and that “collective interests prevail over individual interests” (Hofstede, 2010: 130). However, some African scholars argue that the African culture is communitarianism, existing in form of Ubuntu philosophy.

Ubuntu means 'humanity', 'humanness' or 'humaneness'; articulating "basic respect and compassion for others: caring, sharing, warmth and understanding" (Louw, 2010: 3). Ubuntu is loosely translated to English language as 'a person is a person through other persons' (Taylor, 2014). Therefore, Ubuntu implies "a person's humanity is dependent on the appreciation, preservation and affirmation of other person's humanity. To deny another's humanity is to depreciate my own humanity. To be a person is to recognize therefore that my subjectivity is in part constituted by other persons with whom I share the social world" (Eze, 2008: 387).

It is important to point out that this philosophy has a sharp contrast to Western philosophy of 'I think, therefore I am', as noted by René Descartes (1596–1650) which places importance on interests of individual over that of community. According to Desmond Tutu, Ubuntu says "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. We belong in a bundle of life. We say a person is a person through other persons. It is not I think therefore I am. It says rather: I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share" (Tutu, 1999: 31).

Plurality and Individuality in Ubuntu

The sense of belonging by Ubuntu is different from collectivism as defined by Western cultural theorists; at the same time, it is not characterised by individualism (Mbigi, 1997). With Ubuntu, there is respect for individuality; however, sense of the individuality is not resided in individualistic properties but through social interactions with others (Louw, 2010; Du Toit, 2004). There is interdependency of the individual and community in Ubuntu; neither community exists in a vacuum nor individual subjectivity located outside the community he/she exists (Eze, 2008). The identity of an individual is not in him/herself, it is formed in reciprocal interconnections with others (Foster, 2007). Ubuntu is not all about consensus; rather, "it inspires us to expose ourselves to others, to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich our own" (Louw

2001:23). Accordingly, “the individual’s good is concomitantly advanced precisely because the community’s and individual’s goods are not radically opposed but interwoven. The community is a guarantor of my subjectivity, whereas I guarantee the community’s survival by advancing its constitutive goods, knowing that if the community hurts, it is the individual that hurts (Eze, 2008: 388). Hence, Ubuntu is comprehensively expressed as “we are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are’ (Mbiti , 1989: 106).

While African culture places great value on solidarity (Ramose, 1999), sense of belonging with Ubuntu is not a blind conformity where core values of individual identity are suppressed. Rather, “the principle of humanity enables me to encounter an other’s viewpoint not with the intention of arriving at unanimity, consensus of conformity, but with the intention of experiencing, judging and understanding the ‘other’ which will enable me to make an ‘ontic-commitment’ to the good we share” (Eze, 2008: 393). Relating employee engagement with Ubuntu, an employee does not simply accepts what he/she is told to do, as indicated in the concept of high power distance; however, he/she gets converted to follow an idea through social interactions with the initiator of the idea.

The understanding of Ubuntu is seen to be problematic (Eze, 2008), that there has not been any empirical research on Ubuntu; however, the key values of Ubuntu are solidarity, survival, respect, dignity and compassion (Mbigi, 1997). The essence of Ubuntu is the preservation of the uniqueness and otherness of another individual, and the uniqueness of individuals can only be enriched through constant contact and interaction with one another (Louw, 2001). Therefore, Ubuntu is not characterised by aloneness of individualism or blind conformity of collectivism; “through this understanding of community, Ubuntu philosophy exposes the I/others dichotomy as false, thereby giving a distinctly African meaning to the concept of power sharing” (Louw, 2010: 9). It is concluded that while “it is, in any event, impossible to restore the

'original' version of Ubuntu, "important question has to be: 'How should Ubuntu be understood and utilised for the common good of all Africans, and of the world at large?'" (Louw, 2010: 9).

The next chapter presents a discussion on Nigerian cultural context in relevance to employee engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nigeria Cultural Context of Employee Engagement

Introduction

It is argued that the application of Anglo-derived management practices in a different context may not have same impact (Gbadamosi, 2003) and the cultural dimensions of a nation are said to influence the employees' attitude and behaviours (House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2006; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2011; Hofstede, 2001). In reference to employee engagement in Africa as whole, it is contended that "management and organisational behaviours have to be placed within context, studied within context, and interpreted with the help of various context variables such as culture, history, and so on" (Senaji et al., 2014: 230).

Given that the aim of this research is to explore employee engagement in a different context; as a result, the research is conducted in two insurance companies in Nigeria. In this vein, this chapter presents a discussion on Nigerian cultural context in relation to employee engagement in organisations. A brief history of Nigeria is presented with emphasis on cultural dynamics of the people. Furthermore, few available studies on employee engagement in Nigeria are reviewed.

4.1 Nigeria: A brief Contextual Background

Before Nigeria becomes a country, there were different kingdoms that have been in existence for centuries; such as Benin Empire, Oyo Empire and Nri kingdom. The British capture Lagos in 1851 and Nigeria became a British protectorate in 1901 and later got its independence in 1960 (Falola and Heaton, 2008). It is worth noting that until 1914, there were three separate administrative zones – northern protectorate, southern

protectorate and the colony of Lagos. They were brought under a single administration by Lord Lugard (Kolawole, 2014).

Before the colonisation, paternalistic employment relations practice largely existed in many areas that now formed Nigeria; however, nevertheless, the presence of British as the colonial master influenced many social practices in the country including cultivated practices in formal and office settings (Ubeku, 1993). It is argued that the replacement of paternalistic employment relations system by the British “was done without any considerations for the differences in the sociocultural realities of Britain and Nigeria and the differences in the sociocultural realities of the various ethnic groups that were merged to become Nigeria” (George, 2011: XVII).

Nigeria is a West African country of diverse of sub-cultures with a population of over 186 million and more than 250 ethnic groups. There are over 500 indigenous languages; the three main languages are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (Falola, 2001). English is adopted as the official language, considering several indigenous language variations. The discovery of oil made the country to rely heavily on it. 96% of export revenue is still from sale of crude oil. It is rich with other mineral resources and arable land for farming; however, mismanagement has rendered the country poor (Ezeome and Marshall, 2008). Currently, 70% of the population live below poverty line, unemployment rate stands at around 14% and underemployment (those working but doing menial jobs not commensurate with their qualifications) is also at around 20% (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). As a result of high rate of unemployment (considering underemployment), individuals who are employed do whatever it takes to keep their jobs (Erondue et al., 2004).

The population is made up of Muslims (50%), Christians (40%), and indigenous religious followers (10%); and the different religion ideologies in Nigeria have influence the outlook of the individuals and their perceptions of leader-subordinate relationship (Arnett, 2012). Accordingly, Africans in general, uphold the strong connection between

objects, humans and the supernatural; even though, there are variations among the ethnic groups, “the quest for equilibrium with other human beings and with the supernatural is the guiding principle” (Dia, 1994: 176).

4.2 Nigeria as country of different nations

Even though Hofstede and others categorise Nigeria to have high power distance with collectivism, it cannot be absolutely taken as a given that the different ethnic groups within the country share exact cultural dimensions, there are variations in the dimensions. Some believe the country actually “comprise three different nations, each with a long history and folklore distinct from the other two”; and the border outlines are rather “defined on maps in Whitehall or in the boardrooms of colonial trade offices in Britain” without considering ethnic bonding, “but on what was most convenient in terms of access to river ports, deep-sea harbours and the like” (MacDonald, 2005: 52). Igbo nation occupies most of the south-eastern part of Nigeria; Yoruba nation extends the boundary of Nigeria to some West African and Caribbean countries; and Hausa nation is predominantly in the northern part of Nigeria, also extends to many countries in North and West Africa.

Korpela (1996: 31) also agrees colonialism created Nigeria, the ethnic groups had lived as separate societies for hundreds or thousands of years; therefore, “cultural heritages of these societies cannot be lumped together under some common ‘Nigerian culture’, not to speak about “African culture”. For example, it noted that the Igbo’s “system of voluntary associations, coupled with their values of individualism and achievement, adapted them well to the kinds of opportunities and demands which British colonialism brought” (Gusfield, 1967: 356). Also, the Ndi Igbo people traditionally do not have a sustained centralised government system; they lived in small groups (Chigbo, 2011). The Yoruba people are highly integrated ethnic group; dated back as 9th century, they prefer living close to one another in towns instead of in villages or as scattered

households like their neighbouring groups (Korpela, 1996). In Yoruba kingdom, the traditional ruler, Obas, are primarily chosen from a ruling family; not as a result of wealth but by heritage. Emirs, the traditional rulers in the North are also appointed from a royal family. Despite the variance among the sub-cultures, Nigeria is still seen to be collectivist oriented and have high power distance culture (House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). However, Gerhart (2009) argues that the presence of sub-cultures within a country stands to account for the different level of national culture influence from one ethnic group to another; implying that the extent of unquestioned loyalty to a superior is slightly different from one ethnic group to another.

4.3 Social system values

In African culture, there is more emphasis on collective achievements over individual success; hence, the tendency to be associated with one group or the other (Blunt and Jones, 1997). This informs the collectivist nature of Nigerian culture (Hofstede, 2001); as a result, “self-reliance and self-interest tend to take a back seat to ethnicity and group loyalty” (Dia, 1994: 176). Furthermore, social support is a highly valued among indigenous sub-cultures in Nigeria. Individuals in families and communities provide social support for one another. Beyond this, the individuals extend moral and psychological supports to one another in the “form of personal services and attendance at their social events in order to comfort, encourage, felicitate or to provide solidarity as the case may be” (Gideon et al., 2013: 13). According to Ahiauzu (1989), the Africans feel safer when they are in groups than alone. Furthermore, social support in Nigeria indicates social acceptance and recognition of the individual; in reciprocity, the individual commits him/herself to the group (Goodman, 1994). In relevance to employee engagement, it is posited that a Nigerian employee who gains social support from his/her organisation “is likely to reciprocate by increasing his commitment to the

organisation and increase his work performance more than the one who does not” (Gideon et al., 2013: 15).

In terms of power distribution, African societies, in general, are hierarchical but, egalitarian within age groups (Linguist and Adolph, 1996); as a result, the relationship between leader and subordinate tends to be paternalistic (Jones et al., 1995; Blunt and Jones, 1997). Unless abused, the hierarchical leadership is not seen as a problem in high power distance culture; for example, Hale and Fields (2007) study extent to which followers from Ghana and the USA have experienced the three dimensions of servant leadership at work; also, the study investigate the extent to which the followers relate servant leadership with good judgement and effective leadership. It is found out that the Ghanaians experience significantly less servant leadership behaviours from the leaders than North Americans. Furthermore, the perception of followers in Ghana believe vision to have stronger relationship with leadership effectiveness; because “Ghanaian culture exhibits higher power distance in current practices, followers may have greater expectations that people in leadership roles will provide vision, foresight and direction for followers, than their North American counterparts” (Hale and Fields, 2007: 410). It is worth noting that power distance is measured same in Nigeria and Ghana (Hofstede, 2010); since they share very similar culture.

The study of Hale and Fields (2007) somewhat points to the direction of the importance of leadership on employee engagement in culture with high power distance and collectivism. Given the characteristics that employees are told what to do and they tend to see their workplace as an extended family, the leadership stands to gain from employee engagement based on the extent they think the employees are relevant in the organisation. From the study of Hale and Fields (2007), it also implies that leadership of organisation can achieve higher employee engagement level if the leaders can inspire the followers and implement certain intervention programmes for effective communication between the leaders and the employees until the leader’s vision

becomes shared vision. Similarly, Karatepe (2011) investigates the relationships between work engagement and procedural justice among 167 frontline hotel employees in Nigeria. Consistent with previous study (Saks, 2006), it was noted that employees with higher perception of procedural justice reward the organisation with higher level of engagement in their work. Also, work engagement is found to influence the relationship between procedural justice and extra-role behaviour.

4.4 Explicit Respect for superiors in the use of Honorifics

Despite the variations of Nigerian national culture across its sub-cultures, one characteristic that appears common is the use of titles (honorifics) ascribed to individuals particularly in positions of power. Such individuals prefer to be called by their titles e.g. Chief, Dr., Sir, Ma etc. According to one of acclaimed Nigerian writers, the bearer of titles “apparently wants those who meet him to know that he, one, has what’s often called a traditional title; two, that he earned a medical degree or doctorate (or, quite often, bought one); and, three, that he’s a knight of the Catholic or Anglican Church” (Ndibe, 2014).

Particularly, in the Yoruba culture, calling an older individual by his or her first name is not welcome. Instead, the younger person is expected to quickly determine their own rank in relation to the other person (Olajide, 2012). Even in Hausa tradition; they have titles for their rulers and leaders and children do not call their parents and elders by their names as a sign of good upbringing (Ndimele et al., 2008). The Ibo people who can be argued to have relatively lowest high power distance culture among the three main tribes in Nigeria; in official settings, the use of Mr, Mrs and Sir are common (Opata and Asogwa, 2017).

In corporate environment, it is common practice for professionals such as engineers, architects, accountants, quantity surveyors and pharmacists to use titles. Sometimes,

when titles are not used, the individuals are annoyed (Chidebell, 2013). The reason title holders insist on being referred to with relevant titles is not farfetched. Consistent with Hofstede's argument that in high power distance culture, status and power are seen to go together, titles in Nigeria widely symbolise power (Opata and Asogwa, 2017). Chidebell (2013: 147) states that "as titles have also been generally associated with pecuniary wealth, and a sign of proven social responsibility, many Nigerians aim at earning a title before attaining middle age". In some quarters, conferred titles open up access to certain benefits; to an extent that a man without 'recognised' title is derisively called ofeke in Igbo culture (Opata and Asogwa, 2017). Also in Igbo land, an individual's titles such as Aruma, Ozo Ok'Obu, and Omeregu titles give him access to make use of communal land (Opata and Asogwa, 2017). Centred to the use of honorifics is deference gestures to the superiors in any social settings and absence of these gestures implies a form of disrespect to the seniors (Odebunmi and Mathangwane, 2015); potentially affecting the social dynamics between the managers and employees in an organisational settings.

4.5 Nigeria as a Collectivist and High Power Distance Culture

Among very few studies related to employee engagement in Nigeria is the cross evaluation of the motivational factors to work in four European countries (France, Italy, Netherlands and Scotland) and Nigeria, in an attempt to understand the implication of culture dimension on management practices (Iguisi, 2009). Using survey questionnaire developed by The Research and Development Unit of Euro-African Management Research Centre (E-AMARC), the data was collected from 697 respondents (managers and non-managers) of which 314 respondents are Nigerians. Based on the outcome of the analysis, motivation-related values factors across the five cultures are ranked between 1 and 18.

The Nigerian respondents ranked the following as their first five most important motivation-value factors: 'make contribution to the success of their organisation', 'have challenging tasks', 'have security of employment', 'opportunity for higher level jobs' and 'cooperation with others'. From the list four out of the five factors reveal and confirm the collectivist nature of Nigerian national culture (Igusi, 2009; Hofstede, 2010). In African cultural context, there is more emphasis on communal spirit; as such, employees still seek the need to be part of a family at work and sense of belonging is part of the motivation (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003). Elele and Fields (2010) consider nature of employee engagement at work in terms of what commitment to work means to Nigerians and Americans. To Nigerians, it is found that affective commitment implies the feeling of being part of family at work, finding emotional attachment, finding personal meaning and having sense of belonging to the organisation. For Americans, continuance commitment is based on personal consideration of necessity and alternative choices available; however, an employee chooses to stay at his current job because of absence of alternatives with similar rewards or benefits, for the Nigerians.

While Italy, France and Scotland rank 'Have freedom to adopt your own approach' as 2nd, 3rd and 5th, Nigeria ranks it 10th (Igusi, 2009). This finding is consistent with conclusion by Hofstede and other cross-cultural researchers that employees in a high power distance culture rely on their managers and formal rules; also, they expect to be told what to do. On the other hand, employees in low power distance culture are somewhat expected to be consulted, they are cultured to be independent and take initiatives when necessary (Hofstede, 2001). Interestingly, Italy, France, Netherlands and Scotland rank 'Serve your country' as the last of the 18 motivation-related values factor; however, Nigeria ranks it 10th. Also, all of the countries rate 'have little tension and stress on the job' to be the last or second to the last. This indicates employees across the cultures have the same perspective towards burnout-related issues at work; although, what constitutes such issues are likely to be different. According to Igusi (2009), the conclusion of their study suggests job context is more important than job

content; and in an attempt to positively improve employee engagement in Nigeria, efforts need to be place on contextual factors as evidence in culture dimensions. In terms of organisational intervention in Nigeria, it is posited that “changes in nature of organisational control factors or interpersonal factors are likely to be more valued than changes in the work itself” (Iguisi, 2009: 149).

4.6 Explicit Deference to People in Power

Relevant to Hofstede’s (2001) argument that subordinates in high power distance defer judgement to their superiors, it is argued that the administrative culture in Nigeria is highly hierarchical and decision making is delegated upward (Korpela, 1996). In instances manager appears tough and exercises his authority unfairly as a result of his/her position, employees in Ghana, a related high power distance culture, tend to “act with extreme caution while at work in order not to invite the anger of their superiors for any mistakes that they may make in the course of their work” (Kuada, 2007: 32). The managers in such culture as Nigeria are seen as benevolent ‘good fathers’ by the subordinates (Hofstede, 2010); the employees themselves see the managers as individuals who hold employee’ sustenance; considering the high unemployment rate in the country. Such subordinate-superior dependency that exists in Nigeria affects employee engagement in workplace. It is posited that “younger African under the supervision of his elder in the workplace may perceive his performance obligatory and define his role broader than when under the supervision of a younger person” (Gideon et al., 2013: 14).

Not only do employees in Nigeria tend defer judgement to their superior and act with extreme caution when the leadership is perceived autocratic, the employees tend not to express their concerns on organisational issues (Umar and Hassan, 2013). According to Saunders et al. (1992), when supervisor is perceived to be approachable and responsive, the employees are more willing to voice work-related concerns. The

common believe among the Nigerian employees is that 'Oga at the top' (meaning, top boss) knows better; therefore, the boss' view or opinion should not be challenged. It is suggested further that "to act in a way that shows the boss has erred and therefore need to be corrected is a scandalous situation; hence, silence is the order of the day" (Umar and Hassan, 2013: 189). Even in some organisations in a high power distance culture, it is not surprising to find out that senior managers are not in positions to make certain decisions; their role is "one of operationalizing directions received from above, making them clear to subordinates and providing advice and support" (Blunt and Jones, 1997: 17).

Fapohunda (2016) examines why employees in Nigeria passively engage at work and are more comfortable to remain silent on issues; questionnaire was collected from 321 academic staff of three universities in Lagos, Nigeria. 81.3% of respondents believe their managers do not openly support employee to speak up or voice their opinions on issues and 79.4% of the workers believe their managers act as if they know it all. In general, administrative and organisational motives constitute the main reasons why the employees keep quiet on issues. Due to the collectivist culture, 65.7% of the respondents fear of being isolated or labelled as troublemaker or complainer by their colleagues. Furthermore, there is existence of high power distance issue at the three universities. 84.6% of the respondents do not feel comfortable of discussing organisational issues with individuals above them in the organisational hierarchy; and many of the respondents believe the "university management usually do not deem it mandatory to listen to employees' ideas and opinions in resolving the organizational problems" despite the fact that there supposed to be academic freedom in the university (Fapohunda, 2016: 94).

Umar and Hassan (2013) investigate the organisational silence among middle level administrative employees in Northern Nigeria tertiary educational institutions. The findings indicate that the cultural values of loyalty and respect for superiors are the main

reasons why they are reluctant to voice their opinions on organisational matters. Also, the employees are fearful of being negative labelled as rebellion. The findings further indicate that despite outward free interaction and exchange of pleasantries with the bosses, certain issues and concerns are never discussed because they “attract bad name and reputation for the employee” (Umar and Hassan, 2013: 192). Given the high power distance culture, the employees will rather remain silence if psychological safety cannot be guaranteed (Kahn, 1990). Regarding employee engagement in Nigeria, the issue appears to be more contingent management’s interest, if indeed they desire more from the employee which relates with psychological safety (Kahn, 1990).

Ugwu et al. (2014) study the relationship between organisational trust, psychological empowerment and employee engagement. The data analysis of survey from 715 employees from banking and pharmaceutical sectors shows that organisational trust and psychological empowerment predict employee engagement. Also, organisational variables and psychological resources are found to predict job behaviour. These findings are consistent with previous studies conducted in the West (Kirkman et al., 2004; May et al., 2004); therefore, they argue that “despite the context, employees in Nigeria can also be engaged in their work” (Ugwu et al., 2014: 392). However, the contextual factors that lead to organisational trust and psychological empowerment worth studying as the factors are likely to be different in Nigeria from the West, giving that United States is argued to have low power distance culture and based on individualism while Nigeria is characterised as high power distance culture with collectivism ideology.

Okurame (2009) investigates the impact of mentoring on employee commitment and job satisfaction among health care worker in Nigeria. It is realised that for formal mentoring programmes are rare in the Nigerian work environment; but informal mentoring, primarily “because the work setting is interpersonally flexible” (Okurame, 2009: 346). The findings indicate that informal mentoring is a significant predictor of organisational

commitment and job satisfaction among health care professionals in Nigeria. However, with mentoring based on interpersonal relationships, it can be argued that a subordinate who does not have a good relationship with his/her superior may not get supervisory supports in form of mentoring.

Summary

Research into organisational behaviour in general, in African countries such as Nigeria is not yet developed, it is scarcely investigated (Ugwu et al., 2014); there is no enough research of sub-Sahara African countries (Elele and Fields, 2010). This endeavour cannot be ignored again; given that half of the world's population growth is likely to occur in Africa (CNN, 2017) and most importantly, Nigeria is set to become world's third most populous country while it is expected that population of Europe will somewhat decline by 2050 (UN, 2017). Given the different cultural dimensions between the West and Africa, it has been argued that much direct application of management theories originated from the West fail in Africa. It is pertinent to study organisational behaviour in the African cultural context; thus, the interest to explore the nature of employee engagement in Nigeria.

From the few and scattered findings that relate with employee engagement in Nigeria, it appears that leadership may have huge influence on employee engagement in Nigeria. This seems to be as a result of the collectivist culture with high power distance dimension. Employees in high power distance culture respect their managers either because of the position they occupy or age. As a result of the employees' perceptions of their leader, findings from previous studies show the employees tend to do as they are told even if it is not in the interest of the employees.

CHAPTER FIVE

Research Methodology

Introduction

The aim of this research is to gain understanding into employee engagement; more specifically in collectivist high power distance culture. Given the nature of the research aim and its objectives which is exploratory, this research adopted a comparative case study which involved the use of interview and observation as data collection methods. On the first case, full participant observation was undertaken with thirty-five interviews conducted across the organisation, an insurance company. With the second case, this also entailed full participant observation with thirty-two interviews at another insurance company within same country as the first case.

However, the purpose of this chapter is to give detail explanation of the research design and methods used to achieve the research aim. This chapter starts by explaining interpretivism as the philosophical paradigm chosen then presents justifiable arguments why it is fits for the research. The philosophical paradigm informed the choice of qualitative methodology as the research strategy; the advantage and limitation are discussed accordingly. Furthermore, this chapter covers the steps taken in data collection, nature of the data collected, the participants involved in the data collection, the data storage and process involved in the data analysis. Also, the logistics regarding access to research sites and activities on the sites are explained. In detail, the chapter gives explanation on data recording and analysis. The ethical issues of the research are then discusses before discussing issue on quality assurance of the research findings in terms of credibility, dependability and transferability.

5.1 Research Philosophy

It is important to recognise constituting philosophical assumptions of this study because they have implications on the way the research is carried out and importantly, nature of the research outcome (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This is supported by the argument that “all theories of organisation are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society” (Burrell and Morgan, 2015: 1). These philosophical assumptions relate to assumptions about human knowledge (epistemological assumptions), the realities faced in the course of the research (ontological assumptions) and the extent at which the researcher’s values influenced the research process (axiological assumptions) (Saunders et al., 2015). All through this research work, the researcher bears in mind the philosophical commitments as they informs the research strategy used, type of data collected and nature of the data analysis. Having this in mind, this research adopts interpretivist paradigm in its research design.

5.1.1 Interpretivism as the Chosen Philosophical Paradigm

As stated in the introduction chapter, the central purpose of the study is to explore the nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. Interpretivism is chosen due to the research objectives and characteristics of the philosophical paradigm. Drawing from the two dimensions that typify different approaches to social theory which result into four philosophical paradigms, interpretivism is situated on subjective and sociology of regulation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The researcher’s ontological view point of the research assumes that reality is socially constructed in the interaction of individuals; to human cognition, social world is made up of names, concepts and labels which are used to form reality (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Neuman, 2000). This perspective does not see social reality like in the natural world (Saunders et al. 2015) but argues the role played by individuals and behaviours displayed are understood based on the meanings ascribed to them by the

individuals. This research is anchored on the philosophical paradigm that employee engagement cannot be understood from distance; the researcher needed to position himself where he could study the interactions of the employees and their managers.

Bearing in mind that individuals in organisation comprise of people of different academic and professional backgrounds occupying different roles at different organisational levels and across functions and faced by different circumstances, the researcher rejected the positivist view that reality is one but upheld different realities in bringing rich insights into a complex phenomenon in the organisation. The researcher's perspective maintained the argument that set of employees can experience same issue but have different interpretations of it (Berger and Luckmann, 1966); therefore, the researcher's aim was to understand the subjective experiences of the employees regarding their level of engagement in their organisations. Also, it is not enough to see the phenomenon from the eyes of the employees alone; in order to gain deep insight into the phenomenon under study, a holistic approach was necessary whereby the words, body language and observable actions of the employees and managers are analysed to have rich constructs for the research.

As anti-positivist, the researcher conducted this research from the standpoint that the researcher does not exist independently of the social world; understanding of the phenomenon at hand can only be gained by "occupying the frame of reference of the participant in action" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 5). This informed the rationale for an ethnography approach towards data collection which helped the researcher to 'get inside' the phenomenon being studied and allowing the employees to tell their own stories instead of them responding to a predefined set of questions (Kuada, 2012).

5.1.2 Dominance of a Functionalist Paradigm on the Study of Employee Engagement

Another important rationale for adopting an interpretive approach to the study of employee engagement is that there has been dominance of functionalist paradigm in the research area. Functionalist paradigm is an approach to research which seeks to principally rational explanations of a phenomenon being studied; with the view which tend to be realist, positivist, determinist and nomothetic (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). It is with the view that reality is one and with assumption that the social world composes of tangible empirical artefacts and concrete relationships which can be observed and measured and applicable in any context (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Therefore, researchers that follow functionalist paradigm usually begin with hypotheses to understand organisational behaviour. There have been highly contributory findings from the use of Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, 2002) which has been adapted by many researchers. However, there is a need to go beyond measuring commonalities to exploring contextual aspects of engagement.

While humans are humans everywhere, the lenses in which these individuals see their social world are different, mainly because of cultural backgrounds. Cultural researchers have highlighted cultural variations across the world; for example, British culture is characterised to be individualist and have low power distance, while Nigeria culture is seen to be collectivist with high power distance (Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 2004). Regarding employee engagement, it is even argued that “to date, much of the literature has focused on testing psychological models, and there has been less interest in the setting within which the studies take place” (Bailey et al., 2017: 46). Therefore, interpretivism was chosen as philosophical paradigm in order to understand the phenomenon from the viewpoints of the employees given the cultural dimensions in which they perform their roles.

5.2 Approach to Theory Development: Inductive Research

Decision on research approach is important as it informs the research design employed in answering the research question and guides the thought process in order to remain on course towards achieving the research aim (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). There are two approaches to theory development: deductive and inductive. With deductive approach, researchers start with what is known through reviewing the literature; and bearing in mind relevant theoretical considerations, hypotheses are constructed. A theory is established if premises of the hypotheses are tested and confirmed to be true through analysis of a new data (Bryman and Bell, 2015). However with inductive approach, the researchers start with data collection that is relevant to phenomenon of interest; implying that no theories are considered at the beginning of the research in order to allow the collected data to lead in the emergence of concepts towards development of theories (Yin, 2016).

In relation to this study, the researcher followed inductive approach; the study of employee engagement began with no particular theory in mind but an open mind for the data to determine the theoretical lens to follow. The aim of the research was not to test certain hypotheses in order to validate or refuse certain theories. Rather, this research was particularly concerned with the context in which employee engagement occurs. It does not intend to substantiate what is known before but it intends to reach deeper into the phenomenon and develop theory on area that has not been explored before. Furthermore, inductive approach gives flexibility in methodology to follow; in contrast to deductive research approach which constructs its methodology in a fixed way.

The next section of this chapter discusses the research design in detail.

5.3 Research Strategy: Qualitative Methodology

With the research aim in mind which is to explore the nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture, there was the need to choose a research strategy that put emphasis on words and meanings in order to arrive at rich description and understand of the phenomenon being studied. As a result, the researcher followed qualitative methodology for this study. As supported by Corbin and Strauss (2008:12), qualitative research “allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables”. Also, the understanding of the phenomenon being studied is derived from the social actors’ meanings giving to it (Gephart, 2004).

In order to capture the unspoken nature of employee engagement in the organisations, the researcher found it necessary to observe the interactions of individuals within the organisations to see them act and behave in their domain (Creswell, 2007). There was the need for the participants to fully express themselves in making reference to examples, stories and sometimes using several words to describe same phenomenon; not to be limited to predefined set of answers which quantitative researchers draw out (Creswell, 2009) so that deep understanding of employee engagement can be gained. Furthermore, qualitative methodology was adopted because it allowed the researcher to employ multiple methods of data collection in order to achieve the set aim (Gephart, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Thus, the researcher’s rationale for qualitative methodology which is about studying “things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3).

In addition, qualitative methodology suits the exploratory nature of this study and allows flexibility in helping researchers to quickly adapt to the phenomenon they meet on research site (Cooper and Schindler, 2008). Sometimes, researchers will need to change the way they had plan to collect data based on how the subject being studied

presents itself at the research site or nature of responses from the participants (Van Maanen, 1998). As oppose to quantitative methodology which follows a rigid process, mode of data collection with qualitative methodology is “non-standardised so that questions and procedures may alter and emerge during a research process that is both naturalistic and interactive” (Saunders et al., 2012: 168).

Next section discusses the qualitative research method employed for this research.

5.4 Case Study Design

The choice of research design “must be appropriate for the questions you want to answer” Robson (1993: 38); this is because it guides the nature of data collected and how the data is analysed (Creswell, 2014). In cognizant of this, the researcher found case study design suitable for this research. The case study design is an approach that “focuses on dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534) with the aim to answer “a ‘how’ or why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigators have little or no control” (Yin, 1994: 9). Also, case study was appropriate for this study as the research questions are exploratory in nature; to know ‘why’ of an issue; in this case, why the employees engage in their organisations the way they do.

Case study approach is about the search for meaning and understanding while the researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis with an end-goal to achieve rich description of a phenomenon (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, case study research method is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1984:23). It considers the dynamic present within a setting and emphasises on in-depth understanding of it (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2005).

Case study design was chosen because of the research context where relevant behaviours of the employees and their managers cannot be manipulated in examining the subject being studied (Yin, 2014). Unlike an experiment as a research method which separates the phenomenon from its context and attends only to few variables that interest the researcher, in relation to employee engagement, contextual conditions are also important since in the real world the phenomenon is hardly separable from the given context. It was the researcher's interest to bear in mind the contextual circumstances that relate with employee engagement in the two organisations where the research was conducted. Therefore, contextual tools like artefacts and office arrangements were put into consideration while studying the relationship of employees and their superiors.

The choice for case study design regarding research was also based on its characteristic of being able to focus on a specific unit of analysis; having bounded by time and place (Creswell, 1998). Also, case study approach allows researchers to explore a given phenomenon in depth while still in real-world context (Yin, 2014). The intention was to specifically study the relationship of employees and their managers while at work in order to understand the nature of employee engagement in the organisations; the researcher did not intend to expand focus to other phenomena which were going on in the organisations.

Form of Case Study: Multiple-case Design

Stake (1995) classifies case study into three types: intrinsic, instrumental and collective or multiple. Intrinsic study is done because the researcher has an interest in the case itself and seeks an understanding of it; an instrumental study is mainly to provide insight into an issue by studying a particular case; the case used is of secondary interest – as a supportive role to “facilitate our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2003: 137). However, collective or multiple-case design involves logic of replication where the

researcher reproduces the same procedures of research (Yin, 2003). This research adopted multiple-case design, using two cases.

Cases Selection: Each as Single Case Design

The key factor in defining a case study is dependent on the case chosen to be studied and the set boundaries of phenomenon being studied (Bryman and Bell, 2016; Flyvberg, 2011). Therefore, it is worth noting that the researcher went to each research site conduct a single case ethnographic study; the design of each case was to maximise what could be learnt about it (Stake, 1995) and understand the true reflection of the relationship between employees and the top management of the organisation. Therefore, the thick description, common and revelatory nature of single case design was achieved (Yin, 2014) despite the evolution of the research emerging as a comparative study. Considering the nature of qualitative research which is mainly exploratory in nature and calls for flexibility of the researcher, the cases used render themselves to be theoretically useful (Eisenhardt, 1989) to explore the issue of employee engagement.

So, how did the cases render themselves for comparative study?

Change in Research Aim while on Research Site

The researcher's initial research aim was to understand how shared meaning is developed regarding a strategic initiative from the top management at an organisation (OSC Insurance). The plan was to use the three-year strategic implementation programme by the company; therefore, the intention was to contribute to knowledge from the single case. However, because the strategic initiative was discontinued, the researcher decided to collect data about how the employees carry out their roles and

how their responsibility influence the staff above, below or on same level of organisational structure; thus the emergent of employee engagement as the subject of study. Subsequently, another data was collected from a different company (NSC Insurance) with same research aim.

Despite collecting data from both organisations with same research aim, the fit for comparative study of both cases was discovered during the data analysis of the second organisation. The researcher's initial analysis of the first company (OSC Insurance) appeared to be characterised by employees mainly doing as they are told with little ideas and initiatives from them to the top management. It was at this initial analysis of NSC Insurance that the researcher realised the two cases meeting theoretical sampling criteria and could fit a comparative study; there appeared to striking contrast between OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance in terms of employee engagement even though both were influenced by the same national culture.

As argued by Stake (2003: 138), "the individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristics", the differences and similarities between the first data and second data pointed the researcher in the direction of comparative case study in order to investigate employee engagement. The fundamental notion of comparative design embodies the logic of comparison, implying "that we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations (Bryman, 2012: 72). This also means that by comparing the two cases, the researcher was in a "better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold" (Bryman, 2012: 73). The two cases rendered themselves for comparative analysis because of the preliminary findings from each case. Also, considering the contrasting nature of employee engagement in the organisations, these two cases selected fit the argument that "given the limited number of cases which can usually be studied, it makes sense to

choose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is ‘transparently observable’” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 537).

It may be argued that adding one or two more case studies could give further insights into the phenomenon; however, the researcher limited the number of cases used to two because of two reasons. First, the two cases provided sufficient insights to understand the nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. Due to polarity of the two cases, the researcher was able to understand the roles of leader and organisational interventions (or its absence) in influencing employee engagement; thus helping the researcher to achieve the research aim. Secondly, the researcher conducted sixty-seven interviews with participant observation across the two organisations, due to the time constraint to complete PhD programme, it was nearly impractical to add an extra case and still have a rich analysis with depth insight into the phenomenon.

5.4.1 Rationale for Case Context

Several journal articles in management have called for an extension of theory building in different context (Jack, et. al., 2008; Tsui, 2004). In the fortieth year anniversary issue of the Administrative Science Quarterly, it is pointed out: “where one cannot point to a high level of accomplishment is the global dimension. American-based research on organizations, especially research on behavior within them, has been largely U.S.-domestic focused” (Porter, 1996: 266). The work of Geert Hofstede on culture also sheds light on why existing management theories developed from the West may not be rightly applicable in other societal context due to the difference in cultural dimensions. Even in comparative studies towards fulfilling paradigmatic rigor “much comparative research proceeds as if the theoretical frameworks for comparisons are culture-free” (Jack et al., 2008: 873). It was with the above position in mind that the researcher

decided to conduct this research in Nigeria as rich theoretical discoveries in other contexts like Africa are yet to be realised.

Moreover, the study of employee engagement appears to be interesting in an African context. This is because high power distance culture is inherent in Africa (Hofstede, 1993). The culture in Africa is one where an older person or a boss is perceived to always know better. As a result, the superiors by disposition do not often take advice from their subordinates; even though these superiors may be able to leverage on youthfulness of the juniors in gathering intelligence and effectuating strategies. Furthermore, employee engagement becomes more interesting in African organisations due to the high power distance as the subordinates are more likely to defer decision making to the superiors and be reluctant in taking initiatives on their own. Therefore, organisations in a mature industry were found to be appropriate in studying employee engagement; where roles and responsibility are clearly stated and usually, organisational structure is tall (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

Specifically, insurance industry in Nigeria was deemed appropriate for this research being a mature industry. It is known that success in a mature industry as insurance depends on experience in rightly evaluating business risks; “managing resources and enhancing marginal returns to protect gains made by earlier investments” (Lumpkin and Dess, 2001: 438). Therefore, insurance companies in Nigeria were selected as case-study to see how employee engagement is helping to find answers to strategic issues faced by their top managers. Also, selecting both cases from same industry helps to minimise extraneous variation which can influence both independent and dependent variables thus, giving the untrue viewpoint of their relationship (Bless et. al., 2007). Likewise, minimising extraneous variation helps to set limit at which findings from the study can be generalised to avoid false claims (Eisenhardt, 1989).

5.4.2 Case Boundary: Characteristics of the two insurance companies

The two cases have similar characteristics which help to define the case boundary. First both insurance companies are more than thirty years old in the industry; neither of them is a new entrant which as a result might influence employees experience with their managers. The companies have similar size; the staff strength of each organisation was between around 400. As stated earlier, African culture is predominantly a high power distant type; thus the same overarching national culture has influence on both organisations. Furthermore, both organisations are subjected to same macro-environmental factors; the variations in political and economic issues affect both organisations. Equally important characteristic of the two cases is that employees recruited into these organisations were pulled from the same labour market. The social dynamics of the nation informs the dispositions of the individuals employed at the organisations. Consequently, the two cases became interesting, to see similarities and differences in the engagement level of the employees in the organisations.

Access to Research Sites

The OSC Insurance case study was conducted from May to July 2015. Having realised the case theoretically fit for purpose of the research, the researcher's initial task was to secure access to the company. On their website, the researcher was able to get the profiles and contacts of key personnel in the organisation that would serve not only as gatekeepers but provide further background information about the organisation. The researcher had telephone conversation with the company's senior strategist who helped to understand briefly the organisational structure and process. Through one of the managing directors, the letter of intent was submitted to the company.

Also, the NSC Insurance case study was conducted from April to June 2016. Similar to the OSC Insurance case, the gatekeeper to the organisation was one of the top

executives who introduced the researcher to the Head of Strategy and Marketing. Afterwards, the researcher had a 30 minutes conversation with him which was an opportunity to let him know the research interest. It was also an avenue for the researcher to ask 'who is who' and 'who is what' in the organisation; and to briefly understand long term strategy view at the same, the ongoing strategic initiatives. Also, an official letter of intent was also submitted through him.

Nature of the Sample Size

The research started broadly to explore how individuals in their roles depend and influence one another in an organisation. As a result, the researcher deemed it important to follow the sampling approach that "reflects a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories" (Bryman, 2012: 203). The researcher considered interviewing individuals across levels and functions; these include top management, middle management and lower member staff. Also, the participants work in different department such as claims, underwriting, reinsurance, finance, IT support and services, audit and HR. The interest was to understand the relationship and level of engagement between employees and their managers. Stating the purpose of the research, the researcher approached individuals, sometimes with the assistance of the gatekeepers, and sought their willingness to be interviewed. Only one individual out of the potential research participants declined to be interviewed. It is important that these individuals were willing to be interviewed otherwise the researcher might not have got much insights from them if their participation were made compulsory by the top management. Therefore, the researcher continued to interview individuals across levels and functions until no additional insights were being achieved i.e. reaching data saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). At the end the sample sizes are similar for the two companies.

	Top Management	Middle Management	Lower Member Staff	Total
OSC Insurance	8	7	20	35
NSC Insurance	6	5	21	32
Total	14	12	41	67

Table 1.2: Distribution of the Respondents according to Hierarchal Positions at the two Organisations

Table 1.3 Gender Split of Respondents at NSC Insurance

	Male	Female
Top Management	6	0
Middle Management	3	2
Lower Member Staff	17	4
Total	26	6

Table 1.4 Gender Split of Respondents at OSC Insurance

	Male	Female
Top Management	8	0
Middle Management	4	3
Lower Member Staff	16	4
Total	28	7

Role of the Researcher as an Ethnographer

The quality of the data collected and how it is interpreted are impacted by role played by the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, it is worth noting that role of the researcher spanned between being an insider and outsider. There was a need for the researcher to embed himself in the organisation, to be friend to as many individuals as possible especially the research participants so that they get comfortable with him; thus get rich understanding of the employee engagement issues from their own views and through sharing of their experiences. Being an insider enough becomes very important after the first interview session. The researcher noticed that the first interviewee, who is a lower member staff, was reluctant to delve in detail regarding the issue of employee engagement in the organisation. For the first fifteen minutes, his responses were often

too short; before he opened up, the researcher had to reassure him several times that everything he would say remains confidential and none of the comments if used will be traced back to him. The same individual later on became very useful, guiding the researcher to next respondents and helping him to arrange interviews with others. Acting like an insider, the researcher was close enough with many of the employees and top management to the extent of going to lunch with them regularly.

At the same time, there was the need for the researcher to remain an outsider in order to remain unbiased and avoid too emotionally attached to responses from the respondents. In order to achieve balance between being an insider and outsider, the researcher limited his role in the meetings attended as solely an observer taking note while seated among the organisational members. Also, during interview sessions the researcher made sure not to influence the interviewees by either indirectly prompting them with words to answer the questions in certain way or leading them on to see the phenomenon being studied from the researcher's own perspective. Although, at times when an interviewee did not understand a question asked, the researcher would sometimes rephrase the question and 'paint' a scenario to the interviewee in order for him/her to understand the question and gather his/her thoughts accordingly.

5.5 Data Collection

One of the researcher's main bases for adopting qualitative research approach is the opportunity to employ more than one method to collect data in order to unravel a given social phenomenon (Gephart, 2004). As the qualitative researcher who was trying to understand employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture, the researcher acknowledged the complex nature of the study and one data collection method might not be sufficient to achieve the research aim. Therefore, the researcher went out to collect data with inductive and exploratory tradition of qualitative research which is to be open-minded and employ several methods necessary to study the

phenomenon (David and Sutton, 2011). An advantage of using multiple of data collection method is that it helps to match the implicit aspect of the phenomenon with what is explicitly stated or seen.

The data collection for OSC Insurance case was collected at three locations: the company's head office; Health and Pension subsidiary and Life Insurance subsidiary. As a result, the researcher was able to meet other individuals that were not in the plan to be interviewed; regardless, the researcher had informal chats with many of them. The informal chats and researcher's observation at the three locations also helped to make sense of the nature of employee engagement in the organisation. Insights from the informal chats were recorded in the researcher's journal. Likewise, the researcher's data collection experience at NSC Insurance was similar to case of OSC Insurance. The researcher visited and collected data at four locations: head office, Health subsidiary, Investment subsidiary and one of their retail centres. Also, observing them in their natural settings i.e. their interactions, body language, office setting and artefacts, gave more insights into the relationship between the employees and their managers.

The next section explains the forms of data collection methods used for this study.

Data Collection Methods for the Research

The data collection methods employed for this research were mainly participant observation and interview; although the researcher had access to the present past annual reports of the each company but they were less relevant for the study. The next two sections give detail on the data collection methods.

5.5.1 Semi-structured Interview

One of the research methods used for the case study design was interview. As rightly put, research interview “is a purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer to establish rapport and ask concise and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewee is willing to respond, and to listen attentively” (Saunders et al., 2012: 388). The intention of using interview was to “gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale, 1983: 174). Interview as a research method helps to see a given research problem from the interviewees’ point of view and find out why and how they have certain perspective (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

In order to adequately explore employee engagement, the researcher deemed it necessary to use an interview type that provides flexibility enough for the respondents to talk deeply about the issue and delve into other aspects of the phenomenon that the researcher did not envisage while coming up with the interview questions. Also, as the interviewer, it was important to be able to probe further into relevant responses that worth elaboration; attuning to the perspectives at which the respondents see the issue. At the same, the interview type needed not be too loose but guided by key themes (as it is in the interview guide) about employee engagement in organisation (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Therefore, in relation to the nature of the research question, the technique of semi-structured interview was employed.

As it is with other qualitative interviews, semi-structured interview is “directed conversations evolving around questions and answers about a certain topic (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015: 133). However, with semi-structured interview, the researcher was able to ask open-ended questions for exploratory purpose and to generate rich descriptions of the issue being discussed (Flick, 2014). Furthermore, semi-structured interview differs from unstructured interview as researcher prepares list of questions on the topic to be covered.

The researcher found it important to have interview guide and questions; they helped to highlight to the interviewees the aspects of their lives as members of the organisation that are important to know in order to achieve the research aim. Furthermore, the researcher noticed that some of the interviewees would start to check their wrist watches around thirty-five minutes into the interview session; without the interview guide and questions, many of the one hour interview sessions would have gone while the interviewees have said little on the subject of interest.

As oppose to quantitative structured interview that aims to minimise inter-personal process on the interview, the researcher acknowledged that the interviewees are “actively shaping the course of the interview” rather than passively responding to the pre-set questions (King, 2004: 11). During the interview sessions, there were many instances when the researcher would skip a question on the interview guide (Bryman and Bell, 2015); to follow up on a revelatory statement or example given by the interviewee. However, the researcher made sure to revisit any skipped questions if answer was not given from the interviewee's account.

At early stage of the data collection, the researcher had to modify how the questions were asked and order of the questions, based on the experience from the earlier interview sessions. Despite, there are many instances when the researcher would skip a question on the interview guide (Bryman and Bell, 2015); to follow up on a revelatory statement or example given by the interviewee. However, the researcher made sure to revisit any skipped questions if answer was not given from the interviewee's account. Apart from the sessions with the top executives who had their own individual offices, most of the interview sessions were held in a room allocated to the researcher. As a result, the interviewees were removed from office distractions. At the same, having guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality with them, conducting the interview in absence of other individuals gave each interviewee more freedom to express

him/herself in referring to their experience and that of others regarding their relationships with their bosses and engagement in the organisation.

Also, it is important to point out that because the research participants represented each level of the organisational hierarchy, the researcher had to adapt the interview questions accordingly. For example, in exploring the issue on employee engagement, it implied that the questions the researcher would ask chief executive officer as the individual occupying the highest position have to be different from an entry trainee officer who reports to his/her manager and works in teams with his/her colleagues.

Consent from the Interviewees

As reflected by Creswell (2013:173), “the nature of an interview sets up an unequal power dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee”. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to ‘break the ice’ immediately, to get the conversation going with little or no tension. The researcher’s first task when each interviewee came in was to make them feel relax and not to see the researcher as distant individual. At OSC Insurance, many of the employees initially thought the researcher was conducting the interview for the management, in order for the management to identify the nonconformists among the employees. Considering this, the researcher had to follow strictly the ethics and conducts that surround data collection for qualitative research. The researcher introduced himself to each respondent as a doctoral researcher and stated the purpose of the research every time. From the first three interviews, the researcher noticed that the interviewees appeared to be thinking that the interview was a serious and formal after the participant information sheet was given to them to read immediately; they were careful in responding to the questions. Subsequently, the researcher would quickly give a broad statement to the respondents, to imply that the interest was only to know how they go about what they do in the organisation and that they were not going to be asked questions which they cannot answer. Also, the

researcher made them aware that the interview was not sponsored by the management and that it was solely for the use of researcher's doctoral programme.

Furthermore, the researcher realised that stating a broad statement that the researcher 'just want to know how they go about their job' made them feel at ease with the sense that the interview was nothing serious. Usually, the respondents would ask the researcher questions for further clarifications on the purpose of the interview. Once this had been done, the next procedure of the interview session was to give them the consent form to read and sign. While giving them, the researcher would quickly summarise that the form was about anonymity and confidentiality of the interview. Again, the researcher would paraphrase as much as possible; making them realise the need to record the interview session using researcher's mobile phone, which was mainly for the researcher to remember all that they would say. Also, the researcher would state to them that it will be impossible to identify them from any publications from the research work and at any time should wish not to continue with the interview, they have the rights to withdraw. After reading the consent form, only one individual declined that the interview session should not be recorded; as a result, the researcher took note as fast as possible. In this case, the researcher gave a quick summary of the interview session from the note taking in order for the interviewee to comment whether what he said was noted down correctly.

Reflection at the end of Interview

Each of the interview session lasted for one hour; although, some lasted for hour and half. The researcher ensured as much as possible the conversations with the interviewees were focused on their engagement at work and the dynamics in their relationship between them their managers, individuals on their level and their subordinates. At the end of each interview, the researcher ensured to reflect on the session; to think of how the next interview session could be made better. More

importantly, the researcher would think of new insights gained on employee engagement in the organisation in order to probe further into it in the next interview. At the same time, emerging patterns in the responses regarding the subject of study were being noted in the journal.

For example, the first four interviews at NSC Insurance, the researcher noticed that all the interviewees made reference to the level of openness in the organisation; in that they have first name policy i.e. they call themselves by first names regardless of the positions individuals occupy in the organisation. In the subsequent interviews, the researcher had to include it as a theme for discussion to understand why first name policy has any link with level of employee engagement in the organisation. Also, the researcher had similar experience at OSC Insurance where many of the respondents said 'we have ministry mindset here'. Again, the researcher had to ask others in subsequent interviews about what they mean by the statement.

Other source of verbal data

Another source of verbal data was the unplanned informal chats with many employees at both organisations. As suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), unsolicited accounts of a phenomenon being studied by individuals whose views have not been asked for can prove to be very beneficial to the research due to spontaneity of the context. With this in mind, the researcher immersed himself enough to become friends with many of the staff. As a result, informal conversations would start in the canteen or in the car on the way home. Many of these employees would want to know the research interest; and after explaining the research aim, they would start to narrate their views of their organisations and citing examples. These narrations, although not tape-recorded helped to have wider picture of employee engagement in the organisations. Immediately, the researcher would write down the key points from the conversations which were to be considered when framing interview questions in the next sessions. As

opined, “research that relies on interviewing alone is likely to entail much more fleeting contact” (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 505); consequently, the researcher employed participant observation as another qualitative method in order to reach deeper into the nature of employee engagement. Details of the research activities as an observer in the two organisations are discussed in the next section.

5.5.2 Participant observation

According to Spradley (1980), cultural knowledge exists at two levels of consciousness; explicit culture and tacit culture. At explicit level is the knowledge people are able to talk about easily; however, cultural knowledge that is outside people’s awareness resides at tacit level. Cultural knowledge which is tacit is seen in how people behave and how they go about what they do rather than what they think they do; because “informants always know things they cannot talk about or express in direct ways” (Spradley, 1980: 11). Therefore, this implies the importance of capturing and documenting the behaviours and actions of the organisational members at the two organisations through participant observation. In instances where motive, attitudes, beliefs and values direct much, if not most of human activity, “the most sophisticated instrumentation we possess is still the careful observer— the human being who can watch, see, listen...question, probe, and finally analyse and organise his direct experience” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 213).

As employee engagement implies employing and expressing of self physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Kahn, 1990), the researcher believes verbal responses interviewees are not sufficient to generate theory on the phenomenon being studied; but a need to observe the organisational members in their natural setting. The primary purpose was to directly take notice of them as they interact with one another – to have first-hand account of how they respond to one another i.e.

manager to subordinate; subordinate to manager; manager to manager and subordinate to subordinate.

However, extent of participant observation can vary on the continuum between full observation and full participation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In order to achieve deep insights into the issue of employee engagement at the companies, there was a need for the researcher to 'go native' in order to gain "an internal perspective on the studied field" (Flick, 2009: 229); at the same time, it was important to maintain the status of being a 'professional stranger' (Agar, 1980) so that the researcher would not get carried away from the research aim.

In relation to this research, the level of access to both companies gave the researcher privilege to immerse himself extendedly enough to dig deep into the employee engagement issue. Every day, the researcher resumed at work at 7.30 in the morning, which was the time workers at these organisations get to the office, and left work at 6pm when most of the employees were going home. For the entire duration of the data collection, the researcher had office space allocated to him at Strategy office in both organisations. As a result, the researcher was able to join many conversations and immersed himself in some office talks; more importantly, the researcher was able to know 'who is who' and gain more insights into how the organisations are run.

While Strategy office served as the researcher's base, he spent considerable time at other departments. The data collection was set up in a way that at least 3 days were dedicated to observe individuals at each department. At OSC Insurance, for example, the researcher spent a week with the sales team taking note of their interactions with one another and the nature of conversations. Also, the researcher was fortunate to observe their daily meetings where they set themselves targets for the day.

Being observer-as-participant, the researcher's identity as a researcher was known and clear to all; and the reason for being at the organisations at the time was understood (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher attended eight official meetings at

NSC Insurance. The researcher was fortunate to attend their quarterly business review meeting, QSV. QSV is once every three month where each department and regional office makes presentation on their progress, the issues being faced and target for the next quarter. QSV was a two day long meeting with over 60 organisational members in attendance; the researcher was able to observe the questioning on and probing into issues by the attendees. However, the researcher was not allowed to tape-record this meeting due to sensitive issues being discussed like financial reports of the organisation which had not been published for the public. Also, the researcher had the opportunity to attend management meeting, CDM, twice. In CDM, lower members were given opportunity to be part of the meeting. In total, the researcher attended eight meetings at NSC Insurance and five at OSC Insurance; they were team and departmental meetings. Therefore, these meetings gave the researcher privilege to observe how comfortable lower staff were while in the presence of 'top bosses' in their organisations. Also, the researcher took notice of the employee participation level in sharing ideas and seeking clarification on issue; as well, their confidence level to disagree with anyone in the meeting by presenting their opinions. Generally, in these meetings the researcher assumed the role of an overt observer (Flick, 2009), however; his presence did not appear to affect the nature of the meetings or distract the informants being observed.

Finally, the researcher took notice of office settings; the seating arrangement – the distance between managers seat and their team members.

Documenting/Recording Observation

The researcher, being the participant observer, was able to capture almost all of the meetings attended as descriptive information in the fieldnotes. This includes noting down the number of people present, the seating positions – whether the individuals sit in terms of their hierarchical roles. For example, at NSC Insurance only the meeting facilitator needs to sit in the middle of oval-shaped meeting room, others including

superiors sit on available seat as they arrive; although, the observation showed that most of the executives arrive on time, so most of them tend to fill up the front seats. The researcher noted the participation of the employees in discussions and eagerness of the superiors to allow them contribute. In their office space, the researcher further noted the extent at which senior members involved in small talk, work talk and general conversations on state of the economy and society, with the employees.

At the end of each day, the researcher reflected on the meetings attended with reference to the descriptive notes recorded. It is worth noting that as a researcher that sought to maintain a balance between being an insider and outsider, the fieldnotes on observation of team members in their departments were mainly reflective i.e. the notes were not taking while observing the individuals. It was the interest of the researcher not to 'stop the flow' of interactions or make the observed individuals conscious that their actions and behaviours were being noted down; although, all the participants were fully aware of the researcher's mission at their organisations.

Limitation of Observation as a Data Collection Method

As the cliché goes: 'actions speak louder than words'; observation as data collection method gave the opportunity to see the subject being studied in the natural settings. However, one fundamental concern of observation as a data collection method is the subjectivity of the interpretation by the researcher (Niemann, 1989). This implies that the interpretations of the individuals' actions and reactions while the meeting was going were based on the researcher's perspective. However, in order to overcome observer bias, the researcher followed informant verification process by confirming the interpretations with the informants (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

In several instances, the researcher would ask one of the attendees the role of certain individuals that commented during the meeting. Also, interview sessions serve as

avenues for the researcher to ask interviewees about certain behaviours observed in the meetings. In order to further reduce observer bias, the observation was triangulated with the interview data to validate the researcher's interpretations of the individuals' behaviours and interactions in the meetings. Due to the overt nature of observation, awareness of the observer in a setting by the observed may influence the actions and non-actions of the observed (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher tried as much as possible to have minimal interactions with the observed. Where possible, the researcher took an unobtrusive seat to avoid eye contact with the individuals in the room. As the observer, the researcher tried not to disturb the individuals in the meeting but study their behaviours and interactions.

5.6 Data Recording and Transcription

Heritage (1984) lays emphasis on the importance of recording and transcribing interviews as it helps to correct the natural limitation of the memory; allowing thorough examination of the interviewees' responses. As a qualitative researcher, the interest is not only what the interviewees say but how they say it (Saunders et. al., 2012). As a result, it is necessary that the interviewers do not get distracted with note taking in order to be alert to follow up key points made; "in prompting and probing where necessary, drawing attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewee's answers" (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 482).

Therefore, the researcher tape-recorded all the interview sessions using his smartphone with prior consent from the interviewees, apart from an individual who declined. After the individual had read the participant information sheet and consent form, the researcher agreed to his decision and took notes during the interview. At the end of the interview, the researcher relayed out to him the points noted during the interview and asked him to confirm the points were accurate reflections of his view.

Moreover, the transcription of the interviews was done by the researcher. Each interview was transcribed verbatim on Microsoft Word. However, in the instance where interviewee repeats common words or phrases due to habit, the researcher edited them out to avoid tautology and for clear understanding of what was said. At the same time, the researcher considered such habit carefully because repeating certain phrases could be a form of laying emphasis on certain issues. Although, it took long time to finish transcribing, there was an advantage of carrying out the task by the researcher. In the process of transcription, certain initial themes were already emerging. The researcher started noting down who said what and thinking along as the phenomenon being studied was unveiling itself by listening to the words of the research participants again.

5.7 Quality of the Research Design

The primary concern of any research either testing a theory or building one is about the quality of the research itself; by presenting the findings to rightly reflect the truth about the phenomenon studied (Bryman, 2012). As a result, researchers consider issues regarding reliability and validity of their research conclusions. However, the issue of reliability and validity in quantitative and qualitative research takes different forms because main aim of the former is to test theories while the latter is to generate theories. Therefore, the criteria for judging quality of qualitative research are adapted differently from quantitative research. In assessing quality of quantitative research, reliability refers to “consistency of a measure of a concept”; while validity refers to the “issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept” (Bryman, 2012: 171). However, in establishing the quality assurance for this research work, the researcher adopted alternative quality criteria by Guba and Lincoln (1982) which are: dependability (addressing reliability), credibility (for internal validity) and transferability (referring to external validity).

5.7.1 Credibility (Internal Validity)

Credibility refers to the assurance that the research findings truly reflect the social constructed realities of the research participants (Saunders et al., 2016). In another way, credibility is about the confidence that research findings are from the information given by the participants and rightly represent the interpretation that these participants would have given (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, it is important to note that a major assumption that underlies qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional and every-changing; unlike quantitative research that seeks to discover, observe and measure a single and un-changing reality (Merriam, 2009; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the research upholds the notion that “assessing the isomorphism between data collected and the ‘reality’ from which they were derived is thus an inappropriate determinant of validity” (Merriam, 2009: 213). Therefore, in order to ensure credibility of this research, several measures were taken.

Firstly, the researcher immersed himself deeply into work at the research sites for the entire period; Monday to Friday for seven weeks at OSC Insurance and eight weeks at NSC Insurance. As stated earlier, the researcher usually got to work at 7:30 in the morning and still be on site until sometimes 8pm. For example, one of the interview sessions at NSC Insurance started at 7pm and finished at 8pm. In times that the researcher was not conducting interviews, he was observing staff routines and interactions. The researcher went from one team to another to observe the nature of engagement with one another. The researcher noticed that his extended time in the field gained him trust with the staff; as a result, he was able to achieve more insights into the study through the interview sessions and informal chats. Also, the prolonged time in the field with the research participants was an additional advantage because the research was able to understand the context better and get used to the peculiar characteristics of each organisations.

Secondly, in order to make the research findings credible, the researcher employed multiple data sources. In ensuring that the research findings are credible revelations from the two organisations used as case studies, the researcher triangulated the interview data with observational data. This helped to produce rich and comprehensive accounts on employee engagement in the organisations.

Thirdly, the researcher accommodated different views from individuals at different levels and functions in the organisations. The study of employee engagement cannot start and stop at the employees' level, there is a need to have different viewpoints of their managers. Only CFO at OSC Insurance declined the interview invitation, all the interviewees willingly and happily participated in the research; as a result, participation bias was at minimal level. The researcher had interview sessions with other top executives including group managing director of the company, two managing directors; therefore, the views of the executives on employee engagement were still captured. Also, in instances when an interviewee exhibited bias by not disclosing some information or giving partial answer to a question, considering all interviewees' responses together as a whole story helped to connect the missing links.

Fourthly, guaranteeing the interview participants anonymity and confidentiality helped to get them talk in detail as much as possible. The researcher had an interview room where he conducted the interviews and no one else could hear the participants. In addition, the inclusion of individuals from different levels and functions helped to have a holistic view of the phenomenon and examine the consistency of findings from the same data source i.e. interview data that assures the quality of the research findings.

Furthermore, the researcher was aware that the undue subjectivity of meaning by himself which could be due to holding certain belief and frame of reference (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, in order to increase the credibility of the research findings, the researcher solicited the help of two independent academic colleagues to cross-check

each stage of the analysis. As a result of this, the researcher was able to consider those aspects he would have overlooked in course of the analysis.

Also, being from the same national culture as all the interviewees, the researcher was able to avoid many misinterpretations; the understanding of many of the verbal and non-verbal cues from the interviewees helped to increase the confidence that the research findings reflect the reality at the two organisations (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Moreover, at the end of each interview, the researcher would quickly give a summary from the key note taking of what the interviewee had said and relayed it back to him/her to ascertain that the researcher's interpretation was not biased to what he/she meant.

Moreover, the researcher attempted to increase credibility of the research findings by ensuring that the first level of codes from the data did not involve any theoretical constructs so that this does not lead to subjectivity of the findings towards certain theories in the literature (Silverman, 2006). Identification of issues from the data collected was the primary aim during the analysis stage; it was the emerging constructs that led him to relevant aspect of the literature.

5.7.2 Transferability (External Validity)

Contrary to quantitative research that is concerned on the extent at which research findings can be generalised, qualitative research seeks to know the extent at which the findings can be applied or transferred to other settings (Miles and Huberman (1994); however, it is the readers who decide this. It is put forward that "the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can do" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 298). Therefore, in attempt to achieve transferability of the research findings, the research sought to achieve thick descriptions of the cases by giving a detailed account of the nature of employee

engagement in both organisations. Sufficient descriptions of the people, process and settings of the cases serve as an information base on which others can consider the extent at which the findings apply to their own situations (Merriam, 1988). As a result, the researcher made sure to consider diverse perspectives from top management down to the employees to understand their views on employee engagement in their organisations. As context is important, the researcher bore in mind the physical office settings of the organisations.

Furthermore, the researcher considers the use of research findings from the concept of extrapolations which can be seen as “modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions” (Patton, 2015: 255). Therefore, the researcher do not intend to generalise the research findings based on the number of cases used i.e. statistical generalisation, as only two cases were involved. Rather, the researcher paid much attention to analytic generalisation (Yin, 2014); the opportunity to shed empirical light further to what is known on the study of employee engagement with the hope that readers will find lessons that can be learnt which go beyond the two cases studied or even similar cases.

It is suggested that "replicability of any given experience is less important in understanding human behaviour than is the recognisability of the description by those who lived the experience" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: 213). With this in mind, the researcher believes that transferability is easier for the readers if rationale for the research questions and justification of chosen research design with data collection method are fully described (Bryman and Bell, 2015). For this research, the researcher ensured that detail explanation was given regarding why it was important for the research to be conducted. Also, the researcher defined the scope and boundaries of the research so the extent of transferability is clear as much as possible. At the same time, the rationale for the chosen data collection methods with the limitations that come with them were explained by the researcher.

Finally, the type of research design employed which was multiple-case, on its own increase the transferability of the research findings. The research design did not only reveal specific conditions under which some findings occur for each case, multiple-case design also helps to know the conditions that are general to two cases studied (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As suggested, “analytic conclusions independently arising from two cases, as with two experiments, will be more powerful than those coming from a single case (or experiment) alone” (Yin, 2014: 64); the conditions which led to the research findings from the OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance make transferability of the findings stronger. This implies that organisations with similar work conditions will likely have resultant nature of employee engagement.

5.7.3 Dependability (Reliability)

The traditional quantitative view of reliability concerns with the extent at which research findings will be the same if the research is replicated or repeated. However, human behaviour is not static; there is no guarantee that an employee will behave same way every time with his boss and act in a similar fashion towards a given strategic orientation of his/her organisation. Therefore, the researcher does not assure reliability like a quantitative researcher; instead, he strived to ensure that dependability of the research i.e. the quality assurance that the research findings are consistent with the data collected (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Lincoln and Guba (1985).

In order to ensure dependability, the researcher tried to describe as much as possible the methods used to collect the data and the step by step followed in applying the methods. Also, this chapter – methodology, was dedicated to describe comprehensively the research design and protocol applied to make known the transparency of this research. Moreover, the analysis chapter reflects the thought process of the researcher in a cascaded form. In the process of analysis, the researcher did peer-debriefing with

two academic colleagues and two corporate professionals in order for them to point out irregularities in the claims, by cross-examining the data with the findings.

Also, the researcher acknowledged the importance of coding process of the analysis as it informs the nature of the findings in qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, in order to reduce bias in the coding process, the researcher coded the same data twice with a gap more than of three weeks while working on each data. As a result of the gap, the researcher was able to question the initial codes and substantiate or otherwise the patterns found in the data.

The next section of this chapter describes how the data analysis was conducted.

5.8 Data Analysis

It is argued that the aim of a research determines the type of analysis used to analyse the data (Bryman and Bell, 2015). While quantitative research aims to test theories with emphasis on quantification of data by deriving meanings from numbers and following strict measuring standards, qualitative research is different. With interpretivist philosophy that is associated to qualitative research, there is a need for the researcher to consider the subjective nature of socially constructed meanings given by the research participants. As put forward, “since meanings in qualitative research depend on social interaction, qualitative data are likely to be more varied, elastic and complex than quantitative data” (Saunders et al., 2016: 568). Therefore, in contrast to quantitative data, qualitative data calls for different way of analysis to accommodate words (spoken and written) and images; and which can have both multiple and unclear meanings (Saunders et al., 2016).

Observational Data Analysis

The observational data was analysed considering the behaviours and interactions of the individuals and in their office space. Combing through the data, the researcher specifically paid attention to the extent at which employees expressed themselves on issues and superiors showed willingness to hear from the employees. For example, there were instances at NSC Insurance whereby lower employees gave contrary opinions to their superiors. Also, there are instances whereby the senior executives consciously nudging the lower employees to contribute to ongoing discussions. While comparing the observational data from meetings and office space, the researcher looked for recurring patterns of behaviours between the employees and their superiors; in order to examine how comfortable the employees are with their bosses and how open the bosses are to new opinions from their subordinates.

The Use of Observational Data

The primary aim for participant observation as one of the data collection methods in this research was to add depth and context to the semi-structured interviews; in order to produce thick descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. While the interviews helped to produce data about how the organisational members believe they relate with one another and engage with their work, participant observation substantiates the interview data. Therefore, in presenting the findings of this research, observational data was presented as contextual instances to support or confirm the findings from interview data.

5.8.1 Grounded Theory as Data Analysis Approach

The researcher chose grounded theory as the analysis approach for this research. Grounded theory is an approach of developing theory from data which is gathered systematically and analysed through the research process; as a result, “data collection, analysis and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 12). With grounded theory, the focus is on “the study of patterns of behaviour and meaning which account for variation in interaction around a substantive problem in order to arrive at conceptually based explanations for the processes operating within the substantive problem area” (Locke, 2001: 41).

While it is maintained that researchers adopting grounded theory should be theoretically sensitive as a ‘neutral knower’ (Lempert, 2007), by going to research setting without predetermined ideas (Glaser, 1978; 2004); the researcher was inclined to the argument that theoretical sensitivity is about “having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” which is derived from different sources (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 41). Significantly, one of the sources is the literature, which helps to point out underdeveloped research areas and gain general background knowledge that can stimulate the researcher while collecting data on what is happening with the phenomenon being studied (Strauss and Corbin, 1998); in this case, the study of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture.

Therefore, instead of imposing preconceived ideas, the researcher chose grounded theory not as an aimless observer but a trained researcher with the intention to allow data to guide the direction of research findings while drawing on existing literature to achieve revelatory insights into a phenomenon being studied. By choosing grounded theory as data analysis approach, the researcher acknowledged the need to step back and critically analyse what is going from the data; recognise the tendency toward bias

and accept helpful criticism; and think at abstract level beyond the words of the respondents to understand the phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

5.8.2 The Process of Data Analysis

1st-Order Analysis

The researcher's first task with this approach was to open up the data to develop codes; coding is a process "by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 57). This process started with 1st-order analysis or open coding. Initially, the researcher copied each of the interviews onto Microsoft Word and carefully read the interviews; ascribing meanings (codes) to the statements. These codes were attached to the statements for quick future referencing using the Comment function in Microsoft Word. At this stage, the researcher tried as much as possible to adhere to terms used by informants. Also, the researcher tried to place codes as quickly as possible without dwelling too long at each as this can be a source of bias. At the end of an interview, there were several 1st-order codes which went up to around 70 at the end of the first 10 interviews. At this point, it was difficult to see main themes in the data initially because there were many lines of thoughts which seemed to be independent of one another, arguably due to not having reviewed literature prior to data analysis. However, the researcher was rest assured from the statement: "It is not unusual to look up and conclude, 'I'm lost,' with no firm idea about how to make sense of all these data that don't seem to hang together. Yet it is important to get lost at this stage—as the first author is fond of saying, 'You gotta get lost before you can get found'" (Gioia et al., 2012: 20). As a result, the researcher continued to add new codes from the interviews until he achieved theoretical saturation whereby no different insights were identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1990); new statements were rather variations of previous statements where codes have been

formed. Therefore, the researcher placed such statements under the suitable codes as examples for future reference.

As the data analysis progressed, the researcher further engaged in an implicit act of constant comparison and regularly asking himself sensitising question - 'what is this data telling me' in order help me to uncover the 'mysteries and messages' hidden in the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). At the same, the researcher remained open-minded to the direction at which the emerging codes were pointing him.

At this stage, the researcher copied all the first-order codes onto Microsoft Excel in order to be able to move any code from one location to another. He started to look for similarities and differences among the 1st-order categories; trying to find underlying patterns. As a result of the comparison exercise, the researcher was able to reduce the codes to a manageable amount by collapsing two similar codes to one. He later labelled the codes with phrases that reflect the informants' terms. During this time of analysis, the researcher continued to note down in his memo of any ideas, significant or interesting links among the codes (Glaser, 1978). Memo writing was a way for the researcher to keep track of his thought process towards building theory while he worked through breaking down, conceptualising and putting back together the data.

Seeing himself as a knowledgeable agent who can think deeper and beyond the stated words of the informants, the researcher started to write down in the memo any insights he thought the analysis was unveiling. Furthermore, the researcher trusted his inherent analytical mind coupled with the technical trainings acquired during first two years as PhD student to reason at more abstract level and critically answer 'what is going on here'. It is worth noting that, at this time, the researcher became theoretically sensitive (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and started searching the literature to establish the theoretical lens that was appropriate to discuss the emerging categories.

2nd-Order Analysis and Aggregate Dimensions

Again by seeking for differences and similarity however, at a conceptual level, the researcher made connections between and within the 1st-order categories, and organised them as themes (Langley and Abdallah, 2016).

While still having the first-order codes in Microsoft Excel, the researcher started the process of categorising the first-order codes. In the process of this, the researcher asked himself structural questions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) whether a category fit better one theme than the other. At this stage, the researcher deemed it very important to make sure that the categories and themes are rightly linked. As a result, with constant comparison the researcher had to re-categorise and rename the themes several times until he was convinced of them. Within this process, the researcher engaged two of the researcher's PhD colleagues and two corporate professionals to critique the 2nd-order analysis. At this stage of the analysis, the researcher had begun to note the possible relationships among the themes. After the themes had been established, the researcher was able to arrive at aggregate dimensions by further distilling the emergent 2nd-order themes (Gioia et. al, 2012). This process involved theoretical questioning of the relationships between and among the themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

At this stage, the researcher started a full abduction process of moving to and fro the emergent data, themes and aggregate dimension and the literature (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007) to establish the aspects of the findings which can be argued as new concepts and ones that are supported by previous research. The researcher was able to move from 2nd-level analysis to aggregate dimensions by pondering on the themes and theoretically considering what the central phenomenon was in the themes. However, reaching the aggregate dimensions was a bit challenging; sometimes, the researcher had to go back to the 1st-order codes and read through the relevant statements that made up the codes. At other times, the researcher moved back and forth between the themes and literature; at this time, to establish fitting theoretical concepts.

Cross-case Analysis

As stated earlier, an advantage in building theory from cases is the probability of generating novel theory through the “attempts to reconcile evidence across cases, types of data and different investigators” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 546). With grounded theory approach which helped to complete the analysis of each case, the analytic technique employed for the cross-case analysis was explanation building (Yin, 2014). The researcher’s goal was to build a rich explanation around each case by going through the analysis.

The researcher started building explanation with an iterative process of working his way from aggregate dimensions, then to themes, through to 1st-level codes. By consulting the literature, the researcher thought-through the aggregate dimensions and started to critically consider the relationships between the themes by asking himself ‘why’ and ‘how’ one action or inaction led to one another. By following these steps many times, the researcher was able to make an explanation of each case. The explanations became richer by citing several relevant quotes and making references to anecdotes as told by the informants.

After explanation of each case had been built, the researcher later built a general explanation which was drawn from the variations and similarities of the two cases. However, to avoid drifting away and become selectively biased, which are potential problems of explanation building, the researcher kept closed to the research question and analysis by frequently reviewing them while the explanation was being built. Also, the researcher asked his PhD colleague to read through the explanation and check for any form of bias.

While the researcher made sure he attended to all the evidence from the data so that the findings are not vulnerable to alternative interpretations, the researcher followed the advice of Robert K. Yin who is an expert in conducting case study research;

recommending that “your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your case study” (Yin, 2014: 168). The researcher realised it is important not to dwell on too much on lesser issues that the cases revealed; rather the researcher attempted to give critical analysis on most important issue from the cases.

Researcher’s assumptions on using grounded theory

The researcher employed grounded theory as data analysis approach because of its initial pure inductive nature towards theory development. The process of theory development with grounded theory allowed the researcher to mainly see the story that the data was telling without negating initial background reading on the subject. This echoes the argument that “for organization study to fulfil its potential for description, explanation, and prescription, it is first necessary to discover relevant concepts for the purpose of theory building that can guide the creation and validation of constructs” (Gioia et al., 2012: 16).

As with qualitative research, the basic assumption is that organisational world is socially constructed; thus, to understand the social world, there is need to see it through the stories and meanings given by the social actors. Therefore, with grounded theory, the researcher assumed that the social actors that participated in this research were knowledgeable agents who were well-informed and articulate well enough to express their thoughts, intentions and actions in the social world through words and stories. Also, the researcher assumed that the interpretations of the research participants regarding employee engagement in their organisations were true from their own points of view. The researcher role was only to report their stories in a way that it further sheds light on nature of employee engagement; and ultimately, to help the researcher develop theory from them.

Furthermore, the researcher assumed himself as a technically informed researcher who was able to 'read between the lines' of informants' statements and extend the meanings beyond literally to abstracts. Through the identification of differences and similarities in the concepts as a result of the research training and academic background, the researcher believed in himself to be able to review literature and come up with aggregate dimensions of the analysis.

5.9 Ethical Considerations for the Research

Ethics in business and management research is important and must be respected. Ethical principles in research relate to the standard set to ensure there is no harm to participants, informed consent is gained research is carried out, there is no invasion of privacy and deception is not involved in gaining access and carrying out the research. (Diener and Crandall, 1978). Therefore, researchers must ensure to abide by the standards set by the governing agency; "to earn the respect and trust of both research participants and the public at large" (Ruane, 2005: 16).

This research was guided by the Aston University's Code of Practice for Ethical Standards for Research. Before the researcher went out to conduct this research, he had to submit Research Ethics application and was approved by Aston Business School Research Ethics Committee. For this research, no one under the age of 16 years participated and the researcher gained an informed consent from each of the organisations that was involved. A letter was written to each organisation via their human resource departments explicitly stating the purpose of the study. Despite assuring confidentiality and anonymity of the companies and participants in the letter, each interviewee was informed at the start of the interview, assuring them that their confidentiality is safeguarded. The use of pseudo names were used in place of the names of the organisations and interviewees so that this research cannot be traced to

them. Also, in complying with data protection legislation, all data is stored on the researcher's personal computer which has passwords before it can be accessed.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses how the research was carried out. Considering the nature of the research; an exploratory research to understand the nature of employee engagement, the research adopted qualitative methodology using case study as the research design. Two insurance companies were used as cases; thus this research adopted a comparative case-study design. Semi-structured interview and participant observation were used as data collection methods while employing grounded theory as the data analysis approach. The limitations of the data collection methods and analysis approach used were also discussed. Furthermore, steps followed to ensure this work meets required qualitative research quality was explained while account of ethical considerations was also stated.

CHAPTER SIX

Case Study Findings: NSC Insurance

The interest of this study is on employee engagement, specifically in a collectivist high power distance culture. Employee engagement becomes more interesting to study in high power distance culture because of the express acceptance by subordinates that their leaders are powerful; and the subordinates are to be told what to do. The issue is not only characterised from the employees' side, the leaders in such culture believe they know better and need little or no input from the subordinates. However, the importance of employee engagement has been highlighted to help in environmental scanning, information gathering and ideas generation toward decision making and problem solving in organisations.

The chapter presents findings on the nature of employee engagement at NSC Insurance; specifically, the findings show how organisational interventions and practices promote employee engagement in a high power distance culture. The findings also show the extent to which national culture influences organisational culture and how organisational practices at NSC Insurance mitigate high power distance aspect of the national culture while enhancing collectivism.

As a preliminary section, the perspective of the CEO regarding the strategic vision and intended organisational culture is presented, as this helps to make sense of following analysis. The chapter then moves on to present the first order codes stemming from the accounts of the interviewees, through semi-structured interviews and the experience of the researcher, as an ethnographer at the organisation. These codes depict the common themes derived from the words of the interviewees. Subsequently, second order findings and aggregate dimensions are presented.

6.1 CEO with a Purpose for Employee engagement

When the CEO was brought in in the mid-2000s, he acknowledged the issues and potentials with the insurance industry in Nigeria. As at the time, the industry contributed only 0.2% to the nation's gross domestic product. Also, he realised the disposition of Nigerians on insurance; some have religious sentiments claiming that god is their insurer while others believe insurance is a 'rip off' when it comes to paying claims. Seeing the low acceptance of the insurance in the country, the CEO set a strategic objective for the company which, in his words, is to "change the level of service delivery, the level of customer appreciation and product innovation". It is important to state that the CEO has no degree or professional background in insurance; however, he had worked in another sector within the financial services. At NSC Insurance, the CEO methodology was to have "a very strong and positive internal culture based on values and norms" with the need to have "vision and share it with the staff". Also, "hiring good people and using training and empowerment to turn them into the best" is seen as important. The CEO further narrated that

"we knew that being an Insurance company, we are not going to attract first class people or PhD holders in the beginning but we are determined to always hire the best people we can find but that as we achieve success we will begin to attract those with good academic backgrounds just like the successful banks".

Considering the size, reputation and profitability of the industry, the CEO accepted that the company would not be attractive to best people. Instead, the responsibility is on the organisation to turn the individuals they could get to teams of people who would help the organisation be on the path towards achieving its set objectives. This is because many of the graduates and professionals want to work for oil companies and banks mainly due to the attractive salary package. Ultimately, the CEO realised that in order for the company to grow and be successful – in attracting and retaining customers, employees

have key role to play and it can only be achieved by engaging them with an appropriate organisational culture to facilitate the engagement. The CEO said,

“We knew that being an Insurance company, we are not going to attract first class people or PhD holders in the beginning but we are determined to always hire the best people we can find but that as we achieve success we will begin to attract those with good academic backgrounds”.

Having placed importance on employee engagement, the CEO started talking on the intended culture for the organisation. The main points of his crusade are mainly on the need for the employees to live by integrity and not to be afraid to say their minds on any issues.

“So I came in and started talking about the culture we were going to have. I talked a great deal about integrity because the insurance industry we met was one totally devoid of integrity. What I met was an industry where there were so many under the table deals and I told the staff that we were not going to do any of these. Some of them laughed and said we might as well go home because the company will fail it but I told them we won't fail and that we will succeed”.

The CEO uses several avenues to communicate the need for employees to say their minds; acknowledging open communication as a step towards employee engagement. For instance, as part of the orientation programme for new intakes, the CEO takes several sessions to talk on open communication; highlighting the mutual benefit of open communication for both the organisation and individuals.

6.2 First Order Findings

6.2.1 First Name Policy

While the CEO continues to take the lead in advocating open communication and the need for employees to engage in organisational work beyond just being passive employees, the first action taken was to implement a policy whereby everyone addresses another individual by the first name only, regardless of their function or position in the organisation. Also, the CEO let the staff know that the effect of policy extends to him as well.

At the earliest time when this policy was implemented, it sounded strange to the social values that the employees had known and was shocking to the older members of the organisation. Having grown in a culture where a young member of the community must expressly use relevant titles such as 'sir', 'ma', 'chief' etc; to show that he/she respects the older member; it was a difficult policy to practice. A subordinate is usually expected to face direct or indirect victimisation for calling a superior by their first name. As a result of the 'foreign' practice of first name policy, the CEO faced a major resistance from many of the senior members of the organisation. The CEO said:

"I talked about a lot other things about the culture. I talked about the open communication, the fact that we are going to call each other by first name, innovation and exceptional customer focus. That was how we started. Of course it was not easy. A lot of the people who came in at that time at senior levels could not cope because they have worked for between ten and fifteen years in cultures that were opposite to the one we are trying to build and even though they tried to pay lip service and do eye service, it did not work and they left us and the few staff who remained were those who could live with the culture."

Not only did the first name policy lead to resistance from the senior members to the CEO ideology, many of the senior members could stand the fact that young employees

would be calling them by their first names. Also, it shows that the CEO was trying to carve out an organisational culture that appears to be different from the national culture. The CEO narrated that,

“we had series of entry level staff coming in fresh from school because it is always easy to build culture with young people as they do not know better due to the fact that they have not work anywhere else. The problem we had in the early days was the young people bought the culture easily but when they came to work they met the old people who were still struggling with the culture so as a result we had a culture clash for the first two sets of recruitments because everything we told them in training school was different from what they saw on ground and it took a while for the culture to gain ground”.

As it is evident that the young employees were able to quickly adapt to the policy, the quick adaptability goes beyond the fact that the new intakes were younger in age and have not worked in any organisation. Beyond the rationale of being young, the new intakes rather gained a reasonable level of perceived psychological safety from the CEO; therefore, they were able to follow the policy knowing that there would be no repercussions for it. An entry level staff at e-commerce unit explained:

“First name basis, we call ourselves by first name. I call my boss MD of the company Steve, there is no ma/sir. So that has taken away forms of barrier. When you use ‘sir’ or ‘ma’, it always reminds you that person is older than you. People say familiarity breeds contempt and sometimes familiarity allows open communication. The fact that we allow first names, I can always walk up to you tomorrow because I am not scared of you and I know I can say anything to you; if you decide to witch-hunt, somebody is also fighting for me so far I’m saying the right thing. At the end of the day, the end goal is for the organisation to succeed.”

The psychological safety from being a victim of witch-hunt gives the young individual confidence to call anyone by their first name. He sees it that if the head of the company is happy with it to the extent of making it a policy then he will always have protection from the organisation. Also, it is quite remarkable how the feeling of being safe from consequence of calling a senior member by his/her first name changes this employee's perspective of a philosophical notion – 'familiarity breeds contempt' - that is upheld by some people.

Although, first name policy was difficult for some senior members to accept initially, the policy is now seen to reduce communication barrier. Thus, there is an increase relationship between senior members and junior staff to an extent that it is sometimes difficult to know roles and positions of personnel based on the interaction. According to a middle manager from internal audit

"we have a situation where all staff are being addressed by their first name just to make you comfortable with each other. You have a situation where you can walk past the CEO and say hi and he is always smiling.

Also, the policy has made it easier for employees to be able to approach and speak to any senior staff in the organisation without the fear of appearing disrespectful. According to a HR middle manager,

"so when you talk about open door and first name, it's just to drive the norm of open communication. I can't be opened to communicate with you when you're always behind a locked door or can't address you by your first name. Basically, it is to break communication barriers".

The effect of first name policy is yielding to an extent that the HR middle manager said:

"we deemphasize hierarchy; not that it is invisible but everybody knows who is where on the hierarchy. So if you are a new person here unless someone say who is where you won't know".

Alike, the chief investment officer also remarked that

“if you saw me outside this building, you might not be able to tell if I am an entry level”.

My observation at the organisation also confirms the enactment of first name policy. I met with and interviewed individuals across functions and levels. Being an individual who is familiar with the national culture of the country, the researcher had to be corrected twice as the interviewer, by two senior management staff not to address them with ‘sir’ but their first name. In casual interactions and several interview sessions with the lower employees, the researcher noticed that they kept referring the CEO, CFO and regional directors by their first names. As an individual from the same country, the researcher found it a bit strange.

Importantly, it appears that the young employees still acknowledge the national culture outside the office that older members of the community should be accorded respect. Therefore, even as they call the senior members by their first names, the younger employees still make sure that their attitudes and behaviours are not disrespectful. According to another lower member employee,

“First name basis allows open communication among the employees. Also, it helps to improve innovation because you can easily just say things as it are although we do not disrespect people, we try to always remember that this person is older than you and has been in the business for long”.

In all, the first name policy which appeared as a foreign practice to the national culture has helped to reduce communication barriers between senior members and young employees in the organisation. Without young employees disrespecting the older members by their attitudes and behaviours, first name policy has seen to make members of the organisation comfortable with one another; anyone can be approached, as a result, better social interaction is achieved. It worth stated that this confidence to

call senior members by their first names is based upon the psychological safety that the young employees gained through the support of the CEO who is the individual that led the campaign of the policy. This is because the national culture does place upon younger members of the community a responsibility to refer to senior members with their titles.

6.2.2 Open Door Policy – Accessibility to Top Executives

Similar to the first name policy which the CEO sees as a way to reduce communication barriers between the top executives and the employees, open door policy was introduced in order to further drive open communication in the company. With this policy, the lower employees have access to the top executives to discuss their concerns: both work and non-work related issues. An Internal Audit team member said:

“The relationship with my boss is quite cordial. There are instances whereby you will have to walk into his office to even discuss things that are not strictly official; such gives you the confidence that you are valuable in the sense that you are not just important for the work alone but other areas of your life needs some attention so that is quite commendable”.

In the comment above, the employee associates being able to access his senior managers as being valued in the organisation; and perception of being valued by the managers implies the employees tend to engage more in their work. Also, the open door policy does not only imply every senior executive's door left opened to every employee; it also means any employee is encouraged to access their senior management using other media including emails, phone calls, corridor chats. The chief investment officer said,

“I am believer of open door policy which is something we have as a group. I have sessions with most junior people almost on a daily basis; we have our own chat on WhatsApp. All the people that entered each year we have a WhatsApp chat group where we discussed things; it helps to break the ice – we become like friends.”

While conducting the ethnographic study at the organisation, the researcher observed several times, instances where a lower employee would walk up with a top executive along the corridor to have a chat. As the researcher went to the company's canteen every afternoon for lunch, he noticed staff come in two's and three's with some of the top executives. The executives queued on same line as the lower employees. While waiting to be served, there were informal chats in groups involving the top executives. Also, there were no dedicated seat for anyone; as a result, senior members and lower employees sit together, having chats.

Furthermore, one of the CEO's objectives is to have a culture where ideas are birthed in order to drive product innovation; as a result, gaining a competitive edge within the industry. With access to the top executives, employees are able to push their ideas and pitch them directly with the management.

According to a junior staff,

“There is very little or no bureaucracy in this company. I can walk off to my MD tomorrow on how I think things should be done”.

Also, senior executives are able to quickly deal with impending issues before they go out of hand because any employee can escalate issues to their higher manager if he/she thinks such issue is not being addressed well by the immediate manager. A sales team member narrated that

“I can escalate. The fact that I am reporting to my manager does not necessarily mean the buck stops on his or her table. For some reasons if I do not agree with

it then it goes to the next level and if we cannot reach an agreement there, it goes to the next level. It is defined and everybody knows it. There is a clear line of communication.

Like I said in a traditional insurance company I probably will not be able to walk into my Group Head office. Not necessarily that there are no demarcations but that you can approach anybody. If I want to see the MD all I need to do is talk to the Secretary and I think that promotes some security. For example, if you have an idea and your line manager does not buy it, you can go directly to the Group Head to discuss it with him or her. There is that opportunity even for someone that has just joined”.

However, the employees are aware the fact that there is accessibility to the top executives does not mean it is abused; the employees communicate directly with their immediate managers if their concerns can be dealt with by them. A lower employee from IT department said,

“if my idea is such that it likely affects the process of the company maybe I am suggesting they do things differently and I know it is my boss that will implement it, I will just go to him directly. There are some things you solve with your immediate boss, so why should I go ahead to tell his boss just because there is open communication.”

Another employee finds accessibility to the top executives as a result of open door policy, very useful. He cited an instance when he had to go over his immediate boss to his manager because he needed to get a work done having realised that the top manager needed to approve an action. He said,

“I find it necessary to go over my boss to his boss if he is delaying my work. The head of my Group is about eight levels ahead of me; he is a senior manager

while I am just executive trainee. Yesterday I sent a mail to him that ‘there is something I need to launch and the head of Technology said you are the one delaying’, and immediately, I got the approval. Definitely, the way I wrote it was respectful but still I told him. And that it is the way we work here, it is not about the individual but the end goal.”

Moreover, there is a sense of greater sense of organisational support beyond one which immediate managers give as a result of access to top management. According to lower employee from claims department,

“The company operates open door policy. No one is looked down upon; you are allowed to express yourself. I can approach the Group Head; it is like a family thing, you feel at home.”

In summary, open door policy by the management reduces communication barrier between employees and the top executives; the employees are able to pitch their ideas directly with the executives when necessary. Also, access to the executives is not limited to face to face interaction, through emails and WhatsApp employees can get their ideas and concerns across to the management.

6.2.3 Close Seating Plan

Although, the company setting is not an open plan structure, each unit has its own enclosed office; however, one of the first things the researcher observed at the company is that each unit is structured in a way that the team members sit close to one another with their managers and some other senior members with them. The close seating arrangement facilitates express communication between the managers and their teams. According to Learning and Development Manager,

“sitting together is for two reasons. First is easy transfer of ideas; so I’m sitting with my boss, when he wants to show me something or pass across knowledge

he doesn't need to go all the way – there's that seamless flow of information. Secondly, to make sure your people are within reach. If you want to discuss something with them, they are available and vice-verse. This also is aimed at encouraging open communication”.

Similarly, team members are quickly able to get feedback on the tasks they are working on while managers keep track on the projects, given the feedback from their team members. According to head of IT, it is beneficial that he sits with the team despite his position in the organisation:

"As far as I am concerned, it is not the level that matters, it is a team work; all of us are working towards a goal. It is even better for us to be together and I can see what everyone is doing; because how can you follow up when you are isolated from your people, you would now have to leave your office and come to see them? I do not buy it”.

Also, sitting together creates an avenue for the managers or senior members to brief the team and help them make sense of organisational issues that are not clear to them which could help the employees understand how their work fit into the organisation's bigger picture. Also, sensegiving by the managers in the team helps to expand the employees' knowledge of the business as a whole. A middle manager from Reinsurance department said,

“while sitting together, I can take time to explain to members of the team why we do what we do. Sometimes, I ask my team their opinions on what I want to do. Basically, we sit together in the office and we talk”.

As opinions are shared within the teams, ideas are generated and problems are solved while the team members sit together. According to junior staff from Claims department,

“when I have suggestion regarding an issue, I discuss it within the team; if my superior is not present; I go ahead to inform him that base on what I see, the

best way to go. Sometimes, he will agree, other times he will not – making reference to a similar situation in the past”.

Another staff member from Reinsurance also confirmed that

“we sit together so that we bounce ideas with one another. It is an open office – everybody is supposed to hear everybody’s discussions. We encourage people to speak up regarding issues instead of keeping quiet. When I have a concern, I may not say it directly; I would just paint a scenario and ask individuals their opinion. We go on and argue until we all decide on one way.”

While sitting together facilitates exchange of information between the team members and their managers with team members getting quick feedback and managers keeping track on progress of projects as they unfold. According to the head of HR, the sitting together helps him to reduce the need to call for formal meetings. Also, issues are dealt with immediately, sometimes while still in developing stage. The head of HR said

“Specifically of my team, it is not a dispersed team so it is easier for us to tackle issues on the spot. We do not really have formal meetings. Our meetings kind of work well for us because HR spaces are more of on the job items which means people will create on the job opportunities. So as new things crop up, we meet around to discuss”.

A senior manager from Actuarial also recounted that

“We usually do not take out time to have meetings. Though, we do have a few times. Mainly, It is just us in this room and we do a lot of talking amongst ourselves here - from work-related to non work-related discussions. It is easy to disseminate information, as you can see it is only one person that is not on seat presently; it is more like hang-out time”.

Furthermore, close seating arrangement with managers at NSC Insurance goes beyond just getting work done and paid. There is a noticeable level of camaraderie and greater

sense of belonging among employees and their managers. Friendships have developed as a result of continuous interactions between the employees and managers. The head of IT said,

“I believe, sit in the midst of everybody, you laugh and crack jokes together. You work and come up with ideas together; people are going home and coming back with how to solve yesterday’s problems. It is a way to foster knowledge. Really, your relationship with others should go beyond work because all of us, we spend most of our time at work. Out of 24hrs in a day, we spend 12 or 14 hours at work so the only friends you have are the ones at the office”.

Similarly, many of the employees have seen their work colleagues as their second family members; they look forward to being at work due to the sense of belonging that is apparent at the organisation. A middle manager at Reinsurance said,

“I do not just see it as I am coming to work; I see it as I am coming to meet my people. Even in the days I am tired that I do not want to go to work, I just think of the office how guys are yapping themselves – trying to make jokes out of stupid things -just not to take work seriously. This is what I enjoy – the team, the group, the office space I am in, the way everyone relates, the way I relate with my boss and in turn relates with me”.

While discussing his relationship with his manager, a staff member from Budget and Planning said,

“At the end of the day, we spend more hours here than you spend in your personal life; so you might as well spend it in harmony with your colleagues”.

In summary, close seating plan in the organisation where employees sit with their managers and some senior members, facilitates communication between the employees and management. The employees are able to escalate issues to the management at the same time; they get feedback quickly from the senior members.

While discussions range from work issues being faced by colleagues to issues about the industry, the employees alongside the senior members shape the sensemaking process of the issues.

6.2.4 Culture Clinics – avenue for Continuous communication of intended culture

Few years after the CEO was appointed with his strategic vision to change the levels of service delivery, customer appreciation and product innovation, there continued to be resistance by older staff members to the new culture policies introduced. The older staff were used to the culture where younger individuals are obliged to show deferential treatments towards their superiors and elders by the explicit use of titles such as 'sir', 'ma' and 'oga' which means boss. However, the CEO is creating an organisational culture that employees engage in organisational work where "you do not have top management, middle management and people segregated as such" (Internal Audit Manager).

Older existing staff members who refused to adapt to new cultural practices being introduced were not only the concern of the top executives, the new entrants coming from different organisations with a set of norms needed to uphold the new culture of open communication. According to head of Strategy and Marketing,

"Culture Management is really all about managing new entrants. The members of a family know their culture. People mimic behaviour, they pick it up. We try to make sure that the people we bring in are not yet fixated in their ways".

Head of IT who was recently hired saw the company's culture as one that takes time to adjust to:

“The culture is progressional for me and takes a while before people internalise it because you’re coming from different backgrounds and school of thoughts. All those things you know to do, you must forget them when you are here; maybe when you leave here, you put them back on”.

In order to continue to emphasise and communicate on the intended culture, the CEO initiated culture clinic having realised the new culture is losing ground as new members joined the company. According to the CEO,

“During the first 10 years we observed that the culture was beginning to get diluted as we bring more people in because people do not have the same understanding of the culture, so we started what we called Culture Clinics. We draw a timetable assign topics based on our norms and values and spend an hour and half teaching and discussing the values. This held at times in the morning by 7am or after work in the evenings for about a year until everyone was again in touch with the culture”.

Culture clinic holds every month to sensitise all employees including the senior members the intended behaviours expected of them. Top senior executives and head of HR facilitate the meeting. Regarding culture clinic, the head of Strategy and Marketing said

“A Senior member of staff will facilitate on a topic from the five values and everyone will attend. The facilitator who facilitates a class also has to attend another class. So new people are being trained and old staff are blended through the culture clinics”.

In one of the culture clinics the researcher attended as a participant observer, the meeting was facilitated by the Divisional Director of Sales with over 20 employees from different departments. The company’s core value chosen for the discussion was innovation; the facilitator made the session interactive asking what innovation means to

each individual in respect to their roles in the organisation. It was an avenue for top executive to shape the minds of employees towards intended organisational culture.

It is worth noting that culture clinic was once stopped; however, the CEO realised the cultural practices of open communication and other norms he was promoting started to fade; he identified the source of the issue. The CEO narrated that

“problems always come from the above entry level hires because they spend only a week in the new entry level orientation and even though we talk about the culture, it is really not the same and they are the ones at the most risk not acting according to our culture and because they are senior, they can have significant impact on the young people. We have realized this and we started the culture clinic again and it will run for the next six months.

The head of Strategy and Marketing also confirmed the reason for bringing back culture clinic:

“Now after stopping the culture clinic, like three years ago we started to bring people in again at senior level to do different things and we realized that even some staff that were inside were beginning to lose some of our attributes, so we started the culture clinics this year again”.

In all, culture clinic is a form of meeting for top management to communicate intended culture with employees and know employees' understanding level of the culture. The top executives realised that there is infiltration of unintended culture mix as a result of new hired staff coming into the organisation particularly the above entry level staff. Therefore, in order to keep the intended culture mix of open communication and other norms, culture clinic plays an important role. The importance of the culture clinic was seen when it was stopped to find out that the intended culture was fading out. The Divisional Director had to say,

“Sincerely there are no guarantees culture can be maintained that is why we have meetings and trainings so that people can develop themselves. You can never be sure what will happen when you are not there. We do culture clinics; we try to drive certain behaviours by talking about them often”.

It is apparent that national culture and cultures from other organisations as a result of hiring pose as constant threat to the intended organisational culture at NSC Insurance. Acknowledging this threat, culture clinic stands as one of ways to continue to sensitise all organisational members the intended norms and behaviours expected of them; which has made the company achieved considerable level of success in the previous years. According to Learning and Development manager,

“Over the years, we have seen dilution in the culture and we do not want it to go further. We believe why we were able to move as fast as we did was because of our culture. It was not that we imported people from abroad; we had people from the same labour market. The only different thing was our culture”.

6.2.5 Multiple and Frequency of Meetings at NSC Insurance

Following to culture clinic which is a form of meeting specifically aimed at bringing to the consciousness of employees and their managers the culture values and norms that the organisation is driving, there are several other meetings that hold frequently with lower employees getting involved in them. These range from meetings within teams to those that involve top executives and fellow employees from different departments and regions.

These series of meetings serve as the avenues for employees to express their views on issues and voice their opinions on the direction the organisation to take as rightly applicable to their specific roles. As a result, top executives are able to effectively keep

track of any initiatives being implemented and through the feedback from the employees, they address issues that may prevent successful implementation.

According to the Divisional Director,

“there are regular meetings almost every time. We do a lot of meetings here. This ensures you are able to air your thoughts and opinions. We argue things out. It is easy to send a memo out outlining most people will not buy into it and you are left wondering why things are not shaping up but when we sit and engage them even though I know, they feel they were carried along.

In these meetings, management engages the employees in sense making and environmental scanning on organisational issues. The employees are able to provide the management information that may not have been officially verified but are already in the public space; such information which may be important in the operations and strategy of the company. The chief financial officer said,

“you get to that point when you are involved in a lot of meetings; there are just too many meetings. It can be tough but for me, the meetings are also a process for ensuring the strategy is carried out. We ask ourselves a lot of questions in these meetings about our directions.

I think for us in taking decision, we try to look at very obvious information and less obvious ones; sometimes we consider grapevines because you get the gist from there. We engage our employees – encouraging them to voice their perspectives and ideas”.

At team level, the teams have meetings weekly for updates on pending tasks that may not have been completed in the previous week. With their managers present, the each team quickly run through works which have to be completed in the current week. Also, these 20 – 30 minute meetings are avenues for employees to put their concerns and suggestions across to the organisation which are usually resolved or addressed at the

team level. However, if an issue requires higher level approval, interpretation or action, the manager escalates it to management meetings.

For Sales department,

“every office holds a meeting every Monday to discuss activities for the previous week because we set budgets for every week. In those meetings, a member of staff is chosen to talk about a product. We do role-plays where someone acts as a Sales person and another as the customer” – Senior Manager, Sales.

Similar to the weekly meetings within teams is service level meetings attended by 1 or 2 employees from each department, issues related to hindrances to smooth interdependent workflow across the organisation are discussed. According to a middle manager from Internal Audit,

“The service level meeting that is being done every week is meant to identify where there are service breakdowns. We have cases whereby service delivery was not top-notch, is not as expected; when we identify such cases we will come in to try to know what led to it and see how we can implement procedures to avoid such in the future”.

Furthermore, there are monthly meetings at team and management levels. At these meetings, the organisation keeps track of the progress on tasks, performance and projects. Adopting the template provided by the Strategy office, these meetings usually start by reviewing the ‘must do’ activities of the previous month. The team members go through any issues faced or suggestions regarding the status of the project working on after which the ‘must do’ for the current month are outlined. For example, at Internal Audit

“Every month we have a group meeting. We have four units within the group; Internal Audit and Investigations, IT Audit & System Assurance, Internal Control and Reconciliations Unit. All of these group members come together at least

once a month to discuss tasks that has been agreed as tasks that must be done for the month. So we usually call it must do's. So you have must do's tasks which had been agreed even before the commencement of the month, when we have such meetings that is where we discuss the update the update to those tasks and then we agree on the tasks for the coming month" – Internal Audit Middle Manager

The Sales team calls it monthly performance review; which is an avenue for employees to engage with their managers on issues about their work. Middle manager from Sales said,

"We have MPR and mid-month MPR basically to review performance. From the mid-month MPR we will see how many staff have met half of their budget for the month by the 15th day of the month and see how we can assist those who are struggling".

The weekly and monthly team meeting are avenues for management to keep track of initiatives at the micro level. Through comments and suggestions from the employees, the management get feedback on the progress of the projects.

While having frequent meetings is an avenue to seek clarifications on work issues in order to drive effective implementation of initiatives as cascaded from the top management; however, the frequency of engagement with the employees is not hundred percent sure-proof that everyone will accept decision made. The engagement with employees is a way to ensure all views are considered before decisions are made. According to the Chief Investment Officer,

"Are there things people will complain about as we grow as an institution? Probably yes. That's why it is important to have those engagement sessions so that they say their minds and we consider them".

6.2.6 Participation in key Decision Making meetings

Beyond the weekly and monthly team meetings, lower employees also participate in some key meetings.

According to a junior staff at Budgetary Control

“Ideally, I am a very junior member of staff, I am not supposed to be in credit rating meetings but I attend sometimes. You sit in there and hear questions the rating agency are asking. So, you sit at your own desk later to understand why some very small things are important”.

At a monthly decision making meeting, CDM, where discussions are on issues which have direct impact on several department and matters that a large scale, junior employees are allowed to be involved. Examples include decisions whether to renew an insurance policy of an oil rig, increase servicing centres in a state, change or modify a product etc. However, lower employees are not permanent members of the CDM; each team nominates two members to represent the team alongside their manager.

In the meeting, everyone is given opportunity to put their view across regarding issue being discussed. According to the CEO,

“We like building consensus here and we also like giving people with minority views opportunity to air their views. I believe that sometimes the devil’s advocate have the most brilliant ideas. So I give everyone a chance to say something so as to be certain that we are all flowing in one direction. It is important that we listen to as many people as possible before taking an important decision and if you are part of the committee for instance, the CDM, it is not me taking a decision. The CDM is the highest decision making body in this company and the committee can approve transactions that I as the CEO cannot approve”.

At one of the CDM meetings the researcher attended, he realised there are no specific seats for anyone apart from the meeting facilitator; usually the CEO, who sits in the middle of a side of an oval-shaped long table. Individuals that come in early occupy seats next to the meeting facilitator; and any top executives that comes later sits wherever he/she finds a seat without attempts to sit next to another executive.

In the meeting, one of the decisions to be made was whether to renew insurance policy for a major factory. Everyone was surprised when the presenter, who is a member of Underwriting team said the policy holder is contending that they will not pay high premium since they did not make a claim in the previous year. In the process of making sense of the issue, there were a lot of small talks among the participants including lower staff. Afterward, the CEO asked the participants their views; as a result, as one individual asked a question, another would try to answer it until the CEO stepped in and asked the underwriting team to work through their numbers and see what can be done; suggesting maybe there is a need to have more stringent conditions that must be met by the policy holder while premiums remain relatively same as last year.

Furthermore, the inclusion of lower employees in some decision making meetings is not only for them to voice their opinions and concerns regarding organisational issues; participation in management meetings is an avenue for lower employees to know more about how their roles fit into bigger picture of the objectives the company is trying to achieve. Also, to an extent, the employees gain insights into higher level discussions and concerns of the top management which can result in shaping the thoughts of the employees. According to a Claim officer,

“You’re prompted to want to know more; the exposure you get here is overwhelming. Things you might not be able to do in other insurance companies like attending management meeting. You get sent even as Entry Trainee to attend management meeting; it is because the company has empowered you with the knowledge and wherewithal to be able to express yourself”.

Similarly, understanding the bigger picture of how their work fit into the organisational objectives helps the employee see how valuable their work is and need to do more; which eventually lead to the path of shared ownership of organisational goals between the management and employees. According to the Chief Investment Officer,

“In places I’ve worked before, even when you’re a senior person, unless you’re in special executive committee, there are certain things that will not be brought to your attention. But here, you may be entry level or an intern, you see everything. You know how the business is fairing. If we are doing badly you see. You see how what you do cascade to the bigger picture. You also know that there is benefit excellent in what you do”.

Similar to CDM, lower employee also participate in quarterly business review meetings, QSV. At QSV, each department and regional centre makes presentation on milestone reached towards achieving strategic objectives of the year. They highlight the challenges, performance and issues in the last quarter; bringing to the attention of everyone at the meeting unresolved issues and departmental goal for the next quarter. Also, the meeting is an avenue to seek feedback from top management and members of other departments; and make relevant decisions accordingly.

At QSV, the top management review their strategic objectives by considering the extent the set milestones are reached. While a department was making presentation on their performance in the last quarter, the researcher observed that individuals in the meeting were helping the executives make sense of what is being presented. This is because anyone is allowed to ask questions on any aspect of the presentation that is not clear to them. In the QSV, there were sometimes ‘off the topic/presentation’ discussions where a participant’s point of view led everyone to another issue or event that worth discussing. In such instance, the presenter would pause and continue when such ‘off the presentation’ discussion ends; these discussions end by the CEO asking someone to note down the ‘new’ issues for deliberation in another meeting. As a result of engaging

employees in meetings such as QSV, certain issues that the top management may not have seen or thought about are brought to their awareness. According to the CEO,

“It is very difficult for things to catch us unaware and even when they do we react very quickly because we have monthly meetings, we have weekly meetings and quarterly meetings like the QSV”.

Also, there is a lot of ‘punching holes’ in presentations; participants disagreeing with some figures being presented. One of the instances led to two top executives disagreeing on the figures being presented. There were times that some other middle/lower members would put their points of view across to disagree or agree with either of the two top executives. While this is going on, the CEO continues in a subtle way to maintain healthy arguments. The CEO moved the disagreement between the two executives ‘outside’ the meeting. According to the chief investment officer,

“We encourage active engagement and discussions; we encourage disagreement because it’s part of the process of improvement. We found that once we both feel comfortable that it’s not about saying anything wrong”.

At the end of a presentation, a junior member asked the presenter that a slide is missing in the presentation because there is a slide template used by everyone for presentation. The junior member realised that an important sales figure that indicate level of customer retention was not included in the presentation; immediately, this alerted the top managers. The presenter was later asked to include relevant figures and re-present. The CEO thanked the junior member. During re-presentation, it was later obvious that there has been continuous decline in customer retention in the state represented by the presenter.

At the management decision making (CDM) and the two-day quarter business review (QSV) meetings the researcher attended, everyone appeared keen to understand what is being presented. Also, there was a noticeable employee confidence to probe or voice

their opinions into any aspects of presentation that is not clear to them. One of the factors attributed to this level of confidence in the employee engagement is due to repeated exposure to such meetings where top management are involved and high level issues are discussed; as the lower employee wants to prove he/she is valuable to participate in the meetings. According to the chief investment officer,

“nobody is going to crucify you for saying the wrong thing. It is more important that you say something. And when you know that you have to say something, it then compels you to do some ground work; when you know that you won’t go to a meeting and you won’t be asked to share your own thoughts, then you would do some work. Some of the best ideas have come from low level staff because that’s what new people bring – they bring freshness”.

In support to the above statement by the CIO, a lower staff at Claims department said the top management

“it gives you exposure; It makes you to know more. Basically, there is avenue to learn more”.

There are at least two importance of employee engagement in higher level meetings at NSC Insurance. First, the top management is able to identify issues and respond to them quickly. This is because engagement of lower employees leads to rich discussions on issues that are not just based on top executives’ views. Awareness of management is brought to aspect of the issue being discussed that could have been overlooked as the employees, in many case are closer to micro aspects of the matter in view than the top executives. Second, the engagement of employees in higher level meeting increases the perceived value of the employees and sense of belonging. And, the perceived value creates a self-obligation to be more prepared for and want to learn when next opportunity arises to be part of a higher level meeting. According to the CIO,

“the quarterly meeting – we have it at group level. We get validation from other members of the group. At those meetings, we discuss our strategic initiatives, successes, challenges and performances. So quarterly, we get group validation. And everyone participates, the meeting is not just for senior people; all senior people are mandated to be there. Everyone is there; the room is packed. So we get queries, challenged by all cadres and across the group”.

However, this is not to say that all decision making meetings involve the employees, there are other monthly meeting exclusive to the top management and department heads where there are other high level discussions. At the same time, there are others meeting which are ad hoc in nature where lower employees are members. According to an entry level staff,

“There is a committee headed by Senior Manager and entry level staff is in the committee. For example, there was a committee where I was the youngest; other individuals were senior staff. Things like that promote communication; so you are allowed to say what you feel”.

6.2.7 Management Responsibility and Power Delegation

At NSC Insurance, there have been several deliberate interventions by the top management towards open communication and to facilitate engagement of employees in organisational work. Among the practices are weekly and monthly team meetings; also, employees are nominated to be part of CDM – a decision making meetings. The lower employees are selected to be part of committee alongside senior managers; at the same time, they participate in quarterly strategy review. However, the nature of power and responsibility delegation from the managers to their subordinates is also evident at NSC Insurance.

With the CEO being the prime advocate, it appears that there is a practice of intentional employee encouragement to come up with solutions to issues they encounter and actively drive discussions in the meetings. The CEO narrated one of his meetings with new entry level employees:

“Yesterday I was with the investments trainee team and we looked at Q2 saying to ourselves that even though we made money in Q1 and there were opportunities that came up that we took advantage of but what about Q2. They presented some scenarios to me but I was not happy because I thought the scenarios were too predictable and I said to them I do not think these scenarios are complete, you need to give me two outliers”.

Also, power delegation is a way to remind the employees that they are not only hired to take orders from their managers, they need to take initiatives and more responsibilities beyond their direct daily work. Although, the employees may not be directly involved in taking some strategic decisions, getting their perspectives on organisational issues become a way of enlisting the employees in decision making process. According to the Divisional Director,

“I do not micro-manage and rarely give directives; I let people come up with options. It is always good to test people's capacity but at other times you can point people in the way to go by removing options. The only way to test people's capacity is to allow them experiment; At times, you should sit back and watch how things will play out when things go wrong. You do not jump head first into the scenario.”

Moreover, shifting major aspect of meeting to employee by their managers is seen as a way to get them actively concerned about the issues they encounter instead of being passive meeting attendees. Besides, power shift to employees as agenda drivers in meetings creates shared sense of ownership of issues between them and their managers; also with a sense of belonging to say things as they see them in order to find

a solution to a problem they shared as a team. According to a middle manager at Internal Audit,

“when we discuss in teams, what I do is to allow the discussion flow. Let it be driven even by the least experienced person. That way they feel comfortable and they want to be more dynamic. They are not restrictive because you do not make them feel as if you are evaluating their level of reasoning at every point in time. Although you encourage them to do more but you must allow them say whatever comes to their minds. That way, good ideas come up”.

In devolving more responsibilities to the employees, the management ask employees to share ideas on ways to improve the system. According to a junior member at Budgetary Control,

“sometimes, the management want each team to come up with ideas toward areas in which the company need to improve upon. It does not have to be about your unit; it can be about any part of the company. Of course, you interact with other units; if there is any idea implemented in one unit and you think it can be done in another you suggest it”.

Also, the intentional power shift in meetings from managers to employees stands as an avenue to let the employees realise that their insights on issues are valuable to the organisation and they can influence big decisions in the organisation; even though the managers appear to have more experience than them. The chief investment officer narrated how he validates decisions by letting his staff make them:

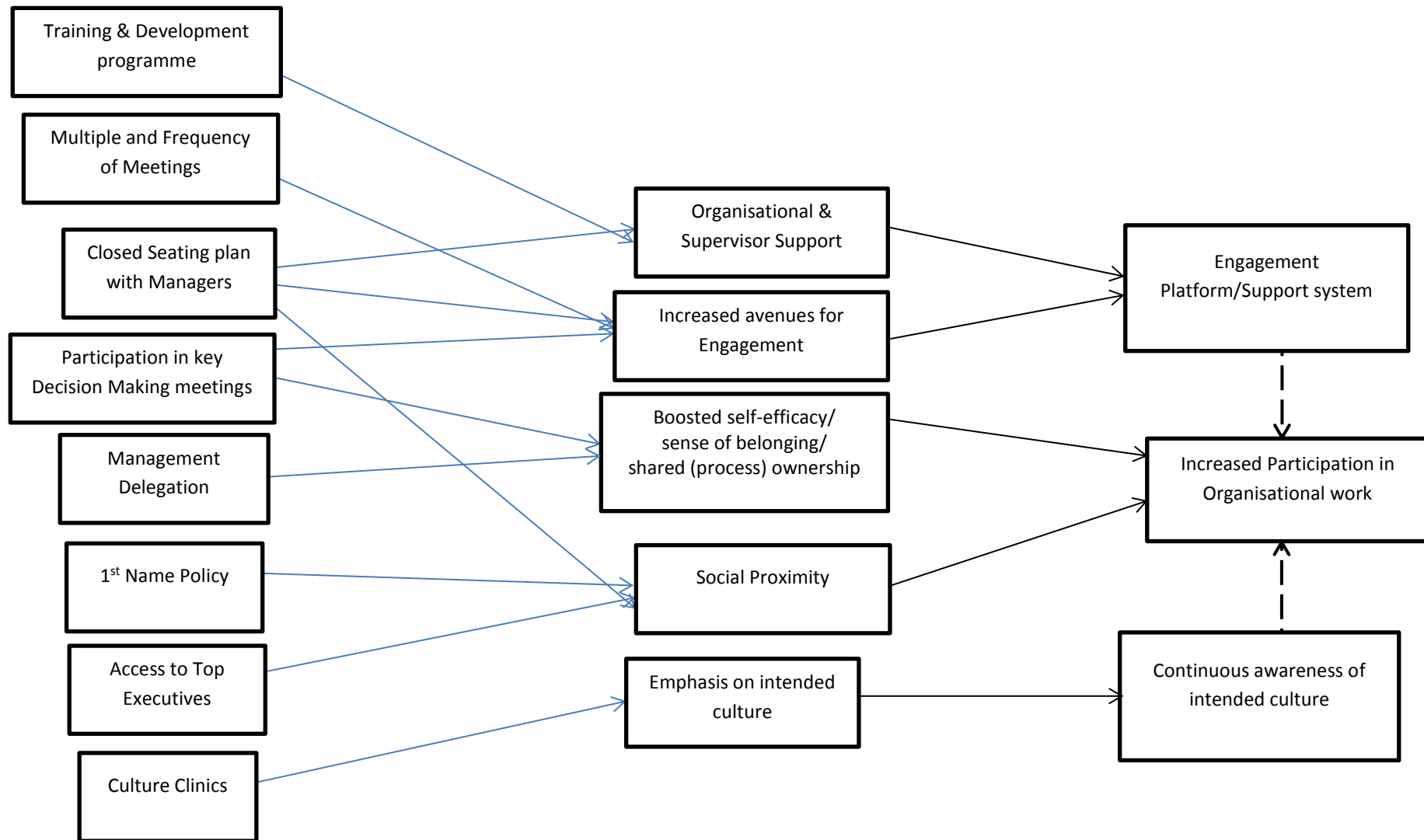
“I called the investment guys across the group and asked one question; there were five people with five different views on one issue. I asked everybody ‘tell us your view and give basis for it and I will ask questions’. And as we went through the discussion, we started to see views that probably held less water and we were able to quickly drill down to two views that looked like the most judicious

views. Two people with those views shared a bit more and even they agreed that there are some middle grounds between their views which is more optimal than their individual views and everyone was happy.

But the important thing was, I may have had a view but I did not share mine. I ultimately found that the final view was better than my own view. Now if I am in a situation where the views are very different, then I will share mine. The luxury I have is my team members are very intelligent. So I have no qualms taking someone else's view. We argue on facts and we always know which one is superior".

From the above comments, allowing employees to drive agenda and voice their opinions in the meetings at NSC Insurance enables both individuality and plurality. There is individuality in the sense that each employee becomes more comfortable and confident to talk in the meeting. Also, there is plurality as logic of individuality of the employees are respected; acknowledging that they do not have to expressly agree to the view of a superior, but voice their opinions to have rich description of an organisational issue.

Fig 1.2 Nature of Employee Engagement at NSC Insurance



6.3 Second Order Codes

The previous section provides a rich description, from interviewees' words, of relational dynamics between employees and managers, and certain organisational practices at NSC Insurance. The interviewees' accounts serve as basis to explore employee engagement; however, there is a need to understand the underlying patterns from the first order analysis towards understanding the nature of employee engagement in the organisation. This section presents the second order analysis of what is going in the organisation, which is also aimed at providing insights on the phenomenon being studied beyond where the data is collected.

6.3.1 Social Proximity at NSC Insurance

In the effort to change the level of service delivery, customer appreciation and product innovation at NSC Insurance, the CEO and top management see the need to have a strong and positive internal culture where the organisational vision is shared among all the employees. In the attempt to get more abstract with interviewee's accounts and observed data, it is realised that there is an enhanced level of social proximity in the organisation which is as a result of first name policy, closed seating arrangement and accessibility to top executives.

Social Proximity through First-Name Policy

Considering high power culture in Nigeria where subordinates are inherently obliged to be deferential to their superiors, the practice of calling anyone by their first names regardless of the position they hold in the organisation makes the employees more comfortable and confident to form better relationships with their managers. It worth stating here that high power distance issue is scaled across levels in organisations. It is not only found in the relationship between lower employees and their immediate managers, the issue is also possible in middle manager and top manager relationship.

At NSC Insurance, the increase in social proximity through first name policy was possible because the policy is enacted by the top management. As a result, the likely problem between lower employees and middle management staff is minimised; otherwise, it would appear as insubordination from the viewpoint of the seniors. Since the top management are comfortable with the middle managers to call them their first names, the enactment of the policy also scales down between middle management staff and lower employees. Therefore, lower employees boldly call any senior members by the first name without concerns of repercussion. This is why a lower employee at Reinsurance said,

“The fact that we allow first names, I can always walk up to you tomorrow because I am not scared of you and I know I can say anything to you; if you decide to witch-hunt, somebody is also fighting for me so far I am saying the right thing. At the end of the day, the end goal is for the organisation to succeed”.

Social Proximity through Close Seating Plan and Accessibility to Top Executives

Furthermore, social proximity is enhanced by the close seating plan at NSC Insurance. The seating arrangement brings the employees close to one another including some senior staff members, thereby increasing the tendency to form interpersonal relationships irrespective of different positions they hold in the organisation. The continuous talk about work and non-work related issues among the staff with their managers as a result of the seating plan builds familiarity where organisational members are more comfortable with one another. Therefore, the employees are more able to freely discuss some concerns that are personal to their roles in the organisation and sometimes, private to them as individuals. A lower employee at E-commerce said,

“There is a guy called Chris he is the senior manager, the head of the group and every other person, there is assistant manager, there is senior executive officer I think we have two Executive Trainees one who are on leave. Basically, we talk with one another, talk about one guy that got burnt, laugh and gist; talk about our personal issues, we talk about why you should go to church, home, politics etc.”.

The level of social proximity in the organisation can also be inferred from the comment by head of IT:

“I sit in the midst of everybody; you laugh and crack jokes together. You work and come up with ideas together; people are going home and coming back with how to solve yesterday’s problems. It is a way to foster knowledge. Really, your relationship with others should go beyond work because all of us, we spend most of our time at work. Out of 24hrs in a day, we spend 12 or 14 hours at work so the only friends you have are the ones at the office.

While high power distance is being mitigated at NSC Insurance, the comment: “your relationship with others should go beyond work because all of us, we spend most of our time at work” also indicates collectivism, which is a major aspect of the national culture.

Moreover, the seating arrangement makes everyone comfortable with one another to open up and voice their opinions as they see issues. Another lower employee at Claims also said,

“My decision-making depends on how big the issue is; I might need to escalate. Most time I might not feel safe in taking decision independently. I will want to put it to the whole house, hear their point of view then we agree on the right path to take. I guess that is why we have superiors”.

Furthermore, my observation at the company also confirms the high level of social proximity. From my experience, it is difficult to differentiate individuals by their positions in the organisation. At Strategy office, there was an instance where a news article on

Nigerian economy became a discussion. Several individuals had their perspectives on the issue; however, there was a junior member with a strong opposite opinion to head of Strategy. There was no instance where head of the department trying to prove superior neither was the lower employee appeared as a minor.

Similarly, employee access to the top executives as a result of open door policy reduces the 'social-gap' between them. Even though, the social proximity due to access to top executives is not as strong as one due to close seating plan, there is still better level of familiarity than an instance where lower employees do not have access to the top managers.

6.3.2 Meetings as Avenues for Engagement on Organisational Issues

The frequent meetings NSC Insurance and employee participation in some key decision making meetings are avenues at which the employees get to know more of the organisation's concerns beyond their daily work and voice their opinions on the issues. For example, the employee attendance of monthly decision making meeting CDM and quarterly business review exposes the employees to discussions and issues beyond their departments; as a result, they are more informed on the company's bigger picture. At the same time, the employees contribute to the discussions from their point of views which are based on knowledge of their day to day work.

Similarly, the weekly and monthly team meetings get the employees talk more on the issues that affect their work and ways to resolve them. The outcome of issues discussed and suggestions made by the team members help to shape the daily operations of the department. However, some issues and suggestions which are of interest to the top executives or have impact on other departments are escalated to the management by the department head.

About their team meetings, the middle manager of Internal Audit said

“you encourage them to do more but you must allow them say whatever comes to their minds. when a team member comes up with a good idea and when you are discussing that idea with the Group Head, you make reference to the fact that the idea came from a team member x. The team member will be encouraged to come up with more brilliant ideas. Instead of taking glory we give recognition to the individual and that works fine”.

In addition to official meetings as avenues for employee engagement, formal and informal discussions as a result of closed seating arrangement with some senior managers serve as medium at which employee add their voice to organisational issues. Even though some discussions are informal, the employee contribution to discussions within team helps to shape their managers’ meaning constructions of issues and events. This is why the CFO said,

“I think for us in taking decision, we try to look at very obvious information and less obvious ones; sometimes we consider grapevines because you get the gist from there”.

6.3.3 Self-Efficacy, Sense of Belonging and Shared (Process) Ownership

In addition to social proximity and increased avenues for engagement as a result of organisational interventions to create “very strong and positive internal culture” for open communication, there is also greater level of self-efficacy, sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership at NSC Insurance. The employee attendance of monthly decision making (CDM), quarterly business review and some other committee meetings creates a sense of being valued as individuals who are knowledgeable enough to reason and contribute to organisational matters beyond their day to day work. This is why the chief investment officer said,

“One thing I tell separate us from other competitors is those monthly and quarterly meetings. Everybody is free to come. And at those meetings we discuss everything. People know everything about you; about what you do. There is 100 percent transparency; they know how you spend your money. It gives people sense of ownership; you feel you can impact and influence. I think that is very important”.

In the CDM the researcher attended, the responses and questions from the attendees including the employees regarding issues being discussed show an acceptance level of responsibility that it is their duty to ensure informed decisions are made in the meeting. Boosting this perceived sense of shared process ownership, the CEO remained acting as the facilitator in the meeting by seeking input from the staff members in the meeting. Although, senior staff appeared to probe further into issues than the lower members, perhaps due to their level of experience, the CEO made sure lower employees contributed to the discussion. This is in acknowledgement that novel insights sometimes come from the lower members; according to the CEO and CIO, the best idea of the year came from a young member staff. This is why the CEO said,

“I give everyone a chance to say something so as to be certain that we are all flowing in one direction. It is important that we listen to as many people as possible before taking an important decision”.

Furthermore, the result of participation in top decision making meeting and being part of certain committee with senior managers signal to the employees that they are actively part of the ‘key’ individuals in shaping the direction of the organisation. Also, the employee involvement in top meetings signifies to them that their input in suggesting solutions and contributing to the discussions is important for the organisation. Also, the inclusion of lower member staff in meetings is a way the top executives are passing a message that management cannot be at the top overseeing issues from bigger picture at the same time see issues at micro level; thus, there is need for the lower employees

to share in the process ownership to drive the vision of the organisation forward. Regarding lower employee involvement in meetings, the chief investment officer said,

“nobody is going to crucify you for saying the wrong thing. It is more important that you say something. And when you know that you have to say something, it then compels you to do some ground work; when you know that you will not go to a meeting and you will not be asked to share your own thoughts, then you would do some work. Some of the best ideas have come from low level staff because that is what new people bring – they bring freshness”.

From the above statement it shows that employees are allowed to voice their viewpoints, however, the reciprocal effect of their participation is the sense of obligation to prepare for the meeting and be ready to raise issues that is not clear to them in the meetings. This is why a lower member said

“You get sent even as entry trainee to attend management meeting; it is because the company has empowered you with the knowledge and wherewithal to be able to express yourself”.

6.3.4 Organisational and Supervisor Support

While the findings from NSC Insurance on close seating arrangement of the team members with their team managers and some other senior executives have seen to facilitate social proximity, the interactions with these executives creates a perceived management support to the employees. In situations that employees are struggling to get headway with their work, they quickly escalate the issue to and get feedback from the senior staff. Therefore, instead of experiencing stress and become psychologically distant from their work, the employees find succour because of the presence of senior managers to put them through issues.

Furthermore, there is psychological safety attained by the employees as a result of support they receive from the managers. The employees express themselves freely knowing that they are free to say their minds on any issues without the fear of consequences. Instead of lying when things have gone wrong because of lack of confidence in their managers to support them, the employees openly voice their concerns before any issues become critical to deal with. This is why the claim officer said,

“My decision-making depends on how big the issue is, I might need to escalate. Most time I might not feel safe in taking decision independently. I will want to put it to the whole house, hear their point of view then we agree on the right path to take. I guess that’s why we have superiors”.

Also, the psychological safety is seen in the managerial support to build the problem solving decision making ability in the employees. The managers are able to keep track of any emerging issues on work they have given their employees to exercise their decision making skills. This is why the Divisional Director said

“It is always good to test people’s capacity but at other times you can point people in the way to go by removing options. The only way to test people’s capacity is to allow them experiment”.

In a similar manner, head of Corporate Sales also narrated how he supports his team members through problem solving:

“if there are issues, sometimes, the employees do not call me but I see that they are discussing. In such cases, I sometimes step in and ask them what they are discussing about. Some other times, I leave them so that they develop how to deal with the issues themselves”.

At NSC Insurance, the perceived management support goes beyond feedback and advice given to the employees. Employees receive moral support as a way to

encourage them; according to a middle level staff at budgetary control and performance unit,

“when the timelines are really gruesome, she (manager) stays in the office with me until everything is done; sometimes, we stay till 1am. In a way, that’s a motivating factor. At the end of the day, we spend more hours here than you spend in your personal life; so you might as well spend it in harmony”.

Among other advantages, the close seating arrangement with some senior members at NSC Insurance lead to better understanding and appreciation of employees as individuals who have their personal issues. While the researcher was conducting this research at NSC Insurance, there was a Monday morning when the staff members became aware of fire incidence at one of their colleagues’ house over the weekend. As a result, the head of Sales called two other employees to follow her to pay visit to the employee at his residence. It is important to note that this act highlight collectivism culture in the organisation.

Training and Development at NSC Insurance

At NSC Insurance, organisational support also comes in the form of training and development for the employees. An employee at Underwriting said,

“we have a lot of trainings here that you almost get tired of them”.

The company offers technical trainings to make the employees more effective at their specific jobs. At the same time, the company through the HR offers training programmes to encourage employees to imbibe the set of behaviours expected of them in order to align with the company’s values. According to the head of HR,

“To reinforce the entire system is training, learning and development. The learning and development system seeks to find the gaps in the achievement of results and behavioural evaluation and organize trainings to patch up that gap”.

As part of the orientation process, trainings are given to new intakes both entry level staff and professional hires in order to bring them to the awareness of the organisational culture and introduce them to set of practices expected of employees in the organisation. The head of HR further stated that:

“We intend to maintain this culture by having intensive trainings. We have people join us so there is need for trainings. That is why we have the New Employees Orientation programme that takes you through what we do in the company and shake up their perceptions or culture”.

For current employees, the deployment of trainings is done as a result of the HR regular assessment work need and constant review of employee alignment with the company's values. According to the Learning and Development manager,

“We do a review like two or three times during the year. Each business unit as an objective for each year and my role is to make sure that the individuals that are to achieve these goals have the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve that goal.

I sit down with the Business Heads to know whether their staff members have the knowledge to meet their goal. When we do appraisal, the Business Heads also comment on the learning needs of each member in their team. This is the basis for the individual training that we do for staff”.

In other instance, training needs related to interpersonal relationship and communication skills are identified in meetings while staff members are making presentation. The Learning and Development manager further explained that

“I sit in management meetings. When someone is presenting, in my mind I’m able to determine if the presenter’s presentation skills is good enough. So I will come up with a training for that. What we do is for each cadre, we have trainings that those people must always attend. For skills that are required, I do not wait for line Managers to say their people need it. I have people go to trainings.

The line manager might ask why I want to send the person on training and I will have to explain. It is with his consent that we do the training. If the line manager disagrees and says the fellow needs training on another subject, what we do is reach a compromise as to when the training should be done”.

Employee Redeployment Programme

As part of organisational support, lower employees get redeployed to different work function every two to three years in order to expand their knowledge of the business. On redeployment the CEO said,

“we do that for the young people basically to learn. Learning is one of our norms. It is very important to us. One of the principal factors that I came into the company with was People. Focus on building capacity and making very average people become extra-ordinary. The only way you are going to do that is through a lot of learning and a lot of empowerment”.

Similar to capacity building, redeployment is a way to build the experience of lower employees so that they are prepared ready to assume higher roles within the organisation. It is realised that taking up higher position in the organisation requires more responsibilities and the need to know more beyond one’s area of expertise for decision making. Therefore, re-deployment of employees helps them to be more relevant in contributing more meaningful to organisational issues; also, it gets them ready for higher job opportunities in the organisation. According to head of HR,

“You either go into the market to recruit those people with requisite experience for that role or you move people within the system into those slots in order to create opportunities elsewhere where you can bring in new people at the entry level.

Furthermore, redeployment of lower employees every two to three years is a strategy towards maintaining the organisational culture. Having realised that the above entry level hires are the individuals that pose greater threat to the cultural mix in the organisation according to the CEO and Head of strategy, moving up employees internally to fill higher helps to reduce the culture threats; however, it is only through redeployment can an employee acquire wide skills and knowledge required for the higher role. The Head of HR further stated that

“at the top you have decision makers and task oriented people at the bottom, the problem with a high level decision maker is that you have many decision to make across a wide area. So you have redeployments and really you want to replace more from within than without because each time you recruit from outside, you run the risk of changing your culture mix because the man is going to come with own ideas from wherever he is coming from”.

A middle manager at Reinsurance testified that

“We have this rotation policy – means you don’t stay too long at a particular desk (role). Two or three years, they move you to another unit. I started with Energy and Special Risk underwriting then I was moved to General Accident; spent 2 and half years, then I’m now at Reinsurance. The advantage of the rotation is that it gives you fair idea around the company so you’re not just Reinsurance guy but you also know how to sell”.

According to another middle manager at Sales

“When you are moved, you learn more and that makes you very knowledgeable. For me it is a very good thing because my understanding is broadened. You will have an idea of risk, pricing and underwriting”.

6.4 Aggregate Dimensions

6.4.1 Increased Employee Engagement in Organisational Work

On his appointment in 2004, the CEO set to change the level of service delivery, customer appreciation and product innovation at the NSC Insurance. In order to achieve the set objectives, the CEO saw the need to build a strong and positive internal culture that is characterised by open communication and transparency where employees are able to express their thoughts and ideas without any form of repression or repercussion. Evidence from the analysis of data collected at the NSC Insurance reveals greater level of lower employee integration in the runnings of the organisation. At NSC Insurance, employees get engaged in organisational work beyond their daily jobs.

The employee engagement at NSC Insurance is mainly facilitated by social proximity and boosted self-efficacy and sense of belonging of the employees. In this context, social proximity is about the tendency for individuals to form interpersonal relationships with one another regardless of hierarchy in the organisation. To begin with, the first name policy implemented by the CEO makes lower employees more comfortable to approach and engage anyone in conversation within the company. Since the policy also affect the top executives, it was difficult for other non-executives to resist it; as a result, overtime everyone sees calling another individual by their first name as a norm in the organisation.

Very close to the effect of first name policy is the open access that the employees have to the senior executives to discuss any concerns. Although, employees may need to book an appointment to see the CEO due to his work schedule, they are still allowed to

access him without their immediate managers querying them. However, a lower employee even remarked that there is far less reason to go to top management regarding issues because issues are equally taken seriously by their immediate or higher managers.

Even more interesting is the spontaneous chats lower employees can have with any of the top executives in the corridors to suggest any idea or discuss any concerns with them. A lower member from Budgetary Control narrated that

“If I am a new guy just came in, I can call anybody one million times to ask ‘I do not understand this, can you put me through’ without the person being reluctant. I do not have to go to my boss using sir or ma. We call our CEO by his first name; if you see him walking pass, you can say ‘Chris can you please....’ Everybody understands that because it all comes from the top; if the CEO sees and interacts with me as if we are on the same level, so I do not think you as a manager or anybody else should then see a senior or junior colleague and act awkward. There is no special preferences everybody uses the same lunch room, so there is no ‘this is my corner’.

Furthermore, social proximity as a result of closed seating arrangement with some senior managers at NSC Insurance enables the opportunity for employees to become acquaintances with their managers at the initial stage of relationship. Further to this, the reciprocity of mutual respect and trust deepens the work relationship to a level above just employee-manager to friendship. There is the evidence that some of the staff members see themselves as a family where look after one another. Therefore, social proximity creates a work environment where employees are able to voice their concerns on organisational issues more freely with their managers and team members with little or no repression.

However, it is worth noting that higher level of employee engagement does not imply there are no disengaged staff or an engaged employee does not have times where he/she feels disconnected. The higher level of social proximity in the organisation makes it easier for such people and times to be managed effectively. According to middle manager at Strategy and Marketing department,

“Even with the disengaged people, that camaraderie spirit is still there and very strong. They work meticulously; their disengagement is with the company and not the staff, so the camaraderie spirit is very strong and keeps us going. They feel like they are doing the job for their friends, not the organization, and they do it well”.

Also, there are reciprocal effects of boosted self-efficacy, sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership towards an increased employee engagement at NSC Insurance. First, when management delegation of certain decision making or problem solving issues to employees goes well, the employees are more psychologically empowered to say their minds more and willing to want to participate more in similar organisational work next time. Similarly, when manager's delegated work to the employees did not go well and the employees were not punished for it, rather they were supported to learn from their mistakes; the employees will be willing to participate in the next work.

While employee participation in key meetings and selection to be part of certain committees are form of increased employee engagement at NSC Insurance, employee participation in some management meetings also have similar reciprocal effect due to boosted self-efficacy and sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership. When an employee at initial times of attending decision making meetings is allowed to voice his/her opinions on issues without being shut down or made to feel as if the opinions are irrelevant, such employee is willing to open up more in subsequent meetings knowing

that the management supported an environment where employees are able to say their minds. Therefore, the cumulative effect of self-efficacy and sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership create employees who say their minds in any meetings.

In summary, social proximity with boosted self-efficacy and sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership at NSC Insurance facilitate an environment where employees freely engage with any individual in the organisation on any issues and express their views; due to the level of camaraderie in the organisation. Also, the reciprocal effect of efficacy and collectivity in the organisation result in set of employees who challenge views, contribute to discussions and voice their opinions as they see them without any fear of repercussion or repression.

6.4.2 Engagement Platform and Support System

It is evident from the data that weekly and monthly team meetings, CDM meetings, quarterly strategy review meetings and some committee meetings stand as platforms where employees lend their voices on issues in the organisation – platforms where they can be heard on issues. Also, engagement is a two-way interaction which involves an iterative process of listening – to know what a discussion is about; and voicing one's view on the discussion. Inherently, these meetings are also platforms where the employees get to know about the organisational issues in order to effectively contribute in suggesting ideas and adding to meaning constructions on issues in the organisation.

Considering the camaraderie within teams, closed seating arrangement at NSC Insurance also serves as a platform where employees hear and discuss issues with their managers and some other senior members. This is why head of HR said that they rarely have meetings because the team members sit together; and when there is an issue, they discuss it spontaneously while seated in their office space.

“my team, it is not a dispersed team so it is easier for us to tackle issues on the spot. We do not really have formal meetings. Our meetings kind of works well for us because HR spaces are more of on the job items which means people will create on the job opportunities. So as new things crop up, we meet around to discuss” – Head of HR

“I don’t like meetings, so we just talk. We sit together so it is easier to pass information. I can take time to explain to members of the team why we do what we do. Sometimes, I ask my team their opinions on what I want to do. Basically, we sit together in the office and we talk.” – Middle Manager, Reinsurance

“There is a guy called James he is the Senior Manager, the head of the group and every other person, there is Assistant Manager, there is Senior Executive Officer I think we have two Executive Trainee one is on leave, basically, we talk with one another.” – lower employee, E-commerce

Similarly, the organisational support via training and development helps the employees to be more informed through knowledge acquisition; as a result they contribute more to discussions on organisational issues. More importantly, the two to three year employee redeployment at NSC Insurance helps the employees to build more understanding of the business; for example, in our the work of Sales department links with underwriting and to Claims.

CONCLUSION

The chapter presents findings from data analysis regarding nature of employee engagement at NSC Insurance. Given the inherent high power distance national culture in Nigeria where junior members of the community are expected to be deferential to the senior members and be told what to do, the findings show how organisational interventions and practices have aided employee engagement in the company.

Through the close seating plan with senior members, implementation of first name policy and access to top executives, there is greater level of social proximity in the organisation; as a result, this enhances the collectivism that is inherent in the national culture. At the same time, management's delegation of power and employee participation in key meetings boost the employee's self-efficacy, sense of belonging and shared (process) ownership; employees are confident to share their views without fear of repression or repercussion as they see themselves as integral part of the organisation toward fulfilment of the organisational objectives. Consequently, the existence of social proximity and sense of belonging with self-efficacy at NSC Insurance lead to increased employee participation in organisational work. With training and development and closed seating plan with senior members, employees achieve perceived organisational support; the existence of this support with avenues for engagement creates engagement platforms where employees can increase their understanding of the business and share the views on issues.

Therefore, the findings show that the high level of employee engagement at NSC Insurance exists due to social proximity and employee self-efficacy and sense of belonging with shared (process ownership); however, this increased employee participation continues to exist through continuous sensitisation of the intended culture and having support system and engagement platforms upon which employee engagement occur.

Importantly, the organisational interventions and practices at NSC Insurance do not only reduce high power distance culture which is inherited from the national culture, collectivism which is also a characteristic of the national culture is enhanced at the company. Therefore, the findings show national does have influence on NSC Insurance. However, with certain organisational interventions and constant employee sensitisation of the intended culture of open communication, the insurance company is able to reduce the aspect of the national culture (high power distance) that poses as a constraint

towards achieving the organisation's set objectives. At the same time, the existence of high level social proximity with shared (process) ownership enhances collectivism which is an aspect of the national culture that promotes better collaboration within and across teams.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Case Study Findings: OSC Insurance

Similar to previous chapter, data collection was conducted at OSC Insurance in Nigeria in order to gain more insights into nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. Thirty-five individuals from every level of the organisational hierarchy were interviewed; from recently employed staff to the group managing director of the company. Also, the researcher was able to observe the social interactions among the organisational members for eight weeks.

The findings show inherent high power distance within the organisation. Surprisingly, mirroring the nature of power distance in the national culture, high power distance is multilevel at OSC Insurance. As lower employee is fearful in voicing his/her opinions on issues, also heads of departments and subsidiaries are careful tabling their views with the board of directors. Furthermore, the findings show i) there are very limited avenues at which employees can share their views; ii) organisational supports through training and development is not adequate; iii) ineffective communication from the top management; and iv) employees lack self-efficacy as a result of not given some leeway to take initiatives on their own.

The chapter then moves on to present the first order codes stemming from the accounts of the interviewees, through semi-structured interviews and the experience of the researcher, as an ethnographer at the organisation. These codes depict the common themes derived from the words of the interviewees. Subsequently, second order findings and aggregate dimensions are presented.

7.1.1 OSC Insurance Organisational Structure

OSC Insurance is structured in a way that there are five subsidiaries of which each is headed by a managing director. The subsidiaries are General Insurance, Healthcare, Life Insurance, Asset Management and Finance. The managing director for each subsidiary has supporting senior and middle managers. The junior employees report to operation managers while the middle managers are supported by the operation managers. However, the managing directors report to general managing director and in many cases report directly to the board of directors.

OSC Insurance: An Organisation with Pecking Order of Orders

OSC Insurance is a company that is mainly characterised by top-down management approach. The decisions of how the company is run are made principally by the board of directors in which the general managing director is a member. The board meets with management team every quarter to review the strategic objectives. At the top management level, the board of directors appear to give directives to management team on how the organisation should be run. According to one of the managing directors of the five subsidiaries,

“The idea of how the business is run comes from the top; they structure the processes, channels and the focus”.

Definitely, the board of directors has governance role to play in giving oversight on the strategic direction of the company, approving major policies and making major decisions. However, management team at OSC Insurance sometimes find it frustrating when the board of directors wants them to get in touch almost on a daily basis to tell the management team what should be done.

The managing director of PEP subsidiary said,

“...in this organisation, you cannot breath; even if it is possible, the board of directors here wants you to come to them daily”.

From the above statement, ‘to come to them daily’ indicates a practice by the board of directors where they sometimes over-extend their roles and responsibilities beyond their governance duties to issues that are within the jurisdiction of the management team; issues such as enacting operational policies and making operational decisions.

Furthermore, when the researcher asked the managing director of PEP subsidiary how he manages his relationships with the board of directors and his subordinates, his response revealed a deferential posture towards the members of the Board; where he many times accept whatever he is told to do. However, in relating with his subordinates he is able to impose his decisions on them. The managing director said,

“It should be the core function of the chief executive, you can never have the two sides to reason the same way. The other side (middle management) are approachable to me because they are my workforce; I can ‘harass’ them! But the other side (board of director), I cannot; I can only say ‘yes sir yes sir’ - agree with them”.

It is worth noting from the above comment the use of title ‘sir’ as a way of showing respect to the a superior. More importantly, the above statement indicates a multi-level ‘superior knows better’ phenomenon – an occurrence where a junior accepts the view of his/her superior without questioning it or voicing an alternative perspective to a given issue. As the managing director has to accept the decisions of the board of directors without any power to challenge their views, so is a middle manager readily accepts the

view of the managing director. Similarly, the phenomenon cascades down to operational managers and lower level employees.

With the above phenomenon, strategic initiatives are push down from the top to the employees; with the employees having little or no say in shaping the conceptualisation of the initiatives but to just do as they are told, even though much of the intelligence needed for decision making are sourced from the employees as they are close to the customers. The managing director further explained that

“once we have conceptualised the strategies at top management level, we hand them to the process owners (middle management) and they must key into the strategies. After then, the strategy implementation 'goes down'. My role is just to supervise, to ensure we are doing it the way company the board of directors want”.

In summary, strategic initiatives are principally originated from the board of directors. The role of management team is to turn given initiatives to operational projects among the five subsidiaries of the company. However, the management team appears to be stifled in their operational role to the extent that the board of directors expects managing directors to get back to them almost on a daily basis. Also, there is an indication that management team also exerts their superior command over their subordinates; telling them what to do. Therefore, the executive directors – managing directors supremacy and managing director – subordinates authority practices are of same phenomenon; a phenomenon whereby superior explicitly dictates what the subordinate does. It is an occurrence where subordinates are told what to do with little or no power to express a contrary opinion to what the superiors have decided. At OSC Insurance, there is a pecking order of orders regarding how things should be done in the organisation. However, the management team has recently started to appreciate the need to get employees engaged more in shaping and contributing organisational issues by expressing their views and making suggestions. This is why the managing director said

“Majorly, initiatives are top-down; now sometimes, it is bottom-up. We found out in recent times, most of the review we did was of the opinions of people down the ladder. It is the staff that go out and see our customers; it is the feedback/complaints from customers via the staff that we follow up and take to management meetings”.

7.1.2 Ineffective Top-down Communication

It is evident that OSC Insurance practices top-down management style where superiors decide what the subordinates do without the subordinates voicing out contrary views. However, this does not indicate that top-down management style is wrong; there are many situations where it is ideal especially when there is a need for organisations to have a unified sense of direction and avoid unnecessary equivocality. It is important to note that top-down management style is actively needed to be supported by certain practices; absence of these practices devoid the management approach its purpose. One of these practices is a consistent and express communication by the superiors to the subordinates, on what to be done in the organisation.

At OSC Insurance, there is a situation where employees do not fully understand the reason behind laid out initiatives by the top management; their engagement is rather restricted to their day to day operational tasks. During my data collection at the company, the researcher asked several employees if they were aware of the strategic initiative called XProjects which the top management was driving towards becoming top five in the industry. However, all the employees asked were not aware of the initiative. Although, these employees did not put it in words however, it appears they accept that anything relating to strategic direction or plans is mainly for the bosses to know or do; and the responsibility of the employees is to do whatever they are told by the management.

To further dig into the issue, the researcher went to the head of Strategy and Business Development who is also a management staff, and asked him why a lot of people in the company do not know about XProjects. His response implies that rationale for a given strategic initiative is often isolated to few individuals in the organisation. He said:

“what you are suggesting is one of the key impediments to strategy implementation within the company and that is the communication of the entire enterprise. It is not only XProjects. Communication is one of the things that work against strategy. I do not know if it is an OSC Insurance’s problem but there is always this things about communicating intentions, key strategic goals etc. The impression is that it is something selective few people should know. Therefore, strategy overall, there is tendency for it to be isolated within certain 'silo'.

The head of Strategy and Business Development further highlighted lack of effective communication from the top management to the employees:

“The primary thing is to articulate and communicate and ensure that it is embedded. Strategy is for everybody. Each should know why they are running around; why they are being asked to change and why they are asked to continue doing what they do more efficient or less; or being made champions of projects. The problem is that communication is just not there in details, in consistency and in time it takes for it to be embedded”.

Lack of timely and detail communication on strategy by some of the management staff makes it more difficult for employees to appreciate and buy into the strategic vision of the organisation. According to the head of Strategy and Business Development

“The executive management who run divisions actually do not see themselves to a large extent as implementer of strategy. Even in articulating the vision, they (management) see it as somebody else's work; for example, they see it as the work of chairman of the company or department of strategy's vision because the department write out the strategy documents”.

It is worth restating that head of Strategy and Business Development is also an executive member in the organisation. At this point, it is baffling why he was able to identify these issues, yet unable to initiate a course of action towards addressing the issues. In his own words

“I am group head of Strategy and Business Development. I report to the group managing director directly and I am member of certain key strategic committees - like Retail, group product development committee, group IT steering committee, and executive committee.”

In summary, one of the essential supports of top-down management approach is effective communication by the top executives to the employees. However, given this management style where employees wait to be told what to do, it is evident from the response of the head of Strategy and Business Development, an individual who is also a management staff, that employees at OSC Insurance do not sometimes know reasons for a given strategic initiative which they are to implement. This is because communication of strategic intent across the organisation is not “just there in details, in consistency and in time” for employees to buy into it in order for them to engage effectively in the implementation of the initiative.

Even in terms of getting approval on issues, it takes a while before the directors give go-ahead on issues that employees need to act upon. For example, the managing director of PEP subsidiary said,

“sometimes, I see opportunities that fetch millions of naira, but I have to carry along my chairman. He can say ‘put it in a report first’; however he (chairman) may not even read it until third day. By the time he has read it, the opportunity is gone”.

Head of Strategy and Business Development also expressed similar issue:

“90% of meetings I have with my team on an agricultural project is on how we are going to scale the next hurdle with our bosses - our approval authorities within the company”.

At the same time, the Business Planning officer said

“OSC Insurance is not a reactive company; we do not respond to information quickly. Sometimes, we would want to do something before we know it, another organisation has started doing it. The management do not respond quickly to the figures my department provide to them; because some of the decision making has to involve the Board”.

7.1.3 Employee Leeway to take Initiatives

The findings at OSC Insurance show that employees have little free-hand to exercise their decision-making abilities or take initiatives. Definitely, the extent an employee will exercise intuition and leverage on their experience in making some decisions and taking actions will vary based on their hierarchical level in the organisation. Nevertheless, there are certain level of decisions and initiatives expected, given the roles employees occupy in the organisation. At OSC Insurance, there is a situation where lower employees wait for their seniors and ask what to do. Head of Strategy and business development

expressed his frustration regarding absence of some power delegation to the employees by the management:

“You are not employed to think but to do; to turn the screws, to write the cheques, to assess the claims. You are not employed to look at a 100 claims a week and say this is what the 100 claims means in terms of what clients are interested in based on the trend and advise the relevant units”

Also, the assistant head of marketing lamented on the laid back attitude of the lower employees, accounting the need for the employees to imbibe a pro-active culture; however, hinted managers’ superiority practice of not allowing employees to take initiatives on their own:

“The staff themselves must imbibe the culture; we need to change to do things very fast; they need to use their initiatives because a lot of them do not. Perhaps, they have been told by their managers that 'whenever there's an issue, you must bring it to me'. When the boss is not there, the work waits till the officer is back and if you ask the employees there, they will say 'they are treating the file' whereas nothing is being done”.

The lack of ability to take self-driven initiatives is not only a phenomenon between junior employees and their managers. There is evidence of this phenomenon happening at higher level in the organisation. At management level, managing director of one of the subsidiaries recounted instances where he had to take directives from the GMD and the board of directors on issues he could handle. The MD lamented that he lost a business because he had to present the ideas to the GMD and the board of directors; the decision was not made quickly enough. The MD of PEP subsidiary said,

“In term of business here, the business owners always want you to get back to them; giving you little or no free hand to experiment or take decision. It is a

cultural issue; even if it is possible, the business owners here want you to come to them daily. Unlike in United States or United Kingdom where business owners give you free hand and believe in what you can bring in to the company”.

In the above statement, the MD highlighted the cultural difference between US/UK and Nigeria; implying how national culture of high power distance influences boss-subordinate relationship, arguing that in Nigeria, there is prevalent practice where juniors are not permitted to take initiatives on their own unless they get approval from their superiors. The managing director further expressed his frustration in how he is incapacitated to take decisions that should be at his disposal as a top executive in the organisation:

“when you have a transaction you want to secure and the potential client asked you ‘can you do this’ and you say ‘I will get back to you’. Real transactions in the world do not allow you to go back, right there you give the response. You cannot do this if you have to brief your boss every step you take. At company X here in this country, the CEO makes decisions immediately and briefs his Board later; but in this organisation, you cannot breath!”

Similarly, sense of employee responsibility and ownership of their roles are dampened as a result of not being able to proactively own issues and resolve them within the capacity of the job power. The head of Facility said,

“As head of Facility, I cannot even approve N10,000 (£30) to buy a thing; the process is that I recommend it to chief financial officer. In his absence, the head of account will handle the case; if it is within his power, he can sign it out. Otherwise, he pushes it to the group managing director; when such case goes to the GMD eventually, you will realise that the recommendation I made rarely change”.

From the above statement, the researcher realise why many of the staff members were expressing that the processes at OSC Insurance are too long and cumbersome; the employees were implying that individuals are not empowered to take initiatives or make decisions unless issues get to the top management. This is the situation with the head of Facilities who is a management staff; however, he has to go through three personnel before he can get approvals on issues that the capacity of his office should afford him to address.

Be it the relationship of junior employees with their managers or managing director with the board of directors, there is little or no trust in the judgement and ability of subordinates to decide or act correctly without recourse to the superiors at the organisation; which affects the implementation of initiatives. Middle marketing manager at OSC Insurance interestingly compared themselves with NSC Insurance which is the other case study for this research; arguing that process and operations at NSC Insurance is faster because employees are empowered based on their respective offices to take initiatives and decisions. According to middle marketing manager,

“At NSC Insurance, their processes are not long and cumbersome; somebody can take a decision and get result. But when processes are long like here, it takes some time to get work done; so we cannot deliver at same time. NSC Insurance proactive and very fast”.

The assistant head of Claims and Underwriting also remarkably compared their company with NSC Insurance; implying that lower managers at NSC Insurance are given power to take certain initiatives and decisions that their counterparts at OSC Insurance do not have. She said,

“In NSC Insurance, at their operation office, it is possible that claim manager can approve claims; however, here at OSC Insurance, you cannot. This is because

we want to check- because it is possible that claim manager collide with broker to get higher claims; here, OSC Insurance does not give you freehand”.

At this juncture, it is evident that lack of belief in the staff to carry out their work effectively and with due diligence is a major contributory reason why employees at OSC Insurance do not engage in their work more than they do. The little or no assurance in the staff by the superiors is also the reason why employees will rather wait for their bosses to tell them what to do. As a result, in a situation when relevant superior is not available, the work stops because the juniors have not been empowered to take decisions on their own.

During my data collection at OSC Insurance, there was a situation where there were no top management members around to make decision on whether employees should stay or go home early due to fuel scarcity in the city. It was at the height of the fuel crisis; many other major corporations have asked their staff to go home early due to difficulty in getting transportation home. However, at the time all of the top executives at OSC Insurance have travelled outside the country to attend a conference. While some senior staff and middle managers were around, no one could take the lead and make the decision early until around 4pm which was closing time for some of the employees.

In summary, there is a situation at OSC Insurance where juniors are restricted in taking initiatives or making decisions even when the offices they occupy give them the power to exercise their initiative skills; rather they wait for their superior to give a go ahead. It is quite important to note that the junior-superior paternalistic relationship also cascades across hierarchies in the organisation. While a lower employee has to wait for boss to tell him/her what to do, board of directors also exercise parochial posture on the management staff. Managing director has to ask the Board if certain exemptions can be allowed before a new business or client can be won, head of Facilities has to go through three individuals before funds as little as £30 can be approved. Also, the comment by

the head of Corporate Affairs indicates that lack of staff empowerment in the area of taking initiatives is a widespread issue in the organisation. According to him,

“A lot of people I talk to feel the same frustration that I do. There is not enough employee empowerment in the system. I do not always have to resort to the Executive Director or the GMD for approval. I should be able to take my initiatives and run with it and executive. But for every little thing and I repeat every little thing, I need to get executive management approval; that slows down work process.

For example there was an instance where a very top executive asked ‘why are these things still here’? then I replied that ‘Sir, it is the instruction you gave that I must get the permission from you’. He said no, I don’t like why you’ve not done it’.

Again, the title ‘sir’ was used by the subordinate to show respect and in a way, to lessen the likely repercussion of not supposedly following the instructions of the superior. A situation where employees are restricted in taking initiatives over time results in employees whose confidence wane; thus, there is low self-efficacy among the employees. The senior strategist summed it up:

“when a subordinate uses his own initiative, If you are right, fantastic; if you are wrong, what you find is that you get even demoralised by such failures. If you use your initiative and fail and get the ‘stick’, then what happens to your confidence or willingness to want to even try more? It dampens it flattens out”.

7.1.4 Fear of Making Mistakes and Saying One's Mind

The findings from OSC Insurance indicate employees are careful to express contrary views or point out management lapses regarding organisational issues at the company. They prefer to 'go with the flow' and not 'rock the boat'. The evidence from the data shows that employees are fearful in what they say because they might get punished by their superiors. According to an IT middle manager,

"We have disgruntled staff; they will not say it out when the bosses are around. The management put out a survey and the employees say they are all happy but they are not".

This shows that much of the feedback from the employees to the management is not full expression of their concerns; rather they only talk about issues that are safe to discuss with the management and will not get them in trouble. The risk management officer interviewed cited an example:

"One time, we had a consultant that came to review our processes and asked us how things could be better. Someone said 'I cannot say anything; I do not want get into trouble' that he does not trust the management. He said 'my job is important to me'; there is fear - fear of losing their jobs or being queried".

A middle marketing manager also expressed the fear of being punished for expressing one's view at OSC Insurance:

"To pass views to management, you have to be careful because what is it about the company that the management have not seen. In terms of suggestions, they may take them as if you are saying something good; at the end of the day, they come and deal with you".

This implies that the top management at the company do not want contrary views apart from notions opinions that support theirs. As a result, the employees will rather keep silent and get on with the tasks as they have been instructed instead of voicing their opinions. Similarly, the findings at OSC Insurance show that employees would rather wait for their bosses for approval on issues to avoid making mistakes; and this is one of the reasons why the processes in the organisation is slow. According to managing director PEP subsidiary,

“Sometimes, the staff members do not believe in the initiatives; some will not want to take risks thereby they wait for their bosses for approval”.

The fear of making mistakes does not only affect the lower employees at the organisation, management staff is also afraid of taking certain decisions in case they get them wrong to avoid being scolded by the executive directors with a possibility of being sacked. The managing director said,

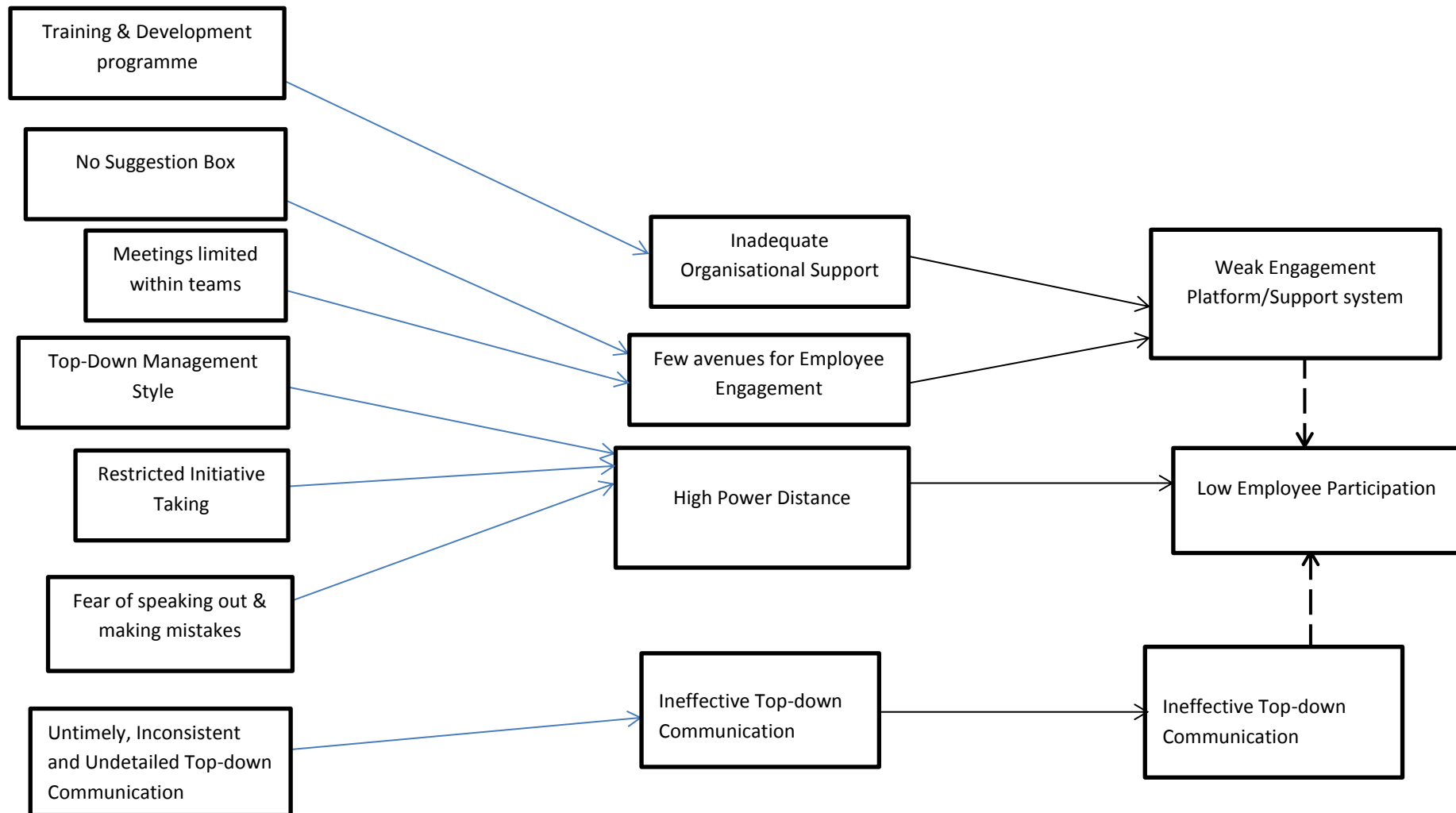
“if this company was to be my own and I am running it; it could have given me more confidence in taking actions and decisions; whenever I see an opportunity which requires quick decision, my fear is what if this thing goes wrong”.

Be it lower employee – manager relationship or managing director – board of directors relationship, superior-subordinate relationship at OSC Insurance is a relationship where subordinates are constantly in a state of fear while in the presence of the superiors; particularly when the subordinates do not get given tasks right. As a result, there is a culture where subordinates do minimum required work to get paid and avoid being sacked. Also, it implies that the culture at OSC Insurance does not encourage experimentations and initiative taking; rather, they are penalised when turned out negative. The managing director further stated

“My reaction to market issues would have been different, I mean faster if I had more say and power in the organisation. In terms of business ideas, I would have been able to do trial and error. Here, if you make error, the directors will nail you! I would do better in terms of business ideas; I would have taken more risk”.

In summary, employees at OSC Insurance are reluctant in expressing what is on their minds regarding organisational issues to the management; also, they are fearful in making mistakes. The continuous psychological impact of these two findings is a group of employees with increasing level of low self-efficacy because they are fearful of repercussions of their mistakes. As they ‘bottle’ issues within themselves, there is growing level of resentment to the management because of not being able to point out issues as they see them.

Fig 1.3 Nature of Employee Engagement at OSC Insurance



7.1.5 Employee attendance in Meetings at OSC Insurance

Meetings in organisations are important platforms on which management communicates strategic intents and actions to the employees. They also serve as avenues where employees report issues and concerns on the projects being implemented as well as receive feedback from the management. Regarding the ongoing strategic implementation across the OSC Insurance, the Senior Business Strategist describes meetings in the organisation:

“Team leader, project champion and rest of the team review the project implementation every two weeks. Agenda typically entails going through the project charter, and addressing key implementation objectives as spelt out in the charter. It starts out by addressing the 'how', set weekly milestones and finally reviewing challenges encountered during the period and proposed resolutions for same”. The team leader and project champion further review their project with project management office monthly. There is board level project review every quarter; that is when project management office takes all review outcomes to the board and executive management to deliberate; further guidelines and supports needed are highlighted; and delivered to the project management office for implementation. So the quarterly review is more like escalation platform”.

This indicates that employee engagement in organisational issues is limited to team meetings at OSC Insurance. There is an assumption that the team leader and project champion take the views and contributions of the team members forward to the project management office, PMO; and the PMO conveys the employees' issues rightly to the board every quarter. This expressly implies that the employees have little work-related interactions on the project being implemented with other organisational members outside their teams let alone engaging management team directly. It also implies that team members lack understanding of the bigger picture as they have restricted understanding how their roles

influence and relate with other departments. Although, employees get to have a meeting with the management once every year for them to let the executives know the concerns and issues. According to the a HR officer,

“we have village meeting where everybody comes, the GMD and others are present. You are allowed to speak your mind on issues”.

Regardless, employees are not exposed to being part of other organisational works, for example being members of committee towards initiatives in the organisation; they are somewhat limited to their daily tasks. The management sees little or no reason to get the employees participate in meetings and committees beyond organisational activities restricted to their teams. On paperless initiative that the company was proposing which is aimed at reducing paper usage and digitising some application forms and files, the IT middle manager believed that the initiative should be championed by the IT department; however, she said

“my involvement: I was told to just write something on paperless - the justification which I did. For me, paperless should be driven by IT”.

Arguably, the extent at which employees can participate in top strategic meetings are limited; however, opportunities to be part of certain committees or meetings can boost the employees' self-efficacy and sense of belonging in the organisation. According to head of Strategy and Business Development,

“what usually happens is when you come up with something; you may not be lucky to be called up to be part of the committee, even the sub-committee for implementation of the idea. So people in the organisation tend to be alienated and basically go to what they know”.

The above comment from a staff, who is also a member of the management team indicates that the management sees it as unnecessary to involve employees in deliberations on issues in the organisation.

7.1.6 No Suggestions Box for Employee Engagement

At OSC Insurance, it is evident from the findings that the management style is top-down where decisions are made at the top and subordinates follow directives from the executives. So far in this chapter, it is also evident that the employees are given little or no free-hand to take initiatives on their own, they are afraid to make mistakes and say their minds in the presence of their superiors. An unnoticed way employees can let their views and concerns known to the management is through suggestion box. As the management find little or no reason to engage employees frequently in meetings, with suggestion box, the employee can write either a detail or short description of their opinions with the hope that management will consider it and take action accordingly. However, there is no suggestion box in any of the subsidiaries at OSC Insurance. The head of Facilities said,

“We do not have suggesting box; we are supposed to have something. You can go and type it somewhere and just drop it without your name - suggesting something positive; so that at the end of the day management will look at such suggestion and if it is of value and they adopt or try to modify it and use it”.

With suggestion box, individuals are safe to let the management know their concerns and annoyance without getting in trouble. However, at OSC Insurance, the process of suggesting ideas is formalised in a way that is likely to disenfranchise the employees. According to an officer from Underwriting department,

“if you have an idea, it has to go through several stages and by the time, it gets decided upon, probably the opportunity has passed by”.

Another staff from Underwriting department explained why employees are not encouraged by the management to make suggestions as a result of the long process of getting heard in the organisation.

“People might have ideas but since they do not have format drafts; they are supposed to go to one boss to go and present; they would not want to tell anybody it because of the long process. The management expects you to have a formal draft of your ideas and be ready to make a presentation. If it is just a suggestion box, anybody could drop their ideas there and someone with experience could pick it up and expand on the idea into a policy draft that it can later be fine-tuned and further considered”.

An employee from Sales department also said,

“Idea box: none that I know of, that is a good thing to have. You know some people might not be so confident of whatever ideas they have because they cannot see the big picture. I think it is something we should have”.

7.2 Second Order Codes

7.2.1 Few Avenues for Employees views to be heard

Considering that employees at OSC Insurance are limited to contribute in organisational issues apart from those that are discussed in their bi-monthly team meeting, the cumulative impact of this with not having suggestion box in the organisation implies that much of employees' views and opinions do not get to the top. However, this has two consequences: firstly, some of the down-up feedback that the management could incorporate in strategy development do not get to the top executives; or the feedback from the lower employees get distorted and become inaccurate by the time it gets to the executives due to several layer of getting views across to the top management. Secondly, not getting views across to the management leads to frustration, resentment and lack of buy-in with the lower employees. Such employees are rather concerned about getting their minimum required job done and get paid at the end of each month.

7.2.2 Inadequate Organisational Supports

The findings at OSC Insurance show instances of lack of up to date employee training and development. Absence of training implies the employees are unable to 'pour' more of themselves in their jobs; as a result, employees get frustrated. According to IT middle manager,

"The management do not see the value for IT training; can you imagine a situation where an IT person does not go on training for two years!"

Apart from the frustration, employees also lose their confidence in doing their jobs as a result of lack of organisational support through training and development. According Retail Sales officer,

"There should be constant training; I mean training with experience individuals. It is about knowledge being passed. The training should not be about just theoretical knowledge but on the job learning. Like your boss telling you on the job, 'this is what happens in certain instances and this is how we mitigate the loss'".

Also, it is evident that lack of supervisor supports affects the subordinates' confidence and experience they should develop. It appears that some of the managers would rather tell the subordinates what to do without expanding the understanding of the juniors to know the rationale behind given decisions made on issues regarding their work. Overtime, the subordinates get used to be told; and when the manager is not available, the subordinates are incapacitated to take decisions. The Retail officer further narrated that

"When I got to group retail, I know I am a smart but I know I do not have the experience – not grounded in all aspects; this was telling on my deliverables. However, there is no one to pass that knowledge to me. The experience of my boss is not passed down to me. There is a gap; I believe anyone should be a replica of his

boss but when you know that you are not really the replica of your boss and now you are out there to do the job, you do not really have the confidence to know whether you are doing the right thing or not”.

The lack of confidence as a result of lack of supervisor support led to subordinate disengaging from a responsibility that was assigned to him. The Retail officer gave an example,

“There was an instance that happened today, there is a claim that happened and an inspection has to be done at location VI, it was passed to me to go to VI. I quickly manoeuvred it that it’s out of my job responsibility”.

7.3 Aggregate Dimensions: Nature of Employee Engagement in OSC Insurance

7.3.1 Weak Engagement platform and Support System

It is evident in a section above that employees at OSC Insurance have few avenues to express their concerns because there is no suggestion box and employees are restricted to meetings only within their teams. The combination of this issue with lack of adequate organisational supports, in the form of training and development, results in a weak employee engagement platform and support system.

Employees are not empowered to have up to date understanding of current tools, knowledge and methodologies regarding how to do their work better. Also, the employees lack appreciative knowledge of how their roles fit into the bigger picture of what top management is trying to achieve, because there appears to be few cross-functional team meetings and direct engagement with top management is mainly once in a year. As a result of this, the employees lack in-depth understanding of their work, organisation and industry; therefore,

they are unable to contribute or engage effectively in shaping the strategy, processes and operations of the organisation. This is why the head of Strategy and Business Development said:

“Even the process of coming up with strategy should be reformed. Yes, vision cannot be many people's own but one person but there is a way you can create it in such a way that it becomes everyone's vision. It is in the process of bringing everybody together and articulating the vision in such a way it becomes everybody's vision. What usually happens when somebody comes up with something and if you are lucky, you may or may not be called up to be part of the committee even the sub-committee for the implementation; so people tend to be alienated and basically go to what they know”.

High Power Distance at OSC Insurance

In some sections above, the researcher presented findings which their cumulative effects indicate high power distance culture at OSC Insurance. Firstly, the findings show the organisation's management style is top-down – a centralised power structure whereby all heads of departments report to and get directives from the managing directors of their subsidiaries; the managing directors do likewise with the board of directors. Secondly, an aspect of the findings shows that employees are fearful of making mistakes and saying their minds on issues that bother them. They are afraid of the repercussion of getting picked on for pointing to issues contrary to the management's perspectives and intentions; or getting punished for mistakes. Thirdly, the employees are given little or no free hand to take initiatives at the organisation; an indication of lack of trust by the management, in the judgement and ability of the employees to take certain decisions and actions without being supervised.

The implication of these findings is that employees do not engage in organisational activities beyond the minimum required effort as stated in their job descriptions. When there are no directives from the management due to poor communication that lacks details, are inconsistent and not timely, the employees do little or nothing. In other instances, the employees get into non-work related social interactions amongst themselves.

All through the researcher's time at the company, he noticed uncommitted attitude by the employees. While they keep to the rules that all employees must resume at work by 8am, the researcher noticed every day at the company that many of the employees are still passing pleasantries at 9am when they should be working on their jobs. Also, by the time it is around 2.30pm, he frequently observed some of the employees on their phones or tablets watching movies online while at work. The head of facilities also confirmed my observation; he said

“when they come in the morning, we are supposed to start at 8am; you see many of them doing one thing or the other, not settled until 9 or 9.30am. By the time it is 4.30pm, I do not need to check my watch to know it is 4.30pm; all I hear is their footsteps by my office; they are going home”.

Considering the findings that indicate the management style at the organisation is top-down where employees are afraid to speak their minds on organisational issues, make mistakes and not giving free-hand to take initiatives, the overarching consequence is a phenomenon where the subordinates continue to be cautious of their actions; rather, they give deferential treatments in order to gain goodwill from the superiors; thus, high power distance culture at OSC Insurance. Managing Director at PEP subsidiary gave an instance:

“When some of these young people came in, you have to go and greet your boss because the boss is as old as your father; otherwise, he/she thinks you are pompous; whereas, greeting him/her is not part of your job/function. Otherwise, they will wait for

you until it is appraisal time, saying ‘he’s disrespectful, he’s not loyal’ just because you did not greet him”.

7.3.2 Low Employee Engagement at OSC Insurance

Given the top-down management style where decisions are made at the top, there is a need for effective communication to the employees through their departments in what to do. However, as stated by the head of Strategy and Development, “the problem is that communication is just not there in details, in consistency and in time it takes for it to be embedded”. At the same time, employees at the organisation lack adequate organisational supports in terms of training and development that could make them more informed and skilful to contribute effectively to in-team work-related discussions and issues that affect the company and industry at large. Furthermore, there is evidence of high power distance culture at OSC Insurance, which is as a result of the continuous weave of top-down management style, employee fear of expression, fear to make mistakes and lack of freehand to take initiatives.

Poor communication, inadequate organisational supports and high power distance; the integration of these themes in OSC Insurance lead to a group of uninformed employees who are afraid to ‘rock the boat’ but keep the status quo and do as they are told. However, with poor communication from the top, the employees are uninspired to do beyond minimum required job to get paid at end of each month; hence, there is evidence of employees that are not well engaged in giving suggestions in how to improve processes, giving true down-top feedback on tasks and helping management make sense of issues through active involvement in certain meetings and committees. Head of Strategy and Business Development shared his experience as a young employee at the company:

“Company like this is complex; it is not everything you bang your head on to achieve; some you let it go. When I first joined this company, I was up and running – pointing

out issues, then someone called me not once not twice and said 'young man, you will burn yourself out, not every battle you fight'. What usually happens is, when you come up with those ideas, they get broken down to this operation 'thing' and the whole ideas disappear”.

In conclusion, account of an employee at Retail summarises the issues that encumbered employee engagement at OSC Insurance:

“When I got to group retail, I know I am a smart but I know I do not have the experience – not grounded in all aspects; this was telling on my deliverables. However, there is no one to pass that knowledge to me. The experience of my boss is not passed down to me. There is a gap; I believe anyone should be a replica of his boss but when you know that you are not really the replica of your boss and now you are out there to do the job, you do not really have the confidence to know whether you are doing the right thing or not.

There was an instance that happened today, there is a claim that happened and an inspection has to be done at location VI, it was passed to me to go to VI. I quickly manoeuvred it that it is out of my job responsibility”.

The above statement indicates:

1. Superiors at OSC Insurance like to tell subordinates what to do without empowering them to be self-starter and take initiatives; however, when the superiors are not available, the subordinates are incapable to get the work done
2. Subordinates that lack self-efficacy and are fearful to discuss concerns with their superiors.

3. There are no other supports system to which the subordinates can look, apart from within themselves.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

There have been several studies on employee engagement; however, there are two issues regarding extant literature on this subject. First, much of the findings and theories developed have been from the West (Rothmann, 2014; Deci et al., 2001). For example Kahn's (1990) work is based on two organisations with participants from United States and Western Europe, of which two-third of them are from wealthy background. The Job Demand-Resources theory is developed from a study in Netherlands (Demerouti, 2001) and data used to develop multidimensional approach to employee engagement is from Canada (Saks, 2006). As a result, there has been call to extend the study to other unique cultures with distinctive identities (Bailey et al., 2015). Close to the above rationale is the second reason; much of extant literature has concerned itself with psychological states, job characteristics, resources and demands. There has been call to consider contextual factors that can influence employee engagement e.g. national culture (Deci et al., 2001; Shimazu et al., 2010). The purpose of this research is supported by the argument that "studies have mainly been done in countries that have democratic governments, privately owned companies and a relatively strong emphasis on individualism. Therefore, the question arises whether the dynamics highlighted by employee engagement research are applicable to other culture with economic systems, governments and cultural values different from those in the United States and Europe" (Rothmann, 2014: 164).

Given the above rationale, this research has sought to contribute to the literature by exploring employee engagement in a non-Western context and examining the influence of national culture as a contextual factor. The research involved two national insurance companies in Nigeria; the nature of interactions among organisational members at these organisations is studied. Therefore, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the research aim has been achieved specifically by addressing: a) to what extent does national culture influence employee engagement; b) how does leadership influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement; and c) to what extent do organisational

interventions reduce aspect of the national culture that impedes emergence of intended organisational culture, which in turn influence employee engagement?

This research has attempted to expand the knowledge of employee engagement to different context by conducting the study in Nigeria which is characterised to have high power distance and collectivism (House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001; 2010). In chapters six and seven, the nature of employee engagement at NSC Insurance and OSC Insurance is presented separately; this chapter sets to discuss the findings.

8.1 Nature of National Culture on Employee Engagement

An important starting point in understanding the nature of employee engagement in organisations is to first consider whether characteristics of the national culture have influenced on the employees and their managers. This study highlights the influence of Nigerian culture on the two insurance companies studied. There is a contention whether national culture influences organisational culture (Gerhart, 2009; Nelson and Gopalan, 2003; Hatch and Zilber, 2012; John, 2006). Hofstede (1983) believes that management is culturally dependent; arguing that effective organisations adapt their foreign management practices to the local cultures. This argument is in alignment with institutional theory that posits organisations respond and adapt to the environment they find themselves; therefore, organisational culture becomes similar to national culture (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). However, the resource based view, RBV, argues organisations differentiate themselves by leveraging on their resources and capabilities that are rare and difficult to imitate in order to gain competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Hoopes et al., 2003).

Nevertheless in this research, it did emerge that national culture indeed has influence on employee engagement through the organisational culture. Also, evidence from the two case studies shows the leader's perspective towards employee engagement matters. Particularly in a collectivist high power distance culture where employees have been programmed from

birth to give explicit deferential treatments to superiors and not to query their views and decisions (Hofstede, 2001), the leadership style of the leader is seen to be significant on the employee engagement. These two cases highlighted the importance of intended and frequent organisational interventions in order to improve employee engagement. The next sections discuss how national culture influence employee engagement in the two organisations in different ways.

8.2 High Power Distance at OSC Insurance

As indicated by cross-cultural researcher, organisations in a high power distance culture are generally characterised to have hierarchy, which reflects the existence of inequality between upper echelon staff members and lower level employees (Mulder, 1977; Schwartz, 1994; House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001). Also, power centralisation is popular and concentrated at the top of the hierarchy; the managers rely on formal rules and their superiors for decisions. Furthermore, the lower employees are told what to do and do not challenge the opinions of their leaders. While these characteristics are expected in the two organisations involved in this research, one of the organisations was remarkably different from the other.

Before discussing the differences, it is worth highlighting a key similarity between the two organisations. One of the characteristics common to both OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance is the organisational structure. At OSC Insurance, there is a group managing director who oversees the five subsidiaries of the company. Each subsidiary has managing director who runs the day to day operations. Each managing director is supported by heads of departments; with team leaders reporting to the HODs. At NSC Insurance, the hierarchical structure is very similar to OSC Insurance structure; there are five subsidiaries with managing directors, heads of department supporting the managing directors, and team leader primarily reporting to their heads of department. Therefore, it can be argued that both of the organisations have top-down management style; because different organisational

structure has influence on the employee engagement (Hornung et al., 2010). However, the nature of power centralisation despite the top-down management style is different between the two organisations.

8.3 Employee Silence and Low Psychological Safety

According to Hofstede (2001), it is expected that superiors and subordinates consider each other as existentially unequal; where power and status are seen to go together. At OSC Insurance, the findings indicate employees are careful to express contrary views or point out superior lapses regarding organisational issues at the company. Also, the feedback from the employees is not full expression of their concerns to their superiors. Expressing contrary viewpoint implies both direct and indirect repercussions from the superiors; therefore, the subordinates would rather remain silence on controversial organisational issues or inadequacy of their superiors.

Extant research on organisations in high power distance culture proposes that subordinates expect to be told what to do (House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2010). From the findings at OSC Insurance, it is quite important to comment that subordinates indeed wait to be told what to do; however, it is not in all cases as a result of lack of knowledge or experience but the fear of repercussion from the superiors, if action taken by the subordinate is not exactly in line with the superior's viewpoint. It is quite interesting that employees in such context acknowledge the fear among themselves. There was an instance a colleague told the other that he does not want to complete a survey set up by the company because he does not want to get into trouble and lose his job as he does not trust the management. A middle manager said he is careful every time in voicing his views on issues to the management stating that "they may take them as if you are saying something good; at the end of the day, they come and deal with you". This is consistent with literature that subordinates in a high power distance culture are concerned about punishment when their views do not comply

with the superior's (Mead, 2003). Although, coercive power is not allowed, superiors in high power distance context disguise it under power bestow on them as result of position they occupy in the organisational hierarchy. This implies that feedback from subordinates to their superiors in high power distance culture do not totally reflect the true views and feelings of the subordinates.

It is quite important and interesting to remark that silence act by subordinate to his/her superior is not limited to lower employee to his team leader or manager. The findings from OSC Insurance show that middle managers are afraid to speak their minds to their bosses; and even managing director is concerned about losing his job if he does not follow the directives of the board even if he knows they are not favourable to the employees working in his subsidiary. It is evident from OSC Insurance that employee silence in high power distance is scaled across the hierarchy; as long as an individual is the superior and the other is subordinate, the power inequality between them continues to have influence on the relationship. It can be board member to managing director, managing director to middle manager or middle manager to lower employee. This is consistent with the literature on high power distance culture (House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2001); the culture in OSC Insurance is one where subordinates do minimum required work as stated by the superior to get paid and void being sacked by keeping quiet on issues.

Not only do employees at OSC Insurance keep silent in voicing their opinions on issues and bringing up views that are contrary to their superiors' views, the employees are also silent in their inactions. This is similar to research findings in Ghana, a neighbouring country with same level of high power distance; it is shown that employees under high power distance culture "act with extreme caution while at work in order not to invite the anger of their superiors for any mistakes that they may make in the course of their work" (Kuada, 2007: 32). The findings at OSC Insurance show that employees would rather wait for their bosses for approval on issues to avoid making mistakes. House et al. (2004) point out that

subordinates in high power distance culture wait to be told what to do; however, the reason for this behaviour is not explained.

The findings from OSC Insurance reveal that subordinates wait for directives from their superiors because of the negative repercussions. In a case that an employee takes a risk and the decision/action goes well with the superior, the employee may be rewarded. However, if the decision/action is wrong, the employee gets punished for taking action without prior authority from the superior; such actions by the employees are seen as insubordination by the bosses. This argument is in consistence with Kahn's (1990) view of psychological safety; when an individual perceives that there will be negative consequence by employing self into a role, they withdraw (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014).

The behaviour of these employees has been researched in previous research that "a sense of efficacy is unlikely to occur when workers are feeling buffeted by circumstances or powerful people within the organization" (Leiter and Maslach, 2004: 97). And as social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) implies, when such employees have the opportunity to take initiatives, they will rather wait for their superiors instead of getting punished. Furthermore, the nature of employee silence and inadequate psychological safety at OSC Insurance is also confirmed by Fapohunda (2016). Fapohunda (2016) examines why employees in Nigeria passively engage at work and are more comfortable to remain silent on issues; questionnaire was collected from 321 academic staff of three universities in Lagos, Nigeria. 81.3% of respondents believe their managers do not openly support employee to speak up or voice their opinions on issues and 79.4% of the workers believe their managers act as if they know it all.

Consistent with mental programming argument regarding norms and beliefs (Hofstede, 2002), evidence from OSC Insurance shows that employee psychological safety is a learned condition from two sources in a high power distance culture. First, the condition is learnt from societal values, particularly from family units and early school education that 'you are not

supposed to talk or act unless you are told to do so'. A subordinate psychological safety is based on the perception that an individual in a higher status has the power to negatively or positively affect lives, if they wish to do so. Therefore, subordinates are in constant consciousness not to evoke superior's 'negative' power that will derail their career progress. Second, psychological safety is learned from individuals' experiences and that of colleagues. The social dynamics between superior and subordinate informs the level of psychological safety next time the subordinate attempts to voice or act on organisational matters.

Based on these findings that employees at OSC Insurance exhibit low self-efficacy as result of perceived low psychological safety in the organisation, the questions worth answering here are: does it mean these employees as individuals in the outer community have low-self efficacy when interacting with other people in the society? Or does it mean that Nigerians in general have low self-efficacy when interacting with people from other cultures? In response to these questions, it is important to note that these individuals only exhibit such behaviour when they are in the presence of individuals who they perceive to have higher status or power than them, whose help or benevolence is sought after in order to achieve their own objectives at work or in the society.

It is argued that individuals with high level of self-efficacy are self-starters who believe they possess "to produce the desired effects by their own actions, to be motivated to act, to persevere in the face of difficulties, and to be resilient in the face of adversity" (Del Líbano et al., 2012: 689). It is worth acknowledging that even though employees who are greatly influenced by their national high power distance culture in performing their tasks in the organisation exhibit low self-efficacy at work, it does not imply that they are self-incapacitated to be self-starters. The employee's convictions or confidence about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task is more dependent on the extent at which the organisation he or she works for allows high power distance values of the national culture on the organisational culture. Put differently, the extent at which employees in an organisation

attempt to experiment, speak up or take initiative on their own depends mainly receptiveness of the superiors. When psychological safety is low, the employees will rather exchange silence for probable victimisation.

So far in this discussion, the nature of low employee engagement in a high power distance culture is mainly due to inadequate psychological safety that leads to employee silence. Employees are not assured that their contrary views will not lead to negative repercussions from the superiors. While psychological meaningfulness and availability are important, the findings at OSC Insurance show that psychological safety is a crucial factor for employee engagement in a high power distance culture.

8.4 Collectivism in High Power Distance Culture

Findings from OSC Insurance shows that the organisation is characterised with high power distance values. Given that lower employees hardly speak their minds on organisational issues that are contrary to their superior's belief and will rather wait to be told what to do, does it mean that there cannot be effective employee engagement in a culture with high power distance? And does it imply that lower power distance culture is better for employee engagement?

So far, ample of empirical research has shown that high power distance dimension is strongly related to collectivism; and low power distance dimension is related with individualism (House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2010; Ghosh, 2011; Schwartz, 1994). Even with the individual variations of national culture values, research has shown that "in societies in which people on average hold more collectivist values, they also on average hold less individualist value" (Hofstede, 2010: 102). More importantly, the research has shown that countries that have high score on the power distance index, have low score on individualism index; thus, high power distance countries are likely to be more collectivist; and low power distance countries are likely to be more individualist (Hofstede, 2010). To substantiate the

above proposition, Hofstede's (2010) empirical research shows that Nigeria has entwined values of high power distance and collectivism. Therefore, a major conclusion from this research is when examining or exploring impact of national culture on organisational culture, it is highly important to consider that the national culture can be inseparable combination of high power distance and collectivist values, as it is the case for most African countries including Nigeria.

Collectivist values highlights 'we' – togetherness over 'I' – individualism. Individuals seek their identity by identifying with groups and they like creating family-like ties with persons who are not biologically related to themselves (House, 2004). The findings at OSC Insurance support the expected level of collectivism in Nigeria. While power distance values of the national culture cause employees to keep silence on issues, it is quite important to comment that the collectivist values inspire friendships and closeness among the organisational members. There is greater level of friendship and togetherness at OSC Insurance. Although, there can be smaller in-groups within organisations, evidence from the case shows that employees identify with one another easily and quickly as a family i.e. their organisation. Ethnographic observation at OSC Insurance shows that employees support one another on social and informal issues.

Collectivism is characterised by interdependence, more knitted social network and pursuit of in-group's interest (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997; House et al., 2004; Hofstede, 2010). The question is why collectivism not readily translates to greater employee engagement in high power distance culture? If employees see their workplace as an extended family and where the interest of the in-group is the priority, the question is why is low employee engagement? Also, it is known that personalities of group members and interpersonal relations are among factors that can facilitate cooperation (Pinto et al., 1993). As a result, it is expected that collectivist culture would have greater level of cooperation within organisations, in terms of employee - employee, employee – manager, and interdepartmental relationships. However, the question here regarding OSC Insurance is

why do collectivist values not foster employee engagement as it should? The answers to these questions lie on the other dimension of the national culture i.e. high power distance culture values.

Aspects of collectivism that should foster greater togetherness in organisations in collectivist high power distance culture are subdued by employee silence as a result of high power distance values. While collectivist values are not absent in a high power distance culture, they exhibit themselves in power classes. There is segregation between senior staff and lower employees. Employees on the same cadre relate well with one another socially; also, they tend to know and discuss organisational issues among themselves. However, the relational nature does not extend to lower employee – manager relationships.

Although, this research does not examine pace at which employees walk as examined by Levine and Norenzayan (1999) and concluded that people in individualist cultures tend to walk faster because they are trying to get somewhere (Hofstede, 2010). However, the slow walking by individuals in a collectivist high power distance culture does not usually imply that they do not have goals to achieve. Observation of individuals at OSC Insurance shows that slow walking pace is rather a self-necessitated act to pass pleasant compliments to one another, which is as a sign of identification to their in-group. Therefore, is collectivist high power distance culture really bad for employee engagement? No.

8.5 Nature of Employee Engagement

As confirmed by Hofstede and others, collectivist high power distance culture is strongly characterised by two main dimensions: collectivist values, which are mainly about identification of self with an in-group; and high power distance values, which relate with power inequality. Based on collectivist values alone, certain pre-conditional elements of employee engagement can be achieved. In collectivist culture, the relationship between employer and employee is on moral terms, which makes the relationship “resembles a family

relationship with mutual obligations of protection in exchange for loyalty” (Hofstede, 2010: 120). This is consistent with the submission that in Nigerian culture, there is more emphasis on communal spirit; employees seek the need to be part of a family at work and they see sense of belonging as motivation (Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003; Elele and Fields, 2010). Therefore, psychological meaningfulness seen as “sense of return on investment of self in role performance” and argued to be as a psychological condition for engagement (Kahn, 1990) can be achieved if the employer continues to fulfil their mutual obligations for the commitment of the employee as the social exchange theory posits (Saks, 2006; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Blau, 1964). Equally, there is heightened sense of belongingness as an individual in collectivist culture tends to define his or her identity by the group he or she identifies with.

Reference to Iguisi’s (2009) empirical findings, it is found that Italy, France and Scotland rank ‘Have freedom to adopt your own approach’ as 2nd, 3rd and 5th, while Nigeria ranks it 10th out of 18 items. And, Nigerians rank ‘make contribution to the success of their organisation’ as the most important motivation-value factors. Interestingly, Italy, France, Netherlands and Scotland rank ‘Serve your country’ as the last of the 18 motivation-related values factor; however, Nigeria ranks it 10th. It is worth noting that being able to make contribution to success of one’s organisation and considering service to one’s country as important are the elements of collectivist values. While being able to have freedom to adopt one’s own approach is seen as more important in the low power distance culture, employees in high power distance culture do not dispute the power inequality, they do not fight to have equal power with their managers in decision making; instead, they clamour for the ability to say their minds in a respectful way without getting punished if their opinions are different to the view of their managers.

Therefore, the nature of low employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture is mainly as a result of the power distance values of the national culture; where the collectivist values are not well appreciated. At this juncture, it can also be summarised that

nature of employee engagement in a high power distance culture is primarily determined by the management, being the superiors in the organisation; by acknowledging and addressing aspect of the national culture that will not help to foster the intended organisational culture while promoting the other side of the national culture that is seen as important for the organisational culture.

8.6 High Power Distance Mitigated at NSC Insurance

In NSC Insurance, the analysis highlights that the influence of high power distance dimension of the national culture on employee engagement is mitigated. Based on the argument that national culture influences organisational culture and no management can be culture-free (Hofstede, 2001), it was expected that the nature of employee engagement at NSC Insurance would be very similar to engagement at OSC Insurance. However, the findings show certain interventions and practices act as control measure to limit the characteristics of high power distance in the organisation; i.e. characteristics such as subordinate waiting to be told what to do, exhibition of low self-efficacy in relation to taking initiatives, and restrained ability of employees to express their contrary opinions with their managers.

It was expected that fear of punishment in case of disagreement with superior's decision would be observed at NSC Insurance as Mead (2003) posited. However, employees at NSC Insurance exhibit the confidence to challenge their superiors' views in a respectful way, when they have different notions on organisational issues. There was an instance that a lower employee challenged his manager that he was delaying the approval of the project the employee supposed to be working on. This is contrary to the submission that employees in high power distance culture do not challenge the views of their superiors; and that they accept the decisions and actions of the managers (House, 2004). It is important to re-emphasise here that employees at OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance are pulled from the

same labour market. They have same level of education and come from the same diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria. Also, almost all of them have never lived outside the country. However, employees' ability to say their minds on issues without raises their level of sense of belonging and boosts their self-efficacy. Unlike at OSC Insurance where employees are afraid to voice their opinions on issues, employees at NSC Insurance exhibit greater level of confidence in meetings with superiors. The finding at NSC Insurance is consistent with literature that high self-efficacy has strong relationship with employee engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

As argued that "employees in a high power distance context are unwilling to participate in decisions and are content with their managers making decisions and giving them instructions, which they follow passively" (Khatri, 2009: 1), it is further expected that lower employees at NSC Insurance do not participate in decision making and rely on their superiors and less on their own experience. Evidence from NSC Insurance indicates lower employees are an active part of decision making process and they see themselves as such; through involvement in layers of meetings and being members of certain committees. There is an example of a lower staff that joined the organisation less than a year before and was chosen to be a committee member where he was the youngest ranked individual.

Does it mean the lower hierarchy employees are exposed to higher strategic board-concerned organisational issues? No. However, the lower employees are part of committees and meetings where decisions are made regarding operations and performance of the organisation. For example, the CDM is the highest decision making body at NSC Insurance where the committee approves transactions, decides renew, accepts or declines large insurance portfolios. The two or three lower members from each department are randomly selected to attend CDM meeting every two weeks in order to get exposed to how their roles affect and influence the work of others. In the meeting, the employees are asked questions related to their department when necessary as they are the representatives of their departments even though their heads of department may be present. Therefore, employee

sense of belonging with deepened sense of purpose is higher at NSC Insurance. This is consistent with the literature that “when people occupy roles and perform tasks that culminate in purposes that they define as important, above and beyond instrumental rewards, they are more likely to define their work as meaningful” (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014: 84).

Moreover, in a collectivist high power distance culture, subordinates give outward deferential treatments to the superiors; and ideal boss is seen as a benevolent autocrat or a ‘good father’ (Hofstede, 2010). Besides, it is posited that a younger African under the supervision of older individual is likely to “perceive his performance obligatory and define his role broader than when under the supervision of a younger person” (Gideon et al., 2013: 14). Not only is outward respect to their superiors is seen as important, individuals in positions of power prefer to be addressed by their relevant titles e.g. Chief, Dr., Sir, Ma etc (Ndibe, 2014). Titles in Nigeria widely symbolise power (Opata and Asogwa, 2017); and when titles are not used, the individuals are annoyed (Chidebell, 2013). However, the findings from NSC Insurance show that individuals in the organisation, regardless of age, status or position call themselves by their first names; as a result, high power distance is further mitigated. It is also worth noting that first name calling at NSC Insurance is a norm in the low power distance culture.

8.7 Two Organisations in Same Context, Different Nature of Employee Engagement

As a recap, OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance have similar tall organisational structure. They are located in the same geological location; their employees are pooled from the same labour market; and almost all of the employees have not lived outside the country. However, the two case studies demonstrate different natures of employee engagement. Employees at OSC Insurance are characterised by the expected nature of individuals in high power distance culture. The employees are silent on issues that are contrary to the opinions of their

superiors; while the subordinates that speak out risk the negative repercussions from the superiors. Similarly, they wait to be told what to do to avoid making mistakes which can lead to punishment. Therefore, the findings at OSC Insurance are consistent with the literature on high power distance that national cultural values influence the management practices and behaviours (Hofstede, 2001, House et al., 2004).

However, NSC Insurance carves out organisational culture that appears not to be in congruence with the national culture. The organisational members calls themselves by first names regardless of age, status or position; employee can challenge the views of the superiors although, in a respectful way and they take initiatives on their own. Therefore, looking at the NSC Insurance alone, it is tempting to conclude that there can be culture-free management; with the view that “a common logic of industrialisation produces converging institutional framework and organisational solutions across nations even against cultural constraints” (Braun and Warner, 2002: 13).

8.8 Contemplative Questions on National Culture and Organisational Culture

Considering the difference in the findings from OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance, the questions worth answering are:

If national culture exists, does it mean national culture selectively affect organisations? Or does it mean that national culture has no influence on organisational culture and poor employee engagement at OSC Insurance is as a result of pure management ineffectiveness?

First of all, this research shows that national culture exists and collectivist high power distance is the nature of national culture in Nigeria (House et al., 2004; Schwartz, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). The expected characteristics of individuals in a high power distance culture are dominantly observed in the behaviours of the organisational members at OSC

Insurance. The superior-subordinate relationship as expected in high power distance culture cascades across the organisational hierarchy; it is not limited to team leader-junior employee relationships but found also in the managing director-middle manager relationships. Although, in consistent with extant literature, there are individual variations of power distance as seen in the behaviours of some of the organisational members (Farh et al., 2007; Kirkman et al., 2009); however, the variations are not strong enough to negate the presence of power inequality in the organisation.

The research at OSC Insurance and NSC Insurance confirm that national culture does have influence on organisational culture. While it can be argued that the management at OSC Insurance may not be effective, the lack of acknowledgment of the national culture characteristics and their impact make it difficult to set management practices to address the aspects of the national culture which emergence of organisational culture, in turn informing employee engagement.

At NSC Insurance, the high power distance values are reduced; evidence that the lower employees participate in decision making meetings and are members of certain committee does not negate influence of national culture. The lower employees are still very conscious of the age, status and position individuals occupy when interacting with them in the organisation. The comment below by a lower employee indicates the national culture still infiltrates into the organisation; this lower employee still observes deferential posture at older senior staff in the company.

“First name basis allows open communication among the employees. Also, it helps to improve innovation because you can easily just say things as it are; although we do not disrespect people, we try to always remember that this person is older than you and has been in the business for long”.

Therefore, the difference from OSC Insurance is that at NSC Insurance, there is consciousness of national culture influence on the management and organisational

practices; as a result, there are certain managerial interventions implemented to continuously mitigate aspect of the national culture that is not desirable for the organisational culture. National culture has influence on organisational culture and does not selectively or randomly affect organisations. The extent at which national culture influences organisational culture depends on the awareness level of the management and the effectiveness of organisational interventions deployed to mitigate the negative aspects of the national culture for the organisational culture.

8.9 Influencing role of leadership between national culture and employee engagement

The findings at NSC Insurance shows that the perspective of a superior (or leader) towards the subordinates (or employees) has huge influence on the way employees perceive him or her; it determines whether they can strongly identify with him or her, and in turn, leads to higher employee engagement in the organisation. This is consistent with previous research that argues when leaders challenge, intellectually stimulate, inspire and influence their followers, they promote in the followers relationships that connect deeply with the leaders themselves and other individuals (Bass, 1990; Kahn and Heaphy, 2014; Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

For a leader in high power distance culture like GMD of OSC Insurance, it is expected that the existential inequality would distance the GMD from lower employees at NSC Insurance as consistent with the literature that more powerful individuals tend to keep or increase the power distance from the less powerful people (Mulder, 1977; House et al., 2004). However, on his appointment the GMD at NSC Insurance saw the need to gain follower's trust, respect and collective sense of mission, and for him to exhibit high moral standard and ethical conduct that other organisational members would follow.

The leadership characteristics of the GMD of NSC Insurance play huge role on the other organisational members. It is important to comment that at his appointment, he has no educational degree or a background in insurance. Despite, he makes his objectives specific; to 'build strong and positive internal culture', share vision with staff through involving as many employees as possible in strategy process, and hire good people and through training and empowerment, turn them into the best. The research at NSC Insurance shows that the GMD uses every avenue to continue to talk on the organisational culture he intends to create. He uses every meeting, be it with senior staff or lower employees, to communicate and act the values and norms expected by everyone in the organisation.

The GMD's leadership characteristics are consistent with the literature that a transformational leader can positively stimulate employee engagement through idealised influence (Bass and Avolio, 1990; Nahavandi, 2009). Also, articulation of vision, projection of strength and confidence by the leader draw the employees to buy into the organisational mission (Soane, 2014; Conger and Kanungo, 1988). While psychological meaningfulness, argued as an antecedent for employee engagement, is an individual state of mind, the consistent clear communication of the leader plays an important role in assisting employees to find meaning in their work and see how their roles fit within the bigger picture of the organisation (Cohen, 2008; Soane, 2014).

The research at NSC Insurance indicates that the GMD encourages the employees to think critically, have different perspectives and suggest new ways to appeal to the customers and come up with better innovative products that meet customers' needs. In the meetings, GMD usually acts as facilitator in encouraging individuals to come up views regarding issues. At the same time, he challenges them to convince the audience why the company should follow their suggestions. This is consistent with the characteristics of transformational leadership; leaders who "inspire and excite employees with the idea that they may be able to accomplish great things with extra effort"; and "willing and able to show their employees new ways of

looking at old problems, to teach them to see difficulties as problems to be solved” (Bass, 1990: 21).

It is important to note that almost all the management interventions for employee engagement are GMD’s ideas. The interventions include first name policy, open door policy, culture clinics, close seating plans, decision making by building consensus etc. The research indicates that these managerial interventions become successful not just because they are initiated by the GMD; the rules and policies guiding the interventions are also applied to him. In other words, he champions the continual actualisation of the interventions.

One of the earliest organisational interventions introduced at NSC Insurance by the GMD is the first name policy; everyone must call the other by his or her first name. It is important to comment that the many senior staff at the time resist it the policy and had to leave the organisation. This expressly confirms the existence of national culture in the organisation because the senior staff were used to their traditional values and norms. And without sounding contrary to the build-up argument about the leadership style at NSC Insurance, as one which seeks consensus among the employees, the GMD, in the early days at the company, had to be firm in his conviction of and decision on first name policy, even when many of the senior staff left because they did not agree with the policy. However, this still does not contradict the argument that the GMD exhibits many of the transformational leadership characteristics. He led the first name policy by insisting that everyone should call him by his first name which is consistent with the literature that transformational leaders serve as mentors, coaches and role models; helping other organisational members to assimilate into the new culture (Bass and Avolio, 1993).

8.10 Value Orientation Influence of a Leader

At this juncture, the question is what influences the value orientation of the GMD? It is worth commenting that the GMD did not live or gain work experience outside the country apart

from one year education abroad. As an individual who grew up in the high power distance culture, it was expected that the GMD would exhibit a greater degree of an autocratic leadership traits. Instead, the fundamental values he exhibits are linked with those seen in a low power distance culture; where hierarchy in organisations is mainly established for role clarity - to differentiate inequality of roles and not of individuals, and where opinions of subordinates are considered in making decisions (Schwartz, 1994).

Unlike the situation at OSC Insurance where there is cascaded subordinate silence on issues due to lack of trust in the superior, the cascaded effect of practices and behaviours driven by the GMD at NSC Insurance is supported by social exchange theory (Cropanzano and Michell, 2005). The GMD lives by the example; not 'do as I say', but 'do as I do'; as a result, the employees know they cannot get punished when they say their minds on issues in the organisation. This is consistent with the literature that when leaders exhibit high moral standards, integrity and honesty, their reputation boosts positive expectations among employees by "enhancing their levels of trust and willingness to cooperate with the leader for the benefit of the organization" (Hsieh and Wang, 2015: 2341). Due to reciprocity, the relationships at NSC Insurance continue to evolve to ones with greater level of trust, loyalty and mutual commitment because the GMD champions such behaviours.

Furthermore, the research shows that the practice and ideology of a leader has a rub-on effect on many of the employees and cascades across levels in organisation. The other top management staff interviewed and many of the middle managers and heads of departments at NSC Insurance have similar perspective regarding the way they treat their subordinates; in terms of letting them driving team meetings, allowing the employees to say their minds and supporting them to take initiatives on their own. The cascaded effect of practices and behaviours driven by the GMD permeate into from the top to the lower level management; even where he is not present, his ideology is present.

This highlights the importance of leadership as an antecedent for employee engagement (Giallonardo et al., 2010; Keltner et al., 2008; Brown and Leigh, 1996; Halevy et al., 2011). Consistent with the literature, it is already argued that employees feel more psychologically safe and they will take risks and express themselves more when they perceive that their managers exhibit inclusive leadership behaviours (Carmeli et al., 2010). The employees at NSC Insurance do not see themselves as benefactors of a 'good father' as high power distance values would cause; rather they see themselves as benefactors of a leader who treat them fairly and appropriate justice rightly. This research also confirms that a leader has a large influence on the development of organisational culture; first, by having the awareness of and understand the forces that influences organisational culture, and second, change it by "realigning the organization's culture with a new vision and a revision of its shared assumptions, values, and norms" (Bass and Avolio, 1993: 112).

Therefore, in answering the research question: how does leadership influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement?

Leadership reduces the influence of high power distance culture on employee engagement through reciprocation and reinforcement of positive behaviours the leaders expect to see in the employees.

Although, it is not part of the research questions, it is worth asking:

Does it imply that transformational leadership is the ideal leadership style to reduce high power distance values in high power distance culture?

While this research does not focus mainly on transformational leadership, it is important to comment that the GMD at NSC Insurance exhibits certain transformational leadership traits. He inspires followers to set high standard goals and reach milestones that have not been reachable; by exhibiting high standard of moral and ethical conduct, he gains followers' trust, respect, collective sense of mission and willingness to transcend self-interest; and he encourages the followers to be independent thinkers and challenge status quo.

8.11 Management Interventions for Employee Engagement in High Power Distance Culture

This research has proven that national culture does have influence on organisational culture, as consistent with previous research (John, 2006; Hofstede, 2001). Similarly, the findings from NSC Insurances prove that national culture does not selectively or randomly affect organisations. So far, this research has proven that the extent at which national culture influences organisational culture depends on the awareness level of the management and the effectiveness of organisational interventions deployed to mitigate the aspects of the national culture that can impede the emergence of intended organisational culture. Also, the leadership style has also been proven to influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement. This research proves that leadership in organisations reduces the influence of high power distance culture on employee engagement through reciprocation and reinforcement of positive attitudes and behaviours the leaders expect to see in the employees.

This section specifically discusses the organisational interventions, how they mitigate the influence of national culture on employee engagement.

Organisational Interventions at NSC Insurance

First Name Policy

One practice prevalent in high power distance culture, notably in Nigeria, which individuals in the West may struggle to comprehend, is the use of titles to address superiors. People in some European countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden may have little understanding of it as individuals in their monarchies are addressed by relevant royal titles. More close to commoners in the United Kingdom are the titles bestowed on individuals for their contributions to the country or significant

accomplishments they achieved. In the UK, individuals awarded Order of the British Empire (OBE) and Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE), are commonly addressed as 'Sir' or 'Dame'.

However, in Nigeria, an individual need not to have made any significant achievements or major contributions to the community, as long as he or she is older or occupy a superior role, certain title is used to address the individual. Extant literature shows that at least, the three major ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria do not call older individuals by their first names. The Yoruba people take it further to use the plural form of the word 'you' to address or refer to a superior (Olajide, 2012); politeness to superiors as a deference value, is in form of normative use of relevant honorific titles among Hausa people. As a sign of respect, Igbo people substitute titles such as mazi, deede, dada or ndaa as a mark of respect to older individuals. Besides the explicit use of titles to address superiors in Nigeria, subordinates also express their deferential treatment to their superiors in the tone of their voice. Extant literature confirms that subordinates use low voice when addressing superiors (Jibil, 2016) and superior calling the subordinate by his or her first name is to show domination (Okehie-Offoha and Sadiku, 1996). Even in corporate environment, where traditional titles are not used, 'Sir' or 'Ma' is used; and when titles are not used, the individuals are annoyed (Chidebell, 2013).

In relation to employee engagement, the first implication of the first name policy is the increasing lower employee strong identification with the GMD. Previous research has shown that identification with leader leads to more committed staff (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007) who are likely to believe that acting in the interests of the leader eventually implies acting in one's own interests (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Since the policy is introduced by the GMD, the self-efficacy of the employees grows, as they know that they cannot get in trouble with anyone in the organisation as a result of the policy. The first name policy signals to the lower employees the potential willingness of the GMD to get them speak up on and actively participate in organisational issues. This is consistent with the literature that "when

organisation members internalise the values and beliefs crafted by management they come to make sense of their self-esteem, confidence and well-being in those terms” (Fleming and Spicer, 2003: 165).

The attitudinal acceptance of first name policy by the superiors is more necessary than the act by the subordinates. The policy removes at least the outward act of deferential treatment by the lower employees to senior and older colleagues in the organisation to promote mutual respect, trust and loyalty. The nature of respect evolves to one that is not because the lower employee must give but one that is reciprocal due to fair treatment and added value from the relationship between superiors and subordinates. This findings support the extant studies on the link among employee attitudinal and behavioural reactions, organisational justice and social exchange relationship (Wayne et al., 2002). It is consistent with the argument that fair treatment creates closer, open-ended social exchange relationships “which produce obligations for the employee to repay the supervisor or the organisation” (Cropanzano et al., 2001: 42).

The dynamics as a result of first name policy is not limited to material exchange which is based on fulfilment of minimum employment obligation but also exchanges of psychological benefits or favours where employees’ self-esteem and sense of belonging are boosted (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Although, it may not be sufficient, first name policy serves to bridge gap between senior staff and lower employees in relation to collectivist values of high power distance culture. As noted from findings at OSC Insurance that there are collectivist values among lower employees as observed in their informal interactions; however, these values do not cut across levels in the organisation due to status and age. Evidence from NSC Insurance shows that successful acceptance of first name policy has a significant influence in eliminating the ceiling that limit the collectivist values across social class in the organisation.

Therefore, when collectivist values permeate across hierarchy and classes, there is greater sense of togetherness and shared process ownership. This confirms the nature of collectivism in sub-Saharan African culture; that there is inherent tendency for Africans to want to be in a group (Beugre and Offodile, 2001; Ahiausu, 1989). Beyond the employee informal in-group, larger corporate in-group is achieved when the lower employees relate with senior colleagues; not out of fear but of relationships based on mutual interdependency. The mutual interdependency echoes one of African proverbs: *Owo omode o to pepe, t'agbalagba o wo' keregbe. Ise ti ewe be agba ki oma se ko mo; gbogbo wa ni an'ise a jon be 'raa* (Ajibola, 1997:31). It means: "just as a child's hand does not reach the top of the mantelpiece, so also does the elders's fist not enter the gourd's neck. When a child appeals to an adult for a favour, it should not be rejected; we both young and old all have responsibilities to one another and we live to complement one another" (Fayemi, 2009: 3).

While it appears that calling a superior or an older individual by his or her first name is not consistent with the deference act of younger individual as present in Nigerian national culture, it is quite important to comment that greater and true respect is facilitated by the policy; through reciprocation of expected behaviours between the superior and subordinate and not as a result of normative use of titles to address superiors which may not reflect genuine respect to the individual.

Culture Clinics

The findings from NSC Insurance shows that one of the management interventions to encourage employee engagement is culture clinics. Culture clinic is a special meeting in the organisation where expected organisational norms and behaviours are discussed. All workers including the top executives are mandated to attend the clinic; although, not at once. Each session of the meeting is facilitated by one of the top executives; however, it is interactive. The facilitator discusses one of the expected organisational behaviours and other

attendants participate to discuss what it means to them and how they can exhibit the behaviours in their daily work.

It is important to note that culture clinic was initially introduced when the intended organisational culture began to get diluted as more people are hired, particularly the experienced (above entry) employees. The struggle to adapt to the culture was not as difficult with graduate employees as experienced and older hires who have worked in other organisations. The need to have culture clinic implies there is a continuous battle between emerging organisational culture and external cultural forces, chiefly national culture. Apart from the fact that organisational member interact with individuals in the outside community, as long as there is a need to recruit a new member, there is the risk of organisational culture getting weakened. This confirms the submission that new members of organisation should be taught the established organisational values and norms as organisational culture will not be strong “if every generation of new members could introduce new perceptions, language, thinking patterns, and rules of interaction” (Schein, 1984: 10).

Culture clinic serves as avenue where the leaders continue to bring to the awareness of the employees the need to speak up on issues. Also, the clinic on its own, is a feedback medium at which top executives attempt to know the level at which the employees uphold the organisational norms and behaviours expected of them. Furthermore, the management at NSC Insurance notice improved culture-fit among the employees once the programme is finished. This indicates that while culture is dynamic, sensitisation of the employees and communication of the expected organisational behaviours and values can strengthen the intended organisational culture. In this light, the power of national culture on organisational culture can be likened to the concept of diffusion in natural science that molecules or atoms move from a region of high concentration to a region of low concentration. Inferring from the concept of diffusion, the influence of national culture on organisational culture depends on the strength of the organisational culture. However, the strength of the organisational culture is continuously dependent on the efforts exert to make it remain strong. Example of such

efforts in this case is the management intervention – culture clinic, through which intended culture is communicated by the top executives.

Seating Plan and Open Door Policy to Top Executives

One of the significant management interventions to improve employee engagement at NSC Insurance is the seating plan. Each department is structured in a way that the team members sit close to one another with their managers and some other senior executive sitting with them. With the seating plan, there is quick feedback from the senior colleagues; at the same time, lower employees are able to escalate issues to their leaders and ask questions. More importantly, the findings show a greater level of social proximity as a result of the seating plan. While employees can pass to and receive from their supervisors due to the seating plan, the social proximity that exists enhances the communication between the organisational members.

The close seating plan enables frequent casual superior-subordinates exchanges; importantly, the exchanges lead to an informal engagement of the employees on organisational issues. There are greater opportunities for employees to share, hear, learn from and contribute to work-related issues due to the spatial arrangements. In relation to formal engagement, employees receive quick feedback from their supervisors and colleagues; at the same, they escalate issues to the supervisors faster. As a result, this supports the previous research that feedback from supervisors and co-workers provides meaningful information and insights to roles which enhance engagement (Crawford et al., 2014).

As indicated that employees can engage on organisation either as informal or formal participation, there is deepened sense of purpose which leads to psychological meaningfulness when the employees feel that they contribute to organisational issues beyond their immediate roles; when they feel that they are a part of enterprises larger (Kahn

and Heaphy, 2014). Besides, there is greater sense of belonging as a result of immediate and frequent supports attained due to interpersonal connection with the supervisors, as facilitated by the close seating plan (Rosso et al., 2010).

Not only do they discuss organisational issues, the spatial arrangements at NSC Insurance facilitate camaraderie between the senior staff and junior employees as they find common interests among themselves. They discuss social issues, crack jokes and gist on friendly personal issues. Beyond HR's formal activities to consider the welfare of each employee at work, individuals in the organisation regardless of their levels, look into the welfare of one another. They visit sick colleagues at home or in the hospital; they provide transportation for individuals who find it difficult getting to work. As a result, trust, mutual respect and friendship foster stronger in the organisation. Again, this signifies the collectivist values of the national culture.

The social dynamics among the organisational members as a result of the seating plan confirms the argument that friendliness or attraction does not only form because of pre-established common interests between two or more individuals, frequency of interaction reveals the common interests and fosters friendliness (Newcomb et al., 1965). It was expected that the high power distance values between the senior and junior individuals would reduce the level of social interaction in the organisation; instead, they see themselves as one big family. It is important to note that this links with the collectivist nature of Nigerian national culture where interest of the group is more emphasised than that of the individual (Alozie, 2015). Therefore, close seating arrangement breeds collectivist values in a high power distance culture; which is the inherent tendency to be associated with or part of a group. Again, it echoes this research's argument that in a culture of high power distance values and collectivism, such as Nigeria and other African countries, it is the high power distance values of the national culture that prevent or reduce employee engagement. The collectivist values independently foster co-working of both senior and junior members of any organisation; unfortunately, collectivism cannot exist separately.

Yet, it is also worth commenting that friendliness or closeness that emerges between senior and junior colleagues as a result of proximity does not negate the inherent African value of due respect to the elders or constituted authority. Rather, proximity strengthens it; moving the respect for elders beyond normative form of adherence or conformity. Similarly, it moves respect for elders beyond instrumental conformity which is “because persons perceive that others are powerful and are likely to sanction them for noncompliance”; instead, social proximity brings about internalised conformity which is “because persons accept others’ norms as their own and conform because they believe it ‘right’ to do so” (Biddle, 1986: 79). It does not imply that there are no variations of personal differences or dissatisfaction between senior and junior colleagues; however, there is greater level of togetherness and friendliness between them which facilitate greater level of employee engagement.

Employees see their supervisor as supportive when he or she is perceived to value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Furthermore, perceived supervisor support is argued to promote job engagement and satisfaction (Saks, 2006; Rich et al, 2010). With the extant research on perceived supervisor support, the level of camaraderie between supervisor and employees that is developed due to close seating arrangement plays huge role in the degree at which the employees perceived their supervisors to be supportive in a collectivist culture. Since supervisors are seen as agents of the organisation, the relationship between the employees and their supervisors also hugely determines the degree at which the employees see their organisation to value their contributions and care about their well-being (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, frequent physical closeness to supervisors indirectly determines perceived supervisor support and perceived organisational support.

Moreover, the open door policy at NSC Insurance encourages open communication between the employee and top management. The employees do not need approval from their immediate managers in order to arrange meeting with higher managers. They are free to meet with the leadership of the organisation and do not need to get worried about

victimisation from the immediate manager should the meeting with the higher manager relates with the work relationship. While the research at NSC Insurance does not indicate that lower employees do actually go over their immediate managers to discuss organisational issues with higher managers as many of the employees have good relationship with their managers, the awareness that they can escalate issues increases the employee perception of openness in the organisation. And this perception informs the perceived organisational support, which in turn increases job engagement and satisfaction (Saks, 2006). This supports the argument that perceived display of openness by the superiors is positively related to extent at which the subordinates speak up on organisational issues (Detert and Burris, 2007). The awareness that giving constructive criticism to the management does not result in victimisation gives employees the courage to speak up every time. However, the behaviour to speak up is dependent on initial perception of the superior; boldness to speak up is reinforced or weakened every time by the individual's experience or that of his/her colleagues.

Based on reciprocal interdependence of social exchange (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), this further emphasises the need for superiors to give the assurance that employees are safe when they speak up on issues. In high power distance culture, employees are afraid to speak up mainly because there is no perceived psychological safety which is fundamental for employee engagement. Therefore, open door policy signals willingness by the management for employees to engage more in the organisation; however, it has to be backed up by the management's psychological or emotional reward to the employees. Although, the social proximity between lower employees and the top executive is not as strong as one between lower employees and their immediate managers and some senior colleagues, the open door policy at least builds the perception that the top management are close by and organisation is supportive.

The relational dynamics as a result of close seating plan and open door policy highlight the African communitarianism of Ubuntu philosophy which thrives on plurality (Lutz, 2009; Eze,

2008; Louw, 2014). Not one that forces audience to forcefully concede to the view of a superior or another colleague, but through creative dialogue – “a process of discovery and understanding not logical deduction”, individuals are converted rather than coerced into a course (Eze, 2008: 114). The two interventions also bring about supportiveness, collaboration, solidarity and cooperation which are based on the ideology of collective existence and intersubjectivity in African communitarianism.

Participation in Senior Level Meetings and Committee

Lower employees at NSC Insurance participate in key decision making meetings and are chosen to be members of some committees which include senior managers. Two or three lower employees are chosen to follow their managers to CDM meeting which is held every two weeks. At CDM meeting, decisions on big accounts are made; whether to renew or accept them. Also, the employees are selected to attend the quarterly business review meeting; a meeting where milestones of departments, subsidiaries and the whole organisation are reviewed. Employees are expected to contribute to discussions and decision making from the perspectives of their roles and departments. Interestingly, the employees attend the meeting knowing that they can be asked questions relevant to their work.

Employees called to attend the meetings perceive their roles to be more meaningful as they see the role have more varieties beyond their daily tasks; importantly, they perceive themselves to be more significant in the organisation. Therefore, there is boosted self-efficacy and sense of belonging. This confirms the theory that job characteristics such as autonomy, task variety, feedback, identity and significance enable the development of internal motivation in the employees (Hackman and Oldman, 1980). The participation in committees as a form of job variety promotes psychological meaningfulness as the

employees feel more useful as they are able to deploy their other skills and abilities that are not necessarily required for the key roles (Crawford et al., 2014; Khan, 1990).

As discussed in a previous section, a characteristic of high power distance culture is the act of passing decision making to the superiors and explicitly accepting their point of view on issues. However, involvement of lower hierarchy employees in some key decision making meeting makes them to see themselves as valuable and knowledgeable individuals who can throw insights into issues and help the management make sense of organisation concerns; thereby boosting the employee self-efficacy and shared ownership of issues in the organisation.

The physical attendance of the employees in such meetings exposes them to the discussion of wider organisational issues; as a result, they are able to appreciate the significance of their roles and how they fit into the bigger picture. More importantly, the employees go back to their teams with more knowledge of the business and information which makes them contribute better in team discussions. Also, attendance of the meeting increases their self-efficacy to actively participate more the next time they attend the meeting or similar gathering.

In all, the privilege to participate in key meetings and be part of committees with senior managers increases psychological meaningfulness of the employees; it makes them feel more worthwhile, useful and valuable to the organisation. Previous research has noted that when individuals believe they can do more; however, their roles give them little or no room to experiment, take initiatives or assume more tasks, they find their roles less meaningful (Kahn and Fellows, 2012). On the other hand, when the individuals feel their roles have true and direct impact on the organisation, employees find their role more meaningful (Kahn and Heaphy, 2014). The findings at NSC Insurance confirm the argument that opportunity for employees to be part of tasks beyond their daily routines increases the psychological meaningfulness which is directly linked with employee engagement. Also, attendance in

meetings and being part of committee are platforms at which employees literally engage more on organisational issues beyond their daily routines.

Summary on Management Interventions

First name policy, culture clinic, closed seating arrangement with managers, open door policy, participation in decision making meeting and lower employee membership in committees have positive impact on employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. The interconnection and cumulative effects of these management interventions reduce the high power distance values while enhance the collectivist values of the national culture.

The successful implementation and adherence to the first name policy reduces the power distance between the senior and junior colleagues; whereby the junior employees can approach the senior colleagues to truly discuss their concerns with them. It is important to comment that successful adherence to the first name policy is mainly dependent on the leadership of the organisation. Otherwise, calling older and senior colleagues by their first names in a high power distance culture is disrespectful, which may result in direct and indirect victimisation of the subordinate; and leading to greater level of disengagement or burnout as there is low psychological safety.

As noted that social support from supervisors and colleagues is positively linked to employee engagement (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Crawford et al., 2010; Christian et al., 2011), the close seating arrangement with colleagues and managers make feedback from and to them more effective as the individuals can escalate issues quickly and frequently to them. Similarly, there is greater camaraderie due to the social proximity. It is important to state that as the power distance reduces, the collectivist values of the national culture, which is about inherent disposition to be part of a group, increases. Camaraderie builds up, trust also does (Crawford et al., 2014; Kahn, 1990); as a result, the psychological safety increases, giving

employees more confidence to say their minds and contribute to discussions with the teams and in meetings.

Furthermore, the culture clinic continually emphasises the intended culture of openness to both senior and junior colleagues. The clinic serves as an avenue to consciously remind and communicate to individuals of the intended organisational culture even if some aspects appear to be different from the characteristics of the national culture. With participation in some decision making meetings and being part of committees with senior managers, employees self-efficacy and psychological meaningfulness increase. Also, the participation in such meeting

8.12 Organisation as an Extended Family, The Ubuntu Influence

From the frameworks developed in the West to understand national culture, it is given that Nigeria and many African countries are mainly characterised by high power distance and collectivism. However, some African anthropologists believe these descriptions of the African culture do not rightly indicate the cultural mix in African communities (Jackson, 2015); instead, the culture is best described as communitarianism which is informed by Ubuntu philosophy (Eze, 2013; Louw 2001; Mbiti, 1989). The Western culture is largely informed by the philosophy: 'I think, therefore I am', as noted by René Descartes (1596–1650); however, Ubuntu philosophy is based on "I am human because I belong, I participate, and I share" (Tutu, 1999: 31).

The organisational practices and interventions with the leadership style at NSC Insurance may appear to reflect elements of low power distance culture; they indicate more, the philosophy of Ubuntu. At NSC Insurance, the junior employee participation in key decision making such as in CDM monthly meeting and the employee inclusion in certain committees with senior members indicate the plurality perspective of Ubuntu philosophy which fosters sense of belonging and interdependency (Eze, 2008). While the junior members in the

organisation may not have vast experience to make many informed decisions, the management acknowledges the ‘fresh’ perspectives that they bring. It is an acceptance by the leadership that top executives do not make the organisation, but with the participation of the junior members. Besides, the lower employees meet with customers more than the executives; as a result, they are the ‘ear on the ground’ for the organisation to gather market intelligence for decision making. This confirms Ubuntu belief that “we are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are’ (Mbiti , 1989: 106). The mutual interdependency echoes one of Yoruba proverbs: Owo omode o to pepe, t’agbalagba o wo’ keregbe. Ise ti ewe be agba ki oma se ko mo; gbogbo wa ni an’ise a jon be ‘raa (Ajibola, 1977:31). It means: “just as a child’s hand does not reach the top of the mantelpiece, so also does the elders’s fist not enter the gourd’s neck. When a child appeals to an adult for a favour, it should not be rejected; we both young and old all have responsibilities to one another and we live to complement one another” (Fayemi, 2009: 3).

Similarly, the open policy at the organisation shows the interconnectivity and interdependency, as implied by Ubuntu. Employees speak up respectfully without fear of repercussion due to the confidence in the communitarianism; in that if a manager intends to victimise an employee, the employee is rest-assured that other managers will protect him/her. This confirms Ubuntu’s protection of individuality. Winning someone to one’s side of an argument is not via coercion or a blind conformity due to pressure from others; rather, it is through exposing oneself to others, “to encounter the difference of their humanness so as to inform and enrich one’s own” (Louw 2001:23). This is not to imply that managers have to wait for their subordinates’ views and it does not mean subordinates’ views are adopted every time, the protection of individuality by the community has two compounding impacts. First, the organisational supports and protection against employee victimisation enhance the credibility of the leadership because employees perceive the leadership to be authentic. Second, the employees show commitment as they perceive themselves to be valued by the organisation; making them more psychologically safe and available. Therefore, the co-

existence of leadership credibility and employee commitment raises the aggregate level of engagement in the organisation.

Unlike in the Western culture whereby work life and personal life are separated as much as possible, NSC Insurance confirms Ubuntu philosophy – ‘a person is a person through other persons’ (Taylor, 2014). The organisational welfare goes beyond work-related supports to a level of care whereby employees see themselves as part of a big family. The organisational members, including the senior executives believe that it is more reasonable to become friends to one another than just work colleagues since they spend around nine hours at work together. With this way of thinking, there were instances a boss would wait until early morning to support his team members get work done. More specifically, head of department for Sales with two team members organised a visit to a work colleague whose house went on fire. These acts affirm Ubuntu – “a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that individuals and groups display for one another” (Mangaliso, 2001: 24).

While many ethnic groups in Africa use honorifics for older persons, it is important to note that Ubuntu is mainly concerned with reciprocal treatments between two people or groups (Louw 2001). It is neither honorifics for elders that indicate respect because ‘Oyo dobale inu e loso’ (An Oyo man prostrates as an act of respect, but really his innermost part is standing erect (Gbadegesin, 2017), nor calling an older person by their first name drives mutual respect that a younger person seeks; from an ethical principle based on African relationality, solidarity and reciprocity, “an act is right just insofar as it is a way of living harmoniously or prizing communal relationships, ones in which people identify with each other and exhibit solidarity with one another; otherwise, an act is wrong” (Metz, 2010: 84). Even though, lower employees at NSC Insurance did call their superiors by first names, they were still very mindful of the respect accorded to older individuals in the organisation; they did not abuse the access to senior executives, which open policy afforded them. At the same, the senior executives did not use their positions to exploit the employees under their

supervision; as a result, there was harmony in the co-existence of the senior and junior staff, which enhances employee engagement in the organisation.

In summary of this section, it may appear that the organisational practices and interventions at NSC Insurance are adopted ones from the West, where most of the management theories are originated; of which, if this is proven, it can be argued that effective management is culture-free. However, the organisational interventions for employee engagement at NSC Insurance are based on Ubuntu philosophy – as it is in communitarianism. The sense of belonging with Ubuntu is different from collectivism as defined by Western cultural theorists; at the same time, it is not characterised by individualism (Mbigi, 1997). Even with their differences, individuals with Ubuntu philosophy tend to see themselves as a family; it is through continuous relation with others, not through isolation does identity of each person is established and respected; thus, making organisation with Ubuntu a rich, dynamic and spontaneous community. To summarise the relationship between the community and individual with Ubuntu culture, Akan proverb goes, “the clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached” (Gyekye, 1997: 40).

Conclusion

This research contributes to literature of employee engagement right from the need to expand and explore the nature of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. It also yielded to call to look beyond micro-level attitudinal variables of engagement and pay more attention to the broader contextual organisational factors that impact employee engagement (Bailey et al., 2015; Jenkins and Delbridge, 2013; Bakker et al., 2011). As a result, three research questions are considered:

a) To what extent does national culture influence employee engagement? b) How does leadership influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement?

c) To what extent do organisational interventions reduce aspect of national culture that can impede the emergence of intended organisational culture?

Regarding the influence of national culture on employee engagement, this research concludes that the extent at which national culture influences organisational culture depends on the organisation's awareness of dimensions of the national culture and the effectiveness of organisational interventions deployed to mitigate the aspects of the national culture may impede the development of the intended organisational culture. As noted by Hofstede (2010), African nations are characterised by both high power distance and collectivism while most of the developed countries are characterised by lower power distance and individualism. Since these two dimensions are highly related, it is not sufficient to examine high power distance values of the national culture alone as high power distance and collectivist values are inseparable in the case of African nations; while lower power distance and individualism are equally inseparable when examining national culture in the West. The high power distance values of the national culture cause subordinate-superior gap; however, collectivist values cause the relationship between superior and subordinate one that is based mutual obligations which facilitate sense of belonging.

In responding to the questions relating to the influencing role of leadership between the high power distance culture and employee engagement, this research concludes that the influence of national culture is altered on employee engagement through reciprocation and reinforcement of positive attitudes and behaviours the leaders expect to see in the employees. The employees will feel psychologically safe to speak up and experiment when the words of the leaders are backed with their actions that they are indeed safe to speak their minds and not get victimised.

Similarly, the research concludes that first name policy, culture clinic, close seating arrangement with managers, open door policy, participation in decision making meeting and lower employee membership in committees have positive impact on employee engagement

in a collectivist high power distance culture. The interconnection and cumulative effects of these management interventions reduce the high power distance values while enhance the collectivist values of the national culture.

Despite of the fact that this research is context specific to collectivist high power distance culture, this research findings on employee engagement can be extended to other cultural context with the conclusion that in order to improve employee engagement in an organisation, there are needs for:

- 1) conscious effort by the management to understand the national cultural dimensions
- 2) conscious effort of bringing to the awareness of the employees the need to engage
- 3) platform and support system to facilitate engagement
- 4) a considerable level of sociality: mutual understanding and respect; an acceptance that employees are knowledgeable to engage other organisational works apart from their specific tasks through voicing their opinions, suggesting ideas and solutions, and actively participating in decision making process which is relevant to their level of expertise.

CHAPTER NINE

Recommendation and Conclusion

This final chapter summarises the knowledge gained and theoretical contributions from the findings and discussion. Also, the conceptual and methodological limitations of the research are discussed. Finally, the practical implications and recommendations for future research are presented.

Most of the theoretical arguments on employee engagement emerge from research conducted in the West, where the national culture is characterised by lower power distance and individualism. It is imperative to extend the literature to accommodate more findings from different context where little research has been done. In response to the call for research that take greater account of organisational contexts (Bailey et al., 2015), this research sets out to explore the nature of employee engagement in an African context where the national culture dimensions are mainly characterised by high power distance and collectivism.

9.1 Summary of the Findings

Research Question One

The first point of departure in this research was to attempt to answer whether national culture influences organisational culture; and if it does, to what extent does national culture influences organisational culture? This research question is seen as important because if national culture does not influence organisational culture, then relevant models of organisational culture, specifically, employee engagement developed in the West can be directly implemented in organisations of different cultural context.

This research concludes that the relationship dynamics between national culture and organisational culture is similar to the concept of diffusion in natural science where there is movement of molecules from high concentrated area to a less concentrated area. The research argues that there is constant and natural flux of national cultural elements to establish themselves in every social structure and interaction. However, the extent to which national culture influences organisational culture is dependent on the awareness level of top management in knowing the aspect of national culture that can help to enhance the intended organisational culture, and aspect that can impede the development of the intended organisational culture. The influence of national culture on organisational culture is ultimately dependent on the organisational interventions to i) promote the aspect of the national culture that enhances the intended organisational culture and ii) reduce the aspect of national culture that impede the organisational culture.

Furthermore, this research confirms the Hofstede's findings that high power distance is related with collectivism as low power distance is related with individualism. Considering that these two cultural values are the dimensions that mainly distinguish the national culture of the western countries and region like sub-Sahara Africa, this research concludes that it is therefore not sufficient to explore the influence of national culture on organisational culture in the light of high power distance values alone, collectivist values of the culture should concurrently be studied. The high power distance values are mainly responsible for the power gap between superiors and subordinates in the organisation; where the subordinates are afraid to say their minds due to possible direct and indirect victimisation. On the other hand, collectivist values of the national culture are responsible for camaraderie and integration of individuals towards achieving a single course. This research argues that in African organisations where lower employees do not engage as they should; it is because the high power distance values are dominant while the collectivist values are subdued.

Research Question Two

The second question this research attempt to answer: How does leadership influence the relationship between national culture and employee engagement?

The research concludes that, particularly in an organisational context, subordinates are afraid to speak up or take initiatives not because they are not knowledgeable to come up with plausible meanings to organisational issues or experienced enough to take actions. The subordinates in high power distance culture will rather defer decision making to the superiors because there is low psychological safety; with the thoughts of repercussions if their initiatives fail or views are not in agreement with the superiors' views.

The leadership reduces the influence of high power distance values on employee engagement through reciprocation and reinforcement of the ideal attitudes and behaviours they expect to see in the employees. In a situation whereby the superior exhibits an imposing power, the subordinates exhibit minimal collectivist values; however, collectivist values are enhanced and cut across hierarchical levels when the leaders' behaviours are consistent with the expected employee behaviours. This implies when the top management really want the employees to speak up, they must ensure the employees are not victimised as a result.

Research Question Three

To what extent do organisational interventions reduce the aspect of the national culture that impedes the emergence of intended organisational culture?

Organisation interventions implemented at NSC Insurance are first name policy, culture clinic, close seating arrangement with managers, open door policy, participation in decision making meetings and lower employee membership in committees. The research concludes that the interconnection of these interventions reduces the high power distance values while

increases the collectivist values of the national culture. There is greater sense of belonging and shared process ownership due to close seating with managers and participation in decision making meetings. The employees feel more valued to be members of certain committees that involved senior members. There is greater level of camaraderie and quick feedback from and to the supervisors due to social proximity facilitated by the seating arrangement and open door policy to top executives. The culture clinic acts as avenue where all organisational members including top executives are reminded and communicated to on the intended organisational culture.

While the three psychological states posited by Khan (1990) are important for employee engagement i.e. meaningfulness, availability and safety, this research concludes that psychological safety is most important for employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. The key issue regarding engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture is fear of speaking up and making mistakes.

9.2 Theoretical Contributions

One of the theoretical contributions of this research is in the relationship between national culture and organisational culture. Based on the concept of isomorphism, organisations need to adapt and fit into the environment to survive (Di Maggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Hofstede (2010) argues organisational values reflect the national orientations of the organisation's founders. However, the emergent of phenomenon such as McDonalised (Ritzer, 1995) and import of Western organisational culture in some non-Western organisations in the form of capitalist rationalization appear to negate the argument of the impact of national culture on organisational culture. From resource based view, it is believed that organisations may have more discretion to choose either to localise or standardise their organisational culture (Gerhart, 2009).

Therefore, this research attempts to reconcile two views by submitting that extent to which national culture influence organisational culture depends on the management awareness of it and implementation of certain interventions either to promote or reduce the impact of the national culture.

Another theoretical contribution of this research is its exploration of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture as this area of literature is still at infant stage. While the three psychological conditions are important for employee engagement i.e. psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability (Kahn, 1990), this research argues psychological safety as the most important in a collectivist high power distance culture. According to extant literature, there are facets of perceived organisational support and perceived supervisor supports (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002); however, this research adds to the growing knowledge of employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture by submitting that the assurance to speak up without negative repercussion is the primary aspect of organisational and supervisor supports which employees seek.

Furthermore, this research draws on the link between national culture and employee engagement while considering the role of the leaders or superiors in the organisation. Arguing from social exchange theory, this research concludes that leadership of an organisation has a strong influence on the relationship between national culture and employee engagement. The reciprocation of intended organisational behaviours by the leaders to the employees specifically enhances employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture. Employee engagement is reinforced or weakened based on trust and mutual respect facilitated by the superiors.

9.3 Research Limitations

The limitation of this research is in two forms, which informs the extent to which the research findings can be generalised and transferred.

Limitation from the case study approach

One of the main strengths of case studies is in its thick, rich and holistic account of a given phenomenon. Researcher explores and captures real-life account of a given case using interviews, participant observation and archival documents. However, there are two issues when generalising these research findings.

First, the two organisations used are in the same industry that is insurance. It may be argued that the research does not accommodate the variations of superior-subordinate relationship in other different industries or sectors e.g. agriculture, education, health etc. Also, the difference in corporate governance framework of organisations likely has impact on power distance, which eventually affects employee engagement. For example, employee engagement may vary when considering family-owned and one-man owned businesses. At the same time, the variation of employee engagement may also be different when studying government parastatals and non-profit organisations.

Second, the two organisations used are mid-size companies of around four hundred employee workforce. While it may be possible to still involve lower employees in some decision making meetings and certain committees with senior staff, it may be operationally difficult for lower employees to have access to top executives of organisation with over four thousand workforce.

The Time Frame

Around eight weeks was spent at each organisation in collecting data through interviews and participant observation. The researcher gets to site around 7.30am and leaves around 6pm. Team, departmental, and business review meetings were attended while the researcher spends at least two days at each department, observing the interactions among the organisational members. However, it can be argued that eight weeks may not be sufficient to conduct culture-related qualitative studies. Nevertheless, the findings from this research

highlight the nature of high power distance and collectivism as theorised by Hofstede and GLOBE researchers.

While this research was conducted in a collectivist high power distance culture, it is important to state that regardless of the context, this research exhibits generalizability and transferability by concluding that when developing organisational culture, the management needs to first understand the nature of the national culture. With the understanding of the national culture, the management is able to identify dimensions of the national culture which can impede or enhance the emergence of the organisational culture. Also, leaders in organisations must exhibit the behaviours they want to see in their employees; because through reciprocation and reinforcement of positive behaviours, the employees tend to identify with their leaders and engage more in their roles.

9.4 Practical Implications

Despite the limitation in generalising the findings from this research, underlying conclusions of the research still hold regardless of the corporate governance, industry and size of the organisation. In order to improve employee engagement in a collectivist high power distance culture, the top executive and management first need to understand the nature of national culture when developing their organisational culture. The top executives need to be aware of certain organisational values that are already inherent in the national culture; likewise, the values that are less dominant in the national culture. Lower employees tend not to speak up or take initiatives because they are afraid of negative repercussions from the managers and top executives, if their views are not in agreement with the superiors. This expressly indicates the need for management to communicate and show in their behaviours that different views are welcome and employees can express their dissatisfactions respectfully in the organisation. It is important to know that when an employee is directly or indirectly victimised from expressing dissatisfactions, he or she is likely to keep quiet the next time.

Not only this, such victimisation behaviours by the superior communicate to other employees that contrary views are not welcome and they should keep quiet on organisational issues.

While rewards, recognitions, trainings and career developments are important for employee engagement, this research finds out that a major reason why employees do not engage beyond the minimum required work in a collectivist high power distance culture is because they feel less valued by the management or superiors to contribute to organisational issues. Therefore, the management needs to consciously implement certain human resources policies which communicate to the employees that their views on issues are valued in the organisation. The management should equally be aware that while they address employee fear of speaking up, they are simultaneously enhancing the Ubuntu philosophy of African culture which is about brotherhood and camaraderie; appreciating the uniqueness and shared responsibility of individuals in addressing common issues.

Even when lower employees cannot access the top executives directly due to the size and several hierarchical levels in the organisation, the HR can facilitate 'skip' meetings. A skip meeting is one where employees meet managers that are two levels or higher to them. It is an avenue whereby an individual higher in hierarchy than the immediate manager listens to the employees regarding their work and views on organisational issues, in order for employees to get heard quickly by top executives in the organisation.

9.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This research in response to the call to extend the study of employee engagement to different cultural context; as a result, it is conducted in collectivist high power distance culture, Nigeria. While this research has attempted to explore the nature of employee engagement in Nigeria, there is still need for more qualitative research on the subject, as many of current work are based on survey and questionnaires. Further longitudinal ethnographic studies are likely to throw more insights into the nature of power gap between

superior and subordinates in an organisation. Also, it is valid to consider the role of governance framework on employee engagement. The nature of control of a family-owned or one-man owned business is likely to influence employee engagement more than a public limited liability company or government parastatals in a high power distance culture.

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Appendix I: Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Project Title: Employee Engagement in Organisation
Researcher: Oluwasanmi Adegaju, PhD student
Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research. Before you agree to take part, the person organising the research must explain the project to you.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you to decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

Participant's Statement

I agree that:

- I have read the notes written above and the Information Sheet, and understand what the study involves.
- I understand that my participation will be taped recorded and I consent to use of this material as part of the project.
- I agree to the use of anonymised quotes and information from the interview and confidentiality will be maintained; it will not be possible to identify me from any publications.
- I understand that if I decide at any time that I no longer wish to take part in this project, I can notify the researchers involved and withdraw immediately.
- I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.

Signature:

Date:

Appendix II: Participant Sheet

[printed on ABS headed paper]

The participant information sheet will be printed on ABS headed paper

Information Sheet for Participants

Study title: Employee Engagement

I am Oluwasanmi Adegbaaju, a PhD student at Aston University (Economics and Strategy Group, Aston Business School, Aston University, Birmingham, B4 7ET, United Kingdom

You are being invited to take part in a research study on employee engagement. More specifically, the research intends to explore the relational dynamics of employee with others and the employee engagement with their work.

Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

I would like to interview you as someone who is [an employee/ middle manage/ top executive] in this organisation. Narration of your role in relation with [who you report to, who report to you, and your colleagues] will be immensely valuable. In this interview you will be asked how you go about performing your role, with reference to your past and present experience. The expected time for the interview will be about 60 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation is valuable as the findings from this study will further our understanding of strategy implementation in organisations like yours.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?

All information collected will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations) and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of the research material. The data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy

on Academic Integrity and kept securely in electronic form for a period of ten years after the completion of a research project.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The result of the research study will be used in my dissertation towards completion of PhD degree.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is self-funded and I am conducting it as a student at
Economics and Strategy Group
Aston Business School
Aston University.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee, Aston University.

Contact for Further Information

For further information, you can contact me on [REDACTED]
Also, should you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted; you can contact the Secretary of the Aston Business School Research Ethics Committee on [REDACTED].

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet.

Appendix III: Consent Letter

[printed on ABS headed paper]

Dear Mr [Name]

I am a PhD student at Aston Business School, Aston University, UK. I am currently undertaking a research on employee engagement in organisations like yours. Specifically, the research intends to explore the relational dynamics of employee with others and the employee engagement with their work.

Prior to undertaking this research, I need your consent to contact the teams; I intend to interview the leaders and some of the team members. In the interview, the participants will be asked questions regarding their roles in the organisation; narrating how their roles relate to other members with reference to their past and present experience. The expected time for each interview will be about 60 minutes.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential; and pseudo names will be given to your company and the participants in order to ensure anonymity - it will not be possible to identify your organisation or the participants from any publications. At the start of interview, each participant will be informed that the interview will be recorded and they have the rights to withdraw from the research at any time.

I have gained ethical approval for the study from the Aston Business School Research Ethics Committee, Aston University. My research is supervised by Dr Efstathios Tapinos () and Dr Carola Wolf ().

I await your response.

Thanks

Yours sincerely,

Oluwasanmi Adegaju

Doctoral Researcher
Economics and Strategy Group

Appendix IV

Transcript: Interview with an Employee

Ques: Thank you for granting this interview out of your own schedule. For record purpose, your name please?

Ans: My name is [REDACTED]

Ques: what is your role and how long have you been working here?

Ans: I am executive trainee in E-commerce unit, have been working with NSC Insurance for about 2years.

Ques: How has it been so far with you?

Ans: It has been a learning experience generally.

Ques: were you working somewhere before?

Ans: No, I have my own business, I have a company that is into brand development. A lot of company don't know the need to brand up their business and at the same time you can not just work up to someone that you want to brand for them when they have not seen any company you have worked or what you have done. It is an entrepreneur and you are allowed. I need a bit of corporate experience to help my business. Though I do not have enough time for my business but it for a short time.

Ques: So what do you do here?

Ans: Basically, typical way of selling insurance is that someone come to you to buy insurance, the person pays and you give him a form to fill and you give him a certificate so that is the conventional way of selling insurance but we leverage on internet to sell and basically we plug on line space, agency channel you use platform, to sell , we make use of agents that you cannot do without on daily basis like travelling agency, MTN, JUMIA, Quickteller and get them to sell for us on. We use their platform to sell our services. Instead of selling paper now, we plug into your daily ecosystem of individual per time. We have MTN as a partner, Quickteller, DSTV operator. It is easier to manage someone by selling for you. That's how we go about selling.

Ques: How many are you in the unit?

Ans: Ecommerce consist of 4units. Directs and Online sales, Priority Client unit, Partnership and financial institution unit. We also have the Digital Service platform unit which is under the Direct and online sales unit. In online unit we are just 3. I work in the Digital service platform unit, we service the online unit. I was with the Direct and Online sales unit but we needed someone that will be focusing on handling the process from the sign up the customer till the end when the processes are put in place to allow the customer commence sales. That is what the Digital service unit does. We are up to 20 in the group.

Ques: You were here during ABC/NSC Insurance merger, how has the merger changed the way you do things?

Ans: Yes, there has been a lot of changes because we held a lot of meeting with ABC and tell you they feel a process should be like this since we sign up with ABC, somehow affected the customers

because they see us has a more formidable since ABC is an international company though our client see us formidable because of TEE company.

Ques: That meeting that you said you had with ABC, How was it?

Ans: Yes, It is based on the agenda of the meeting. They give advice and it is not mandatory that you do what they say, you will give them the reason why the changes should not be made. The business is difference what work for them might not work for us here. At the end of the day what matter most is we have the same goal which is to be successful.

There is very little or no bureaucracy in this company. I can walk off to my MD tomorrow on how things should be done or I can send a mail to my immediate boss to tell him that 'I am supposed to work on something and you are delaying my work'. You know we operate First Name Basis.

Ques: What is first name basis?

First Name Basis, we call ourselves by first name. I call my boss MD of the company Wale, there is no ma/sir. So that has taken away forms of barrier. When you use 'sir' or 'ma', it always reminds you that person is older than you. People say familiarity breeds contempt and sometimes familiarity allows open communication. The fact that we allow first names, I can always walk up to you tomorrow because I'm not scared of you and I know I can say anything to you; if you decide to witchhunt, somebody is also fighting for me so far I'm saying the right thing. At the end of the day, the end goal is for the organisation to succeed.

So, first name basis allows open communication among the employees. Also, it helps to improve innovation because you can easily just say things as it is although we don't disrespect people, we try to always remember that this person is older than you and has been in the business for long. Still, we are allowed to speak freely and do whatever we want freely so far we get necessary approvals and bureaucracy is minimal because of all these.

How about ideas generations and suggestions?

Ans: Yes, I am allowed to suggest ideas, I am given the freedom to pursue my idea, meet the people I want to work with. When it's time to do business, all I need to do is go and get approval from management or a team that sits regarding such proposal. I explain to them what I've been working on; I ask them if there's any necessary changes to be done. But I need to be sure it doesn't affect the brand or company policy or the process of the company. If there is any correction to fix, we fix it and we launch the product.

Its two ways, either you are trying to bring business or suggesting to your boss on how to do things better.

If I'm trying to bring business, I can just go to my clients and bring the business. But if my idea is such that it likely affects the process of the company maybe I'm suggesting they do things differently and I know it is my boss that will implement it, I'll just go to him directly. There something you solve with your immediate boss, so why should I go ahead to tell his boss just because there is open communication.

Ques: So when do you find it necessary to go over your boss to his boss?

If he is delaying my work. The Head of my Group is about 8 levels ahead of me, he is Senior Manager while I am just Executive Trainee. Yesterday I sent a mail to him that there is something I need to launch and the Head of Technology said you are the one delaying and immediately I got approval. Definitely, the way I wrote it was respectful but still I told him and that it's the way we work here, it is not about the individual but the end goal.

Ques: Sorry, if you do not mind can I have the hierarchy again?

Ans: you come in as Executive trainee – Assistant Executive Officer - Executive officer- Senior Executive Officer – Assist Manager- Deputy Manager-Manager- Senior Manager- Assitant Deputy Manger- Deputy General Manager-General Manager- Divisional Director I think they are General Manager then we have the CEO/CCO.

There is hierarchy here. Yes, you are allowed to do some things but sometimes you need to get approval from your bosses. There is a saying that those who are in the port we always know what exist, I can never know more than my General Manager so I will always go back to get more initiatives.

Ques: How about directives from your immediate boss or from above, has there being a time you have different point of view.

Ans: Yes, if you have different point of view, you say it even if it is not accepted or backfires, it will be recorded that you have said is. There is a committee that head by Senior Manager and ET is in the committee. There was a committee where I was the youngest; other individuals were senior staff. Of course, the person you put in a committee has to talk; otherwise, if he doesn't talk why did you put him in the committee. Things like that promote communication. So you are allowed to say what you feel. In as much as there is 100% freedom of communication at the end of the day it's 89% or 99%. It depends on how each one develops rapport with his immediate boss. That allows you to have open communication 100%, because open communication ultimately depends on individuals. The company has not said we should not communicate 100% so far you are not disrespecting the other person. And so far it doesn't tarnish the image of the other person.

Ques: how is your office like?

Ans: it is an open office at least for us downstairs. There is a guy called Seun he is the Senior Manager, the head of the group and every other person, there is Assistant Manager, there is Senior Executive Officer I think we have two Executive Trainee one is on leave, basically, we talk with one another, talk about one guy that got burnt, laugh and gist, talk about our personal issues, we talk about why you should go to church, home, politics. If we need to scold anybody, we take him to the room and scold him, there is no time my boss has scolded me in public.

Ques: How do you see NSC Insurance generally?

Ans: Specifically, I will tell you the truth, when I wanted to get a job, I will tell you my perception on this- When I was interviewed by the CCO, he asked me to name 3 brand I will like to work for. Accenture, Stanbic IBTC and NSC Insurance and he said which company will I pick first and I said I will pick Accenture. In terms of insurance industry, I do tell people that I cannot work in other insurance though some are coming up couple of them are coming like GOR. Though the Head of GOR is former NSC Insurance Staff I will not go there because of their culture does not stick with mine though I like their branding.

NSC Insurance is a good place to work, though sometimes you are overworked but it brings out the potential in you. We can't bask in the glory that we moved from nowhere to number 2 in the industry. We need to push ourselves. We are trying to input foreign rules because at is the only thing I think the company should take cognizance of. We should not allow Nigeria slow system to affect us. But generally, NSC Insurance is a good company and I don't regret it.

Ques: So when there issues, how do you go about resolving, what action do you take, who do you speak to.

Ans: when things happen in my team, the first person I talk with is my boss since there is open communication, it boils down to rapport and for me to escalate to the GM, it means the situation is critically bad.

Employee Engagement Interview Guide

Personal information

1. What is your name
2. What position do you hold in this organisation
3. How long have you been working in this organisation?

Experience in the workplace

Describe your work relationships with individuals on, above and below your level within the organisation?

Describe usual issues you face in working with individuals on, above and below your level within the organisation?

Your team, how is the work condition and 'atmosphere'?

Describe how are your meetings are structured?

How often do you have meetings?

How comfortable are you speaking your mind in meetings or to your boss?

Tell me your perspective of this organisation between when you joined until now?

In relation to work condition, what practice do you think needs to change or improve in the organisation?