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Organizational Strategies to Reduce Workplace Stress in Oil and Gas Companies in Nigeria

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2022

Abstract

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Nigeria

by

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MBA, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, 2013

B.Eng, University of Benin, Nigeria, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Successful strategies are critical for managers in the oil and gas industry to reduce

workplace stress while improving employee performance and organizational profitability.

Failure of organizations to manage employee occupational stress may lead to employee

dissatisfaction, poor morale, diminished performance, reduced productivity, and damaged

organization image. Grounded in the stress management intervention framework, the

purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers of oil

and gas companies use to reduce employee occupational stress and improve employee

performance. Semistructured interviews were conducted with three managers in the oil

and gas industry who developed strategies to reduce employee occupational stress.

Organizational documentation and artifacts were reviewed as a secondary data collection

method. Using Yin's five-phase data analysis, interviews, and secondary data led to three

themes: quality work-life balance; employee competence, training, and development; and

corporate communication. A key recommendation is that managers in oil and gas

companies implement quality work-life balance initiatives to improve employees' health,

well-being, and performance. The implications for positive social change include the

potential to create employment opportunities for members of society, improving their

health and wellbeing, while enabling organizations to positively impact society through

the implementation of projects arising from improved organizational profitability.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my wife, Mrs. Lauretta Gbemre, and to my kids, Ogheneruno Cara Gbemre, Oghenerute Bryan Gbemre and Ogheneruona Asher Gbemre, who supported me throughout this journey and cheered me on. This is in fulfilment of a lifelong aspiration, and I would also want to dedicate this doctoral study to the memory of my mother (the Late Mrs. Bage Ruth Gbemre), who, although no longer with us, always believed in my ability to be successful in the academic sphere. You are gone but your belief in me has made this journey possible. Without my family, this would not have been possible; thank you for the support and sacrifice and for allowing me to work and pursue my dream.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Stress in the workplace has been identified as a significant topic of interest in academia and the business environment due to its impact on organizational performance (Oruh & Dibia, 2020). Employee occupational stress is a global phenomenon with implications for employees, organizations, and economies (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). Because of the implications of occupational stress on organizational performance, further research is warranted.

Background of the Problem

Organizations lose a significant amount of money arising from the impact of stress on employees, which could manifest in the form of decreased employee performance capacity, reduced interest in work, reduced efficiency, and psychological consequences (Sidhu et al., 2020). Employee occupational stress can be healthy; however, if not properly managed, it can escalate from minor anxiety to chronic illness (Darling & Whitty, 2020). Employee occupational stress worldwide costs businesses loss of revenue due to its impact on employee performance (Ajayi et al., 2019).

Derivable benefits exist from organizational intervention in employee occupational stress. Benefits include improved workforce health, increased productivity, reduced inefficiencies, and increased encouragement of positive behaviors in the workplace (Foy et al., 2019). Organizations owe their workforce a duty of care (Darling & Whitty, 2020), and should manage employee occupational stress to improve workers' performance to boost overall organizational efficiency. In addition, employee performance can be improved by workplace stress management and intervention

practices within the organization (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). The purpose of the study was to determine strategies that organizational managers adopted to reduce employee occupational stress.

Problem Statement

Occupational stress can be costly to organizations in terms of employee dissatisfaction, poor morale, diminished performance, reduced productivity, and damaged organizational image (Jacobs, 2019). Estimates of occupational stress-related costs in Hong Kong were between $614 million and $905.3 million per annum (Siu et al., 2020). The general business problem is that some organizations suffer a decline in productivity arising from the negative effects of occupational stress. The specific business problem is that some organizational managers lack strategies to reduce employee occupational stress.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress. Specifically, the target population for the study consisted of three managers from three different oil and gas companies located in Nigeria who had developed strategies for reducing employee occupational stress. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to balance employees' work and life, improving family time, and employees' quality of life. Additional implications include the potential to reduce the negative effect of employee occupational stress on healthcare costs and reduce the incidence of emotional outbursts that lead to vandalism, bullying, reduced social contact, and depression.

Nature of the Study

The three primary research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Zoellner & Harris, 2017). The quantitative research method is characterized by reliance on statistical techniques to examine variables' characteristics or relationships (Yin, 2018). The quantitative research method was not chosen because quantitative researchers test the relationship among variables, which was not the purpose of the study. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore the phenomenon under study in greater depth (Harrison et al., 2017). I used the qualitative research method to gain insights into a phenomenon, which in the study, is the managerial strategies used to reduce employee occupational stress. The mixed method, which is a quasi-simultaneous qualitative and quantitative is not suitable for exploratory research rooted in constructivist epistemology because using the mixed method requires both the quantitative and qualitative methods (Wilkinson & Staley, 2019).

Some principal designs for conducting qualitative research studies are ethnography, phenomenology, and case study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Ethnography is an approach for studying systems through prolonged engagement with one or more groups to explore the groups' cultures (Canevacci, 2017). My intention was not to research cultural systems but to research strategies; therefore, ethnography was not a preferred design. Phenomenological researchers explore personal meanings of participants' lived experiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is a form of interpretivism (Korcuska & Flynn, 2018). My research was not about exploring the personal meaning of participants' lived experiences, but to

study a phenomenon within its environment; therefore, phenomenology was not chosen. Using a case study design allowed for data collection to thoroughly investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its environment in a real-life context (Roberts et al., 2019). Case study research comes from an interpretive paradigm and is the preferred strategy when *how*, *what*, or *why* questions are being posed (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). I therefore chose a case study design to explore managerial strategies used to reduce employee occupational stress in a real-life context. For the study, I used the multiple case study design. Multiple case designs provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study from different sources, unlike the single case study, which is less complex with a homogenous sample (Yin, 2018).

Research Question

What strategies do managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress?

Interview Questions

1. What are the current stress-reduction strategies you use in your organization?

2. How did your employees respond to those strategies and derivative practices?

3. How did you measure the effectiveness of your stress-reduction strategies?

4. What, if any, work–life balance initiatives did you implement to reduce employee occupational stress?

5. What were the key barriers to implementing strategies to reduce employee occupational stress?

6. How did you overcome the key barriers to implementing strategies to reduce employee occupational stress?

7. How, if at all, were the strategies to reduce employee occupational stress communicated throughout the organizational ranks and among stakeholders?

8. What additional information would you like to add regarding strategies you used to reduce employee occupational stress?

Conceptual Framework

The stress management intervention (SMI) theory was the conceptual framework for the study. Giga et al. (2003) developed a comprehensive approach to stress prevention and management using the SMI theory. This framework is a tool that organizations can adopt to prevent and manage stress at various levels of the organization. Giga et al. categorized workplace SMIs as occurring at an individual, individual/organizational, and organizational level.

Giga et al. (2003) highlighted that the necessary first step before implementing a worksite stress prevention program was to develop a culture where employers and employees are all involved in the design and initiation of the intervention process. Both the employers and employees should be willing to continually communicate, analyze, and revise their plans and to learn from interventions that may or may not produce expected results. However, individuals respond differently to organizational stress (Kabat-Farr et al., 2018). Therefore, because of its relevance, I selected the SMI theory to explore the workplace stress management strategies the participating organizations' managers used to reduce employee occupational stress.

Operational Definitions

Coping strategies: Coping strategies are methods of coping with workplace stress (Naoum et al., 2018).

Intervention: Interventions are programs or techniques that empower individuals to manage stressors by developing individual coping abilities (Giga et al., 2003).

Stress: Stress is caused by physical and physiological demands on the human body (Jacobs, 2019).

Stress management: Stress management is an organizational intervention to manage workplace stress (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020).

Stressor: Stressors are factors such as work overload, labor exploitation, an unconducive work environment, and work–life imbalance that cause employee stress (Oruh & Dibia, 2020).

Work stress or occupational stress: Work or occupational stress is the inherent stress associated with the work environment (Darling & Whitty, 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are factors that are not verifiable but provide input into the study (Pyrczak & Bruce, 2017). I made several assumptions in conducting this research. The first assumption was that respondents would answer truthfully and honestly. The second assumption was that managers would be open and transparent while addressing issues around stressed employees in the organization, especially about revealing sensitive

information about employees. The third assumption was that stressed employees would truthfully report stress-related issues to managers in the organization.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in the study, which are out of the researcher's control (Shin et al., 2016). One limitation of the study was the small sample size of three managers from three oil and gas companies located in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. Purposeful sampling, which I used in this research, leads to the limitation of weakened generalizability. Another limitation was the issue of religion and cultural sensitivity, which might have influenced some participants to be less willing to reveal sensitive, stress-related health information about themselves.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that limit the scope and define the threshold of the study (Qiu & Gullett, 2017). The study involved three managers, one each from three oil and gas companies located in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. The study's first delimitation was the use of a multiple case study design and limiting the interview responses to three managers from three oil and gas companies located in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. The second delimitation of the study was the use of managers as opposed to other employees in the industry who may know about the topic. Also, the study did not include participants living outside the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. However, the study's findings might provide valuable managerial insights to managers in other industrial sectors aside from oil and gas.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Workplace stress has negative effects on organizations, as it leads to work absences, performance decline, poor wellbeing in employees, and burnout (Johnson et al., 2018), which manifests as employee inefficiency and reduced organizational performance (Darling & Whitty, 2020). Having an organizational strategy to manage stressed employees is critical to improving the performance of organizations (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). The goal of the study was to reduce employee occupational stress, which has the potential to motivate employees and reduce work absenteeism that will add value to the business and improve organizational efficiency. The findings from the research study could be of significant value to managers in oil and gas companies to manage employee occupational stress and to improve their job performance. The study findings could contribute to the effective practice of business improvement through workplace interventions for handling employee occupational stress, thereby improving employee performance, job satisfaction, and improving organizational profitability. Completion of the study identified potential strategies for organizations to reduce employee occupational stress to enhance employees' productivity and organizational profitability.

Implications for Social Change

Organizations owe their workforce the duty of care (Darling & Whitty, 2020) and should protect the workforce from work overload, work–life imbalance, and burnout

(Oruh & Dibia, 2020). The results from this research study may be used to assist managers in reducing employee occupational stress in organizations.

Identifying strategies for managing employee occupational stress may lead to improved wellbeing and positive performance of employees (Sidhu et al., 2020). Managers in the oil and gas industry could use the findings of the study to reduce employee occupational stress and improve the performance of employees. Improved organizational performance could increase organizational efficiency, productivity, and revenue. Increased revenue translates into an increased tax base for local communities, which could be used to develop parks and social programs for benefiting citizens.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers applied to reduce employee occupational stress. The review of literature for this study included the documentation of relevant theories on occupational stress, stress prevention, and stress reduction practices. A literature review helps researchers to understand the issue being explored (Amini et al., 2020). This literature review consists of two parts. The first is the discussion and critical analysis of the conceptual framework, the SMI framework (Giga et al., 2003), and supporting and contrasting theories, which include the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978). The second part of the literature review consists of a discussion and analysis of the concept of employee occupational stress, stress perception in organizations, management of workplace stress, organizational commitment to stress management, and the impact of managers on employee

occupational stress, and the oil and gas industry. The review ends with a summary in which I discuss the impacts of managers on employee occupational stress.

The review of the professional and academic literature commenced with analyzing peer-reviewed studies that address occupational stress, organizational intervention, and employee coping strategies. I searched peer-reviewed journal articles using Google Scholar and several databases, including Business Source, Emerald, ProQuest, SAGE Open, and Science Direct in the Walden University library databases. I made use of UlrichsWeb to verify peer-reviewed journals. I limited the search to journal articles published within 2018–2022 to comply with Walden's recommendation for currency (Walden University, 2022). The study consists of 135 references, made up of 129 peer-reviewed articles representing 96% of the total. The total number of references in the study published within the 2018–2022 period is 111, which is 82% of the total number. The literature review contains 102 references; 91 are peer-reviewed and have a publication date between 2018 and 2022, representing 89% of the total.

The keywords and phrases I used to search for journal articles include *employee occupational stress*, *leadership influence on stress management*, *organizational intervention to employee stress*, *stress and motivation*, *stress coping strategies*, *consequences of stress*, *stress reduction strategies*, *stress and leadership style*, *trends in oil and gas industry*, *manifestation of stress*, *financial cost of occupational stress*, *corporate communication strategies*, *corporate social responsibility initiatives*, *transformational leadership*, and *work–life balance*.

The SMI Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Giga et al.'s (2003) SMI framework. The SMI framework is robust as it incorporates both workplace stress prevention and stress management strategies (Vanhove et al., 2016). Improved organizational performance is derived from the implementation of the SMI framework as the framework allows managers to identify workplace stressors, evaluates the stressors, and implements organization-specific intervention programs that incorporate every member of the organization (Giga et al., 2003). Stress prevention and management programs should be developed and adapted to the specific needs of the organization rather than developing generic solutions that may prove ineffective. SMI intervention strategies focus on stress management by evaluating employees as well as the interaction between the employees and the job tasks they perform (Giga et al., 2003). SMI encompasses stress reduction strategies, employee resilience building, and cognitive and coping strategies in stress management (Macik-Frey et al., 2007; Rahman & Cachia, 2021; Vanhove et al., 2016). To comprehensively manage workplace stress, managers implementing SMI in the organization do not evaluate stress as only occurring at an individual level but also as the interaction between employees and their job tasks (Giga et al., 2003).

Managers applying SMI identify and solve organizational problems at various intervention opportunities. Using the SMI framework, managers categorize workplace stress as occurring at three levels: individual, individual/organizational, and organizational (Giga et al., 2003). Individual intervention to stress management provides

employees with the skills, tools, and resources to carry out their job tasks and cope with the associated stress and pressure and can take the form of managers encouraging employees to partake in work–life balance initiatives, implementing proper time management, and putting employee assistance programs in place (Giga et al., 2003). Individual/organizational interventions manage stress-related issues between individuals, and their job tasks and can be implemented using coworker support groups, person–environment fit alignment, and granting autonomy to employees to innovate and creatively carry out their job tasks (Giga et al., 2003). Organizational interventions are the standard practices and policies organizations put in place to manage workplace stress. Some examples of organizational interventions are employee selection and placement, job selection and redesign, and effective corporate communication strategy (Giga et al., 2003). However, the necessary first step before implementing a worksite stress prevention program is to develop a culture where employers and employees are involved in the design and initiation of the intervention process (Giga et al., 2003). Employers and employees are advised to be willing to continually communicate, analyze, and revise their plans and to learn from interventions that may or may not produce expected results (Giga et al., 2003).

Employees perform better when managers make them feel informed and take part in decision-making. Managers implementing SMI empower employees through regular communication and involving employees in decision-making in an environment of support and collaboration. Empowering employees can lead to increased job commitment and motivation (Rinfret et al., 2020). SMI reinforces the importance of communication

because the timely dissemination of information reduces ambiguity and motivates employees to implement strategic planning initiatives in alignment with organizational goals (Giga et al., 2003). Employing SMI in isolation may lead to an unethical workplace situation that can result in workplace toxicity (Flaxman & Bond, 2010). SMI consists of regular risk evaluation and adapting the interventions to manage specific organizational issues leading to a work environment of continuous improvement (Datta & Hurlbert, 2019). SMI holistically incorporates every member of the organization, which fosters workforce cooperation and collaboration that will benefit the organization.

Managers are enjoined to understand organizational SMI that can improve the performance of employees. Organizational interventions that modify the stressors or reduce their impact on employees have been found to be effective (Rumbold et al., 2018). Giga et al. (2003) analyzed 74 international studies published between 1990 and 2001 for evidence of effective practice of SMI and found that interventions practices in organizations vary in terms of objective, structure, and target groups and that proper methodical research is rare. Most organizations focus on individual stress management programs that empower employees by developing their coping skills without addressing procedures for reducing environmental stressors (Giga et al., 2003). This finding led to the development of the SMI to comprehensively manage workplace stress intervention.

Many researchers have used the SMI framework to examine organizational interventions to stress management. Rumbold et al. (2018) used the SMI framework to analyze organizational SMIs in sports and found a wide range of organizational stressors, coping behaviors, and outcomes for sports performers. The application of stress audits

can lead to the optimization and improvement of the performance of sports performers (Rumbold et al., 2018). In addition, Kabat-Farr et al. (2018) applied the SMI in their research on managing incivility, anger, guilt, and the role of organizational commitment and reported improved organizational performance from the development of SMIs, such as relaxation and coworker support groups to manage employee negative behaviors and emotions.

Managers can promote a healthy workplace through the implementation of workplace stress interventions. Huettermann and Bruch (2019) investigated the relationship between health-related human resource management, employees' collective well-being, and organizational performance using the SMI framework and found that organizations that implement workplace interventions create a psychologically healthy workplace. Huettermann and Bruch emphasized the importance of organizational leadership in improving employees' commitment and wellbeing. Managers are advised to implement transformational leadership as it promotes a work environment of support, improved employees' positive stress mindset, and well-being.

Effective deployment of SMI can improve the effectiveness of the intervention outcome. Caponecchia et al. (2020) investigated the taxonomy of workplace bullying using the SMI framework and emphasized the application of the right workplace intervention from a suite of organizational interventions to improve the efficacy and effectiveness of the intervention deployed. From these interventions, Caponecchia et al. commented on the effectiveness of SMI as providing direction for managers to enhance organizational effectiveness. Caponecchia et al. advised managers to adapt the

intervention type and timing for effective outcomes and improved workforce performance. Managers can test and refine the taxonomy of workplace bullying by applying different intervention programs and choosing the most appropriate organizational intervention.

A comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial factors by managers can lead to the implementation of more effective SMIs. For example, Pignata et al. (2018) investigated the human resources and occupational health and safety stress interventions using the SMI framework. Pignata et al. found that a combination of individual and organizational intervention strategies is ideal and can lead to enhanced understanding of psychosocial factors and improved effectiveness in stress management. Smith et al. (2020) evaluated the impact of a wearable-based SMI on the improvement of mental health outcomes and found improved mitigation of negative aspects of stress. Smith et al. advised organizations to readily adopt incorporating wearables as an organizational intervention to stress management. Managers applying SMI across the different levels in the organization achieve better collaboration and improved results.

Managers implementing SMI and engaging with the rest of the organization improve employee performance. Karanika-Murray et al. (2018) investigated leadership engagement by drawing from the experiences of the intervention team using the SMI framework and reported better leader engagement and improved workforce performance. Organizational commitment to stress management can lead to professionalism and more committed employees delivering superior results. To preserve an organization's competitive edge, managers can proactively anticipate future developments (van Dorsser

& Taneja, 2020). Business uncertainties can be in the form of competitors or new products.

Managers providing support to their employees in accordance with the recommendation of SMI encounter less workplace stress. Organizations benefit from an environment of support and collaboration (Amor et al., 2020). Employees thrive when they receive the right support, steer, and guidance from their supervisors and managers. Employees enjoy high esteem value and are committed to their jobs. During periods of crisis, managers can maintain their relationship with followers by using the attachment theory to remotely support employees when physical proximity is not feasible (Hinojosa et al., 2020). Managers are advised to explore strategies to continuously support employees as a means of reducing employee occupational stress and improving employee self-esteem values.

Managers can put strategies in place to support work–life initiatives in the organization in alignment with SMI. Giga et al. (2003) advised organizations to implement work–life balance initiatives to reduce employee occupational stress. Employees must strive to balance their work and nonwork roles to be more efficient (Aruldoss et al., 2021). Management support plays a vital role in managing employees' stress and emotions (Jacobs, 2019). Managers are enjoined to explore strategies for employees to strike a healthy work–life balance while providing guidance and support to employees to improve their performance and boost organizational profitability.

Managers can improve the effectiveness of resilience-building programs in the workplace for improved employee performance. Vanhove et al. (2016) conducted a study

using SMI to test the effectiveness of resilience-building programs and found that

resilience-building programs have become a primary means of stress prevention within

organizations and that they improve the health and performance of employees. The

proactive deployment of workplace resilience-building using SMI may lead to improved

health and performance of employees and job satisfaction. Employee occupational stress

reduces job satisfaction (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). The lack of job satisfaction can

negatively affect organizational productivity, as employee occupational stress leads to a

decline in employee productivity, loss of organizational value from employee absences

due to stress-related illnesses, and the financial exposure of organizations in treating

stress-related illnesses in employees (Ajayi et al., 2019; Akhtar Malik & Björkqvist,

2021; Altindag, 2020). To achieve organizational effectiveness, managers must be aware

of the importance of quality of work life and work–life balance (Aruldoss et al., 2021).

Managers can explore the use of computer-based formats and technology to improve

employee resilience through computer-based training focused on improving employee

psychosocial health (Vanhove et al., 2016). Supervisors should explore strategies focused

on boosting employee resilience as a means of improving their performance, health, and

wellness.

      The effective implementation of SMI by managers in the workplace can lead to

improvement and advances in workforce occupational health. Macik-Frey et al. (2007)

conducted a study using the SMI framework and found improvement and advances in the

occupational health of the workforce arising from a growing positive paradigm shift in

individuals. Organizations practicing this positive paradigm shift transform occupational

health issues, such as absenteeism, burnout, strain, and despair into purpose, thriving, vigor, hope, and optimism (Macik-Frey et al., 2007). The workplace stressors that negatively affect employees' health and wellbeing can be modified into manageable stressors by employees through attitude change, overcoming deficiencies and illness, and becoming actualized people (Macik-Frey et al., 2007). In the workplace, employees are subjected to stress, which affects their health, reduces their work efficiency and performance, and can lead to increased accidents (Yousaf et al., 2020). Workplace stressors have negative effects on employees if not well managed. Managers with the knowledge of the positive paradigm shift will be structurally empowered to address the health of their workers from a more holistic paradigm, providing increased support, opportunities for autonomy, goals that are more challenging and meaningful, and social support (Macik-Frey et al., 2007). Employees feeling in control of the workplace stressors manage occupational stress better.

The implementation of SMI by managers in organizations can lead to moderated effects in stress management. Flaxman and Bond (2010) conducted a study on worksite stress management using SMI and reported improved wellbeing of initially distressed workers and the delivery of clinically meaningful mental health benefits to distressed workers. Varying degrees of stress can be found within an organization, which can result in distress in employees. Women and junior employees experienced more occupational stress in the workplace (Maulik, 2017). Junior employees experience more stress due to a lack of understanding of tasks, how to carry out the tasks, and unwillingness to ask for support. Women also face potential discriminatory practices and harassment (Maulik,

2017). To forestall against women and junior employees facing excessive stress, managers can provide the tools, stress management training, and resources for employees to perform their tasks, while also providing an environment of support and collaboration (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). Managers should pay attention to women and junior employees and ensure fairness and transparency in managing the organization (Li et al., 2019; Maulik, 2017). In an organization that is safe and perceived to be fair, employees will be able to seek support and speak out if they are facing harassment or discrimination (Maulik, 2017). Managers are encouraged to take cognizance of harassment and discrimination and intervene to ensure a safe workplace for all employees.

The use of relaxation spots in organizations as recommended by SMI can reduce employee occupational stress. An organizational strategy of managing employee occupational stress is the introduction of relaxation and support from coworkers to reduce the negative impacts of employee occupational stress (Giga et al., 2003). Organizations can also implement work–life balance initiatives to reduce employee stress (Chaudhuri et al., 2020). The use of relaxation spots enables individuals to take control of their emotional behaviors and to apply appropriate coping strategies (Giga et al., 2003). Managers can explore the use of relaxation spots and work–life balance initiatives to reduce employee occupational stress while improving organizational performance and profitability (Giga et al., 2003). This workplace intervention can only be achieved through leadership commitment to SMI strategies by providing the enabling environment and the proper tools for employees to deliver on their job performance.

Workplace spirituality can be implemented by managers to reduce employee occupational stress. Pattanawit and Charoensukmongkol (2022) conducted a study on the benefits of workplace spirituality on employee work outcomes and reported a high level of person-job fit and improved employee performance. Singh et al. (2022) emphasized the impact of employee spirituality and karma orientation in improving employee motivation, enhancing their wellbeing, and reducing burnout. Employees who perform their job tasks selflessly experience reduced emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Singh et al., 2022). Managers are enjoined to design employee development programs to help employees overcome personal distress as a means of managing employee occupational stress.

Quality work–life balance can lead to alleviation of employee anxiety and improved employee performance. Soroya et al. (2022) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between employee performance and the quality of work–life balance and found that quality work–life balance has a significant impact on the job performance of employees. Wang et al. (2022) highlighted information overload as a cause of workplace stress and anxiety in employees. Managers are advised to incorporate work–life balance initiatives for employees while managing the dissemination of information to avoid employee information overload. This has the potential to mitigate workplace stress and improve employees' performance.

Related and Contrasting Theories to SMI

SMI was the conceptual framework for this study. I considered two alternative theories to provide further context for my conceptual framework: Lazarus and Folkman's

(1984) transactional theory of stress and coping and Burns' (1978) transformational

leadership theory. In this section, I examine the two theories and their effect on managing

employee occupational stress.

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

According to the transactional theory of stress and coping, stress is conceptualized

as a relationship between the individual and the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The theory posits that a mismatch between an individual and the environment results in

stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress occurs because of an imbalance between

perceived external or internal demands and the perceived personal and social resources to

manage them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The imbalance between an individual and the

environment can be caused by work overload without adequate organizational support

(Saadeh & Suifan, 2020). The demands an employee perceives and the resources they

possess to perform the job demands may lead to employee occupational stress.

For stress to occur in individuals, there must be some prior cognitive evaluation.

The implementation of the transactional theory of stress and coping proposes an ongoing

cognitive stress appraisal consisting of three evaluations that take place before stress

occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The first evaluation is the primary appraisal of the

stressor in which an individual assesses the degree of threat concerning their wellbeing

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Next is the secondary appraisal of the stressor, which

considers the availability and effectiveness of the coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman,

1984). The third evaluation consists of the selection and deployment of the coping

strategy to manage the stress (Lerman et al., 2020). The accurate evaluation of stress

events produces efficient coping strategies that allow employees to adapt effectively to contingencies (Jacobs, 2019; Lerman et al., 2020). Managers are advised to deploy the right stress evaluation method to develop efficient and effective stress management strategies in the organization. These actions may lead to improved stress evaluation and diagnosis with the potential for proper stress management leading to improved employee wellbeing and performance.

Employees develop different reactions and coping strategies to occupational stress. Stressed employees develop coping strategies by avoiding ineffective leaders causing them stress, withdrawal, and work absenteeism (Jacobs, 2019). Individuals display two coping strategies when they encounter stress: problem-based and emotion-based response. Individuals demonstrating a problem-based approach modify the sources of the stress while emotion-based coping strategy involves the individual controlling their emotions when undergoing the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Majority of stressed individuals display irrational behaviors such as emotional outbursts, bullying, and vandalism, which are losses to the individuals, organizations, and the society. These irrational behaviors are disruptive; therefore, interventions have value and promote wellbeing (Horan et al., 2018). Managers are enjoined to build the stress coping capabilities of employees to avoid the negative consequences of stress on individuals, organizations, and the society.

Bullying is a common occurrence in most organizations but treatable with interventions. Many employees have reported either being bullied or experiencing another employee being bullied. Junior workers and women face discriminatory actions

in the workplace (Maulik, 2017). Studies have shown that bullying is one of the many stress reactions that can be addressed with an intervention (Caponecchia et al., 2020; Maulik, 2017). Mediation is an appropriate technique for handling bullying in the workplace (Lempp et al., 2020). Managing bullying in the workplace can lead to improved job satisfaction and engagement for employees.

The implementation of the Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory of stress and coping maps employee occupational stress to the environmental stressors without fully considering organizational interventions to reduce the employee occupational stress. This is an identified area where the SMI is more robust than the transactional theory of stress and coping. In contrast to this theory, SMI incorporates consideration of employee resilience-building, cognitive reappraisal, and employee coping strategies (Rahman & Cachia, 2021; Vanhove et al., 2016). With this in view, SMI appears to be a more fully developed and comprehensive framework for understanding occupational stress and recourse for managers.

Transformational Leadership Theory

According to Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory, transformational leaders motivate their followers to perform at higher levels of morality and motivation. Transformational leaders build a connection with their followers by motivating them and increasing their morality (Schuckert et al., 2018). Transformational leaders display four qualities: (a) act as ideal role models to the followers, (b) inspire and motivate followers to perform their tasks, (c) demonstrate genuine concerns for their followers, and (d) challenge and stimulate their followers to be more innovative (Rinfret et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership helps to improve employee performance and motivate them to a higher level of performance and morals (Burns, 1978). However, such motivated employees may face burnout if they are not provided with the right support (Ree & Wiig, 2020). Managers are advised to apply the right leadership style while fostering a work environment of support and collaboration for improved employee performance.

Transformational leaders improve the performance of employees, which translates into improved organizational efficiency. Transformational leaders improve organizational performance by inspiring, motivating, and empowering employees (Carleton et al., 2018). Transformational leaders also improve workplace safety cultures and work engagements (Ree & Wiig, 2020). In addition, transformational leadership plays a significant role in building competitive advantages in organizations through building the competence of employees (Rizvi & Garg, 2020). Furthermore, transformational leadership is also linked to improved organizational performance, as transformational leaders can motivate employees to take responsibility for the organization's performance (Rizvi & Garg, 2020). Organizations with transformational leadership have motivated employees working towards a common goal and shared vision, which corroborates Bass and Riggio's (2006) understanding that transformational leaders act as role models in charge of communicating organizational visions and developing employee capabilities to deliver improved results. Transformational leaders engender a learning workplace environment through inspiring, stimulating, supporting, and recognizing followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

There is a relationship between leadership style and employee occupational stress. Leaders providing support to employees reduce the likelihood of employee burnout (Masoom, 2021; Tafvelin et al., 2019). Transformational leadership is time-consuming and requires emotional involvement from the leaders and the followers, which puts a strain and extra demands on employees thereby increasing employee occupational stress. The job demand resources (JDR) model shows that employees encounter a series of job demands and resources, which can either contribute to or detract from their employee occupational stress (Bakker et al., 2003). Leadership style has an impact on employee occupational stress. An ineffective leader can be a source of stress to employees in the organization (Jacobs, 2019). Managers are advised to adapt their leadership style to changing situations in the workplace while providing support to employees in their task delivery.

Workplace stress can be caused by the interaction between an employee and the job task. Employee occupational stress is caused by a combination of high job demands and low resources (Karasek, 1985). Job resources include performance feedback, rewards, career opportunities, job security supervisor and colleague support, and strategic planning (Bakker et al., 2003). Job demands are those aspects of the job that require sustained physical and mental effort and are related to certain physiological and psychological costs (Bakker et al., 2003). Job demands include workloads, emotional demands, and workflow (Bakker et al., 2003). Job resources are the tools and resources required by employees to carry out their work goals (Amor et al., 2020). The work environment has inherent sources of stress (Darling & Whitty, 2020), and managers are

advised to recognize the sources of workplace stress and ensure to balance workplace stressors to obtain optimal employee performance. Evaluation of the JDR model proposes that burnout will occur if the job demands exceed the resources available (Bakker et al., 2003). Managers are enjoined to explore organizational strategies to reduce the negative impacts of employee job demands on their performance.

Although transformational leadership can lead to improved employee performance, it can also increase occupational stress in employees and managers. Transformational leadership style involves interpersonal contact between the leader and the followers, which can lead to increased employee occupational stress (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019). Interpersonal contact can be stressful as it involves emotional labor and the effective management of feelings and expressions to meet employee work demands (Johnson et al., 2018). Transformational leaders challenge employees to be more creative at work, which may increase employees' job-related stress.

Emotional intelligence may also influence manager-employee relationships. In a correlational study between transformational leadership and emotional intelligence, Rinfret et al. (2020) found that managers with high emotional intelligence adopted the transformational leadership style in leading organizations. Managers' application of emotional intelligence equips employees with the needed resources and competencies to manage employee occupational stress (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). In organizations where managers consider employee wellbeing and health, the employees are committed and deliver superior results (Rinfret et al., 2020). The application of emotional intelligence by

managers can enhance a work environment of support and collaboration, leading to reduced employee occupational stress and improved employee performance.

Concept of Employee Occupational Stress

The increasing awareness of workplace stress is becoming a serious organizational issue as it affects the health and wellbeing of employees while reducing their workplace performance. Employee occupational stress is a global phenomenon that affects individuals, organizations, and society (Jugdev et al., 2018; Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). Organizations strive for optimal productivity and sustainability. The drive for organizational productivity leads to workplace stressors, which eventually culminates into stress in employees (Oruh & Dibia, 2020). Employee occupational stress directly affects individual performance (Altindag, 2020), and has consequences on the health of individuals, which affects work performance (Jugdev et al., 2018). The workplace environment has inherent stressors, which can lead to employee occupational stress arising from excessive workload, role conflict, lack of job elevation and promotion, and unsatisfactory working conditions (Sidhu et al., 2020). Employee occupational stress is becoming a major challenge for organizations and has potentially negative effects on employees as it affects their health and wellbeing and leads to a decline in productivity (Ajayi et al., 2019).

Work-related stress has been recognized as a major occupational health issue. Stress occurs when a person conceives that an external threat is beyond their capability to manage the threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The fast-paced nature of work and competitiveness can be sources of employee occupational stress (Naoum et al., 2018).

Workplace stress can also be caused when the individual is overloaded or bullied in the

workplace (Oruh & Dibia, 2020). Workplaces have natural and unique stressors that

contribute to environmental and employee occupational stress (Darling & Whitty, 2020).

Workplace stress occurs when there is a mismatch between employees' job demands and

their ability to work on the said demands (Jugdev et al., 2018). Workplace stressors

define the source of potential stress, which can affect the health and wellbeing of

employees (Oruh & Dibia, 2020). Both internal and external factors in the workplace

environment produce stress triggers in employees, which can lead to employee

occupational stress. Understanding the work environment can lead to strategies to reduce

employee occupational stress and improve organizational performance.

Physical and psychological stimuli in the work environment can cause employee

occupational stress. Job demands require physical and psychological effort and emotional

resources (Ravalier et al., 2019). Stress occurs when an employee does not have the

required job resources and support to meet the job demands and work goals (Amor et al.,

2020). These unmet physical and psychological demands become stressors to the

individual (Park & Jang, 2017). Empowering the individual with the required job

resources is critical to improving the individual's work engagement and reducing the

initial physical and psychological demands (Amor et al., 2020). To reduce such identified

stress, management support that stimulates employee personal efficacy and development

is required (Park & Jang, 2017). Stress occurs when an employee does not have the

required job resources to execute a job task. For employees to perform, they should be

given the right tools and resources and they should be supported in the discharge of their

duties.

When employees are overloaded with tasks without the required resources to do

the job, it results in employee occupational stress. Employee occupational stress is caused

by a combination of high job demands and low resources (Karasek, 1985). Employees

should be structurally empowered with job guidelines and standard practices on how to

carry out work tasks (Giga et al., 2003). Managers in organizations are enjoined to

balance employee workload and to effectively delegate tasks to capable employees as a

means of managing employee overload for improved workforce performance.

Workplace stress can be caused by other factors. Other causes of workplace stress

in organizations are role and interpersonal conflicts and job ambiguity (Naoum et al.,

2018; Park & Jang, 2017). Role conflicts and job ambiguity are stressors because they

emotionally drain employees in the search for ways to carry out the tasks and eventually

lead to a decline in performance (Naoum et al., 2018). To reduce role conflicts, managers

should empower their employees and grant them autonomy (Giga et al., 2003; Park &

Jang, 2017). Managers are advised to provide clarification on employees' roles in the

organization and ensure their job tasks are clearly defined to reduce ambiguity.

Employee occupational stress can lead to mental stress that affects both the health

and performance of employees. Workplace stress can cause physical, mental, and

emotional stress in employees (Foy, et al., 2019; Srivastava et al., 2018), which results in

ill health and a decline in the performance of employees because of employee burnout

leading to work absences and decreased productivity (Mendy, 2020). Employees' mental

health is one of the biggest issues in Japan and other developed nations (Tsutsumi et al., 2020). There is a link between chronic employee occupational stress and mental health issues, which is detrimental to organizational performance (Ajayi et al., 2019). Employees having mental breakdowns suffer productivity loss and incur cost of treatment for the organization. There is the stigma of mental health, which makes it difficult for employees to divulge such information to their supervisors (Nwaogu et al., 2019). Due to non-disclosure of mental health issues, affected employees function sub-optimally, which negatively affects employee performance.

High-performing organizations aspire to proactively diagnose and intervene in employee occupational stress. Many organizations invest in measures to reduce health expenses and improve productivity (Smith et al., 2020). Effective organizational intervention lowers job stress and burnout and improves the performance of employees (Akhtar Malik & Björkqvist, 2021) while also enhancing employees' work culture of support, work engagement, job performance, and job satisfaction (Bayona et al., 2020). Employees strive to perform efficiently in an environment of support and collaboration to deliver superior results (Amor et al., 2020). Organizations are to promote a work environment of support and shared vision to improve employees' sense of worth and appreciation (Masoom, 2021), which leads to job satisfaction and improved results delivery. However, the proactive intervention of employee occupational stress has a cost implication on organizations. Hence, managers are advised to analyze the cost of providing interventions and improving the health and wellbeing of employees. Managers

in world-class organizations have implemented cost-effective organizational intervention to stress management in attempts to better their workplace environments.

Organizations that have workplace interventions perform better. The integration of organizational intervention strategies produces innovation capabilities (Huang et al., 2021). Workplace interventions motivate staff and promote their wellbeing (Horan et al., 2018). These approaches have the added advantage of reducing employee occupational stress, promoting wellbeing while improving employee performance and organizational profitability. Managers can drive organizational innovation through the application of both formal and informal means (Fagerlin & Lövstål, 2020). Managers are advised to ensure such innovation initiatives do not have adverse effects on the health and wellbeing of employees, as employees play a fundamental role in organizational performance (Schuckert et al., 2018). Organizational innovation enhances the competitive edge of organizations and helps them to remain sustainable (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). Organizations are advised to innovate to remain competitive in today's global world of declining profits, instability, and intense competition.

Manifestation of Occupational Stress

Employee occupational stress can manifest into illness in employees, which leads to absenteeism; employees not meeting deadlines; incomplete project delivery; and employee strain leading to emotional outbursts, burnout, and depression (Ajayi et al., 2019; Jugdev et al., 2018; Maulik, 2017). Moderate or chronic exposure to environmental stressors can lead to psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and psychological disorders (Akhtar Malik & Björkqvist, 2021; Saadeh & Suifan, 2020; Srivastava et al.,

2018). Employees subjected to chronic workplace stress can suffer depression and mental health issues. Stress is associated with increased feelings of mental and emotional distress that may lead to anxiety, moodiness, and depression in the short term, while chronic stress can lead to mental breakdown, depression, organ failure, and cardiovascular diseases in the long term (Martin et al., 2018; Maulik, 2017). The overall effects of employee occupational stress can negatively affect employees' health and wellbeing, which may translate into employee illnesses and a decline in work performance.

It is important to implement workplace SMI to manage employee stress while improving their wellbeing and enhancing their job performance (Leduc et al., 2021) as EOS has negative consequences on individuals, organization, and society. Organizations that put strategies in place to manage employee occupational stress may have a healthier workforce that is committed to the organization, motivated, and will deliver high-quality performance (Rinfret et al., 2020). Stress has consequences on organizational performance as it leads to work absences and a decline in organizational productivity. Employee occupational stress manifest in organizations in the form of low productivity, high employee turnover, wasted investment in employee training, and increased operations costs due to training replacements for sick leave (Foy et al., 2019). Employee occupational stress can incur a significant emotional cost to employee health and wellbeing and a substantial economic cost to organizational performance (Johnson et al., 2018; Sidhu et al., 2020). Stress has negative consequences on society. Negative examples of employee occupational stress on society are bullying, harassment, aggression, and violence (Foy et al., 2019). Other negative consequences of stress are

emotional outbursts that lead to vandalism, reduced social contact, the risk of suicide, and

significant healthcare costs treating stress-related illnesses (Foy et al., 2019; Johnson et

al., 2018; Sidhu et al., 2020). Employee occupational stress takes a toll on society, as it

can lead to a dysfunctional society. If employee occupational stress is properly managed,

the amount spent on healthcare costs can be channeled into building parks and other

social programs. Reducing employee occupational stress has positive consequences for

the organization, as it can lead to reduced employee absenteeism and improved employee

and organizational productivity.

Employee occupational stress can lead to burnout. Workplace burnout is an

extreme stress situation that causes a crisis in the connections people establish with work

(Jugdev et al., 2018). Burnout can also be a consequence of chronic mental strain (Bakker

et al., 2003). Workplace stressors contributing to burnout are work overload, job

uncertainty, time, and budget pressures (Jugdev et al., 2018; Lloyd-Walker et al., 2018).

Employees experiencing burnout suffer a decline in their work performance, and burnout

can lead to depression (Martin et al., 2018; Ravalier et al., 2019). Manager's support and

employees' perceptions of a stress-management intervention can help to reduce burnout

(Horan et al., 2018). Encouraging employees to periodically take time off work and to

participate in work–life balance initiatives can assist to reduce burnout (Giga et al.,

2003). Employees engaging in work–life balance initiatives take time off work and are

away from the workplace stressors, which leads to improved health and wellbeing.

Despite some organizations providing interventions, most stressed employees do not use

such interventions because of fear of stigmatization and an eventual sack (Nwaogu &

Chan, 2020; Nwaogu et al., 2019). Organizations that have workplace interventions and work–life balance initiatives in place may prevent employees from experiencing burnout. Managers are advised to encourage work–life balance initiatives to manage employee burnout.

Stress Perception in Organizations

Organizations are encouraged to be proactive in stress management to forestall against the negative effects of employee occupational stress. There is the need for managers to proactively focus on the sources and typology of stress and their impact on employee health and wellbeing as a prescriptive means of reducing employee occupational stress (Naoum et al., 2018). Perceived stress is the perception and appraisal of the stressors (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). Karasek (1985) proposed the job demands control support (JDCS) model of stress perception, which offers organizational support in handling employee occupational stress. French et al. (1974) proposed the person-environment fit model for stress prediction. The JDCS model has a limitation of being transactional and has limited coverage of job characteristics of employees (Pozo-Antúnez et al., 2018). The person-environment fit model includes the recognition of the interplay of organizational resources and stressors (Jugdev et al., 2018) and offers the added benefit of managing the subjective perceptions of stress. The person-environment fit model of stress perception is more prescriptive in handling occupational stress as it supports stressed employees in managing employee occupational stress.

There is also the job characteristics model (JCM) for stress perception (Siruri & Cheche, 2021), which encompasses employees' job dimensions in stress perception. The

five dimensions of jobs are skill, task significance, task identity, autonomy, and feedback (Siruri & Cheche, 2021). Managers can detect employee occupational stress by combining the JDCS and the JCM for robustness. However, combining the JDCS and the JCM models may be laborious, time-consuming, and may lead to increased operational costs for the organization. There is a need to measure work-related stress and assess the effectiveness of organizational interventions implemented (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). Managers can undertake a cost-benefit analysis to evaluate the appropriate stress perception methods to implement in the organization for effective detection of employee occupational stress.

Organizations can implement the use of surveys and questionnaires to assess the stress levels of employees. Stress-check programs can be used for building employee awareness, providing support, and putting improvement initiatives in place (Tsutsumi et al., 2020). Organizations should understand the importance of assessing employee occupational stress levels and implementing the appropriate workplace intervention strategy as it reduces mental health issues in employees and boosts performance.

In fast-paced fieldwork and projects, a lack of effective communication is a source of stress. Managers are enjoined to build communication strategies in projects as a means of managing employee occupational stress, as ambiguity in communication and information sharing was identified as a source of stress for employees (Ajayi et al., 2019; Lloyd-Walker et al., 2018). Effective communication and feedback mechanisms will assist managers in reducing employee occupational stress and preserving the health and wellbeing of employees.

Organizations can implement periodical audits to check employee stress levels. Organizations can make use of stress audits to aid managers in identifying stressed employees (Rumbold et al., 2018). Periodic stress audits will help identify employees undergoing mild stress before it gets to chronic levels, while also identifying chronically stressed employees requiring workplace intervention. The use of stress audits to check employee stress levels might help preserve the health and wellbeing of employees and reduce stress-related sicknesses such as depression, mental health disorders, and cardiovascular diseases.

Trends in the Management of Workplace Stress

Managing workplace stress can lead to positive outcomes for organizations. Supervisor support will lead to improved employee and organizational performance, employee wellbeing, and mental health (Horan et al., 2018), which enhances increased job performance, reduces worker's illnesses and treatment costs, reduces compensation claims, and increases organizational productivity (Nwaogu & Chan, 2020). Supervisor support refers to the extent to which employees feel that their supervisor values their contribution to tasks and their wellbeing (Horan et al., 2018). Employees feeling valued are motivated to outperform normal standards in contributing to the overall organizational performance.

Managers' support enhances a work environment of collaboration and shared values, which leads to improved knowledge-sharing and the delivery of superior results by employees. Supervisor support and SMI improve employee performance (Horan et al., 2018). However, supervisor support can be tasking and emotionally draining to the

managers. Burnout occurs because of increased work-related stress (Mohammed et al., 2019). Supervisor support requires emotional labor and involvement with employees over time (Johnson et al., 2018). Processes and standards to guide employees in task delivery and stress diagnosis can foster an environment of support and collaboration to prevent burnout in employees and supervisors.

Managers can proactively manage occupational stress through the education and training of employees about employee occupational stress. To enhance employee productivity, managers need to train employees on stress management and emotional intelligence to equip them with the needed resources and competencies to perform their jobs and manage occupational stress (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). Employees should be trained about occupational stress as a means of equipping them with the skills and ability to manage employee occupational stress (Cruess et al., 2018). Managers are advised to explore strategies to educate and equip employees with the tools to identify occupational stress to reduce the effects of employee occupational stress.

Some organizations have creatively developed initiatives to manage workplace stress. Some of the initiatives are seeking social support as a means of managing the negative effects of employee occupational stress (Yousaf et al., 2020). In India, some organizations are practicing workplace spirituality to manage employee occupational stress (Saxena et al., 2020). This innovative approach is consistent with preserving the organization's competitive edge through the deployment of cost-effective solutions to solve organizational challenges.

Organizations can be innovative in modifying workplace stress. Some organizations engage in job design and matching employees to jobs (Bakker et al., 2003). Some other organizations engage in trait mindfulness as a means of supporting transformational leadership (Carleton et al., 2018; Djourova et al., 2020), while others engage in neuro leadership as a means of providing an integrated and more refined approach to organizational intervention (Zwaan et al., 2019). These stress intervention approaches are relatively new and are still developing. Fostering a work environment of support and collaboration reduces employee occupational stress and improves employee performance. Performance improvement can lead to organizational efficiency and profitability, which will benefit both the organization and society.

Organizations should explore having comprehensive workplace interventions for employees and managers. Managers hold a prestigious and economically advantageous position, which differentiates them from nonmanagers in the organization (St-Hilaire & Gilbert, 2018). Managers play a significant role in organizations and managers' sense of esteem, identity, and recognition should be preserved to prevent burnout (Hamouche & Marchand, 2020). If the organization does not recognize the efforts of managers through rewards and recognition, the result could be a source of stress for managers, and this stress will have a significant impact on the organizational performance. HR policies and interventions should encompass employees and managers.

Organizations benefit from implementing different SMIs. SMIs lead to a reduction in emotional exhaustion and employee burnout (Johnson et al., 2018). Organizations can implement a suite of SMIs and apply the right intervention to audit the

effectiveness of intervention strategies (Caponecchia et al., 2020). Organizations can increase the value of interventions, as interventions will lead to higher employee wellbeing and improved organizational performance (Johnson et al., 2018). Implementing a suite of SMIs is laborious and involves much effort in iterating the current stress intervention practices to adopt a holistic approach.

Improving Employees Coping Strategies

Employees respond differently to workplace stress and develop different coping mechanisms to the workplace stressors. Coping strategies are the thoughts and behaviors individuals adapt to manage internal and external stress factors (Moneva et al., 2020). Workplace stress intervention and health promotion programs can either be primary or secondary (Martin et al., 2018). The primary intervention is an awareness mechanism about employee occupational stress that modifies the workplace stressors through job redesign, increasing employees' role in decision-making, and the provision of coworker support (Akyurek et al., 2020). Secondary interventions focus on cognitive-behavioral training, time management, and goal setting (Giga et al., 2003). Organizations are advised to explore workplace strategies to improve employee stress-coping strategies to manage employees' health and wellbeing.

Workplace health interventions improve employees' health. Akyurek et al. (2020) conducted a study and found that primary and secondary workplace stress intervention and health promotion programs resulted in improved coping skills and quality of life while reducing employee occupational stress. Cooper et al. (2019) and Ward et al. (2018) proposed the development of mental toughness in employees in managing work

challenges, stressors, and pressures, while Nwaogu et al. (2019) suggested that organizations should promote organizational justice, flexible work systems, work promotion, and intervention strategies as primary and secondary interventions necessary to prevent mental health problems in employees. Improved employee coping capabilities will lead to reduced employee occupational stress and improved work performance.

Some organizations can explore spirituality as a stress-coping strategy. Managers can explore incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in improving employee occupational health and sustainability (Carleton et al., 2018; Djourova et al., 2020; Shahbaz & Sajjad, 2020). Mindfulness is a practice of the mind that enables individuals to relieve stress by controlling their feelings, emotions, and behaviors (Shahbaz & Sajjad, 2020). The practice of mindfulness improves the mental toughness in individuals and improves employees coping strategies to stress (Cooper et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2018). Mentally tough employees develop stress-coping strategies and such employees manage their stress levels and do not suffer the negative consequences of stress.

Organizational Commitment to Stress Management

Organizational commitment to stress management leads to improved employee performance and organizational success. Visible leadership support has been shown to improve successful organizational health interventions and employee performance (Karanika-Murray et al., 2018). Organizational commitment motivates employees to deliver improved performance. Organizations can formulate policies and ensure psychosocial hazards are avoided when designing work (Schuller, 2019). For example, Shell, a global leader in oil and gas exploration, has an innovative work–life balance

initiative where employees are encouraged to take time off work and relax in company-owned resorts. In addition, Shell has a well-developed diversity and inclusion program that incorporates every employee into the business model without any employee feeling segregated against. These practices have helped to reduce the effects of workplace stress on employees and to improve employee job commitment. Organizational commitment to stress-reduction strategies can lead to committed employees with improved work performance (Saadeh & Suifan, 2020). However, organizational commitment has cost implications and can be expensive as job resources such as employee support or training are capital intensive. In many organizations, management focuses on improved employee performance to remain in business.

Organizations can commit to providing the tools and resources for employees to perform their job tasks. Organizational commitment equips employees with the appropriate tools, resources, and support to perform effectively (Karanika-Murray et al., 2018). There are cost implications for organizations to equip employees with the right tools to diagnose and manage occupational stress, resulting in some organizations not investing in stress management initiatives. Every organization is responsible legally to its employees as every organization owes their employee the duty of care (Darling & Whitty, 2020). Health and safety regulations enable the organization to ensure the employees are not affected or made ill by their work, which includes work-related stress.

Ineffective leadership and ignoring organizational commitment by leaders in organizations can lead to a decline in organizational performance. Ignoring organizational commitment can have negative consequences on organizations (Saadeh &

Suifan, 2020). Managers can improve organizational commitment in employees by providing employees with the right leadership, appropriate job resources, support, and training to enable them to meet their work goals (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Managers must monitor the work environment and intervene appropriately on employee occupational stress (Kabat-Farr et al., 2018). Employees deliver quality results when they feel valued by their managers and supervisors.

Managers are enjoined to invest in improving the psychological capital of employees. Psychological capital is the ability of employees to cope with psychological distress. Managers are advised to develop the psychological capital of employees because psychological capital has been shown as a good buffer for employee occupational stress (Biron et al., 2018; Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). Organizations can implement authentic leadership to improve employees' psychological capital (Schuckert et al., 2018). Organizations are enjoined to strategize on providing support to employees without burning out the managers emotionally and physically.

Organizations can develop strategies to recognize and reward managers. Rewarding managers will motivate them to outperform organizational goals (Hamouche & Marchand, 2020). Mohammed et al. (2019) recommended the implementation of stress-relief programs, health fairs, and changes to managerial styles that align with the culture of employees, and improved communication amongst workplace management and employees as techniques to improve motivation and organizational performance. Organizations are enjoined to implement policies to preserve the mental health of managers as a means of fostering a sustainable and healthy workplace.

Businesses can cooperate with institutions to develop a safe work environment. Organizations can cooperate with institutions or scientific centers to promote evidence-based approaches to manage employee occupational stress and establish new health and safety standards to manage employee occupational stress (Molek-Winiarska & Molek-Kozakowska, 2020). Organizations partnering with external organizations strategy may have the downside of reduced commitment and the exposure of business secrets to competitors. An organization's commitment to stress management plays an important role in managing employee stress and improving organizational performance. However, it can be cost-intensive and time-consuming, and this behooves organizations to adopt the best strategy to foster organizational commitment in employees.

Leadership and Occupational Stress

The style of leadership in organizations has an impact on employee performance. Leadership and a supportive organizational climate are critical to improving the performance of employees (Amor et al., 2020). Transformational leaders improve employee performance and commitment to work, which increases employee occupational stress levels (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019; Tafvelin et al., 2019). In the drive for organizational efficiency and profitability, most managers adopt the transformational leadership style in leading organizations. This adoption leads to the organizations meeting their targets at the expense of employees' health and wellbeing, which manifests into employee occupational stress with all the attendant negative consequences such as work absences, fatigue, emotional outbursts, and depression. Some employees working under managers practicing transformational leadership either show up for work ill or take

sick leave and absences (Nielsen & Taris, 2019). Managers can explore strategies to foster a work environment of support and collaboration for employees by providing them with the necessary work tools, information, knowledge management, and motivation. This approach tends to keep employees motivated while reducing employee occupational stress through the provision of support by the managers for effective results delivery.

Practicing transformational leadership in an environment of support and collaboration requires financial investment by organizations. The organization will commit to the training of employees, investing in person-environment fit, and implementing knowledge management initiatives, which can take the form of work tools and technology. There is a positive correlation between transformational leadership and job resources (Ree & Wiig, 2020). Employees deliver on their job tasks when they have the appropriate job tools and support. Employees are critical to organizational productivity and managers should preserve employee wellbeing and health (Marques et al., 2019). Managers' integration of strategic knowledge management initiatives into their leadership styles lead to increased organizational efficiency, reduced costs, and improved organizational development and growth, while maintaining the organization's competitive advantage (Ali et al., 2019; Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). Organizational leaders should be committed to providing the right environment for employees to perform their job tasks.

Managers can adopt the right leadership style in different situations. Schuckert et al. (2018) investigated the impacts of authentic leadership and transformational leadership on employee innovation behavior. Schuckert et al. advocated the use of

authentic leadership to improve employees' psychological capital and innovation. Authentic leadership refers to a leadership style where the leader understands their strengths and weaknesses and demonstrates their authentic self in analyzing information (Willis et al., 2021). Authentic leadership has been shown to improve employees' behavior and performance (Malik et al., 2021). Managers are advised to be flexible and adapt different leadership styles in different situations (Willis et al., 2021), which will help in developing managers' competency in adapting and integrating different leadership styles in reducing employee stress and improving organizational performance.

Managers' knowledge and capability can also be a source of stress for employees. Ineffective leadership results in negative consequences for employees leading to low-quality delivery, withdrawal, avoiding work situations, and increasing employee occupational stress (Jacobs, 2019). The leadership style of managers has an impact on employee performance. A high level of employee occupational stress is a sign of management deficiency (Altindag, 2020). As a result of intense business environments and competition, managers may be focused on organizational performance without considering the overall health and wellbeing of employees. The focus on organizational productivity increases employee occupational stress, which results in a decline in employee performance, and reduced organizational performance and profitability.

Managers can creatively support employees during crisis periods. Nielsen and Taris (2019) recommended that organizations should not be judged by only performance targets, but also by the health and wellbeing of employees. This strategy will ensure that managers explore strategies to support employees to improve their health and wellbeing

while driving organizational performance and profitability. During crisis periods,

managers can innovate and remotely support employees. Hinojosa et al. (2020) proposed

leadership intervention by exploring attachment theory to remotely support employees in

uncertain and strange periods. COVID-19 was unprecedented and brought numerous

challenges for businesses, managers can explore attachment theory to remotely support,

reassure and improve employee performance.

Managers can continuously interface with other stakeholders in the organization

to explore strategies to foster a psychologically healthy workplace. Huettermann and

Bruch (2019) suggested that managers should incorporate human resources in taking

effective action to strengthen employees' ability, motivation, engagement, and

opportunity. Amor et al. (2020) advocated the empowerment of employees to improve

their work engagement and improve their performance. This approach will lead to the

implementation of organizational SMI through the empowerment of HR in formulating

policies to help mitigate employee occupational stress and providing support to stressed

employees, thereby leading to a reduction of stress-related and psychological illnesses in

the organization.

The Oil and Gas Industry

The oil and gas industry is a prominent employer of labor. The oil and gas

industry plays a significant role in the economic growth and development of most

countries and has a significant impact on the lives and livelihoods of people around the

world (Ali et al., 2019; Ohene-Asare et al., 2018). Oil and gas companies operate in a

complex business environment. The complexity is caused by trends such as globalization,

liberalized trade, and innovative technology (Malik & Lenka, 2019). There are other issues such as corruption, pipeline damage, and crude oil theft that cause a decline in oil and gas production. In 2016, oil production in Nigeria dropped from 2.3million barrels per day to one million barrels per day because of pipeline damage and crude oil theft (Olujobi, 2021). In a country like Nigeria where oil and gas is the mainstay of the economy and with pervasive corruption, oil and gas companies face significant external challenges threatening organizational profitability and sustainability leading to employee occupational stress.

The oil and gas sector is seen as a prosperous sector by other Nigerians and is exposed to external risks. Employees in the Nigerian oil and gas sector are subjected to external threats such as organized crime, kidnapping, and hostage-taking. Nigerian oil and gas sector is regulated by the federal government to fight corruption and to ensure transparency in the operation of the oil and gas companies. For societal improvement and development, there is the need for regulatory improvement in creating healthy work environments (Darling & Whitty, 2020). However, working in the oil and gas sector can be stressful as the sector is riddled with challenges of frequent turnover, downsizing, and frequent kidnapping, and hostage-taking of employees in the oil and gas sector seen as prosperous. Employees are subjected to ongoing external threats, which leads to employees resigning and relocating abroad, while those remaining face external threats in the discharge of their duties.

Oil and Gas Industry Strategies to Reduce Occupational Stress

In the oil and gas industry, the effective application of knowledge sharing can reduce employee occupational stress. Knowledge sharing is the process of mutual sharing of information in an organization that leads to the creation of joint facts (Raza et al., 2018). Akhtar Malik and Björkqvist (2021) found managers developing an environment of mutual trust and respect led to motivated employees feeling safe and satisfied to deliver on their work duties. Employees perceiving high organizational support experience low occupational stress (Masoom, 2021). Managers providing support to employees reduce the likelihood of employee occupational stress and burnout (Tafvelin et al., 2019). The sharing of information in an organization empowers employees and helps in reducing work-related stress. For optimal organizational performance and sustainability, managers in the oil and gas sector are advised to put strategies in place to explore and integrate knowledge-sharing strategies as a means of reducing employee occupational stress and preserving the competitive advantage of the organization.

Employees should have access to the right tools and resources to do their jobs, and managers are advised to be clear when passing information as the ambiguity of information is a source of stress in employees. Employees with access to work tools and resources in an environment of support experience reduced work-related stress. To get quality performance from employees, there must be the sharing of thoughts and information amongst employees (Ohene-Asare et al., 2018). High exchange of information results in improved organizational learning and innovation (Kopp et al., 2020; Ohene-Asare et al., 2018), and managers can improve the innovation process by

using multiple controls and the implementation of risk management processes (Datta & Hurlbert, 2019; Fagerlin & Lövstål, 2020). Employees provided with the right tools and resources to do their jobs in an environment of support are committed to their jobs and experience reduced employee occupational stress.

Oil and gas companies can aspire to become learning organizations that promote knowledge sharing and workload sharing to reduce employee occupational stress. Increasing organizational support reduces employee occupational stress and improves employee self-esteem to manage the threatening conditions of the work environment by formulating a stronger coping mechanism (Masoom, 2021). Supervisors and managers can reduce employee occupational stress by providing support to employees, which can take the form of improved supervision, supportive leadership, and intervention success (Horan et al., 2018). Employees working in an environment of trust and collaboration are more relaxed and do not suffer from work-related stress. In a work environment of low trust, employees experience the negative effects of organizational stressors (Akhtar Malik & Björkqvist, 2021). Managers can explore strategies for employees to share knowledge and workload in an environment of trust and collaboration as a means of reducing occupational stress while improving organizational performance.

Knowledge Sharing Practices in Reducing Employee Occupational Stress

Organizations in the oil and gas industry are enjoined to explore strategies to preserve their competitive advantage. Unstable organizations are a source of stress to employees (Zwaan et al., 2019). The management of organizational knowledge can be a source of competitive advantage (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). Knowledge plays

an important role in today's global economy as it equips the workforce with the right competencies to make decisions (Ali et al., 2019). Managers can explore strategies to preserve the organization's competitive edge as a means of reducing employee stress.

Mutual relationships enhance knowledge-sharing capabilities that lead to the reciprocity of information and knowledge amongst colleagues. Knowledge sharing provides the tools to support employees to deliver on their targets (Marques et al., 2019). Employees face workplace stress when they do not have the tools and resources to carry out their jobs (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). The mutual sharing of knowledge in organizations should be encouraged to reduce employee occupational stress. Managers are enjoined to explore strategies to promote mutual trust as a means of improving employee performance while reducing their work-related stress.

Technology is an effective platform for learning and socialization to take place in an organization. Technology plays an important role in the knowledge-sharing process in organizations (Ali et al., 2019; Kopp et al., 2020). Excess work, additional work hours, and new technology have been identified as some work-related stressors (Marques et al., 2019). The use of technology in organizations enables communication and collaboration among staff (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018). However, new technology deployment should be gradual as it can contribute to uncertainty and employee occupational stress (van Dorsser & Taneja, 2020). Managers can explore strategies to train employees before the deployment of new technologies in the organization as a means of reducing work-related stress. This approach is proactive as it equips the employees with the correct tools and resources to carry out their job.

Summary

Employee occupational stress has negative effects on individuals and organizations. There have been several studies on stress in the workplace, however, a gap in the literature exists for studies focusing on the role of managers in reducing workplace stress. A relationship exists between workplace stress and employee performance. Managers can continually improve employees' performance to achieve organizational goals and aspirations. Improved SMIs can lead to improved health and wellbeing of employees, improved employee performance, and enhanced organizational efficiency. Managers are responsible for providing a work environment of support and collaboration, which will aid in reducing employee occupational stress and improve their performance. This study was conducted to narrow the gap of understanding of managerial actions in the oil and gas industry to reduce workplace stress.

Transition

Section 1 of the study is the foundation for the study and included the background of the problem, problem and purpose statements, nature of the study, research question, and conceptual framework. This section also included a review of the professional and academic literature. The literature review expounded on the conceptual framework and research on employee occupational stress, stress perception in organizations, management of workplace stress, and improving employee coping strategies. I rounded up by discussing organizational commitment to stress management and the impact of leaders on employee occupational stress and application to the oil and gas industry.

In Section 2, I focus on the study's methodology by discussing the role of the researcher, participants, research method, research design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instrument, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity. In Section 3, I provide an overview of the study, and present the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendation for further study, reflections, summary, and conclusions.

Section 2: The Project

The study was a qualitative multiple case study to explore strategies managers applied to reduce employee occupational stress. Workplace stress has adverse implications for employees and can lead to burnout, depression, and cardiovascular diseases (De Cieri & Lazarova, 2020; Martin et al., 2018; Ravalier et al., 2019). This section includes the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participant selection, the research methodology and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instrument and techniques, data analysis, and the reliability and validity of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress. Specifically, the target population for the study consisted of three managers from three different oil and gas companies located in Nigeria who had developed strategies for reducing employee occupational stress. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to balance employees' work and life, improving family time, and employees' quality of life. Additional implications include the potential to reduce the negative effect of employee occupational stress on healthcare costs and reduce the incidence of emotional outbursts that lead to vandalism, bullying, reduced social contact, and depression.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the main instrument for data collection and analysis (Yin, 2018). Researchers use qualitative research to reveal well-

grounded and rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study to provide further insights (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The researcher's role includes participant selection, data collection, data interpretation, and data analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the principal source of data collection (Hjelle et al., 2018). My role as the qualitative researcher of the study involved recruiting participants for data collection and analyzing all data collected from managers from three oil and gas companies located in Nigeria. I served as the principal instrument for data collection and as an interviewer to explore the research problem by asking open-ended interview questions. Researchers use qualitative research to build a complex, holistic picture in the phenomenon's natural setting (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Equally important is the researcher's familiarity with the study, which makes it possible to select the most appropriate participants and data collection method. The qualitative researcher builds trustworthiness and credibility in the research process by collaborating with participants during the data collection process (Yin, 2018). I have spent my working career in the oil and gas sector, starting as a graduate trainee, and have risen to become a manager with supervisory responsibilities. My experience exposed me to the job demands and challenges other managers may experience.

As the researcher, I complied with *The Belmont Report's* protocol regarding guidelines to follow when conducting research studies by securing the consent for the interview from the participants, protecting the participants from harm, and safeguarding the participants' confidentiality (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research [NCPHS], 1979). Researchers should

strive to conduct ethical research. *The Belmont Report* outlines core ethical concepts, which are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons involves acknowledging autonomy and protecting individuals; beneficence ensures that researchers treat research participants ethically; and justice ensures fairness and transparency (NCPHS, 1979).

The Belmont Report contains information about ethical principles used during biomedical and behavioral research related to human participants. I adhered to *The Belmont Report* principles and protocols for conducting research. Research participants were protected using the informed consent guidelines established in *The Belmont Report*. Adhering to informed consent ensures that every participant is prevented from harm and protected under the guarantee of the law (Brittain et al., 2020; Kamer et al., 2018). I sought confirmation with the research participants that their decision to participate in this study met informed consent guidelines established in *The Belmont Report.* My role as a researcher was to treat participants with respect and protect their identity.

Researchers must accurately record data to eliminate partiality and bias (Hjelle et al., 2018). To remove bias in the interview process, I remained open to contrary evidence and avoided viewing the collected data through a personal lens. Yin (2018) advised researchers to mitigate personal assumptions that could affect the data collection and analysis processes. I conducted multiple interviews and applied member checking to ensure accurate interpretation. Member checking is an iterative process used to verify the accuracy of data by allowing the participants to verify the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the collected data (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Interviews are the most common form of qualitative data collection (Harrison et al., 2017). An interview protocol allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals' perceptions and ensures the researcher does not view data through personal perspective (O'Cathain, et al., 2016). The interview protocol also assists with acquiring data saturation because it establishes a set of interview questions that are consistent and do not vary with participants (Weller et al., 2018). I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure a systematic process in collaborating with my participants to fully explore the subject under review.

Participants

The participants for this study were three managers from three different oil and gas companies located in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. Researchers must establish the eligibility of the participants by verifying the participants' experience and knowledge of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). The participants possess multifunctional expertise and had previously developed strategies for reducing employee occupational stress. For this case study, I included experienced participants with appropriate competencies and skills, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or gender. I selected participants using the following criteria: (a) have been managers in an oil and gas company for at least 5 years and (b) have previously used strategies for reducing employee occupational stress.

I used the purposeful sampling technique to select the participants from the target population. Purposeful sampling allows for the exploration of the phenomenon under study (Roberts et al., 2019; Yin, 2018). Researchers use purposeful sampling to select qualitative research participants (Roberts et al., 2019). Participants having used strategies

for reducing employee occupational stress were selected for this study to aid an in-depth understanding and exploration of the research phenomenon. Researchers gain access to research participants through research institutes linking participants to researchers or through government support (Nemat☐Shahrbabaki et al., 2018). I used emails and telephone calls to gain access to the participants with the right competence by checking that they have multifunctional expertise and that they had previously developed strategies for reducing employee stress.

A researcher's relationship with the participants is critical to the success of the research study (Ngozwana, 2018). To establish a working relationship with participants, researchers must maintain meticulous records and adopt procedures that support the ethical integrity and rigor of the research (Brittain et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). I developed a working relationship with the participants through ethical integrity and demonstrated the rigor of the research. For ethical integrity, I maintained an open and transparent attitude that won the trust of the participants and explained processes in place for protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. To demonstrate rigor, I provided them with the background of the study, communicated the value the study will add to the profession, followed an interview protocol, and conducted member checking. The researcher may encourage participants to be open and share experiences to enrich the research findings, as qualitative studies have been established as a credible method used to study participant experiences, behaviors, and views (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I encouraged the participants to ask questions to remove doubts or concerns. I also informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Participants' characteristics must align with the central research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I ensured participants for the study possessed characteristics that aligned with the overarching research question. I confirmed the eligibility of the research participants through their experience and competencies and extended an invitation to them to partake in the study through email.

Research Method and Design

For this qualitative study, I used the multiple case study design. Qualitative researchers focus on a contemporary business problem driven by data collected from participants in the phenomenon's natural setting (Yin, 2018). In the study, I used the multiple case study design. Researchers that conduct multiple case design provide a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study from different sources, unlike the single case study, which is less complex with a homogenous sample (Yin, 2018).

Research Method

I used the qualitative research method for the study. The three primary research methods are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method (Zoellner & Harris, 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to explore the phenomenon under study in greater depth in its natural setting (Harrison et al., 2017). I selected the qualitative research method to gain insights into a phenomenon, which in the study is the managerial strategies used to reduce employee occupational stress.

The quantitative research method is characterized by reliance on statistical techniques to examine variables' characteristics or relationships (Yin, 2018). The quantitative research method was not chosen because quantitative researchers test the

relationship among variables, which is not the purpose of the study. The mixed method, which is a quasi-simultaneous qualitative and quantitative approach, is not suitable for exploratory research rooted in constructivist epistemology because the mixed method includes a quantitative aspect analysis (Wilkinson & Staley, 2019). I selected the qualitative method because the research was aimed to gain insights into the phenomenon of strategies that managers use to reduce employee occupational stress.

Research Design

Possible designs for conducting qualitative research studies are case study, ethnography, and phenomenology (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used the multiple case study for the study. Case study research comes from an interpretive paradigm and is the preferred strategy when *how*, *what*, or *why* questions are being posed (Alsharari & Al-Shboul, 2019). Researchers make use of the case study to thoroughly investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its environment in a real-life context (Roberts et al., 2019). Using the multiple case study design, I explored strategies that managers use to reduce employee occupational stress.

Ethnography is an approach for studying systems through prolonged engagement with a community to capture participant perspectives (Canevacci, 2017). My intention was not to research cultural systems but to research managerial behaviors; therefore, ethnography is not a preferred design. Phenomenological researchers explore lived experiences to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is a form of interpretivism (Korcuska & Flynn, 2018). My research was not about exploring

lived experiences, but to study a phenomenon within its environment; therefore, phenomenology was not chosen.

Data were collected through interviewing the purposefully selected participants. The study provided insights into the techniques managers use to reduce employee occupational stress. Data saturation occurs when participants provide no additional or new information, which signals the end of the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Qualitative researchers must interview participants, collect data, and determine whether responses repeat or present new information (Yin, 2018). I ensured data saturation by further questioning the participants until doing so yielded no new information or theme. I carried out member checking in data analysis to decide when no new themes or data emanate. All interviews were conducted through the Zoom videoconferencing platform (https://zoom.us) at the times agreed to by the participants.

Population and Sampling

The study's population consisted of three managers in the oil and gas industry who had previously developed strategies to reduce employee occupational stress. Participant experience and viewpoints lead to a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I used purposeful sampling for the study. Purposeful sampling ensures that participants have the appropriate range of competence and skillsets to answer questions related to the overarching research question (O'Cathain et al., 2016). I selected purposeful sampling for the study because it allowed me to recruit participants who met the established participating criteria, which are that participants (a) have been managers in an oil and gas company for 5 years and (b) have

previously used strategies for reducing employee occupational stress. I confirmed the eligibility of the research participants through their experience and competencies.

For qualitative research, the smallest acceptable sample size is one, as the most critical element is the depth of understanding of the phenomenon under study (Boddy, 2016). Too many participants in a qualitative study can reduce the effectiveness of research (Ames et al., 2019). I purposefully selected three managers with the appropriate skills, knowledge, and competencies with a proven history of implementing strategies to reduce employee occupational stress.

I conducted interviews through Zoom calls at agreed times when participants were comfortable. To reduce disruptions and interference, participants choose interview times (Yin, 2018). Allowing participants to choose interview times ensures they choose times that are convenient for them to freely express themselves. Zoom interviews were preferred as they eliminated travel costs and could easily be recorded. Technology allows for the replication of face-to-face interviews through virtual means while allowing for the comfort and convenience of participants (Leung, 2015).

Ethical Research

As the researcher, I used an informed consent form, which contains information regarding the study's background, procedures, benefits, risks, incentives, data privacy, and participants' rights to withdraw. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, I used an alphanumeric code such as RP1, RP2, and so on to identify the different participants. Confidentiality means that the research participants cannot be identifiable by others

external to the research process (Ngozwana, 2018). I also answered any questions the participants had about the study.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without being subjected to any form of penalty. Human consent in research is voluntary without any penalty for withdrawing from the study (Capron, 2018; Ngozwana, 2018). Participants could withdraw from the study by informing me through a telephone call or email without stating the reason for withdrawing from the study. Qualitative researchers are faced with the ethical challenges of preserving the confidentiality of research participants (Ngozwana, 2018). Participation in the research was voluntary without any form of incentives provided to the research participants. Provision of financial incentives can lead to undue inducement of research participants (Wolf et al., 2018). I applied the guidelines of *The Belmont Report* to protect the research participants. *The Belmont Report* (NCPHS, 1979) contains a description of the ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human subjects in research, specifically, respect for participants, beneficence, and justice. As the researcher, I treated the research participants with respect and protected the confidentiality of the participants.

To ensure that the research complied with ethical standards, I obtained permission from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB) before contacting the participants and collecting any data (Walden University, 2022). I emailed a letter to participants who met the requirements to partake in the study. The managers replied to the email by stating *I consent* before data collection began. The participants'

acknowledgment of the consent form is important to show no coercion existed to participate in the study (Reid et al., 2018).

The researcher is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of research participants and participating organizations (Ngozwana, 2018). To protect confidentiality, I used a dedicated hard drive to maintain participant data and store the hard drive in a safe and fire-proof cabinet for 5 years. I will store all the archival company data in a secure location and be the only individual with access to those documents. After 5 years, I will destroy all the data linked with the doctoral study on the hard drive and archival company data stored in the secured location. The IRB approval number for this study is 02-07-22-0600978.

Data Collection Instruments

I functioned as the primary data collection instrument for this study. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Hjelle et al., 2018). Researchers use interviews to explore the phenomenon under study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). In this multiple case study, I conducted semistructured Zoom interviews with each participant and ask eight open-ended questions to explore strategies that managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress. The use of semistructured interviews can lead to new perspectives, concepts, and themes (Roberts et al., 2019). In addition to the semistructured interviews, after the interview I accessed the companies' archival documents such as employee handbooks, companies' website information, occupational health statistics, and health and safety records. I conducted methodological triangulation on the multiple data sources to converge the research findings and attain

data saturation. Researchers use multiple data sources to obtain different insights about the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018). To reduce bias and enhance the reliability and validity of the study, I conducted member checking. Member checking is an iterative process used to verify the accuracy of data by allowing the participants to verify the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the collected data (Naidu & Prose, 2018). After transcribing the interview, I provided each participant with my interpretation of the transcription and ask them to verify the accuracy of my interpretation. I used email as the method to conduct member checking after the initial interviews with the participants.

An interview protocol improves the effectiveness of the interview process by ensuring comprehensive information is obtained in a systematic and consistent manner (Yeong et al., 2018). I followed an interview protocol to ensure consistency in the interview process by asking the research participants the same questions. I sought the consent of the participants to record the interviews. I took notes during the interview process. A case study researcher uses semistructured interviews, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (Roberts et al., 2019).

Data Collection Technique

I carried out data collection after obtaining Walden University's IRB approval to proceed with data collection. I conducted semistructured Zoom interviews using an interview protocol to explore strategies managers in the oil and gas industry can implement to reduce employee occupational stress. Semistructured interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (Roberts et al., 2019). The

interview protocol guides the researcher in conducting the interview to maintain

consistency (Yin, 2018). I administered eight open-ended interview questions to the

participants. I scheduled interviews with participants by agreeing and confirming the date

and time of the Zoom calls. Furthermore, I obtained the participants' consent, and I

informed the participants I would record the interview to aid in transcribing the interview.

I used my mobile phone to record the interviews, while I took notes during the interview.

Yin (2018) advised researchers to take notes during the interview process. To reduce bias

and add validity to the research, I carried out member checking to confirm the accuracy

of my interpretation of the transcription process.

The participants' answers to the interview questions helped me explore strategies

managers used to reduce employee occupational stress. A semistructured interview

allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (Roberts et al., 2019).

The advantages of the semistructured interview technique are that it (a) allows a

comprehensive summary of events, (b) allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific

phenomenon, (c) helps to understand a phenomenon through meanings that people assign

to them, (d) allows the participants to communicate freely in their own words about their

experiences, and (e) allows the researcher to follow an interview protocol (Lass et al.,

2018; Roberts et al., 2019). The disadvantages of the semistructured interview technique

are that it (a) can be time-consuming and laborious (b) may be prone to researcher bias,

and (c) may involve a cost to complete the data collection process (Roberts et al., 2019).

I also reviewed company archival documents such as the employee handbook,

website information, occupational health statistics, and health and safety records after the

interview. The review of archival company documents has the following advantages: (a) data are collected in the phenomenon's natural setting, (b) data are stored other than for academic research purposes, and (c) the phenomenon is examined in an ethical manner (Heng et al., 2018). The disadvantages of reviewing company archival documents are issues around transparency, because they are internally generated and difficulty in accessing company archival data by outsiders (Heng et al., 2018).

Member checking is a quality control process to verify the accuracy of data by allowing the participants to verify the researcher's understanding and interpretation of participants' answers to interview questions (Naidu & Prose, 2018). Cross-checking researcher's interpretation of transcribed interview data with participants promotes the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study. I carried out member checking to verify the accuracy of my interpretations of participants' answers to interview questions. Member checking adds validity to the research and establishes more equitable relationships between the researcher and the participants (Brear, 2019).

Data Organization Technique

I filed all collected data in a dedicated hard drive to ensure no loss or compromise of collected data. The researcher should safely preserve and maintain all the recorded interviews, research logs, and reflective journals as part of the data storage process (Heng et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). I stored all the archival company data in a secured location, and I will be the only individual with access to those documents. I kept a log of the interview process to track the interview process and insights gained, and it will be correctly labeled. Yin (2018) advised researchers to correctly label and categorize interview notes. To

ensure the confidentiality of participants, I used an alphanumeric code, such as RP1, RP2, and so on, for the different participants. I used Microsoft Word and Excel spreadsheets to identify emerging themes and patterns.

I electronically saved and categorized the collected data for ease of reference. The use of data analysis software helps the researcher to quickly access and search data more effectively (Yin, 2018). I stored all the transcribed interview data along the different themes. I stored all collected data on my computer and saved a backup in a dedicated hard drive. To avoid unauthorized access to the research data, I set a password on the laptop and hard drive and safely stored them in a secure location. All research data will be securely stored and destroyed after 5 years after completion of the study.

Data Analysis

I carried out data analysis using MS Excel and NVivo (Version 11) software. I transferred all the collected interview data into MS Excel and NVivo for data analysis. Methodological triangulation is the simultaneous use of multiple data sources to yield the same answer (Heesen et al., 2019). Researchers analyze data to reveal themes and emerging conclusions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed archival company documents to identify emerging themes. Multiple data sources provide different insights about the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018). I carried out methodological triangulation to converge the research findings from multiple data sources. I applied methodological triangulation by conducting semistructured interviews with managers in the oil and gas industry and reviewed

archival company documents relating to stress and stress-related illnesses. Methodological triangulation adds credibility to the research (Yin, 2018).

I coded the data on MS Excel using a coding strategy to identify emerging themes. A properly executed data analysis provides comprehensive answers to research questions (Zoellner & Harris, 2017). I carried out data analysis using the five steps outlined by Yin (2018): (a) gathering data, (b) evaluating data, (c) comprehending the data, (d) identifying data usage, and (e) concluding the data. I carried out data gathering through conducting semistructured interviews and the review of archival company documents. I evaluated the gathered data using MS Excel and NVivo (Version 11) software for the emergence of themes. The identified themes were checked against the conceptual framework for alignment. As part of data analysis, I carried out methodological triangulation to validate the collected data from multiple sources to promote cross-comparison of results.

The purpose of data analysis was to identify themes that apply to the overarching research question of this qualitative multiple case study. Data analysis is critical to the qualitative research as meanings emerge from the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Interviews are the most standard forms of data collection in the phenomenon's natural setting (Varpio et al., 2017). My research objective was to identify themes and patterns drawn from the participants' response to the interview questions. I recorded interviews using my mobile phone recorder, transcribed all collected interview data and applied member checking to validate the interview process. I transferred the transcribed data from the interviews to MS Excel and NVivo (Version 11) software to identify any

emerging themes. Emerging themes from the interview data become the categories for analysis (Roberts et al., 2019). The conceptual framework for the research was Giga et al.'s (2003) SMI framework. I compared the emerging themes with the Giga et al.'s SMI framework and current research to identify strategies managers can implement to reduce employee occupational stress

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the research process (Leung, 2015). To ensure the consistency of this research, I followed an interview protocol. An interview protocol improves the effectiveness of the interview process by ensuring comprehensive information is obtained in a systematic and consistent manner (Yeong et al., 2018). I documented the data collection process and adapted my research methodology to the standard process for carrying out a qualitative case study. The use of an interview protocol assures the reliability of a study (Yin, 2018). Ensuring research reliability authenticates the research results as being valid (Yin, 2018). I enhanced the study's reliability by carrying out interview transcription, interpretation of interview transcripts, member checking, and methodological triangulation to converge the research findings.

Dependability

Research dependability refers to the consistency of research data when subjected to similar conditions (Reid et al., 2018). To ensure dependability, I followed an interview protocol to ensure research consistency and replicability. For a research study to be

considered reliable, the study should be dependable and consistent (Leung, 2015). A case

study protocol allows a researcher to be focused (Yin, 2018). For consistency and focus, I

used an identical process to conduct semistructured interviews, transcribed the interview

data, interpreted the transcribed data, and carried out member checking to obtain

information on strategies managers can explore to reduce employee occupational stress.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research refers to the suitability of the research process,

tools, and data (Leung, 2015). A case study approach was chosen for this research due to

its exploratory nature. In alignment with a case study design, I followed the case study

protocol for sample selection, data collection, interpretation, and data analysis to ensure

research validity and credibility. I carried out member checking to confirm the veracity of

collected information and to eliminate researcher bias. Methodological triangulation was

also carried out to converge the research findings from multiple data sources.

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the believability of the research (Ngozwana, 2018). To

achieve credibility, I conducted member checking to ensure research accuracy and to

eliminate researcher bias. Member checking improves the credibility of the research

process (Brear, 2019). I used multiple data sources, hence, I carried out methodological

triangulation to converge the research findings.

Transferability

Transferability can be defined as the generalizability of the research (Leung,

2015). Generalizability refers to the extent to which research findings are transferable to

different sectors, context, or environment (Yin, 2018). I ensured research quality in this study by purposefully selecting the research participants and ensuring only participants with the appropriate competencies were selected to partake in this study. In addition, I articulated my methodology and carried out a detailed interview process developed in alignment with the conceptual framework. The researcher should explain the way their research is transferable to another environment and sector (Varpio et al., 2017). By providing an accurate description of my methodology, future researchers can determine the transferability of this research study to their needs.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the validation that the research findings are the participants' responses and not the researcher's interpretation (Nemat□Shahrbabaki et al., 2018). To ensure confirmability, I transcribed the interviews, interpreted the transcribed interviews, and carried out member checking. Member checking is an iterative process used to verify the accuracy of data by allowing the participants to verify the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the collected data (Naidu & Prose, 2018).

Data Saturation

Data saturation occurs when participants provide no additional or new information, which signals the end of the interview process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure data saturation, I continued interviewing participants until no new information emerged or until it started to repeat. The sample size needed to achieve data saturation varies due to the paradigm in which the research is taking place and ranges from a minimum of one participant to a maximum of thirty (Boddy, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015).

For this research, I chose three participants and continued to interview them until no new information emerged.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I provided a detailed description of the objective of the study, stated the purpose of the study, explained the role of the researcher, the research method and design, participants, population and sampling, and ethical research. I also discussed data collection instruments, data organization, data analysis techniques, and the study's reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the research findings, discuss applications to professional practice and implications for social change. I make recommendations for action, highlight areas for future research, and provide personal reflections and study conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress. The data were collected from manager interviews and the review of archival company documents. The research participants included three managers from three different oil and gas companies in Nigeria who have previously developed strategies for reducing employee occupational stress. I obtained secondary data from the companies' archival documents, such as companies' website information, employee handbooks, occupational health statistics, health and safety records, field notes, and observation logs.

Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions, organizational documentation, and thematic analysis, I identified three themes: (a) quality work–life balance; (b) employee competence, training, and development; and (c) corporate communication. By relating these findings to the SMI framework, I developed a better understanding of the strategies managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative multiple case study was, what strategies do managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress? I conducted semistructured Zoom interviews to gain insights on strategies used by three managers from three different oil and gas companies in Nigeria to reduce employee occupational stress. I used RP1, RP2, and RP3 to denote the three participants for confidentiality purposes. In addition to the semistructured interviews, I reviewed archival company

information, such as evidence from the companies' websites on stress management, and

conducted a review of the current literature on stress management initiatives. In the

following subsections, I will present the three themes that emerged from the thematic

analysis of participants' responses to the interview questions and archival document

review (see Table 1).

Table 1

Strategies Managers Applied to Reduce Employee Occupational Stress (N = 3)

SMI Strategy	Percentage of use by managers
Quality work–life balance	100%
Employee competence, training, and development	100%
Corporate communication	100%

Theme 1: Quality Work–life Balance

The first theme that emerged from the thematic analysis was quality work–life

balance, which involves employees effectively balancing their work and life

commitments. Quality work–life balance improves the health and wellbeing of

employees. All the participants agreed to implementing quality work–life balance

initiatives as a means of reducing employee occupational stress and improving

performance. Managers implementing quality work–life balance initiatives develop a

work environment where employees are committed and deliver improved performance

(Aruldoss et al., 2021; Foy et al., 2019).

All study participants observed improved job performance from employees

implementing quality work–life balance. RP1 emphasized the importance of team-

building sessions as a means of reducing workplace stress and improving performance.

RP1 stated, "regular team bonding sessions are encouraged by the company where employees unwind and let out steam." These sessions provided a counterbalance to work demands and reduced stress in employees. RP1 also stated that "employees participate in variety nights and informal company competitions where employees from different workstreams and organizations in the conglomerate mix, blend and interact in an informal setting." RP2 stated, "the employee performance process should not only be used to evaluate employee, determine promotion and remuneration, it should also be used to incorporate work–life balance initiatives and strategies to reduce employee stress." RP2 further asserted that "goals should be set on how employees can maintain a healthy work–life balance and employees should be measured against it during performance appraisal." RP3 stated, "my company encourages employees to partake in flexible working where we work in the office for 3 days and work from home for the rest of the week." Workplace stress can be caused by the imbalance in the management of the interface between work and life (Hammond et al., 2020). Workplace stress can be reduced through the implementation of quality work–life balance initiatives. Managers encouraging quality work–life balance develop a work culture of committed and motivated employees.

All participant managers encouraged employees to participate in work–life balance initiatives and the response had been outstanding. As evident on the three different companies' websites, the organizations encouraged employees to partake in work–life balance initiatives. RP1 stated, "employees responded well to the work–life balance initiatives and the response has been encouraging." RP1 further stated that

"employees look forward to the work–life balance initiatives." RP2 stated that "there were inferential ways to measure performance improvement, for example, the countenance of employees improved." RP2 noticed improved employee commitment from employees participating in work–life balance initiatives. RP2 further stated, "other ways of measuring employees' response were an increase in productivity levels, employees attending meetings regularly, and employees meeting deadlines compared to previously." RP3 recalled an event that led to the implementation of work–life balance initiatives. RP3 stated, "most of the work–life balance initiatives came on the back of the pandemic and were well received by the employees." Employees participating in work–life balance initiatives were better focused, delivered better results, and took care of their families.

The implementation of quality work–life balance enables employees to revitalize. Soroya et al. (2022) asserted that quality work–life balance improves employees' wellbeing and job performance. Wang et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of managing work overload as a means of reducing employees' anxiety that causes workplace stress. RP1 stated that "stressed employees were given days off to refresh and to get revigorated." RP1 further stated, "there is a forum in the office where employees converge to discuss nonwork-related issues as a means to unwind." RP2 stated, "as a strong believer of quality work–life balance, I am responsible for the wellbeing of my employees." RP2 posited, "I encourage team-building activities where we celebrate successes with the rest of the team." RP2 concluded by saying the following: "I encourage my subordinates to get involved in non-work-related activities, such as

pursuing their hobbies because a well-rested employee is a productive employee." RP3

stated, "flexible working enabled employees to take better care of their families as they

spent 40% of their work time working from home." In this study, I learned about the

importance of quality work–life balance as a strategy to reduce employee occupational

stress and improve employee performance. In this study, all three managers interviewed

affirmed the implementation of quality work–life balance as a strategy to reduce

employee occupational stress.

From the review of the three organizations' websites and publicly available

resources, all participant managers encouraged employees to partake in work–life balance

programs. In the review of RP1's employee handbook and media release, the

organization arranges a company-wide, intra-group sports competition where employees

compete informally amongst themselves and interact unofficially. These competitions

serve as a platform for promoting team bonding and strengthening the spirit of enterprise

across the organization. In addition, RP1's organization sponsors several work–life

balance initiatives, such as marathons and retreats for employees and their families.

RP2's corporate sustainability report illustrated methods to value the balance between

work and employees' personal lives. The organization promotes quality work–life

balance initiatives by promoting its mental health program and launching an employee

assistance program. The employee assistance program provides mental health and

wellness resources, a suite of wellness programs, and a new resilience application. In

addition, RP2's organization supports initiatives that help improve physical condition and

the well-being of its employees. From a review of RP2's corporate sustainability report,

the organization established a sports committee, which organizes events that encourage regular physical activity for employees and family members. On RP3's organization's website, a review of its corporate governance report showed that the organization arranges yearly retreats outside the office where employees and their families participate in different fun activities. In addition, RP3's organization sponsors sporting events where employees, their families, and other members of the community participate and compete in an informal setting. These work–life balance initiatives help to improve the health, wellbeing, and performance of employees.

Theme 1, quality work–life balance, aligns with Giga et. al.'s (2003) SMI framework used as the conceptual framework for this study. According to Giga et al., relaxation enables employees to be in control of their emotional behaviors. Individuals in control of their emotional behaviors apply appropriate stress-coping behaviors. Quality work–life balance improves the work environment and enhances workers' satisfaction (Aruldoss et al., 2021). The participants acknowledged the importance of quality work–life balance in improving employee commitment and job satisfaction, which leads to improved performance. Organizations that implement work–life strategies and social support reduce workplace stress, improve quality of life for employees, and enhance performance (Foy et al., 2019). Researchers support the implementation of quality work–life balance initiatives in organizations, as they contend that these initiatives improve job safety, employee satisfaction, and career opportunities (Aruldoss et al., 2021). Relaxed employees perform better, deliver on their job tasks, and are in control of their work–life interface.

Theme 2: Employee Competence, Training, and Development

The second theme that emerged from the thematic analysis was employee competence, training, and development. Employee competence, training and development are important for the effective delivery of job tasks by employees. Employees should be trained to equip them with the needed resources to perform their jobs (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). During the interview, all participants attested to the importance of implementing strategies to improve employees' competence, training, and development to reduce employee occupational stress. RP1 stated, "employees from across the organization mix and blend, this is a means of reducing employee occupational stress and lateral learning across the organization." RP2 stated, "I match the competence of my employees to the tasks I give to them." RP2 further posited "As a manager, I know the competence of my employees and I mentor them to improve their competence." RP2 further asserted, "I simplify work as a means of reducing employee occupational stress in my subordinates." RP2 affirmed, "I ensure my employees work on tasks that add value to the organization to improve their competence and confidence." RP3 stated, "employees should be trained and given the resources to carry out their jobs." RP3 further stated, "when employees do not have the right tools to do their jobs, stress sets in." Competent employees who are trained and have the relevant tools and resources perform their jobs effectively and encounter reduced workplace stress.

Having competent employees who are regularly trained is an advantage for organizations. Ali et al. (2019) asserted the proactive management of organizational knowledge-sharing initiatives as a source of competitive advantage for organizations,

whereas Archer-Brown and Kietzmann (2018) highlighted the importance of

organizational innovation in the enhancement of the competitive edge of organizations

and the development of sustainable business operations. Employees' competence should

be improved through training and development programs. RP1, in expressing his belief in

employee development, stated, "there is a need for organizations to employ competent

hands." RP1 commented on the value of organizational agility strengthened by

appropriate employee development, saying, "in a bid for organizations to reduce cost,

they downsize, and employees are overloaded with work, so it is essential for

organizations to employ the right number of staff with the right experience to reduce

work overload." RP1 recommended for "organizations to employ the right number of

staff with the right experience to reduce work overload." RP3 added, "organizations need

adequate and committed manpower to carry out job tasks." Competent and trained

employees effectively discharge their job tasks and preserve the competitive advantage of

the organization.

For business continuity, organizations should train employees and have

succession plan in place. Training empowers employees to effectively discharge their job

tasks. Training is a positive force that further enables employees to meet their work goals

(Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). In addition, managers should ensure there is a succession

plan in place to prevent gaps in the organization when staff movement takes place. All

the participants highlighted the importance of employee training, mentorship, and

empowerment." RP3 posited "the importance of a strong succession planning in place so

that some individuals are not overworked." RP3 further stated, "with a strong succession

plan, employees can take time off work to refresh, recharge, and address exhaustion and their job will not suffer as other employees can do their jobs." Employees' competence should be improved through training and development, and there should be a succession plan in place to ensure business continuity.

From the review of the three organizations' websites and publicly available resources, all organizations have strategies for improving employees' competence through training and development. RP1's organization affirms its commitment to human capital development by operating a career development program. A review of RP1's press release showed that the organization also boosts employee competence through the building of learning and development centers and the deployment of strategies to drive sustained human capital development and transformation. According to RP2's corporate sustainability report, the organization partnered with global organizations for the training and development of its employees. The organization developed a virtual training platform for employees in response to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In addition, RP2's organization ensures the selection of competent and qualified employees based on their qualifications, training, and experience. RP3's organization organizes periodic training for its employees. A review of RP3's corporate governance report showed that the organization also contributes to improving employees' competence by sponsoring scholarships, training, and knowledge transfer. These organizational workplace training and development programs help to improve the competence and performance of employees.

Theme 2, employee competence, training, and development, also relates to the conceptual framework for this study, Giga et al.'s (2003) SMI framework. Giga et al. recommended implementing training and education programs as a means of updating employee skills and reducing workplace stress. Employees need to be equipped with the proper training, tools, and resources to effectively carry out their work goals (Amor et al., 2020). All the participants highlighted how incompetence and lack of training and development can lead to job ambiguity, which is a source of workplace stress. Job ambiguity drains employees and leads to employee occupational stress (Naoum et al., 2018). Training and development improve the competence of employees and enables them to effectively carry out their work goals (Dartey-Baah et al., 2020). Having adequately trained employees can be a competitive advantage for organizations. Managers are enjoined to improve employee competence through training and development programs in an environment of support and collaboration for improved organizational performance.

Theme 3: Corporate Communication

The third theme that emerged from the thematic analysis was corporate communication. Organizations communicate their activities through an effective corporate communication strategy (Weder et al., 2019). Effective corporate communication is essential in the dissemination of organizational goals and vision. Employees feel empowered when they are updated about organizational goals and vision. Empowering employees can lead to increased job commitment and motivation (Rinfret et al., 2020). Managers are enjoined to regularly update employees about updates in the

organizational goals as ambiguity and communication gaps can lead to stress in employees. During the interviews, all the managers attested to the importance of communication in reducing employee occupational stress. All the participants agreed that they emphasized communication as a means of reducing employee occupational stress.

Communicating organizational goals and vision to the whole organization can be seen as a long-term enhancement strategy. Organizational learning and innovation can be enhanced through the sharing of information (Ohene-Asare et al., 2018). Corporate information sharing updates employees about long term strategy of the organization. RP2 asserted, "as a manager, I am very clear about goals and company vision. If goals are not clear, employees get confused and it causes stress." RP2 affirmed, "I carry employees along on organizational goals and vision, thereby reducing ambiguity in my team." Effective corporate communication disseminates appropriate information to employees about organizational goals and vision, thereby reducing ambiguity that causes workplace stress.

There is the need for organizations to have corporate communication teams that disseminate information throughout the organization without ambiguity. Organizations should clearly communicate corporate social responsibility initiatives (Weder et al., 2019). RP1 stated, "there is a corporate communication team that updates employees in the organization using the right terms, pictures, and terminologies to communicate." RP1 further stated, "the corporate communication team makes use of appealing graphics and pictures to win the hearts and minds of employees." RP3 stated, "Corporate communication was championed and pushed by HR." RP3 further stated, "emails were

sent to employees communicating the initiatives." RP3 concluded by saying, "HODs had more individual sessions with employees, and they clarified issues and boundary conditions with employees." An effective corporate communication strategy is vital as it enables organizations to regularly update employees about organizational goals and vision in an open and transparent manner.

From the review of the three organizations' websites and publicly available resources, all organizations engaged in corporate communication strategies. From a review of RP1's press releases, the organization has a corporate communication team that oversees the organization's media and public relations. In addition, the organization emphasizes the importance of corporate communication in enhancing effective collaboration and sustainable development. RP2's organization has a corporate communication team that engages with the different stakeholders. The corporate communication team attempts to inspire and inform the workforce and raises internal and external awareness of the organization's activities. From a review of online reports and press releases, the corporate communication team engages with government, local communities, and other stakeholders to understand and work to address significant issues in areas where the organization operates. From a review of RP3's corporate governance report, the organization has a corporate communication team that sends messages and updates employees. The organization encourages open communication, proactiveness, meaningful participation of all stakeholders, and the timely resolution of issues. In addition, the organization recognizes and encourages effective and honest

communication. These corporate communication strategies help to encourage shared vision and reduce ambiguity, which can lead to employee occupational stress.

Theme 3, corporate communication, aligns with Giga et al.'s (2003) SMI framework used as the conceptual framework for this study. Giga et al. recommended communication as a means of managing employee insecurity and improving organizational effectiveness. Corporate communication is a means of communicating organizational goals and vision to the organization. Organizational goals and vision need to be effectively communicated to the organization to prevent ambiguity, which can lead to workplace stress. Managers are enjoined to build communication strategies in projects as a means of managing stress in the workplace, as ambiguity in communication and information sharing was identified as a source of stress for employees (Ajayi et al., 2019). Effective corporate communication strategy is an organizational-level intervention to stress management (Giga et al., 2003).

Applications to Professional Practice

Identifying the strategies that managers use to manage employee occupational stress is crucial to improve employee performance. Estimates of occupational stress-related costs in Hong Kong were between $614 million and $905.3 million per annum (Siu et al., 2020). Workplace stress has a negative impact on organization as it affects the health and wellbeing of employees and leads to reduced efficiency (Foy et al., 2019). This decline in performance requires managers in oil and gas companies to implement strategies to reduce employee occupational stress. This study's findings could

significantly contribute to stress reduction and performance improvement arising from the implementation of stress reduction strategies by managers in the oil and gas industry.

Based on the findings of my research, managers in oil and gas companies could reduce employee occupational stress and improve organizational performance by implementing three strategies, namely: (a) achieving quality work–life balance; (b) improving employee competence, training, and development; and (c) improving corporate communication. The first strategy, implementing quality work–life balance, is important as it enables employees to manage the interface between work and life, thereby leading to employee focus and improved performance. The second strategy, employee competence, training, and development, is critical as employees are the most important asset in an organization. Hence, the need to improve their competence through training and development programs as a means of achieving organizational goals. The third strategy, effective corporate communication strategy, ensures that organizational goals and vision are effectively communicated to employees, including updates related to future organizational plans and projects.

By implementing these stress-reduction strategies, managers in oil and gas companies could reduce employee occupational stress and improve the performance of organizations. Ali et al. (2019) asserted that the proactive management of organizational knowledge-sharing initiatives can be a source of competitive advantage for organizations. Therefore, the results of this research study may add to the body of knowledge on strategies managers in oil and gas companies can use to reduce employee occupational stress to improve organizational performance.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study may significantly contribute to positive social change by providing managers with the strategies to manage employee occupational stress, thereby improving the health, wellbeing, and performance of employees. Additional implications include reducing the negative effect of employee occupational stress on healthcare costs and emotional outbursts that lead to vandalism, bullying, reduced social contact, and depression. Organizations can benefit in the form of improved productivity that may lead to increased profitability (Giga et al., 2003), thereby generating increased revenue, which translates into an increased tax base for local communities, which could be used to develop parks and social programs for benefiting citizens. Furthermore, reduced employee occupational stress translates into increased organizational profitability, which can lead to organizations performing corporate social responsibility projects that positively benefit society (Weder et al., 2019).

Managers in the oil and gas industry implementing these stress-reduction strategies of (a) quality work–life balance; (b) employee competence, training, and development; and (c) corporate communication may preserve the health and wellbeing of employees and meet organizational goals. By improving organizational productivity that could lead to profitability, managers can implement sustainable projects in fulfillment of their corporate social responsibility commitments to the host communities where they operate. Such projects can be used for sponsoring medical outreaches and sporting competitions; building of hospitals, schools, and civic centers; and awarding scholarships to deserving citizens. By expanding the business, the organization could contribute to

positive social change by creating employment opportunities for members of society. Therefore, this study may help improve the health and wellbeing of employees, while enabling managers of oil and gas companies to positively impact the society through the implementation of projects in the society arising from improved organizational performance that may lead to increased profitability, emanating from the reduction of employee occupational stress.

Recommendations for Action

Research on stress-reduction strategies in the Nigerian oil and gas industry is critical as oil and gas is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy (Olujobi, 2021). Employee occupational stress negatively affects employees' health and wellbeing, performance, and organizational productivity. Managers can reduce employees' anxiety caused by work overload through the implementation of work–life balance initiatives (Wang et al., 2022). Through the findings of this research, I highlighted areas that managers of oil and gas companies should implement to manage the negative effects of employee occupational stress and improve organizational performance and productivity.

My first recommendation is that managers of oil and gas companies implement quality work–life balance initiatives and encourage employees to participate in these programs. Aruldoss et al. (2021) stressed the importance of quality work–life balance initiatives in the improvement of organizational effectiveness. Second, I recommend that managers in the oil and gas industry improve employees' competence through training and development programs. Managers should aspire to employ competent employees and put programs in place to improve and update their competence through participation in

training and development programs. Human capital can be enhanced through training and development (Archer-Brown & Kietzmann, 2018), thereby reducing job ambiguity, which is a workplace stressor (Naoum et al., 2018). The reduction of workplace stress leads to improved employee health, wellbeing, and performance. Finally, I recommend that managers in oil and gas companies collaborate with human resources and the corporate communication team in the organization to regularly share corporate information and organizational goals, vision, and aspirations throughout the organization. Huettermann and Bruch (2019) suggested that managers should incorporate human resources in taking effective action to strengthen employees' ability, motivation, engagement, and opportunity. With the implementation of these strategies, managers in the oil and gas companies can reduce workplace stress and improve organizational performance. I will disseminate this study's result to interested stakeholders through presentation at conferences, industry events, seminars, publications in academic journals on stress management, business journals, lateral learning to colleagues, and my professional network.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this qualitative multiple case study, I aimed to explore strategies managers in the oil and gas industry use to reduce employee occupational stress. To better recommend future research, I examined the study's limitations. The first limitation of this study was the small sample size of three managers from three oil and gas companies located in Nigeria. Irrespective of sample size, the depth of understanding is critical in qualitative research (Boddy, 2016). The themes might be different if the sample size was increased.

In addition, future researchers can extend this study to other industrial sectors aside from the oil and gas industry. Therefore, I recommend future research with a larger sample size and in other industrial sectors aside from the oil and gas industry.

Another limitation identified in pursuing this research was participants' concerns in revealing sensitive, stress-related health information. To mitigate this limitation in future research, awareness can be conducted to enlighten and sensitize members of organizations about the benefits derivable from transparency in research. Managers should ensure fairness and transparency in managing the organization (Li et al., 2019; Maulik, 2017). Future research should be conducted across the whole organization and not targeted towards only managers. Therefore, I recommend future research should be conducted across various cadre of employees with an emphasis on research benefits and transparency. As a novice researcher, I possessed limited knowledge in conducting research and my interpretation might have been subjective (see Ngozwana, 2018). Consequently, I recommend that future research should include multiple experts with the role of assisting in data coding and analysis to mitigate subjectivity.

Reflections

I found the Walden University's Doctor of Business Administration Program challenging. I am particularly grateful for the support and encouragement I have received throughout the entire program from faculty and family members urging me to keep on. I encountered successes while I also faced some challenges. In retrospect, the challenges made me stronger and motivated me throughout the entire program.

I gained an in-depth understanding of the strategies managers apply to reduce employee occupational stress. My writing skills also improved. While conducting this multiple case study, I explored the strategies managers in the oil and gas industry use to reduce employee occupational stress. From the study findings, I learned that managers apply a suite of SMI strategies made up of achieving quality work–life balance; improving employee competence, training, and development; and improving corporate communication.

I learned that employees deliver better results when they can manage the interface between work and life. My new knowledge and understanding of the research problem has positively impacted me as I have incorporated some of these strategies in managing my subordinates to improve their work performance. In addition, I have acquired new knowledge, which has changed my perceptions and personal biases about workplace stress and the strategies used to implement to reduce employee occupational stress. I look forward to the future with optimism.

Conclusion

In fast-paced business environments, employees are subjected to increasing workplace stress. In this qualitative multiple case study, I used Giga et al.'s (2003) SMI framework to explore strategies to reduce employee occupational stress. Through the thematic analysis of collected data and review or archival documents, I found that managers in the oil and gas industry can preserve employees' health and wellbeing and improve their performance through the implementation of stress-reduction strategies, such as implementing quality work–life balance initiatives, improving employees'

competence through training and development, and using effective corporate

communication methods. These strategies may be helpful for managers to reduce

workplace stress and improve employee performance.

The three themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data and archival

document reviews were (a) quality work–life balance; (b) employee competence,

training, and development; and (c) corporate communication based on the strategies

implemented by the participating managers to reduce employee occupational stress.

Employees' performance improves when they can properly manage the interface between

work and family (Hammond et al., 2020). From the evidence of this research, applying

these strategies could improve employees' health and wellbeing, and improve

organizational performance.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

1. I will greet the participant and reintroduce myself once the Zoom call starts.

2. I will then go over the consent form to make sure the participant has read it and know their rights as a participant.

3. I will ensure the participant is ready and will begin audiotaping the interview, acknowledging the pseudonym given to the participant as well as the interview time.

4. I will begin asking the participant the eight interview questions, giving them time to answer, and ask any follow-up questions.

5. Once the interview is completed, I will set up a time for transcript review.

6. After the time for transcript review has been confirmed, I will thank the participant for participating in the interview.

Post-interview:

1. Carry out the transcription of collected data through NVivo.

2. Summarize the interview information.

3. Carry out member checking of the interview information.

4. Follow up and clarify interview with the participant.