



Impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture

WILLIAMS, Lewis Adegboyega

Available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/30855/>

A Sheffield Hallam University thesis

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Please visit <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/30855/> and <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html> for further details about copyright and re-use permissions.

Impact of Frequent Downsizing Exercises on Organisational Culture

**Lewis Adegboyega WILLIAMS,
22051752**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University and Business School Netherlands for the
Award of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA).

August 2021.

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University or other academic or professional organisation whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted has been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is approximately **58,200**.

Name	<i>Lewis Adegboyega WILLIAMS</i>
Date	<i>August 2021</i>
Award	<i>DBA</i>
Faculty	<i>Sheffield Business School</i>
Director(s) of Studies	<i>Professor John McAuley and Dr Sláva Kubátová</i>

What is the difference that makes a difference? – Richard J.
Bernstein (1986)

“There are no differences but differences of degree between
different degrees of difference and no difference.”

“A difference which makes no difference is no difference at all.”

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” –

William James (1842 - 1910)

Abstract

Organisational downsizing has been shown to produce mixed results, more negative than positive when managers of organisations pursue short-term economic effects aimed at improving their productivity or efficiency (Cascio, 2005) without considering its organisational culture. This requisite glue that keeps organisations together. Incidentally, there is no existing research focusing specifically on the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the all-important, continually emerging phenomenon called organisational culture, yet a range of studies have explored the core concepts of organisational culture and organisational downsizing. Hence, this study's primary theoretical focus relates to these currently established theories, extensively researched as conduits to expose their interactions and inter-relationships.

Consequently, this study explored the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the organisational culture of an international oil company operating in Nigeria, whose “cultural branding” had once been “people-oriented”. However, the organisation's attrition rate increased significantly when the company embarked on a series of “back-to-back” downsizing exercises. In addition, the sudden departure of some key staff members across the organisational strata created gaps that changed how things were done.

A qualitative, inductive, and interpretative approach was used with in-depth interviews of thirteen (13) organisation members as the primary data source between 2017 and 2019 (pre-Covid-19 years). The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using general thematic approaches. The hermeneutic phenomenology methodology permitted access to phenomena that are often subconscious and provided a means for interpreting participants' lived experiences.

Findings from the study indicate that frequent downsizing generates effects (such as uncertainties, increased workload, anxiety, inattentional blindness impeding safety culture, increased turnover intentions, loss of collective organisational pursuit, etc.) which negatively impact people in organisations. Consequently, the organisation's culture is affected, even to reputation loss and organisational death. While some themes generated were isolated and independently acting, others displayed traits of

interdependent actions that emphasised how their impact on organisational culture was exacerbated. Thus, the study produced a conceptual framework, which helps to explain how the themes interact to influence organisational culture significantly. The revelation of the depth of the impact is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge and management praxis as it helps managers of organisations to see the colossal associated social costs of frequent downsizing exercises and prevent them. This ground-breaking research thus serves as an inaugural effort in a possibly massive range of research aimed at closing the gap in the literature on the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture, especially in the Nigerian context.

Acknowledgements

“To Him who sits on the throne, God Almighty, be the Glory, Honour, Dominion and Majesty – Great things He hath done”. I thank God Almighty immensely for His Mercies, Grace and Help over my life, seeing me through this research journey. Thank you, Lord, for your encouragement and the finisher’s anointing poured upon me to bring the research journey to a close.

I also acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the great support and guidance from my Supervisor, Professor John McAuley, *Emeritus Professor of Organisation Development and Management*. His belief in me and the research subject made this thesis happen. I also appreciate the support of Dr Sláva Kubátová, who joined Prof McAuley in the fight to restore the research even when all hope seemed lost.

I also say a big ‘Thank You’ to the participants in this research. What would I have done without you? I could not have fully realised the research results without your contributions.

I thank my wife, Omolara, who may not fully appreciate how much help she was to me. Taking care of the home front and other things helped me to realise this course. And, of course, my three children, Toluwanimi, Temiloluwa and Tenidoluwa, who became Engineers during my research years. They also may not fully comprehend how wanting to set an example for them motivated me to finish the research.

To my mother, who instilled in me the desire for continuous education, I say another big ‘Thank You’. This inspiration also helped me to push through.

My cohorts in BSN are not left out for their influence on me while on this research journey. Special thanks to Emmanuel Aihevba for being an excellent sounding board for me.

Thanks to Pastor Tokunbo Omofade for his influence to overcome the inertia to start this programme.

<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u>	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	xii
List of Figures	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction to Research	1
1.0 Preamble	1
1.1 Personal Introduction	2
1.2 Context of the Study	4
1.3 Aim of the Study	7
1.4 Research Objectives	7
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.6 Proposed Research Methodology and Methods Summarized	8
1.7 Structure of the Thesis	9
1.8 Conclusions and Chapter Summary.....	10
Chapter 2: Initial Literature Review	12
2.0 Interest, Concepts and Definitions	12
2.1 My Pre-Understanding	13
2.1.1 Organisational Culture	14
2.1.2 Corporate Branding.....	16
2.1.3 Downsizing	18
2.2 Impacts on Organisations.....	18
2.2.1 Organisational Learning / Knowledge Management	18
2.2.2 Motivation and Employee Retention.....	19
2.2.3 Business Continuity	20
2.3 Conclusions and Chapter Summary	20
Chapter 3: The Research Design	23

3.0	Introduction.	23
3.1	Research philosophy	23
3.1.1	Positivist World View	24
3.1.2	The Social Constructivist World View.....	24
3.2	Ontology – The Nature of Being	26
3.3	Epistemology – How Knowledge is Shared.....	27
3.4	My Ontological and Epistemological Positions	27
3.5	Research Approach	28
3.6	Qualitative Strategies	29
3.6.1	Narrative research	29
3.6.2	Case studies	30
3.6.3	Ethnography	31
3.6.4	Phenomenological research	32
3.6.4.1	Descriptive phenomenology	33
3.6.4.2	Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenology	33
3.6.4.3	The Hermeneutic Circle	35
3.6.5	Grounded theory	37
3.6.6	Reflexivity	38
3.7	Methods (<i>In-Depth Interviews</i>).....	40
3.8	Role of the Researcher	41
3.9	Recruitment of Participants - Population and Sampling	42
3.10	Reporting Method	43
3.11	Research Ethics	43
3.11.1	Procedural Ethics	45
3.11.2	Situational Ethics	46
3.11.3	Relational Ethics	47
3.11.4	Exiting Ethics	47
3.12	Limitation of Study	48
3.12.1	Access to Senior Management Staff	48

3.12.2	Researchers' Experience and Influence	48
3.13	Research Risks	48
3.13.1	Access and Potential Safety Hazards Associated With Remote Locations	49
3.13.2	Sincerity of Participants	49
3.13.3	Participants' Comfort and Duration of Interview	49
3.14	Research Evaluation	49
3.14.1	Credibility	51
3.14.2	Transferability	51
3.14.3	Dependability	52
3.14.4	Confirmability	52
3.15	Conclusions and Chapter Summary.....	54
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings		55
4.0	Introduction	55
4.1	Data collection Process and Analysis	56
4.2	Perception of the Organisation (- Internal and External Image).....	61
4.2.1	Initial Career Outlook - What made the company attractive...	62
4.2.2	It's the Nature of Business.... Not Charity	65
4.3	People in the Organisation	66
4.3.1	Most Prized Asset or What?	66
4.3.2	Brain Drain - Experience, Organisational Memory (Knowledge) Retention and Mentorship.....	67
4.4	Organisational Culture - Company Brand and Image	70
4.4.1	Clear Understanding of Organisational Culture	70
4.4.2	The Company's (Goshen Gusher Energy) Organisational Culture	71
4.5	Concept of Downsizing - for Business Survival and Continuity	77
4.6	'Impact' of 'Frequent Downsizing' on 'Organisational Culture'.....	84
4.6.1	Leadership Impact	85

4.6.2	Loss of Organisational Culture	86
4.6.3	Loss of Reputation	88
4.6.4	Loss of Productivity	89
4.7	Impact of Frequency on Employees and Career (- Impact on Wellbeing and Career Outlook).....	90
4.7.1	Employee's Wellbeing (Physical, Psychological, Medical and Mental Health).....	90
4.7.2	Employee's Career Aspiration.....	100
4.8	Uncertainties - About the Future.....	107
4.9	Leadership Actions, Inactions or Reactions	112
4.9.1	Leadership Reaction and Communication.....	112
4.9.2	Shock to Leadership	117
4.10	Conclusions and Chapter Summary	118
Chapter 5: Discussions, Contribution to Praxis and Conclusions		119
5.0	Introduction	119
5.1	Discussion of Findings	120
5.2	The Organisation – It's all about People, At least, should be	121
5.2.1	Organisational Culture	122
5.2.2	Downsizing of the Organisation	123
5.3	Frequency of Downsizing - People come, People go.....	124
5.4	Impact of Frequent Downsizing Exercises on Organisational Culture	125
5.4.1	Organisational Performance	126
5.4.2	Uncertainty – Is this the last, or should we expect another? ..	127
5.4.3	Employee Psychology (Workforce Psychological, Medical and Mental Well-being)	129
5.4.4	Increased Workload - No longer how we do things	131
5.4.5	Impact on Safety Culture - Consequence of Anxiety Resulting in Inattentive Blindness	133

5.4.6	From Collective to Individual Pursuit - Loss of Focus and Concentration.....	137
5.4.7	Organisational Memory and Mentoring – Loss of Organisational Capacity.....	139
5.4.8	Turnover Intentions	142
5.4.9	Organisational Stories – The New Normal	148
5.4.10	Brand of the Organisation and Organisational Reputation ...	150
5.4.11	Organisational Climate and Impact of Leadership Actions...	152
5.4.12	Organisational Suicide or Death - Are these signs of The end?	155
5.4.13	Web of Interconnections of Frequent Downsizing Impacts	156
5.5	Limitations of Study and Recommendations for Future Studies.....	158
5.6	Contributions to Praxis	161
5.6.1	Action-Learning Roadmap for Implementation.....	163
5.7	Conclusions	166
5.8	The Aim, Purpose and Objectives of the Study Reviewed.....	169
5.9	My Personal Reflections	173
	References	174
	Appendix 1 – Interview Plans with the Semi-Structured interview	
	Questions	188
	Appendix 2 – Initial Thematic Breakdown For one of the Interview	
	Transcripts.	190

<u>List of Tables</u>	<u>Page</u>
Table 1: Summary of actual interview participants and details	55
Table 2: Excerpt from one interview transcript	58
Table 3: Excerpt from the roll-up of themes from the 13 Interview transcripts	60
Table 4: Possible solutions to frequent downsizing impact on organisational culture	164

<u>List of Figures</u>	<u>Page</u>
Figure 1: Initial framework on the Impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture	21
Figure 2: Conceptual framework showing the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture	126
Figure 3: Modified conceptual framework showing the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture	157
Figure 4: Roadmap for Leadership awareness of the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture...	165

List of Abbreviations

CEO	-	Chief Executive Officer
GGE	-	Goshen Gusher Energy
HR	-	Human Resources
IOC	-	International Oil Companies
JHA	-	Job Hazard Analysis
JOA	-	Joint Operating Agreement
JSA	-	Job Safety Analysis
JV	-	Joint Venture
JVA	-	Joint Venture Agreement
MoU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
NNPC	-	Nigerian National Petroleum Company
OC	-	Organisational Culture
OPEX	-	Operating Expenses
SBU	-	Strategic Business Units
SOPs	-	Standard Operating Procedures

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Research

'We have things of value, but you can never find them because you don't even know how to look' - Ally Condie (2010)

"We cannot revisit the past expecting to get a new introduction." - A.J.P Taylor (1906-90)

1.0 Preamble

Global changes in the world economic climate have made many companies change business strategies to stay afloat and remain competitive. Many of these companies have resorted to having a lean organisation instead of carrying a sizeable human capital to achieve their business objective. This view has led organisations to resort to massive staff layoffs, eroding the companies' values. According to Kim (2003), it is generally accepted that economic restructuring requires the downsizing of over-expanded and unproductive firms to make them competitive in the global market. Still, downsizing, however, may not lead to greater productivity as anticipated (p. 449). The presumption around the positive outcome of downsizing for the organisation makes them go for it as the first resort without considering the real impact it may have on its continued existence. Yes, a few organisations may have achieved the desired short-term economic outcomes, but indeed many have also suffered from the negative impacts of this exercise. Such adverse effects prompted Zorn *et al.* (2017, para 10) to advise company leaders to consider whether any positive short-term returns from downsizing will outweigh the potentially severe long-term consequences. Before deciding to downsize, the leaders were also to examine the specifics of their resource portfolio to determine whether their firms are adequately shielded from downsizing's negative impacts. Moreso, as moves that eliminate significant intangible resources may limit the ability of managers to counteract the negative effect of employee layoff.

One valuable asset an organisation should always protect is the one that makes them unique and gives them a competitive edge over its competitors. The glue that binds them together, without which they are not who they say they are. These are the vision and values they have worked hard to establish over time and must work even harder

to protect. Rowe and Cadzow (2014) posit that “core values form the foundation and bedrock of our culture; in fact, they are the shared beliefs that guide decisions and behaviours as people conduct day-to-day work and interact with each other” (p. 163). According to Desson and Clouthier (2010, p. 1), organisational culture is crucial in achieving organisational goals, attracting and keeping desirable employees, creating a positive public image, and building respectful relationships with stakeholders. Indeed, having “the right kind of culture” is widely acknowledged to be among the most critical antecedents of how effective or successful the organisation will be – talking about the future. They share Schein’s (2004) definition of organisational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 1).

It is, therefore, reasonable for organisations intending to change in response to any situation to consider the critical element that determines their existence and future success. Much research has focused on the short-term economic reward downsizing has brought organisations, but little or none has directly studied the impact of downsizing, let alone the frequency, on organisational culture. This research intends to take an interpretative approach to address the effects of frequent downsizing exercises on the corporate culture of a going concern.

1.1 Personal Introduction

I am a Petroleum Engineer of over three decades standing. I started with Goshen Gusher Energy (GGE) – a pseudonym for the actual company - as a Drilling and Completions Engineer and worked in this capacity for ten years, attaining the position of Head Drilling and Workover Engineer. I acquired a Master's degree in Engineering Management during this period to broaden my business management and engineering skills. I was later redeployed to the Materials and Logistics group as the Materials and Warehouse Superintendent to help resolve some performance and organisational issues within the group. I returned to my engineering practice after two years, working as a Production Engineer. I have since worked there, rising to a middle management level as a departmental team leader. Throughout my career, I have mentored and

watched people grow in the organisation; and made significant contributions to the organisation's bottom line. In my time, I have seen the company grow in financial and human resource (HR) strength with people having a high sense of career satisfaction, working till their full retirement age. My experiences with people, both as a technical subject matter expert and manager, have led me to believe that proper people management, along with a structured culture, can play an essential positive role in the growth of an organisation.

Also, on my non-academic and non-professional side, I am a lifelong Bible student and teacher who has been schooled in the hermeneutics tradition of opening the scriptures and interpreting scriptures in the light of scriptures since spiritual truths in scriptures are hidden in symbolism. So I am somewhat familiar with that qualitative research methodology. My faith also makes me passionate about people, so I take people-centric stances in my professional and personal lives.

Employee Turnover has been generally very low (less than 1% year-on-year) in the company. The first voluntary separation offering caught people off-guard, and management met only about two-thirds of their target. The condition of the offer was such that one could not self-nominate. Consequently, a second offering occurred seven months later. During the second exercise, there was a clamour for management to allow people to apply just for their information since they did not achieve the target the first time. Far more people than imagined signified interest in leaving the company. The word that made the rounds was that people are beginning to lose their 'trust' (an essential element of their organisational culture) in the company as they no longer see the values that hold them together.

Many organisations undergoing similar situations may be tempted to adopt the same strategy to reduce operating expenses. However, adopting this may lead to increased intentions to turn over to the point where organisations no longer exist. Therefore, understanding why this happens is necessary so that organisations can operate at the proper performance levels without destroying the essence of their being.

It is also expedient, at this point, to set the context of the study by way of a brief introduction to the Nigerian oil and gas industry to understand its history and structure and the organisation where this research took place.

1.2 Context of the study

Oil was discovered in Nigeria in 1956 at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta after half a century of exploration. “The discovery was made by Shell-BP, at the time the sole concessionaire. Nigeria joined the ranks of oil producers in 1958 when its first oil field came on stream producing 5,100 barrels per day (BPD). After 1960, Nigeria extended exploration rights in onshore and offshore areas adjoining the Niger Delta to other foreign companies. The discovery of oil in the late 1950s and the oil boom in the early 1970s made Nigeria one of the world's top 10 oil exporters, which made the Nigerian economy follow the boom/bust cycles of the world oil market” (Ishaka and Ogbanje, 2017, p. 30). By the late sixties and early seventies, Nigeria had attained a production level of over 2 million barrels of crude oil daily. Although production figures dropped in the eighties due to an economic slump, 2004 saw a total rejuvenation of oil production to a record level of 2.5 million barrels per day.

Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa. It held the largest natural gas reserves on the continent and was the world's fifth-largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in 2018. Although Nigeria is Africa's leading crude oil producer, production is affected by sporadic supply disruptions. (US EIA report, 2020). Nigeria joined the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971. It established the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) in 1977, a state-owned and controlled company that is a major player in upstream and downstream sectors.

Over the past years, however, the oil industry has contributed variously to Nigeria's economic development. “These have included the creation of employment opportunities; local expenditure on goods and services; contributions to government revenues, gross domestic product, and foreign exchange reserves; and the supply of energy to industry and commerce” (Odularu, 2008, cited in Ishaka and Ogbanje, 2017, p. 31).

Petroleum production and export play a dominant role in Nigeria's economy and account for about 90% of her gross earnings. This dominant role has pushed agriculture, the traditional mainstay of the economy, from the early fifties and sixties, to the background (Odularu, 2008, p. 7).

The petroleum industry is capital, technology and skill intensive. Given the diversity of activities from exploration to marketing, labour requirement for the petroleum industry, including workers in the petroleum ministry and parastatals, could be substantial. The Labour force in the industry includes executives and professionals in oil and gas companies, senior staff, junior staff, service contractors and part-time day-job workers. (Omotola, 2006, cited in Ishaka and Ogbanje, 2017, p. 34).

A regulatory act known as the Nigerian oil and gas industry content development Act was introduced in 2010 (Ovadia, 2013, cited in Adedeji *et al.*, 2016, p. 62). “The government’s objectives for the local content policy initiative include the expansion of the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil and gas industry, the diversification of the sources of investment into the sector such that some of the funds would begin to come from local sources, the promotion of indigenous participation and the fostering of technological transfer, increase in oil and gas reserves through aggressive exploration; employment generation for all categories of Nigerians amongst others” (Balouga, 2012; Gbegi and Adebisi, 2013 cited in Ayonmike and Okeke, 2015, p. 29).

The current plummeting prices of oil globally and the non-diversification of the Nigerian economy have resulted in an economic crisis that has touched every sector of Nigerian society. In this recent time of falling oil prices, the impact is felt on the Nigerian economy through inflation, job loss and naira depreciation. This is because Nigeria is a mono-economy, dependent on oil importation and exportation for its survival. (Ishaka and Ogbanje, 2017, p. 32).

The Nigerian oil industry is operated under a joint operating agreement (JOA) and within the legal and fiscal framework of a memorandum of understanding (MoU). The MoU governs how the oil income is allocated among the partners. This allocation includes payment of taxes, royalties and industry margin under split of the barrel as a joint venture agreement (JVA) between the government-owned Nigerian National

Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and oil companies such as Shell, Exxon-Mobil, Chevron-Texaco, and TotalFinaElf. The NNPC holds majority shares while the oil companies have minority interests in the oil development (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation [NNPC], 2006, cited in Effiong, 2010, p. 329).

As a background, the organisation under review, Goshen Gusher Energy (pseudonym for the actual company), is an International Oil Company (IOC) operating under a Joint Venture Partnership with the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC); NNPC being the senior partner with 60% interest. At the heart of the company's culture is its vision: to be a global company most admired for its people, partnerships and performance. One of the interpretations of the vision is that they "earn the admiration of all their stakeholders, i.e., investors, customers, host governments, local communities and their employees". Its foundation is built on its values (diversity and inclusion, partnership, high performance, protecting people and the environment, etc.) which distinguish them and guide its actions.

Goshen Gusher Energy is an oil producer in Nigeria with an average total daily oil production rate of 300,000 barrels (at the time of this study) and about 1,200 regular employees (and many others through contract employment), operating from three primary locations. A Group Managing Director leads the organisation with four other directors as direct reports. Together, they constitute the executive management team of the company. Reporting to the directors are various general managers and senior managers that make up the senior management cadre of the organisation. Next is the middle management level, which includes some managers and team leaders. They cascade the company vision, values and business plans to the organisation's multi-level senior and junior staff categories.

NNPC investment viability in IOCs in the industry is gauged on a cost-per-barrel (\$/barrel) basis. Apart from wanting the country's oil assets to be developed appropriately, the NNPC also wants it done most efficiently and cost-effectively. Despite the IOC's different operational terrain and associated constraints, NNPC wants good returns on its investment and, as such, pays more attention and fulfils its cash call obligations to the IOCs with the best recovery for every dollar spent.

NNPC no longer considers “the company” an attractive or viable business venture because of its high cost of operation. So, the company struggles to get cash calls from the JV partner. Cutting operating expenses (OPEX) or increasing production could reduce the high cost. So, the company took the bold step of cutting operating expenses by downsizing through a voluntary separation package offered to some people. This downsizing exercise was done twice within twelve months and continues to happen.

1.3 Aim of the study

This study aims to see the impact these back-to-back downsizing exercises have had on the organisational culture held by the staff members. The current level of commitment of survivors to the organisation is critical to moving the organisation past the current status of performance, which necessitated frequent layoffs, to the desired level. It is, therefore, vital to check their pulses to understand the effect of the frequency on their psyche.

Very little literature exists that shows a qualitative assessment of employees’ views about downsizing, but they have not demonstrated its impact (positive, negative or none at all) on organisational culture, so I intend to study the impact and share my findings. Hopefully, other organisations, especially within the Nigerian landscape, will benefit from the outcome as the Nigerian national cultural context will be considered, given that majority of the people involved are Nigerians. Thus, aside from the specifics of reflection on lived experiences shared by employees of the organisation in which the research is carried out, the national cultural considerations will help confirm the findings by other organisations, especially those operating in the Nigerian work environment.

1.4 Research objective(s)

The main objective of the study is to examine the impact the frequency of the recent downsizing exercises had on the survivors’ perception of the organisation’s culture. In so doing, the study will seek:

- a. To investigate the extent to which the remaining staff members believe they are treasured and want to remain in the company’s employment.

- b. To investigate the extent to which they believe in the company's organisational culture and that they can still have long and fruitful careers without future forced interruptions.
- c. To find out if the survivors are still motivated to continue to work for the organisation without turnover intentions and commit to the success of the organisation.
- d. To determine the impact of these frequent downsizing events on the company's organisational culture.

1.5 Research Questions

Many questions seek answers in order to understand the impact of these downsizing exercises on the organisation. These questions will help to drive the enquiry:

- What were the impulses to downsize as the primary focus of cost-cutting, given that "people" are a central aspect of the company's core values?
- To what extent is an understanding of organisational culture and the impact of downsizing at senior levels of the organisation?
- What is the impact of reducing experienced staff as part of the downsizing exercise in terms of organisational knowledge and learning?
- What impression of the organisation did the sudden increase in employee intention to turnover and eventual turnover give at senior levels of the organisation, given the organisation previously had a meagre attrition rate?

1.6 Proposed Research Methodology and Methods Summarised

This research is intended to be carried out using qualitative/inductive methodology. Hermeneutic phenomenology, a research methodology that utilises qualitative methods to obtain information about lived experiences of people to study a society's culture, will be employed for this research. Hermeneutics refers to an "interpretive methodology, where the researcher commits to interpreting texts taking his / her previous experience and role in the research into consideration, as well as the data collected from observation, interviews, etc." (Crowley-Henry, 2009, p 37).

The primary data collection method will be semi-structured in-depth interviewing, which is repeated face-to-face encounters between the participants and me, directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. In contrast to quantitative research methods, as a researcher, I will not just be an impersonal data collector (as I cannot be wholly neutral or detached from the process). Still, I will be immersed in, and related open-ended questions will be asked. For this exploration, I will apply some principles of action learning by asking open-ended questions as much as practicable to enable the interviewees to come out with the required data for interpretation. In this regard, 10 – 15 survivors of the downsizing exercises in Goshen Gusher Energy, the international oil company operating in Nigeria, were targeted for the in-depth interviews. The outcome of the study will be based on deductions from the in-depth interviews of the participants, reflecting on their perception of recent events and projections for the future. I will elaborate more on the process in Chapter 3, where I discuss my research design.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The following is an explanation of how I have structured my thesis on a chapter-by-chapter basis.

In Chapter 1, *Introduction to the Study*, I presented the background of the study with a discussion of the Nigerian oil and gas industry, narrowing it down to Goshen Gusher Energy to set a context. I also shared details of myself, my motivations for carrying out this research, the aim of the study and the research questions for which answers are sought. I also presented a summary of the research methodology and method of data collection, as well as the research gap to be filled.

In Chapter 2, *Initial Literature Review*, I described my interest in the study of organisational culture and my pre-understanding of all the concepts relating to it. This guided my initial literature review on the subject and the conditions that affect it. Concepts such as downsizing, organisational culture and its relationship to corporate branding were discussed, as well as the impact frequent downsizing has on

organisational culture. An initial conceptual model to be used to drive the research was also presented.

In Chapter 3, *The Research Design*, I presented my philosophical research considerations (stating my ontological and epistemological disposition), theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods that I used in this research and the justification for my choices. In addition, I stated my role as the researcher along with identified risks (and mitigation plans), limitations and ethical considerations for the exploration. The research evaluation and results communication methods were also expressed.

In Chapter 4, *Presentation of Findings*, I presented the data collection and analysis process used for my exploration of the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the organisational culture of the company in which this research was set in. Thereafter, I presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the themes generated, lightly grounded in theory.

In Chapter 5, *Discussion of Findings, Contribution to Praxis and Conclusions*, I shared my interpretation of the findings from the interviews conducted. I thereafter showed the impact of the “frequency” of downsizing on organisational culture. The discussion was centred on a conceptual model I developed, which aided the comparison with extant literature. Following the discussion section, I stated the limitation of the study and my recommendation for future studies. Finally, I shared my contribution to praxis and ended the chapter with the conclusion of the thesis.

1.8 Conclusion and Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter has provided the study's background, context and relevance. Here, I briefly introduced myself, my qualifications and my experience to enable readers to understand me as the researcher. Then, I introduced the Nigerian oil and gas industry stating its critical role in the Nigerian economy and development. The chapter also outlined the significant roles played by various international oil companies, including the company the research was set in, to develop the industry through joint-venture partnerships with the Nigerian government. The study's aims,

along with the research objectives and questions, were also enumerated. This chapter also stated, in summary, the research methodology - Hermeneutic phenomenology (*a research methodology that utilises qualitative methods to obtain information about lived experiences of people to study a society's culture*) that will be employed for this research. It also highlights the data collection process - semi-structured in-depth interviewing (*which is repeated face-to-face encounters between the participants and I*), that will be used for the study. Finally, the chapter ended with a brief overview of how the thesis is structured from the first to the last chapter.

The chapter that follows describes my interest in the study of organisational culture, my pre-understanding of all the concepts relating to it and how my initial literature review on the subject was conducted - funnelling down from broad global issues to current more relevant debates on the themes of the research.

Chapter 2

Initial Literature Review

What do researchers know? What do they not know? What has been researched and what has not been researched? Is the research reliable and trustworthy? Where are the gaps in the knowledge?

When you compile all that together, you have yourself a **literature review**. - Jim Ollhoff (2011)

“Literature allows us to be open to listen and to be curious.” – Tracy k. Smith (2018)

2.0 Interest, Concepts and Definitions

As stated in Chapter 1 above, this research is intended to be carried out using qualitative/inductive methodology. As such, not much literature review is required at the beginning of the research journey. As Creswell (2009, pp. 41 - 42) states, “the use of the literature in qualitative research varies considerably, and that literature is less often used to set the stage for grounded theory, case studies, and phenomenological studies”. He states further that “the researcher may incorporate the related literature in the final section, where it is used to compare and contrast with the results (or themes or categories) to emerge from the study” - a strategy I intend to use in this research. Also, according to Nightingale (2009, p. 381), “all types of literature reviews may be affected by selection bias because the authors are likely to include only major studies in a particular area, and only those that are most consistent with their personal opinion or the results of their research”.

My initial exploration of literature was with a consideration of the contents of the main themes of my research topic and the different sub-themes that emerged while reviewing the main themes. The main themes are “organisational culture” and “downsizing”, and in the course of my exploration, a somewhat resemblance of organisational culture with corporate branding started to emerge. This development prompted my interest in exploring the subject in this direction as well, with a premonition that there could be a link between the two. The excitement of the pursuit made my research even more worthwhile.

Consistent with the literature review process recommended by Creswell (2009, p. 44), my initial literature review was conducted through a broad unrestricted database search (online and hard copies of books) of existing research literature to understand

current debates and gaps in the broad core concepts of downsizing and organisational culture. The volume of literature obtained was later funnelled down, moving from the broad to focussed areas, screening and checking for suitability with criteria such as research setting, methodology of research and the recency of research (to understand current debates and gaps) etc. Relevant and recent research findings obtained through qualitative research that support remotely or directly the concepts of downsizing and organisational culture, particularly how they affect one another in an African setting, were then used as bases for the research. The relevant referenced works of literature are presented at the tail end of Chapter 5 under “References” using the Havard referencing style that was approved for citations in the body of the thesis at the beginning of the research.

I am interested in organisational culture (and phenomena that impact it) because I believe it is central to the existence and progress of any business. It is what separates one organisation from another. I would like to lay a foundation with my pre-understanding and premonitions about the themes associated with this research while stating the philosophical considerations I will use in my exploration. Research into the impact of frequent downsizing exercises conducted in corporate organisations on organisational culture can be tedious and tricky. It relates to several themes in organisational theory, such as business continuity, employee motivation and retention, corporate branding, downsizing, organisational culture, organisational learning and knowledge management etc.

The research journey can be taken in different directions depending on the researcher and, indeed, the audience receiving the outcome. I would like to start by stating my pre-understanding of the various concepts I believe should be considered in this exploration.

2.1 My Pre-Understanding

Almost “thirty years of systematic research of organisational culture within the organisational behaviour field has transformed it from concept to theory. ‘Borrowed’ as a concept from anthropology, organisational culture has, over years of research, been developed, structured, and associated with other concepts in the fields of

psychology, sociology, and management. As a result, corporate culture has become one of the essential tools in understanding people's behaviour in organisations. Today, organisational culture is one of the most explored phenomena of organisational behaviour and an inevitable variable in explaining the functioning and performance of all kinds of organisations" (Janićijević, 2011, p. 70). It is, therefore, my mission to explore further the many meanings (or views) and attributes of organisational culture.

2.1.1 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is a shared set of beliefs and values reinforced by an organisation's symbols and structure and manifested in how people think and act. Organisational culture emerges from social interaction and is defined in terms of its values and beliefs, manifested in the organisation's practices (Meek, 1998; Pratt and Beaulieu, 1992, cited in Emerson, 2013, p. 20). In modern organisations, "these shared values are typically expressed as mission, vision and value statements, as well as in other artefacts" (Pearse and Kanyangale, 2009, p. 69). Organisational culture is an element of cohesion and a catalyst for internal connection and adaptation to the environment (Rudelj, 2012, p. 29). In other words, "organisational culture forms the glue that holds the organisation together and stimulates employees to commit to the organisation and perform" (Van den Berg and Wilderom, 2004, p. 571). It is undoubtedly a unique and very complex phenomenon immanent to business organisations, with connections primarily in determining the organisation's identity and interaction with stakeholders (Rudelj, 2012, p. 31).

Organisational culture is very vital to the existence and survival of an organisation. Lim (1995, p. 16), as well as Denison (1984, p. 5), stated: "that 'corporate' or 'organisational' culture was used to explain the economic successes of Japanese over American firms through the development of a highly motivated workforce, committed to a common set of core values, beliefs and assumptions". Organisational culture is in an ongoing interdependence with the strategy and architecture of today's organisations and the challenges of modern management (Rudelj, 2012, p. 31). As Edgar Schein and other management theorists have observed, organisational culture may be an abstraction, but it has potent effects on how organisations think and behave (Desson and Clouthier, 2010, p. 3). According to Hofstede (2003), as cited in

Bamgboje-Ayodele and Ellis (2015, p. 5), “organisations do not operate in a social vacuum but are influenced by the sociocultural context”. In support of this, Ogbonna (2010, p. 12) posits that “culture is the summary or sum-total of people’s way of life, which is transferable, in this case, must have great influence in business since business revolves within the circumference of people and their culture”. It is, therefore, safe to say organisational culture often reflects national culture through diversity recognition, adoption and celebration, as in the case of Goshen-Gusher Energy - a company which has a large footprint of operations in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and joint venture (JV) partnership with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

National culture can be defined as the profile of a society with respect to norms, values, and institutions (Hofstede, 2001, cited in Bamgboje-Ayodele and Ellis, 2015, p. 4). Ansah and Louw (2018, p. 4) also project Hofstede’s (2001) claim that “national culture is seen as the collective mental programming of the mind in a countrywide context”. They put forward Pagell’s (2004) argument that “the description of divergence in behaviour of organisations by country of origin implies that each country has a distinctive set of features that tend to influence resolutions that are made in companies” (p. 4).

Khan and Law (2018, p. 35) declare that “studies have repeatedly shown that national cultural systems, as well as individual cultures, greatly affect the corporate cultural system in many ways. For example, national culture influences managerial decision-making, leadership styles, and human resource management practices”. They further stress a point made by other researchers that organisational policies (e.g., human resource policies) are influenced by various national institutions such as labour laws, educational and vocational training practices, and industrial standards and regulations as proof of their assertion.

While several researchers, according to Bamgboje-Ayodele and Ellis (2015, p. 4), have written extensively on cultural dimensions, I also find the dimensions and the ratings of Hofstede most suitable to describe Nigeria's culture because of the interrelatedness of its dimensions and the actual prevailing culture in Nigeria.

Few studies have been done on management using Hofstede's dimension in Nigeria. Considering Hofstede's 5-dimensions of national culture differentiation viz: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Confucian dynamism, my observation and understanding of the Nigerian national culture can be described as highly Masculine (Leadership predominance), Collectivist (predominant communal living), with high Power Distance (respects hierarchy), high Uncertainty Avoidance (uncomfortable with ambiguity) and Short-Termism (focus on the present) by nature.

Goshen Gusher Energy is a process-driven and highly procedural organisation, the dominant organisational culture type being bureaucratic or hierarchical. Rashid *et al.* (2003, p. 712) submit that "values like formalisation, rules, standard operating procedures, and hierarchical coordination are key in the bureaucratic culture. The long-term concern of this culture was predictability, efficiency and stability". Nigeria, as a nation, is very diverse culturally. Therefore, when an equal opportunity employer like Goshen Gusher Energy operates in the country, one would expect a lot of national cultural influence on how work is done. How work is done here is expected to be slightly different from some other strategic business units (SBUs) it operates elsewhere in the world.

Given the stated importance of organisational culture as an element of cohesion and stimulant to commitment and performance, it is clear why it should be well understood and shielded from impacts consequent upon any strategy direction an organisation takes at any point in its lifetime. Furthermore, organisational culture's importance becomes even more perceptible to organisations from a corporate branding standpoint. This concept, more recognised, valued and protected, makes organisational culture more real to organisations as it elicits their focus and attention.

2.1.2 Corporate Branding

Employer branding is an interrelated term to organisational culture. In certain instances, they are interchangeably used. Branding is defined as "a targeted long-term strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees and related stakeholders with regard to a particular firm" (Sullivan, 2004 cited in Dawn

and Biswas, 2010, p. 21). The employer brand builds an image confirming the organisation as an excellent place to work. It is derived from “who you are”, “who you want to be”, and “who people perceive you to be”. It includes the values, mission and vision of the organisation; that is, it has the same elements as organisational culture.

A business owner or the management of any organisation will do everything necessary to protect its brand (or organisational culture); because there lies the backbone of its existence. Branding was “originally used to differentiate tangible products, but over the years it has been applied to differentiating people, places and firms” (Peters, 1999, in Dawn and Biswas, 2010, p. 21). A corporate brand is “one of the most important strategic assets a business can have”, according to Hatch and Schultz (2008, p. xvii) in their discussion of how successful organisations develop their presence in the world (McAuley *et al.*, 2014, p 160). McAuley *et al.* (2014) also draw the inference from Hatch and Schultz’s (2008) argument “that in order to develop a corporate brand, companies need to align strategy, culture and identity” (p. 160).

Similarly, employer branding has “become a new approach for gaining an edge in the competitive world. It refers to the process of identifying and creating a company brand message and applying traditional marketing principles to achieve the status of the employer of choice”, according to Sutherland *et al.* (2002, p 13 - 14). According to them, an employer of choice is an organisation that top talent aspires to work for because of its reputation and employer brand message, both of which are tailored to appeal to the target audience.

Also, as declared by Barrow and Mosley (2005) and reported in Dawn and Biswas (2010, p. 21), “employer branding is used to transfer the message of the personality of a company as an employer of choice and to adapt the tools and techniques usually used to motivate and engage employees. Just like a consumer brand, it is an emotional relationship between an employer and an employee”.

Branding is often easier to conceptualise, and understanding the relationship between the two terms helps drive home organisational culture’s importance. One notable phenomenon that threatens organisational culture or corporate brands is downsizing.

2.1.3 Downsizing

Organisational downsizing “refers to a set of activities, undertaken on the part of the management of an organisation and designed to improve organisational efficiency, productivity and competitiveness” (Cameron, 1994, p. 192). It is “the planned elimination of positions or jobs” designed to improve productivity and competitiveness (Cascio, 1993, cited in Reynaud and Degorre, 2007, p. 4). Despite its prevalence, the relationship between downsizing and corporate performance has not been studied thoroughly (Reynaud and Degorre, 2007, p. 4). According to Kowske *et al.* (2009, p. 49), “layoffs can negatively affect organisational culture, creating complications for employees and customers”. The social and economic costs of downsizing outweighed any short-term organisational advantage, and for the individual organisation, downsizing affected the morale of those who stayed in the organisation profoundly (McAuley *et al.*, 2014, p. 211). Downsizing is essentially a balancing act: managing the legacy of the organisation, its reputation and its ongoing business performance. It is equally about skillfully managing people, those who are retained by the organisation and who will separate from it (Sweeney, 2011, p. 2).

2.2 Impacts on Organisations

My initial thoughts towards the major challenges business owners face after a downsizing exercise have to do with organisational learning depletion (or knowledge management), motivating and retaining the employees left behind, improving business performance and ensuring business continuity. It is hoped that other challenges will be revealed during the research.

2.2.1 Organisational Learning / Knowledge Management

Organisational learning/knowledge management refers to the amount of knowledge available and retained by the company. It involves the processes for individual and collective learning inside organisations. In a 2010 online presentation by *Knowledge Management Tools*, organisational learning is said to have two approaches to it. The first view looks at the firm as a whole and examines learning from a cognitive perspective - the firm is treated like a large brain composed of the organisation's individual members. The second view claims that “learners inevitably participate in

communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Furthermore, that “learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 51). This aligns with Cascio’s (2005, p. 43) submission that “learning organisations are collections of networks in which interrelationships among individuals, that is, social networks, generate learning and knowledge - this knowledge base constitutes a firm’s memory”.

According to Bahtijarević-Siber *et al.* (2008), reported in Rudelj (2012, p. 31), “the important challenges of modern management in the 21st century are stated as business and managerial ethics, social responsibility and an organisation that learns and manages knowledge”. Erosion of the skills bank of an organisation can be through high unprecedented employee turnover. Turnover “not only erodes performance by depleting organisational skill banks but, perhaps more dramatically, by altering the social structure and fabric of an organisation” (Shaw *et al.*, 2005, p. 594). Stewart *et al.* (1999, p. 60) also posit that “corporate downsizing removed large numbers of individual employees from corporate payrolls and, along with them, their knowledge and experience”. Downsizing as an institutional feature gave way to another “set of rules” that suggested it was better to maintain “the stock of knowledge and capability within the organisation to maintain the challenges of growth” (McAuley *et al.*, 2014, p. 211). A motivated workforce, however, helps organisations to retain knowledge.

2.2.2 Motivation and Employee Retention

Motivation “is the main tool to eliminate the negative employee turnover rate inside organisations” (Vnoučková and Klupáková, 2013, p. 80) and retention “is a voluntary move by an organisation to create an environment that engages employees for the long term” (Chaminade, 2007, cited in Goud, 2014, p. 11). The main purpose of retention is “to prevent the loss of competent employees from the organisation, as this could have an adverse effect on productivity and service delivery” (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009, p. 411). Employee commitment, productivity, and retention issues are emerging as the most critical workforce management challenges of the immediate future; driven by employee loyalty concerns, corporate restructuring efforts and tight

competition for key talent. For many firms, “surprise” employee departures can have a significant effect on the execution of business plans and may eventually cause a parallel decline in productivity. This phenomenon is “especially true in light of current economic uncertainty and following corporate downsizings when the impact of losing critical employees increases exponentially” (Caplan and Teese, 1997, cited in Sinha and Sinha, 2012, p. 145). The level of impact this departure determines if productivity improves in an organisation and if the business continues.

2.2.3 Business Continuity

Productivity and retention rates generally “fall further as employees become distracted, confused and preoccupied with potential outcomes immediately following an organisational transition such as a major restructuring, corporate downsizing, merger, acquisition, or even rapid growth spurt” (Cartwright and Cooper, 1999; Bridges, 1991, cited in Kreisman, 2002, p. 3).

Today, “people with a new role (with predominantly mental work) and a developed awareness are the main resources of organisations, and they directly affect outcomes and organisational development” (Rudelj, 2012, p. 31). Hence, business survival or continuity depends mainly on the people and what they know.

2.3 Conclusion and Chapter Summary

To some, the concept of organisational culture is an abstraction, but when viewed in congruence with branding, the relevance or meaning becomes more apparent. On the other hand, downsizing has been found to have mixed results when undertaken by management to improve the productivity/efficiency of organisations. In this research, therefore, the relationships between the broad concepts of downsizing, organisational culture, corporate branding, employee motivation and retention, as well as business continuity will be closely examined. Figure 1 shows an initial framework I generated to tie them together. The figure omits a host of other themes, concepts or phenomena that are unknown at this stage. As the research progresses, a clearer understanding of their relationships, as well as with others, will emerge.



Figure 1: Initial Framework on the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture.

Since people are the bearers and drivers of organisational culture, the impact of frequent corporate downsizing on them should indicate the organisation's future, whether they (people and the organisation) survive after the exercises or not. This understanding should give credence to the essence of this research, which is to demonstrate the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture. The quest will be accomplished from the interpretation of survivors' feelings (relative to the initial themes and others that will emerge during the research journey), as they will be the ones to take the organisation to the desired height afterwards. I hope that the qualitative/inductive method proposed for this exploration (as will be presented in the following chapter) helps to uncover hidden truths about the impact of frequent corporate downsizing on survivors (the drivers of the organisation's culture); and that corporate organisations will henceforth consider this when restructuring to have and operate a lean organisation for higher efficiency and profits.

The results of my initial literature survey have further triggered my interest in the subject of this research and propelled me further to carry on with the study. At this introductory level, I have seen the importance and power of an organisation's culture and what could disrupt it. I intend to unearth the conscious and subconscious impacts that frequent downsizing exercises have on an organisation's culture, especially as it relates to its people and organisational success. I intend to demonstrate the long-term consequence these exercises may have on the people and the organisation; and how they outweigh the presumed shorter-term benefits of downsizing.

Therefore, this chapter has presented my interest in the study of organisational culture, my pre-understanding of its concepts, and my initial literature review. Finally, it ends with an initial conceptual model I intend to develop further in my research journey.

The following chapter describes my research design (stating my philosophical stance, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods), my role as the researcher, risks, ethical considerations for the exploration and how the research will be evaluated and reported.

Chapter 3

Research Design

‘If we knew what it was we were doing; it would not be called research, would it?’ - Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

‘The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking’ - Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

3.0 Introduction

This chapter showcases the build-up to the philosophical perspective employed in this exploration. It details the philosophical research considerations, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods I chose for this research and their appropriateness for the study. The choices I made were predicated on my ontological and epistemological stances. I also specified my role as the researcher and presented identified risks (with mitigation plans), limitations and ethical considerations for the exploration. The research evaluation and results communication methods were also stated.

I start this research journey hereafter with my review of research philosophy applicable to the study of the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture.

3.1 Research Philosophy

Philosophical perspectives are “worldviews that define the nature of the world, the individual’s place in it, and the possible relationships to that world and its parts. These perspectives form the foundation for any line of inquiry, including those associated with a particular discipline” (Schuh and Barab, 2008, p. 68). The “two major and most popular forms of research perspectives are qualitative methodologies, which are grounded on the interpretivism paradigm, and quantitative methodology, which is grounded on the positivist paradigm” (Tuli, 2010, p. 105).

3.1.1 Positivist World View

Flowers (2009, p. 3) asserts that “the positivist position is derived from that of natural science and is characterised by the testing of hypothesis developed from existing theory (hence deductive or theory testing) through measurement of observable social realities”. Flowers’ position presumes the social world exists objectively and externally, that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations of this external reality and that universal or general laws exist or that theoretical models can be developed that are generalisable, can explain cause and effect relationships, and which lend themselves to predicting outcomes. He states further, quoting other researchers, that “positivism is based upon values of reason, truth and validity and there is a focus purely on facts, gathered through direct observation and experience and measured empirically using quantitative methods – surveys and experiments - and statistical analysis”. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) in Flowers (2009, p. 3), relate this to the organisational context, stating that “positivists assume that what truly happens in organisations can only be discovered through categorisation and scientific measurement of the behaviour of people and systems and that language is truly representative of the reality”.

Evely *et al.* (2008) concurred with Morgan and Smircich’s (1980) as well as Dyson and Brown’s (2006) assertion that “though positivism is a widespread worldview in the social sciences, it cannot be the only philosophical approach in the study of social sciences” (p. 53). According to Evely *et al.*, “some social scientists hold the view that positivism does not provide the means to examine human feelings, emotions, and values adequately. To many social scientists, human emotions, feelings, and values cannot be studied in a positivist manner as they are subject to many influences on behaviour, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes that cannot be quantified” (p. 54). A more suitable approach will be social constructivism.

3.1.2 The Social Constructivist Worldview

Social constructivism, which Mertens (1998) submits, “is often combined with interpretivism, is a perspective, and it is typically seen as an approach to qualitative research”, according to Creswell (2009, p. 26). More accurately, “interpretivism denotes those approaches to studying social life that assume that the meaning of

human action is inherent in that action” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 161). In fact, Adom et al. (2016) state that “the interpretive paradigm of philosophy is the mother of the constructivism paradigm” (p. 1). Moreover, they claim “the constructivism approach is one of the best philosophical approaches that help us understand the complexities and multiplicity of phenomena, especially in this 21st century” (p. 9). In addition, they say, “researchers who carry out studies to comprehend the practices of a group or society and its implications towards their attitudes can adopt the constructivist approach; and that studies revolving around life histories or life stories of renowned personalities in communities as well as the oral history of a clan, ethnic society can be perfectly grounded in the constructivist paradigm of philosophising” (p. 7).

Mottier (2005) asserts that “the interpretive perspectives do not define social reality as an exterior object; rather, the social world is seen instead as a subjectively lived construct”. Interpretive perspectives consequently “abandon claims to objectivity to emphasise, instead, the reflexive nature of the research process and the subjective nature of constructions of meaning, both by the research subjects and by the researcher” (p. 4). Creswell (2009, p. 26) also alludes to the fact that “social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things”.

An interpretive approach provides a deep insight into “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 43). The interpretative paradigm views the relationship between socially engendered concept formation and language. Also, Bryman and Bell (2011) see “the constructionist view as a social phenomenon created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” (p. 701). Interpretative beliefs are based on socially constructed, subjective reality. These beliefs are influenced by culture and history. The “interpretive turn in the social sciences importantly leads us to recognise the cultural and historical situatedness of constructions of meaning by social agents, and the interpretations that researchers develop of them” (Mottier, 2005, p. 7).

Interpretive research “assumes that reality is socially constructed, and the researcher becomes the vehicle by which this reality is revealed” (Cavana *et al.*, 2001; Walsham,

1995 cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 43). The interpretative paradigm “retains the ideals of “researcher objectivity” and the ideal researcher as a passive collector and expert interpreter of data“ (O’Brien, 2001, p. 7). It is imperative to study the details of the situation to understand the reality behind them.

This approach is “consistent with the construction of the social world characterised by the interaction between the researcher and the participants” (Mingers, 2001, cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 43). The research goal is to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied”, says Creswell (2009, p. 26). The researcher’s interpretations play a crucial role in this kind of study, bringing “such subjectivity to the fore, backed with quality arguments rather than statistical exactness” (Garcia and Quek, 1997, cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 43).

I find the interpretative tradition most suited or appropriate for my research interest because it provides a better avenue for the deep exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of people in the organisation I crave. This is more so considering my ontological and epistemological stance, which is discussed in the following section.

3.2 Ontology – The Nature of Being

Ontology is concerned “with the nature of phenomena and their existence. It raises questions regarding whether or not a phenomenon we are interested in actually exists, independent of our knowing and perceiving it” (McAuley *et al.*, 2014, p. 32). Ontology asks what the nature of reality is. The ontological assumption in research entails “an indication of the researcher’s preference by specifying what is considered truths about knowledge, information, and the world” (Schuh and Barab, 2008, p. 70).

McAuley *et al.* (2014, p. 32) differentiated between realist and subjectivist assumptions as follows:

Realist assumption ‘entails the view that phenomena such as organisations exist out there independently of our perceptual or cognitive structures and attempts to know’. A subjectivist assumption, on the other hand, concerns the ontological status of the social phenomena we deal with, which entails the view

that we take to be a social reality, is a creation or projection of our consciousness and cognition’.

The realist ontological stance aligns with the social constructivism approach I will be using for this exploration because a real organisation (and people) exists for me to explore and understand the impact that frequent downsizing has on its organisational culture. An alignment with epistemology now needs to be considered and established.

3.3 Epistemology – How Knowledge is Shared

Also, according to McAuley *et al.* (2014, p. 33), epistemology is “the study of the criteria we deploy and by which we know and decide what does and does not constitute a warranted claim about the world or what might constitute warranted knowledge”. They also describe two entirely different Epistemological positions as follows:

Epistemological objectivists are those who assume that it is possible to neutrally observe the social world and the behaviour of social phenomena such as organisations (i.e., without influencing or distorting what we see by and through the act of observation or perception). A *subjectivist* philosophical stance (sometimes referred to as *idealist*) assumes that what we perceive is, at least in part, an outcome of us and our conceptual understanding of the world that we bring to bear in order to make sense of what we experience (p. 34).

As the researcher, and in alignment with the social constructivism approach I will be using for this exploration, the *subjectivist* philosophical stance will be more appropriate as I am not detached from the organisational setting and research, and my conceptual understanding of the organisation at the end of the day will help to make sense of the impact of frequent downsizing exercises being experienced by the organisation.

3.4 My Ontological and Epistemological Positions

Morgan and Smircich (1980) assert that “there is a need to use an ontological assumption that will provide for a more balanced approach to research in organisation theory” (p. 491). The research question and context should dictate the choice of appropriate method (Karami *et al.*, 2006, p. 45). It is often the case that it just would

“not make sense for a researcher to use quantitative tools to explore certain types of questions. For example, it might be quite inappropriate for a researcher interested in personal attitudes towards leadership issues to use a blunt instrument such as a questionnaire” (Remenyi, 2002, p. 39).

The assumption “that does not ignore human actors will be more appropriate for research in organisational culture. Subjectivism recognizes that social entities are considered as social constructions built up from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors” (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 110). Social constructionism “aligns with the epistemological position of the interpretive philosophy that it is necessary to explore the subjective meanings motivating the actions of social actors so that a researcher can be able to understand these actions” (Saunders *et al.*, 2009, p. 111). Social constructionism, therefore, views reality as being socially constructed.

Due to the nature of the study, I will be taking an objectivist ontological and subjectivist epistemological stance in this research. In essence, I am epistemologically a subjectivist and aware of how people in the organisation have different ways of looking at the organisation and each other; how the different layers of the hierarchy are all stories that members have to account for their positions in the organisation and believe that truth lies somewhere in the way we interpret and understand that which we seem to see, touch, hear, smell and taste as defined in McAuley *et al.* (2014, p. 31).

3.5 Research Approach

Initially, I wanted to carry out research requiring me to use statistical inference and judgment about the subject of inquiry. However, it happens that what I am curious or concerned about requires a deep understanding of the feelings and emotions of people, which I doubt statistical methods will help to substantiate. As Remenyi (2002, p. 39) argues, “it is often the case that it just would not make sense for a researcher to use quantitative tools to explore certain types of questions”. Qualitative research “provides insights and understanding of the problem setting” (Karami *et al.*, 2006, p. 48). As such, I will take a qualitative approach to my research exploration.

Qualitative research “refers to a study process that investigates a human social problem where the researcher conducts the study in a natural setting and builds a whole and complex representation by a detailed description and explanation as well as a careful examination of informants’ words and views” (Creswell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Morgan and Smircich, 1980, cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 43). Qualitative researchers are “interested in answering those “why” questions and are not simply carried away by the quantitative answers. What is important with qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research methods, is that it requires the researcher to become more personally immersed in the entire research process, as opposed to being just a detached, objective researcher” (Spector, 2005, cited in Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 621).

3.6 Qualitative Strategies

According to Pearse and Kanyangale (2009), “when embarking on a research enquiry, it is generally accepted that the phenomenon being investigated has a bearing on the formulation of the research problem, the consequent design of the research, and its implementation. As such, the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of organisational culture will shape what the researcher is looking for and how it can be accessed. Schein (1996) and others subscribe to the qualitative perspective of culture and define culture as a deep phenomenon that is manifested at various levels and, as they argue, cannot and should not be measured quantitatively” (p. 68).

Creswell (2009, p. 29) speaks about “the existence of various approaches for conducting qualitative research. The major longstanding frameworks for enquiry amongst them are Ethnography, Grounded theory, Case studies, Phenomenological (descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology) and Narrative methodologies”. He talks about them being more clearly visible up till the 21st century. These were all considered, and the most suitable was adopted for my research, as follows:

3.6.1 Narrative research

According to Creswell (2009, p. 30), “narrative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then often retold or re-storied by

the researcher into a narrative chronology". In the end, "the narrative combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a collaborative narrative" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). Storytelling or stories are at the heart of the narrative approach (Patton, 2015, cited in Sweeney, 2016, p. 72). According to Bell (2003, p. 97), the terms "story" and "narrative" are used, "often interchangeably, to refer to a wide variety of discursive practices (e.g., childhood recollections, fables, scientific explanations, television documentaries, historical accounts) and dimensions of understanding (e.g., allegories, theories, ideologies, myths, paradigms, normative frameworks)". From Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) point of view, as reported by Bell (2003, p. 96), 'the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world".

Sweeney (2016, p. 72) shares Marshall and Rossman's (2016) submission that "the narrative is produced from people narrating their stories; and because the participant is the storyteller, there is more focus on the individual rather than the context in which the experience occurred. So, if the narrative patterns are followed strictly, there's a high chance of omitting the details that may guide the researcher in answering all burning questions". I recognize that lived experiences may be shared in short story formats and so cannot be excluded entirely. For instance, the use of metaphors that is acceptable in the narrative parlance cannot be barred. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), cited in Bell (2003, p. 98), metaphors are "not simply part of poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical language, but are also part of ordinary literal language and, fundamentally, part of the way we conceive things and structure our everyday activities". Storytelling will follow the patterns chosen by the storyteller and is not necessarily guided in the deep exploratory pattern of the researcher and would not be suitable for my research; so, it cannot be the overarching method of my study.

3.6.2 Case studies

Case studies are "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals in-depth. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data

collection procedures over a sustained period” (Stake, 1995, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). Gerring (2007, p. 17) also, argues that “the case study method employs triangulation (multiple sources of evidence) and that indeed, virtually all case studies produced in the social sciences today include some quantitative and qualitative components”. Gerring goes further to state that “the *purely* narrative case study, one with no numerical analysis whatsoever, may not even exist” (p. 11). Since my study employs the qualitative tradition of research, I reckon the method will be inappropriate for me as I have no intention of collecting qualitative and quantitative data. This would have required some triangulation which I did not anticipate. Yin (2009), cited in Rule and John (2015, p. 3), argues that case study inquiry “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”. Due to this requirement to generate theory before collecting data, I do not see it as suitable for my exploration since my research is strictly inductive.

3.6.3 Ethnography

Ethnography is a strategy of inquiry “in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period by collecting, primarily, observational and interview data” (Creswell, 2007, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). Fetterman (1998), mentioned in Ehigie and Ehigie (2005, p. 625), describes it as “the art and science of describing a group or culture. Such a group can be a workgroup, team, or an organisation, and the culture could be the organisational culture”. Ethnography focuses on “society and culture and seeks to understand how groups within society form and how their culture is sustained” (Marshall and Rossman, 2016, cited in Sweeney, 2016, p. 71). Researchers conducting ethnographic assessments of organisational culture do so “by observing and recording behaviours in an organisation, for an extended period” (Jex, 2002, cited in Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 625). Ethnographers detail “the routine daily lives of people in the group, focusing on the more predictable patterns of behaviour” (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 625).

Since my study involves culture as a major phenomenon, it would appear that Ethnography is a fit. I am already a part of this work setting since I have worked in this organisation for about three decades, so I am pretty familiar with the organisation’s culture. So I do not have to carry out any prolonged field observation. My tacit

knowledge of the organisation's culture, occasioned by my extended stay in the organisation (which may suffice for observation), combined with in-depth interviews, which I am readily disposed to doing, may have given my research an ethnographic spin. Therefore, knowing that my research is on the impact(s) of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture, it will be challenging to study these impacts through observations as required. So ethnography cannot be my primary research method.

3.6.4 Phenomenological research

Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. As Leedy and Ormrod (2001), cited in Williams (2007, p. 69) put it, the purpose of this study is "to understand an experience from the participant's point of view". "Understanding lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method" (Moustakas, 1994, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). The focus is "on the participant's perceptions of the event or situation, and the study tries to answer the question of the experience. Phenomenological studies are optimal for understanding human emotional experiences and typically investigate deep, personal, human phenomena such as love and anger" (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, cited in Sweeney, 2016, p. 72). Creswell (1998), quoted in Williams (2007, p. 69), also points out that the essence of this study is the search for "the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on the memory, image, and meaning". The method for a phenomenological study is similar to that of grounded theory because interviews are conducted. The method of collecting data is through lengthy (1 - 2 hours) interviews to understand and interpret a participant's perception of the meaning of an event (p. 69). I find phenomenological research methodology suitable for my research because my focus is on the participants' experience and perceptions of the impacts of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture. There are, however, two distinct approaches to phenomenological research:

3.6.4.1 Descriptive phenomenology

Phenomenology, “understood as the careful description of experiences in the manner in which they are experienced by the subject, proposes to study, in Husserl’s words, the whole of our life of consciousness” (Moran, 2013, p. 37). Considered the founder of phenomenology as a philosophy and the descriptive (eidetic) approach to inquiry, Husserl’s central insight was that consciousness was the condition of all human experience (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 173). “An important tenet of the Husserlian approach to science was the belief that the meaning of lived experiences may be unravelled only through one-to-one transactions between the researcher and the objects of research” (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 173). These transactions must involve “attentive listening, interaction, and observation to create a representation of reality more sophisticated than previous understandings” (Husserl, 1970, cited in Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 173). The difficulty of this study is that the researcher usually has some connection, experience, or stake in the situation, so bracketing (setting aside all prejudgments) is required (Williams, 2007, p. 69). It calls on investigators to set aside preconceptions through the procedures involved in bracketing. The process involves “studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). However, given that I will not be studying the participants in my study in this manner, the descriptive phenomenology is unsuitable for my research, even more so because I am involved in the organisation, experiencing the same phenomenon, and so I cannot set aside my prejudgments entirely as required.

3.6.4.2 Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenology

Husserl had many successors who, over time, “modified, critiqued, and further developed his approach. One of these successors is Heidegger, who sought to answer the question of the meaning of being. He believed that humans are hermeneutic (interpretive) beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives” (Draucker, 1999, cited in Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 174).

Wojnar and Swanson (2007, p. 174), concurring with other researchers, submit that “Heideggerian phenomenology is based on the perspective that the understanding of

individuals cannot occur in isolation of their culture, social context, or historical period in which they live. Hermeneutic phenomenology is “attentive to the philosophies underpinning both hermeneutics and phenomenology” (Van Manen, 1997, cited in Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p. 616). It is a “research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the lifeworld of individuals that can connect with the experience of all of us collectively” (Smith, 1997, cited in Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p. 616). From “identification of the experience of phenomena, a deeper understanding of the meaning of that experience is sought, and this occurs through increasingly deeper and layered reflection by the use of rich descriptive language” according to Smith (1997), cited Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p. 616.

The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenology, therefore, is “to construct an animating, evocative description of the human actions, behaviours, intentions and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld” (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007, p. 622). “Understanding and interpretation, and all that they involve, are the primary concerns of hermeneutics” (Geanellos, 1998, p. 154). Interpretation is an attempt to grasp and recreate meaning so that more complete or different understandings occur; it seeks to make clear or bring to light that which is fragmentary, confused or hidden. It also has explanatory power as it describes, reveals or illustrates how a particular understanding came into being. This is most often seen when researchers use textual excerpts to illustrate interpretation.

McAuley (2004, p. 192) also submits that “lying at the heart of hermeneutics are issues of intuition, interpretation, understanding, the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research and the reader”. In recent times, hermeneutics is understood as a philosophical take on interpretivist social science, an assertion that “understanding is interpretation”. Thus, reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing or tracking one’s standpoint, prejudgments, biases or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the engagement of one’s preconceptions. The need to address pre-understandings is vital for researchers using the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology as inherent in Heidegger’s writing is the notion that interpretation involves a background of presuppositions from which the interpreter can never be free. Consequently, researchers that use Heideggerian

hermeneutic phenomenology are obliged to demonstrate the working out of their fore structures in terms of the phenomenon under investigation.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2001), as reported in Cole (2007, p. 66), suggest that “the inherent meaning in the research material can be revealed through the researcher’s intuition, where the interpreter’s feelings, knowledge and experience complement the exploration and interpretation”. They state further that, “in situations where the interpreter’s knowledge or experience is greater than that of the individual being studied, be it different or related, the interpreter can have a better understanding of the subject individual than the individual has of themselves. This, they say, is one of the key principles of the hermeneutic approach”.

Hermeneutically speaking, according to Geanellos (1998, p. 158), “interpretation is never final or complete; it is always an approximation”. This insight is noted in the earliest hermeneutic writing. For example, Schleiermacher, in his 1819 lectures, said: “no individual inspection of work ever exhausts its meaning; interpretation can always be rectified. Even the best is only an approximation of the meaning” (Geanellos, 1998, p. 158).

According to Cole (2007, p. 66), the role of the researcher is “to try and become aware of many things through the interpretation of the text; and recognise that there may be meaning within the culturally dominant text. The text itself can be about anything that is derived from human experience and its consequences, which may include books, poems and songs”. In addition, Benner (1994), cited in Whitehead (2004, p. 513), also suggests that “the themes emerging from the text may, therefore, be different for each reader but, critically, although readers may not share the author’s interpretation, they should be able to follow the pathway that led to the interpretation given”. Cole (2007, p. 66) states further that “a tenet of the hermeneutic approach has always been that exegesis can only be understood if it is considered in context and related to the whole”.

3.6.4.3 The Hermeneutic Circle.

According to Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), “the hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for understanding and interpretation” (p. 622), and so “the researcher remains open to

questions that emerge from studying the phenomenon and allows the text to speak. The answer is then to be found in the text” (p. 623). This leads to an exploration of the critical aspect of the hermeneutic approach.

According to McAuley (2004, p. 193), Gadamer (1985), who Grondin (1995) describes as “both the forceful and coherent exponent of contemporary hermeneutics”, discusses “many core principles that underpin the hermeneutics approach and that constitute the hermeneutic circle”. These include the idea that there can be a “hermeneutic rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole. The harmony of all the details with the whole is the criterion of correct understanding” (Gadamer, 1985, cited in McAuley, 2004, p. 193).

The basic principle of understanding is “to find in the particular or detail, the spirit of the whole and to comprehend the particular through the whole. Both are poised only with and through each other. Just as the whole cannot be thought of apart from the particular as its member, the particular cannot be viewed apart from the whole as the sphere in which it lives. Thus, neither precedes the other because both condition each other reciprocally and only in this manner is it possible that one will comprehend the particular through the whole and conversely, the whole through the particular; for both are simultaneously given in all their particularity” (Ast, 1808, cited in Geanellos, 1998, p. 159).

According to McAuley (2004, p. 195), quoting Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2001), the researcher can start the hermeneutic circle “at one point and then delve further and further into the matter by alternating between part and whole, which brings a progressively deeper understanding of both”. In this case, prior research and prior literature are bringing into the developing scene some loose boundaries; some steer into what is being explored. In this sense, both the preunderstanding and the research itself go through iterations of interpretation. From this springboard, “hermeneutic scientists interpret immediate events such as non-verbal phenomena; physical environment and unexpected events in the light of previous events, private experience and whatever else they find pertinent to the situation under investigation” (Gummesson, 2000, cited in McAuley, 2004, p. 195).

Hermeneutic (Interpretive) phenomenology is the methodology I find most suitable to address my research questions. Since the main focus of phenomenology, according to Ajjawi and Higgs (2007, p. 616), is “on pre-reflective experiences and feelings (the essence of a phenomenon)”, an essential aspect of my research is exploring my participants’ experiences of frequent downsizing on organisation’s culture, the hermeneutic (Interpretive) phenomenology will be the primary methodology for my research. This methodology is also aligned with the social constructivism stance I am taking for the study. As a matter of fact, hermeneutics is a deeper form of social constructivism as it is concerned with understanding the deep meaning of experience; it seeks profound interpretations beyond semantic interpretations and presupposes all interpretation is a process comprising of a pre-understanding, pre-judgment and hermeneutical circle. As such, I will be interpreting from the text of the transcribed experience, reaching for deeper meanings with my foreknowledge and prejudgements, as I find the spirit of understanding the whole through all the parts.

3.6.5 Grounded theory

Grounded theory is “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants. This process involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information” (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 30). Two primary characteristics of this design are “the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and the differences in information” (Creswell, 2009, p. 30).

When embarking on a research enquiry, it is generally accepted that the phenomenon being investigated has a bearing on the formulation of the research problem, the consequent design of the research, and its implementation (Pearse and Kanyangale, 2009, p. 68). As such, “the researcher’s assumptions about the nature of organisational culture will shape what the researcher is looking for and how it can be accessed” (Pearse and Kanyangale, 2009, p. 68). Organisational culture is concerned with processes involved in creating meaning and action, and so at first glance, researching organisational culture using the grounded theory method is intuitively

logical, given the symbolic interactionist roots of grounded theory and the ease of conceptualising organisational culture as a fundamental social process (p. 67).

Charmaz (2008) argues that “grounded theory is not only a method for understanding research participants’ social constructions but also is a method that researchers construct throughout inquiry” (p. 397) and that grounded theory “is a method of explication and emergence” (p. 408). Andrade (2009, p. 46) also submits, quoting others, that grounded theory, “the discovery of theory from data”, provides “the opportunity for the researcher to theorise from evidence existing in the data. Through the correct application of this systemic process, the researcher can produce either substantive theory, which is generated from within a specific area of enquiry or formal theory, which is focused on conceptual entities”.

Pearse and Kanyangale (2009, p. 67) also state, quoting other researchers, that “the original rationale of the grounded theory method was to discover or generate a well-integrated, inductive theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour, and which is relevant to those involved”. The major advantage of grounded theory is its inductive, contextual, and process-based nature (Charmaz, 2006; Orlikowski, 1993; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, cited in Andrade, 2009, p. 46). These characteristics prove to be particularly useful for interpretive researchers. A social constructionist approach to grounded theory “allows us to address “why” questions while preserving the complexity of social life”, according to Charmaz (2008, p. 397).

My research questions do not make grounded theory the most appropriate research methodology though grounded theory is inevitable in my research since I will be contrasting my findings with extant literature, which is grounding theory in my data. Thus, it is taken in combination with hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.6.6 Reflexivity

Qualitative writing is “socially constructed, situated in the researcher’s use of varied interpretive lenses” (Patnaik, 2013, p. 100). Reflexivity pertains to the “analytic attention to the researcher’s role in qualitative research” (Gouldner, 1971, cited in Dowling, 2006, p. 8). It is a concept “central to qualitative research in general, where

it is viewed as a means of adding credibility. It is both a concept and a process” (Dowling, 2006, p.17).

As a concept, it “refers to a certain level of consciousness and as a process, is introspection on the role of subjectivity in the research process” (Palaganas *et al.*, 2017, p. 427). Reflexivity “(in the form of articulating the researcher’s personal views and insights about the phenomenon explored through, for instance, a personal journal) is a method of enhancing credibility in grounded theory methodology” (Chiovitti and Piran, 2003, cited in Dowling, 2006, p. 17). According to Parahoo (2006), quoted in Jootun *et al.* (2009, p. 42), reflexivity is “a continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values, preconceptions, behaviour or presence and those of the respondents, which can affect the interpretation of responses”. It is also of “recognizing, examining, and understanding how their “social background, location and assumptions affect their research practice” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, cited in Palaganas *et al.*, 2017, p. 427). The key to reflexivity is “to make the relationship between and the influence of the researcher and the participants explicit” (Jootun *et al.*, 2009, p. 46).

An “understanding of one’s attitudes, values and biases is a useful tool in gaining deeper insight into the research and ensuring that the focus remains on the research and its participants. Simultaneously, by situating oneself in the research process, the researcher facilitates the reader’s understanding of the perspectives that led to the analyses and findings” (Patnaik, 2013, p. 100). Reflexivity acknowledges “the role of the researcher as a participant in the process of knowledge construction and not merely an outsider-observer of a phenomenon. In this, reflexivity goes beyond reflection or merely a process of introspection or self-awareness” (Patnaik, 2013, p. 101).

A theoretical understanding of reflexivity “is perhaps easier than achieving it in practice. There is the danger of it becoming an exercise in self-indulgence. The researcher might also gain insights that incite self-doubt. Developing a sufficient grasp over the exploration of self as a subject and as an object can be, in itself, an intense and lengthy process, taking the researcher away from the real objective of such engagement. However, the social construction of research demands that the

researcher's voice be heard, not just to legitimise the researcher's philosophy in conducting the study, but also to lend the work credibility and to embed it better in an epistemological context" (Patnaik, 2013, p. 105).

As surmised by Palaganas *et al.* (2017, p. 427), "practising reflexivity is a significant component of qualitative research (Morse *et al.*, 2002), but as a process, it should be embedded in all the principles (Van de Riet, 2012)"; and "relate to the degree of influence that the researchers exert, either intentionally or unintentionally, on the findings" (Jootun *et al.*, 2009, p. 42). Jootun *et al.* (2009, p. 42) also stated that the "inclusion of a reflexive account increases the rigour of the research process".

In my study, I practised reflexivity as a method of enhancing credibility even though my central methodology recognises my pre-understandings and biases in the research process.

From all the discussions of the methodologies considered in the foregoing and the chosen methodology for the exploration, in-depth interviewing aligns best with the method of data collection.

3.7 Methods (*In-depth Interviews*)

Generally, an interview is described as the "favoured digging tool" of social sciences (Kvale, 1996, in Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 627). Interviewing in organisational settings simply requires verbal accounts to learn about the social life of workers. Interviewing could be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured. In most cases, however, these are combined for more informative data gathering. For qualitative research, "interviewing is flexible and dynamic, and is therefore described as in-depth interviewing" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998 in Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 627). In-depth interviewing is thus explained as "repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and participants, directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words" (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005, p. 627). Furthermore, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) referred to qualitative interviewing as "nondirective, non-standardized, and open-ended".

According to Ehigie and Ehigie (2005, p 627), the in-depth interview is “usually designed as a conversation between equals rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. Unlike the case with interviewing in quantitative research, where structured questions and response alternatives are made available for participants, the interviewer is not just an impersonal data collector but is more of a research tool for data collection. This is based on the fact that the interviewer does not just obtain answers generated by respondents but reasons as to what questions to ask and how to present them to specific respondents to obtain reliable answers. Thus, the in-depth interview is a semi-structured interview that is very much related to the participant observation but with some differences”. The conversational interview will be used to explore and gather experiential narrative material that “would serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the experience being studied” (Noronha and D’Cruz, 2006, p. 93).

For this exploration, I applied the principles of action learning by asking open-ended questions as much as practicable, enabling the interviewees to come out with the required substance for interpretation. Some of the questions were also related to my long observation of the non-visibility (or extinction) of certain customs embedded in the organisation’s most dominant culture. This thus made my role as a researcher very crucial to the discovery journey.

3.8 Role of the Researcher

According to Maxwell (2002, p. 20), the role of the researcher has “two major components. The first is the personal properties that the researcher brings to the research viz the prior experiences, beliefs, purposes, values, and subjective qualities that shape how the researcher conceptualizes the study and engages with it. That is, the researcher is the major instrument of the research. The second component is the researcher’s relationships with those studied”.

Sweeney (2016, p. 73), referring to Greene’s (2014) work, submits that “researchers can be insiders or outsiders to the subjects of their inquiry”. For this research, I was the principal data collector. I performed the role of the researcher and a member of the participants' organisation, industry and national culture. This privileged me to be

an inside investigator, a position that helped facilitate trust and confidence in my relationship with the participants. The relationship made it easy to establish rapport with the participants quickly and throughout the data gathering process; more importantly, it provided the required access to their lived experience of the investigated phenomena. I was also conversant with the participants' language, which enabled greater access to their world. So I did not need to ask for clarification during and after the interviews constantly.

Though my research method allowed me to use my pre-understanding as a bias for the research, I still engaged in bracketing to lessen the impact of my bias, ensuring the participants' understanding of the phenomenon was not prejudiced. Rather than give them my definition or pre-understanding of the phenomena being studied, I allowed the participants to define the phenomena, express their understanding of them freely and describe how they were experienced. Thus, reflexivity was used as an essential tool in this research endeavour.

3.9 Recruitment of Participants - *Population and Sampling*

A population is defined as “all people or items that one wishes to understand, while sampling is the process of selecting a segment of the population for investigation. It is a process of selecting a sample of units from a data set to measure the characteristics, beliefs and attitudes of the people” (Rahi, 2017, p. 3). According to Rahi (2017, p. 3), authors like Malhotra and Birks (2007) have explained that “a smaller group of the population can make an inference about a larger group of the population”. This type of selection is also beneficial “to reduce the work burden and cost that would have been involved in studying the whole target population”. Similar to this, Cooper *et al.* (2003), cited in Rahi (2017, p. 3), have posited that ‘there are several reasons for sampling which includes better speed of data collection, the accuracy of results and cost-efficiency’.

I have worked in all the operational areas of the company and know there are peculiarities with each location, so I suspect there may be different perspectives that could be shared as per work location. I therefore sought and randomly selected individuals across the various work locations within two years in the company (

Goshen-Gusher Energy) that experiences a relatively high frequency of downsizing exercises. Twelve participants were in the senior staff cadre, while the thirteenth person was a middle management staff. The data collection and analysis processes will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, just before I present the findings from the interviews.

3.10 Reporting method

According to Sandelowski (1998, p. 375), “one key element in the successful dissemination and utilization of qualitative findings is a well-written research report”. She went on to declare the fact that there is no one style for reporting the findings from qualitative research but espoused Wolcott’s (1990) assertion that qualitative researchers must choose not only what “story” they will tell but also how they will tell it. Sandelowski argued that “qualitative researchers must select from an array of representational styles and formats those that best fit their research purposes, methods, and data; and must attend to the balance among description, analysis, and interpretation, choose whether to emphasize character, setting, or plot, determine whose perspectives or voices will prevail and treat metaphors seriously” (p. 375). Given that my research is inductive and interpretative, my style of writing will have a blend of narrative and descriptive convention, using metaphors as appropriate to explicate the whole research journey.

There were underlying research ethics I had to deal with during the research, which I will present in the following section.

3.11 Research Ethics

Orb *et al.* (2001, p. 93) assert that “ethical issues are present in any kind of research and the nature of ethical problems in qualitative research studies is subtle and different compared to problems in quantitative research”. Sweeney (2016, p. 94), deriving her stance from other researchers’ points of view, also alluded to the fact that “ethics in qualitative research involves the moral considerations that a researcher makes throughout the study - from the inception of the study to the conclusion of it; and that ethical underpinning of the study is the vehicle for achieving qualitative excellence”. In

Tracy's (2010) words, "ethics are not just a means, but rather constitute a universal end goal of qualitative quality itself, despite paradigm' (p. 846).

Dooly *et al.* (2017, p. 351) suggest that "qualitative research, especially studies in educational contexts, often brings up questions of ethics because the study design involves human subjects". Qualitative researchers "focus their research on exploring, examining, and describing people and their natural environments" (Orb *et al.*, 2001, p. 93). Therefore, any research that "includes people requires an awareness of the ethical issues that may be derived from such interactions" (Orb *et al.*, 2001, p. 93).

Ethical dilemmas that may arise from an interview are difficult to predict, but the researcher needs to be aware of sensitive issues and potential conflicts of interest. An interview is usually equated with confidentiality, informed consent, and privacy, but also by a recurrence of "old wounds" and sharing of secrets (Orb *et al.*, 2001, p. 94). Researchers should therefore take into consideration "how they are going to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants" (Dooly *et al.*, 2017, p. 351).

Connecting with the views of Kara and Pickering, 2017, cited in Ciuk and Latusek, 2018, p. 1), "ethical thinking in qualitative research goes beyond ethical decisions during data collection and analysis; but concerns broader issues such as presentation and circulation of research results, public engagement or the dumping of data in research databanks to make them available for other researchers, which is increasingly required by funding bodies".

This recognition notwithstanding, the remit of Research Ethics Committees (RECs) and the associated anticipatory pre-study ethics regulation has been expanding (Mautghner *et al.*, 2012 cited in Ciuk and Latusek, 2018, p. 2). Before commencing this research, I reviewed the University's research ethics policy and completed the research ethics checklist (SHUREC1), which served as a guide to ethical considerations and scrutiny for this research, especially as it involves human participation.

According to Tracy (2010, p. 846), 'just as multiple paths lead to qualitative quality, a variety of practices attend to ethics in qualitative research, including procedural,

situational, relational, and exiting ethics'. Thus, to achieve qualitative quality in my research, I followed these four practices.

3.11.1 Procedural ethics

Procedural ethics refer to “ethical actions dictated as universally necessary by larger organisations, institutions or governing bodies. Governing bodies include universities’ Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRBs, in their forms, issue mandates such as do no harm, avoid deception, negotiate informed consent, ensure privacy and confidentiality etc.” (Sales and Folkman, 2000, cited in Tracy, 2010, p. 847). One of the most central requirements of research ethics committees, and arguably also one of the most often debated ethical challenges, is the need to obtain informed consent from the prospective research participants (Ciuk and Latusek, 2018, p. 3). Procedural ethics also suggest that research participants have a right to know the nature and potential consequences of the research - and understand that their participation is voluntary. Such procedures not only attend to ethics but also lead to more credible data: “weak consent usually leads to poorer data: Respondents will try to protect themselves in a mistrusted relationship, or one formed with the researcher by superiors only” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 291 cited in Tracy, 2010, p. 847).

According to Ciuk and Latusek (2018, p. 8), “it is widely accepted that researchers are obliged to protect their research participants (and themselves) against any undesirable effects of their study. The requirement of no harm and the obligation to protect one’s research respondents have contributed to the practice of treating the identity of research subjects (i.e., people, organisations, and selected social groups) as confidential as possible and substituting them with pseudonyms in reports and publications of the results”. For this research, the interviews were taken with my personal voice recorder, which no other person can access. The collated data was transcribed and stored electronically on my personal computer.

I practised this ethic by approaching my participants to get their consent (though given verbally), stating the nature and intent of my research and assuring them of confidentiality as pseudonyms were used for them and the organisation. These

occurred only after complying with Sheffield Hallam University's research ethics policy and requirements.

Also, as suggested by Sweeney (2016, p. 95), referring to Martin-Perez *et al.* (2013), "researchers can offer incentives to study participants as a means of eliciting a higher response rate to participating in a study". The main problem with offering incentives is the possibility of biasing the study (Göriz, 2006, cited in Sweeney, 2016, p. 96). I did not offer any incentives to the participants for participating in my research. Elicited mutual interest in the subject was enough to get them willing to participate.

3.11.2 Situational ethics

Situational ethics refer to ethical practices that emerge from a reasoned consideration of a context's specific circumstances. The term situational ethics emerged in the 1960s from Christian theology. A situational ethic deals with "the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). These responsibilities go beyond review boards and proclamations like "the greater good" and "do not harm".

A situational ethic assumes "that each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions. Situational ethics asks that we constantly reflect on our methods and the data worth exposing. In summary, this approach suggests that ethical decisions should be based on the particularities of a scene" (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). It didn't appear that any situation would compromise the position or integrity of my participants or any chance the results would have negative repercussions on them. Nevertheless, I addressed this by ensuring their identities was hidden and nothing in the research could implicate them. I also made them aware they were not under any compulsion to share anything they were not comfortable with to prevent any unforeseen emotional outbursts or unexpressed discomfort. Even when one participant shared an episode of depression experienced, he was calm about it, but I kept checking his demeanour and voice tones to be sure it was okay to continue.

3.11.3 Relational ethics.

Relational ethics involve “an ethical self-consciousness in which researchers are mindful of their character, actions, and consequences on others” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Relational ethics are related to an ethic of care that “recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Ciuk and Latusek (2018, p. 10) noted that “many ethical issues in qualitative research based on direct relationships with research participants are related to commencing, maintaining, and ending those relations; and that the ability to establish relations with research participants is crucial for qualitative researchers. The skill, they argue, is often considered a prerequisite for building trust with participants, which, in turn, is expected to help the researcher obtain more honest answers from research participants and richer data”. The participants in my research were not entirely unknown to me despite not being members of the same workgroup. So I already had a good relationship with each of them, which was why I could approach them (easy access), earn their trust and get them to flow with me during the data collection process. This relationship was respected and maintained throughout the process.

3.11.4 Exiting ethics

Ethical considerations continue “beyond the data collection phase to how researchers leave the scene and share the results. Certainly, researchers never have full control over how their work will be read, be understood, and used” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). Researchers can consider how best to present the research to avoid unjust or unintended consequences. Interestingly, almost all the participants in my study asked if they would get to see the research results when it was finished. Though already planned, this allowed me to exercise “exiting” ethics by promising to share the results with them at the end of the research. It was a good feeling for me, as a researcher, to know the results of my study are keenly awaited. The experience was mutually beneficial as it was also an elixir for me to finish the research.

3.12 Limitation of Study

The only outstanding limitations of the research, in my opinion, are access to Senior management staff and the researcher's experience and influence which are discussed thus:

3.12.1 Access to Senior Management Staff

The study was not commissioned by the organisation in which the research was conducted. As such, a pseudonym was even used to protect its identity. Therefore, more senior staff members in the management cadre could not be approached and interviewed. Only one participant in the middle management level was interested and willing to contribute to the research. More profound insights may perhaps have been provided if they were approachable and ready to be part of the exploration. This, however, does not take any merit from the process or the quality of data obtained from the eventually recruited participants. Future research of this nature could be conducted if approval can be secured to include this class of staff members.

3.12.2 Researcher's Experience and Influence

Also, my personal experience and dispositions had a bearing on the whole research. This was the first time I would be involved in qualitative research, and so my philosophical stance and methodology controlled the exploration. Another researcher may have considered other methodologies/methods and achieved a different outcome. The process was also subject to the extent to which I could rely solely on the obtained data while practising reflexivity. Just like with my methodology, and as cited earlier, I would admit my interpretation may not be final or complete as interpretation is always an approximation (Geanellos, 1998). So the research outcome is limited to my experience (though guided) and my interpretation (even with reflexivity).

3.13 Research Risks

A robust risk assessment was carried out for this research, especially as it pertained to the method employed for data collection methods. The primary identified risks, which were thereafter mitigated before proceeding, were:

3.13.1 Access and Potential Safety Hazards Associated with Remote Locations:

Aside from the organisation's headquarters where I work, the other two locations were industrial. I would have needed a business justification to go and interview the participants on-site and also would have been exposed to particular hazards I may not be aware of nor entirely up to date on preventive measures to take. Appropriate "personal protective equipment" and re-orientation would have been needed. Instead, I scheduled the interviews with my participant during their off-duty days at neutral and cosy locations like the company's recreation centre. This way, we avoided the hazards and were able to have the interviews in a comfortable space.

3.13.2 Sincerity of Participants:

Due to the nature of the phenomena being studied and the intrusive method of data acquisition, the study could have suffered a setback if the participants were not forthcoming with their actual lived experiences, given that the conversations were captured with a voice recorder. This risk was mitigated with the assurances of confidentiality and demonstration that pseudonyms will be used to represent them while relating to their submissions in the report. This was to guarantee the sufficiency of data for the research.

3.13.3 Participants' Comfort and Duration of Interview:

There was also the risk of prolonged exposure and comfort of the participants during the interviews. This was mitigated by aligning on the comfortable venues and schedules that were favourable to them. The time for the interviews was also kept within the acceptable range for each participant; though planned for about an hour on average, the eventual time range was 16 to 84 minutes. Though the research was not predicated on observations of participants in their work locations, recollection of experiences perhaps may have been fuller if the interviews were conducted in their work settings.

3.14 Research evaluation

Whittemore *et al.* (2001, p. 522) observed that "one contemporary dialogue has centred on the difficulty of establishing validity criteria in qualitative research". Drapeau

(2004), cited in Hayashi *et al.* (2019, p. 99), also submits that “while validity is recognized and widespread in quantitative research, the same cannot be said for qualitative studies”. On their part, Morse *et al.* (2002, p. 14) argue that “without rigour, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility. Hence, a great deal of attention is “applied to reliability and validity in all research methods”. Ambert *et al.*, 1995, cited in Whittemore *et al.* (2001, p. 524), went further to state that “qualitative research seeks depth over breadth and attempts to learn subtle nuances of life experiences as opposed to aggregate evidence). Qualitative research is contextual and subjective versus generalizable and objective”.

Hayashi *et al.* (2019, p. 98) also assert that “the validity and reliability of research and its results are important elements to provide evidence of the quality of research in the organisational field. As there is diversity within qualitative research methods and techniques, there are no universally accepted criteria to assess validity in qualitative studies”. McKinnon (1988), cited in Hayashi *et al.* (2019, p. 100), also highlighted the “unintended biases and effects caused by the researcher, limitations in access to adequate data, and the complexity and limitations of the human mind as threats to the quality of research results. Several authors prefer to propose and adopt different terminologies and concepts for qualitative studies, arguing that validity and reliability, for example, are consecrated terms in quantitative research and therefore carry a certain inheritance with them”. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), cited in Hayashi *et al.* (2019, p. 101), “the trustworthiness of a research study is the central aspect of the issues that are conventionally called validity and reliability”.

According to Morse *et al.* (2002, p. 14), Guba and Lincoln, in their seminal work in the 1980s, “substituted reliability and validity with the parallel concept of “trustworthiness,” containing four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) developed authenticity criteria that were unique to the constructivist assumptions and that could be used to evaluate the quality of the research beyond the methodological dimensions. Thus, over time, reliability and validity have been subtly replaced by criteria and standards for evaluation of the overall significance, relevance, impact, and utility of completed research”. In this research, I also used Guba and Lincoln’s four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to evaluate the quality of my research thus:

3.14.1 Credibility

This is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Credibility establishes “whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants’ original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants’ original views” (Korstjens and Moser, 2018, p. 121). Credibility is concerned with “the validity of the conclusions that are drawn from the data and how these conclusions match the reality being reported” (Mabuza *et al.*, 2014, p. 3). According to them, “there are many aspects of the study design and reporting that affect the credibility of the work: recognised research methods, sufficient engagement with the phenomenon of interest, checking the transcriptions and emerging themes with the informants (so-called “member checking” and “respondent validation”), debriefing of the researcher with their mentor or supervisor, peer scrutiny of the process and triangulation” (p. 3).

Since I used in-depth interviews as my source of data, I recorded all conversations with the 13 participants and later transcribed each conversation. I went through this process many times to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and to draw out the meanings of the words. I also reflected on the voice tones of the participants in the process, so I did not have to circle back with the respondents for validation. I also used participants' direct quotes (and paraphrases) as much as required. Also, according to Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 121), data triangulation “refers to using multiple data sources in time, space (collecting data on the same phenomenon in multiple sites or testing for cross-site consistency) and person (gathering data from different types or level of people)”. I used data triangulation, as advocated in the preceding, to collect information from participants in the different work locations and people with years of experience ranging from 6 – 25 years across the senior staff and middle management cadres.

3.14.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to “how well the study conclusions can be applied to other similar settings; the ability of others to judge whether the findings can be transferred depends on a detailed description of the study setting, the selection of participants and the

findings. This is often referred to as a thick description” (Mabuza *et al.*, 2014, p. 3). The “degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through the thick description” (Korstjens and Moser, 2018, p. 121).

The onus of transferability is always on the recipient of the study to determine the applicability to (suitability for) their situation or location. To make the decision easy, I have made a detailed description of the phenomenon being studied, the organisation my research was set in, how the participants were recruited, my method and methodologies, as well as the findings from the research process.

3.14.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the extent to which similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated. However, variability should be expected in qualitative studies as the focus is on “the range of experience rather than the average experience”. The best way of supporting the dependability of the research is to ensure that the methods are described in sufficient detail that they could be replicated by someone else (a step-by-step ‘audit trail’) and any limitations are discussed (Mabuza *et al.*, 2014, p. 3). Dependability is “the stability of findings over time; and involves participants’ evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study” (Korstjens and Moser, 2018, p. 121). They go further to define it as “transparently describing the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings”. The records of the research path are kept throughout the study. Dependability includes the aspect of consistency. One needs to check whether the analysis process aligns with the accepted standards for a particular design. I have detailed my data collection process and analysis to guarantee dependability, as presented in the next chapter.

3.14.4 Confirmability

According to Mabuza *et al.* (2014, p. 3 - 4), confirmability refers “to the degree of objectivity of the researcher in data collection and reporting. The reader wants to

ensure that the results are truly based on the data and not the characteristics or preferences of the researcher. Triangulation of the findings with other researchers and methods can help with this, but still, all qualitative researchers must also account for their reflexivity". They say reflexivity refers "to the researcher's awareness of the self as a research instrument". The quality of the data obtained through interviewing or observation will, to some extent, depend on the nature of the interviewer. Qualitative research does not claim to be free of subjectivity. Still, it should strive to be conscious and describe how the researchers have accounted for the subjectivity as part of the research process. Describing the researcher's credentials, training, occupation, and prior relationship to the research subjects helps to demonstrate in the proposal that you are thinking about reflexivity.

Confirmability is "the degree to which other researchers could confirm the research study's findings. It is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data" (Korstjens and Moser, 2018, p. 121). They go further to say confirmability "concerns the aspect of neutrality". One needs to secure the inter-subjectivity of the data. The interpretation "should not be based on your particular preferences and viewpoints but needs to be grounded in the data. Here, the focus is on the interpretation process embedded in the process of analysis". According to Sweeney (2016, p. 109), confirmability is "also achieved when a study has credibility, transferability, and dependability".

As detailed in the research methodology, reflexivity was used during this exploration. Though my hermeneutic phenomenology methodology permitted the use of biases and pre-understandings, I nevertheless engaged in reflexivity by conscious self-awareness and criticism, having declared all my biases, pre-understandings and my role as an inside researcher (who is set in the organisation and experiencing the same phenomena being studied). I also submit that only I, as the researcher and my research supervisor, have seen the actual transcripts, which are not attached to the research report for confidentiality but can be made available on request.

3.15 Conclusions and Chapter Summary

Considering the reviewed methodologies/method above, I see how applicable they may be to the subject of my research and their respective limitations. I see an overlap in my chosen methodology, especially in the data collection phase, with some of those discussed above. I acknowledge the fact that participants may choose to respond in the narrative form and that my observation, being part of the organisation, may also form a part of my initial bias. I have chosen hermeneutic (Interpretative) phenomenology as the overarching methodology for my exploration (using in-depth interviews as data source) since it permits the use of my pre-understanding and bias in my inductive inquiry. The intent is not to allow bias to drive the conversations as I plan to refine my pre-understandings using the hermeneutic lens during the thematic analysis process. I intend to contrast my findings with theory, so grounded theory is inevitable in combination with my chosen course of research. Reflexivity will help to give credence to the work. I have also presented identified limitations and risks with mitigation plans and my commitment to carry out ethical research.

The following chapter is on the presentation of the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted during my exploration of the impact of the frequency of downsizing on a company's organisational culture. The results were from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews of the thirteen participants in the research. The themes generated will also be grounded in theory as they are presented.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced - James Baldwin (1962)

“The aim of argument or findings should not be victory, but progress.” - Joseph Joubert (1848)

4.0 Introduction.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the semi-structured interviews I conducted while exploring the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on a company's organisational culture. I have worked in all the company's operational areas and know there are peculiarities with each location. Hence, I suspect there may be different perspectives that could be shared as per work location. I therefore sought and randomly selected individuals across the various work locations within two years in the company (Goshen-Gusher Energy) that experienced a relatively high frequency of downsizing exercises. Twelve participants were in the senior staff cadre, while the thirteenth person was a middle management staff.

Table 1 shows a summary of the participants, with pseudonyms used in place of their real names.

Transcription		Operational Areas												
		Lech - Head Office						Estios-Field Location				Akani - Field Location		
		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
		Bee	Emmy	Yommy	Ownny	Ijay	Nero	Lakeside	Billy	Pees	Ofonzo	Sitie	TeeKay	Chuks
		F	M	M	F	F	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Department / Group		PetroTech	PetroTech	SCM	PetroTech	IT	PetroTech	IT	PetroTech	PetroTech	FE	FE	Operations	Operations
Years of Service		25	11	7	12	12	20	6	8	8	18	13	10	6
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Pay Grade Level	Senior Management	18												
		17												
		16												
	Middle Management	15												
		14						X						
	Senior Staff	13												
		12	X	X		X						X		
		11										X	X	
10				X		X			X					
9									X				X	
8						X								
Interview Duration		63.00	84.36	60.00	36.14	16.03	54.19	34.41	24.56	39.53	40.59	34.10	41.31	57.25

Table 1: Summary of Actual Interview Participants and Details

Before going into the details of the findings, I would like to share my data collection process to aid understanding of the findings:

4.1 Data Collection Process and Analysis

A plan was made to approach employees working in the organisation's three work locations. I have worked in all the operational areas of the company. I know there are peculiarities with each location, so I imagined there might be different perspectives that could be shared as per work location. So, I targeted recruiting 12 – 15 willing participants across the work locations. Since it was going to be an uphill task to get to two sites because of their remoteness and the hurdle of seeking approval to go there, I informed the participants on their off-duty days. I secured two persons from one location and four from the other. I sought and secured the willful concurrence of seven persons from the largest location, the organisation's headquarters, where I worked at the time of the research.

The interviews were scheduled and conducted at each participant's convenience, mostly at comfortable sites outside their work settings. Many were at the company's recreation centres. I made efforts to meet with each participant at prescribed venues and at their convenience. I assured them over and over again of the ethical standards of the research and confidentiality even as the interviews were recorded digitally to enhance the flow of information due to the qualitative research method. I stated how free they were to stop at any time and to inform me what they were not comfortable with if the interview ever got there. They were excited about the topics and were eager to participate. I allowed ample time for the participants to express their views in their own words, using action learning principles or processes. The shortest interview time was 16 minutes, while the longest was 84 minutes. Appendix 1 shows the interview plan with the semi-structured interview questions used as a guide for the interviews.

Time Span:

I sought and randomly selected individuals across the different work locations within two years in the company (Goshen Gusher Energy) that experienced a relatively high frequency of downsizing exercises. The interviews were staged to help understand the pattern of the data coming in. In addition, the strategy provided an opportunity for

reflection on the interview questions and process. The first set of 4 participants was interviewed between March and April 2017. The interviews were later transcribed, and an unsuccessful attempt was made to analyse the data with coding software. The second and final set of interviews was conducted between March and April 2019. All consultations and interactions with participants were completed in the pre-Covid years.

Data Transcription:

After the interviews, I relived each episode when I transcribed the details into a Microsoft WORD document. The process enhanced my immersion and kept my participants' lived experiences alive. I played back each recording many times and also read and re-read the transcripts many times as well. This process helped me in my reflections after that.

Thematic Analysis (TA)

According to Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 57), "thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. By focusing on meaning *across* a dataset, thematic analysis allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. This method is a way of identifying what is common to how a topic is talked about or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities".

My initial intention was to analyse the transcribed details of the interviews using a computer software package. I sought the best of all the ones available. When the process took longer than I had imagined and I was not getting the proper connection or experience with the obtained data, I decided, with sound supervisory counsel/guidance, to take the longer path of manual coding. The manual coding process enabled me to remain immersed in the participants' lived experiences.

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) prescribed 6-phase approach to thematic analysis: familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and finally, producing the report. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020, p. 848), Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis "is designed to be a recursive process, rather than a linear process,

in which subsequent steps may prompt the researcher to circle back to earlier steps in light of new data or newly emerging themes that merit further investigations”.

Manual Coding

The transcripts from the interviews were analysed, and identical codes were generated from each of the 13 interview transcripts. At this stage of the process, I familiarised myself thoroughly with all the datasets (Stage 1 & 2 transcripts) by reading them many times and generating initial codes from them, following Braun and Clarke’s (2012) guidelines.

A 3-column Microsoft WORD document was created for each interview, with the transcript from the interview downloaded in the middle track. The transcripts were read through (noting and shading unique data points from the text), and initial codes were assigned to the unique identified texts from the transcripts. The codes were placed alternately in the first and third columns, as shown in the following excerpt from one of my interview transcripts.

Codes	Transcribed Interview Text Details	Codes
Lack of communication thickens the Cloud of uncertainty	Interviewee: The frequency had an impact for that period. This was because the duration between the first one and the second one was a bit short. If it was something that was done with the view of years apart, it would have helped people settle their minds and improve on themselves but where you have such uncertainty year one, year two, year three you are considering it, everyone would start asking themselves what really is going on.	The frequency created the Cloud of uncertainty
	The number one key to this is communication. When I'm uncertain and the person who is in charge is not communicating with me, I don't know his thoughts, he doesn't know what I'm thinking, and the cloud of uncertainty thickens. It doesn't make things any better but if within the period maybe year one, year seven or whatever year	
	Interviewer: you think people will start looking out?	
	Interviewee: Yes as long as the duration between each downsizing periods are short, people will definitely look out. Like I said, normal humans don't like uncertainty.	PEOPLE looking for outside opportunities
	Interviewer: Again you said you've spent eleven years, I think	

Table 2: Excerpt from one interview transcript.

The codes were generated as connections between concepts with vocabulary to facilitate the interpretation of the data meaningfully – they were not just mere single-worded. A total of sixty (60) codes were generated from the transcript analysed above. After this process, all the generated codes were collated in preparation for the themes generation process that followed. The number of codes varied from one interview to the other. Thus, the first two steps of familiarising myself with the data and generating initial codes were completed.

Themes Generation

A theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, cited in Kiger and Varpio, 2020, p. 848; Braun and Clarke, 2012, p. 63). As such, the three steps of searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, and defining and naming themes in Braun and Clarke’s (2012) prescribed 6-phase approach to thematic analysis followed. First, the codes generated from all the interviews were collated and combined to generate themes initially through fewer worded categorisations. The themes were also developed as connections between concepts from the codes to facilitate the interpretation of the data meaningfully. This activity was done for each of the 13 transcripts independently. Appendix 2 summarises how the codes were mapped and categorised for one of the interview transcripts. A total of 11 themes emerged from the transcript.

The initially generated themes were later reviewed and combined in a roll-up exercise after completing the 13 independent transcription exercises. The table below is an excerpt from the final exercise.

		110	100	00
Themes	Sub-Themes	Bee Codes	Nero Codes	Billy Codes
Leadership Actions & Inactions	Leadership Reaction & Communication	Organization dealing with Health Issues	Mitigation efforts in response	Leadership has noticed the cracks and
		Leadership realization of Current leadership Quality & Strength	Company Reacting after...	Ensure employees are not focusing on Rumours
		Leadership misfit	Creating an enabling environment	Company should communicate properly
		Leadership is sometimes ignorant of goings on	Outsourcing to fill gap	Ask for ideas from employees
	Policy Enforcement		Knowledge Gap - Mitigation	Would have shown the last to be touched is PEOPLE
			People resign because of bosses not company	Emp will look-out for the coy when it looks out for them
	Shock to Leadership	Rude Shock	Not enough motivation & support from bosses	
Perception of the Organization - Internal & External Image	Initial Career Outlook - Reasons for Joining	Fit for Qualification	OC - Major driver to choosing company	Opportunity that became available
		Offer not comparable	Pay higher than in other industry	Have become comfortable - Not Looking out
		Limited Opportunities	Good Pay	Comparable performance
		Companies are all about the same	Does well in industry	Long career if unthreatened
	Nature of Business		Fear of missing the OC	Work at least till early retirement age
				Desire to work longer

Table 3: Excerpt from the Roll-up of Themes from the 13 Interview Transcripts

Thus, the three steps of “searching for themes”, “reviewing potential themes”, and “defining and naming themes” in Braun and Clarke’s (2012) prescribed 6-phase approach to thematic analysis were completed. The roll-up exercise resulted in a total of eight themes and ten sub-themes that were eventually used to report the findings in the following format.

Report of Findings

The sixth and final phase is producing the report of findings. The following shows the results of the interviews, presented along eight (8) themes (and ten sub-themes) that emerged from the interviews:

1. Perception of the Organisation - Internal and External Image
 - Initial Career Outlook - Reasons for Joining
 - Nature of Business
2. People - Most Prized Asset
 - Most Prized Asset
 - Brain Drain - Experience, Organisational Memory (Knowledge) Retention and Mentorship
3. Organisational Culture - Company Brand and Image
 - Clear Understanding of Organisational Culture
 - Company's Organisational Culture

4. Concept of Downsizing - for Business Survival and Continuity
5. Impact of Frequency of Downsizing on Organisational Culture
6. Impact of Frequency on Employees and Career - Impact of Frequency on length of Career
 - Employee's Well-being (Physical, Psychological, Medical and Mental Health)
 - Employee's Career Aspiration
7. Uncertainties - About the Future
8. Leadership Actions and Inactions or Reactions
 - Leadership Reaction and Communication
 - Shock to Leadership

Due to the preponderance of evidence or facts, I have supported the views shared by the interviewees with more than one quote while presenting these results. The intention is to show how they have said a thing the same way and how the same things have been told differently in their words but support the respective themes. In the chronicle, “interviewees”, “participants”, and “respondents” were interchangeably used for the participants. I begin here with their reflection on the internal and external image of the organisation.

4.2 Perception of the Organisation (- *Internal and External Image*)

I thought it reasonable first to attempt to understand how or what attracted each interviewee to the organisation so I could better understand the value placed on the organisation. It was also an attempt for me to understand what would make them stay or leave.

The responses from the participants reveal that there is more than one reason that makes someone want to have a career in a company with which they have never had any work-related interaction. At the end of the day, the decision to join a company is dictated by the individual's perception of the company, amongst all other things. Therefore, decision drivers differ from one individual to another.

4.2.1 Initial Career Outlook - What made the company attractive

Five interviewees alluded to the fact that the company is very rewarding. The comments of three of them are as follows:

‘Oh, well, I think this company is a very rewarding company, financially’.... ‘I also think the financial compensation, you know, is a motivating factor’... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘In this part of the world, the company seems to be amongst the best in terms of remuneration... [Yommy.... SCM Specialist]’.

‘The pay is good and the knowledge I also gain from the company’... [Ijay.... IT Specialist].

Saying the financial compensation from the company was a vital motivating factor in their choice of the company for their career pursuit. In addition, they identify with the organisation's possible perks and attractive working conditions. Barrow and Mosley (2005) reported this, as cited in Dawn and Biswas (2010, p. 21), saying, “employer branding is also used to transfer the message of the personality of the company as an employer of choice”. Others chose to work with the company because of their professional fit. For example, the company is an oil and gas company, which is best suited for the person's qualification as a geologist.

‘I just chose this company because of my background. I studied geology and have a Master's degree from the Institute of Petroleum Engineering; I have a Master's degree in Reservoir Evaluation and management. So, I didn't see myself working in another industry; this is what I know – how to look for oil’... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist].

A couple of the interviewees said it was either the only opportunity they had at the time of employment or the first opportunity that materialized amongst others, or they had limited options:

‘I found myself fortunate to have been able to get into the company, and I would not have said it was my first choice; there were several other companies, you know, in this sector that I could have joined, but I decided to join this

organisation because that was the opportunity that came for me and I took that opportunity because it was a good opportunity at that time'....[Billy Petroleum Engr].

'It's a tough one, especially in this part of the world where we don't get job openings.... A lot of things that have been happening in the oil and gas sector are politically driven. If the political climate is not favourable, then you need to cherish what you have at hand'.... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

'As at the time I joined, there were offers, but this was the better one'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr].

Another respondent shared with me how the organisation's culture was the solid determining factor for him. This, he says, has kept him working in the organisation for a long time because he fears losing that work atmosphere, while others had similar drivers like the perceived organisation's reputation, corporate social responsibility and corporate performance in society, thus:

'One major driver, I think, in my own opinion, is that I have some moral beliefs, some core beliefs, and I believe the company allows me to express it without being so vindictive regarding those moral and core beliefs....and I'm afraid to go to other company whereby that will not be respected, so that is really my major reason for that'... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

'Okay, before I joined, I had a very strong impression of them because of the reputation they carry and their performances'.... 'I chose this company because of the reputation I know the company to have outside and it does have a good brand, it's a good place to work, and we also have a good reward for the efforts put in'... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Career hopes and aspirations were essential for some others. To this, one testified as having an outstanding experience in the first five years of employment:

'When this opportunity came calling, it was something that I had a view that it could help me grow in my experience'.... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'My first five years were extremely good - I got two (2) promotions in my first five years....so why would I leave? [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'Yes, the prospect of working longer here aided my decision'... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

And from the different conversations, it was clear that all the individuals had plans of working till retirement. Therefore, they would continue to have a long and productive career as long as the condition precedent to their employment remained the same or better:

As long as I don't feel threatened or unwanted in the company and I can continue to stay in the company for as much as I want'... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'The fact that the company has been around for a long time, much longer than my joining and with the plans that are on the table much longer than when I leave or retire from the industry'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Hopefully till retirement'.... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

The company was also so good that people hardly left except through normal retirement or uncontrollable circumstances (like family relocation, death etc.). This is evident from the low attrition rates according to the interviewees:

'The attrition rate in my own company isn't high..... Maybe five to ten per cent'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Normally people would not leave but for retirement processes...attrition rate? - I would say within 0 - 5 per cent'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'Normal attrition rate?... I think it's low'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

All these comments are consistent with Dawn and Biswas's (2010, p. 21) views that the "employer brand builds an image confirming the organisation as a good place to work". The profit-making nature of the organisation is discussed next.

4.2.2 It's the Nature of Business - *Not Charity*

Four of the interviewees admitted that the company is a going concern and, as such, should be operated for profit and not otherwise continuously. And so, they understand why decisions driven by financial health conditions are not inappropriate:

'Organisations exist, well, most organisations, not all of them because non-profit organisations have different drivers and expectations, but for the companies that are involved in the capital market or profit-making, it's all about value and profit to shareholders at the end of the day'.... 'Management typically is driven by financial ratios, and financial returns, reward and the last thing they want to hear is that a goal is not achievable'.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'Being objective, First, the business is not like Charity'.... 'To be fair, yes, it's a business, and you're out to make a profit. So, the thing is, so you've gone this way, and you are trying to correct things; whichever way you look at it, your workforce will reduce'... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'It's a business, and it has to be run as one'... 'They want to make sure their profit margin is at a certain level, no doubt about it'... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'The company is not a charitable organisation; they are there to make profits'... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

In connection with the comments from the interviewees, Atta-Panin (2015, p. 1) argues that "the ultimate responsibility of businesses is to make profits for their owners. He stated that modern corporations cannot exist and provide the products and services enjoyed by society if they do not make worthwhile profits for their owners, who risk their wealth by investing and providing the funds necessary for their operations".

The next theme that emerged is about People in the organisation.

4.3 People in the Organisation

People run the wheels of an organisation and, as such, form the nucleus of an organisation. Amid the goings-on, I needed to know the interviewees' perception of how the organisation values people, based on my prejudgment that an organisation without people is no organisation.

4.3.1 Most Prized Asset or What?

Participants used different words to qualify the importance placed on people in the organisation. Words such as 'biggest', 'number one', 'most prized', 'most valuable', 'most treasured', etc., were interchangeably used. Almost all respondents agree that people are the most treasured asset of the organisation and should be treated as such. They said that:

'The employees are; because you can have all the technology, we or the equipment, if you don't have the people to work, then you would not be able to deliver. So, for me, the employees are the number one asset of the organisation'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'So, in our company, they take people first; there is a lot of consideration before; they don't even 'sack people'...' so, there is a lot of emphasis on the people'... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

In support of these views, Roberts (2014, p. i) attested to the fact that "people are significantly important to business success", just as Samuel and Chipunza (2009, p. 411) add that "retention of competent people in an organisation prevents the adverse impact on productivity and service delivery in the organization".

Despite the value placed on people, recent events in the organisation have shown that nobody is really indispensable. Participants said that:

'Oh, I, as an individual, the exercise made me realize the fact that one is dispensable'... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'The impression they are giving to us shows that nobody is indispensable, irrespective of what you do'... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'Yes, the company has again proven that they really don't love anybody. They love people along their lines of business, so I will also love them as long as they meet my objective'... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Two generations of people and their dispositions were identified and recognised in the organisation – Baby boomers and millennials. The older folks, the baby boomers, were identified as loyal, while the younger, the millennials, are said to be disloyal:

'The baby boomers are loyalists, so we have the older people that are loyalists ...to the company and despite downsizing,...they still find it hard to stop being loyal because it's in their DNA; that's how they are brought up. So, for them, while there is an apprehension about loyalty, it doesn't really change the loyalty'....' the millennials, that are not loyal; are looking for the next big thing, so the rationalization or the rationing or the downsizing has really little impact on them'.... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

Rudelj (2012, p. 31) also submits that “people are the main resources of an organisation and they directly affect outcomes and organisational development”, which further stresses the comments made by the participants from the previous. Also connected with people is their knowledge, experience, and value these add to the organisation.

4.3.2 Brain Drain - Experience, Organisational Memory (Knowledge) Retention and Mentorship

In the beginning, the company enjoyed the privilege of good mentors that helped the organisation and the people in the organisation to grow organically. However, some

interviewees stated that their departure had created a substantial mentoring gap in the organisation:

'So, when we started, we had Leaders that coach; they teach you what they have learned, okay? And they allow you to express yourself and grow. You don't realize you're growing until you look back and see how far you are coming from'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'Well, my take on it is that are we going to have a huge gap from mentoring? There is definitely going to be'... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

'Definitely, there is that missing link, and I will say that...yeah, when we first started.... we had like the use of..... Generic mentors, but you had, like, people older in the system in your team whom you could talk to, discuss work with, and they give you insights that you never had or thought about; You just kind of use their experience'... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr].

Washington (2010) also affirms that “a benefit of mentoring for organizations is that mentoring promotes a company's best practices, policies and procedures, as well as the overall culture of a company; new employees are better able to adapt to the culture of the organization as well as be successful” (p. 2). Washington further states, in alignment with other researchers, that “mentoring has been found to offer specific positive outcomes that include increased job satisfaction, greater organizational socialization and reduced turnover” (p. 16), and so the gap should not be allowed to exist in organisations.

The participants in this study also said these recent events also created a vast knowledge gap, with highly skilled employees departing unplanned, under short notice:

'One of the things we noticed when the first one was done was that a lot of knowledge left the system, people that were supposed to step into those shoes and make sure that the boat was settled were all of a sudden even after a few years, removed from the system. There was a lot of experience lost and

knowledge taken away from the system, and that left a lot of gaps because operational gaps began to show, and even strategic gaps began to show up also'... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

'There is still something the organisation is not getting right, so you see that people with a lot of skill, that have acquired a lot of skill set over the years have left; nobody in the systemyou still have people that have experience.... so, it's not the same quality anymore, like it used to be.... Another thing that I've seen is what the severance package has done or had an impact on the organisation - we are losing people with skills, so a lot of the people that remained in the system have not learnt the ropes like the people that left'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'However, with the self-nomination, the company actually lost some very bright brains and competent hands.... Part of the disadvantage is that the experience moves along with these folks who are downsized. The experiences, especially when it comes to sensitive projects, are always affected'... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

The preceding comments are corroborated by Stewart *et al.* (1999, p. 60) when they stated that "corporate downsizing removed large numbers of individual employees from corporate payrolls and along with them, their knowledge and experience". Another respondent says there is no substitute for experience, as any documented checklist of how to do things cannot effectively replace expertise. She stated that the experience is needed to bridge the mentoring and knowledge gap created. Her view on the checklist and the use of checklists was also corroborated by another respondent who also alluded to the fact that people will start to run on 'templates' in the absence of experience. In her words:

'Again, it's like what I said, I think maybe it's generational or a cultural thing - people feel once I have like my checklist, nobody needs to hold my hand anymore, So, I just need to follow the checklist, and once I've done it right once or twice then really my confidence has grown, and I don't need anybody'.....I think people just still need to be aware, you know, continue to have this sense

of vulnerability that, you know, things can happen even if I follow a checklist. So it's not just a checklist kind of thing. It's always 'use someone else's experience to better'.... 'And then even with downsizing and rightsizing, so to speak, you are losing more of those experiences which you can use to bridge that gap'... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Well, they start to run on things like templates.... they will look for templates...they will say, "how do I do this?" And start to look for ways to survive'..... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

Someone also reported that the exchange of batons was not smooth because of how the severance happened, so it was difficult to transfer knowledge properly:

'Knowledge transfer becomes a problem because of the way it's done sometimes without planning and again'.... people leave with the knowledge they have they don't transfer it properly to the people that are staying behind...and that affects the company sometimes'... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

All these comments are consistent with Stewart *et al.*'s (1999, p. 61) submission that "many organisations have unwittingly discarded useful knowledge, and its restoration has become a critical need". This is the position participants say Goshen Gusher Energy is in now, a position that may affect its brand and image.

4.4 Organisational Culture - *Company Brand and Image*

I then sought to check their understanding of organisational culture as a concept and how visible Goshen Gusher Energy's organisational culture is.

4.4.1 Clear Understanding of Organisational Culture

Some of the interviewees demonstrated a good understanding of what organisational culture means. They defined and described the concept the way they understood it during the interviews. Four of the views are presented as follows:

'Organisational culture, that is the way members of an organisation behave; it's a common denominator between employees working in an organisation; it typically evolves from what management wants the ideal employee to be - what the company values, yes, and the employees tend to share those values and exhibit those values'... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'Okay. I think it represents the organisation's DNA, how they perceive things, how they reason, and how they make their decisions. Their belief about people and what people should, how they should treat people, the priority of people, and the philosophy of the organisation that anytime you want to make a decision, this is how we make our decisions - this is what we will do'.... [Yommy.... SCM Specialist]

'It's how a company does things, the culture, the way the company approaches issues, the way they want to be perceived by outsiders, both by their customers, both internal and external, both staff and other customers alike'... [Chuks.... Production Operator].

In addition, one interviewee also remarked that culture is passed down from the top:

'I need employees to think and behave this way, you know, the company starts to propagate down to everybody to start passing the message down'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

Ogbonna (2010, p. 12) also explained that "culture is the sum total of people's way of life which is transferable", which is seen in many interviewees' comments.

4.4.2 The Company's (Goshen Gusher Energy's) Organisational Culture

All the interviewees acknowledged that the most dominant culture within the organisation is the safety culture. This is exemplified in the following statements:

'That something that is central to the company's culture is safety and diversity; so, culture is, any part of the world that you go in this organisation, one thing that they hold very dear is safety'... [Ofonzo Snr Facilities Engr]

'Safety is the number one priority for the company'..... The organisation decided they wanted to make it to number 1 priority, and they started putting policies and bringing events that could make everybody start to think about safety. So, you find in the company today that Safety is the number 1 priority on everybody's list'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

According to two respondents, Safety is key to all performance achievements in the company. Organisational performance results are obtained through and by safety. Results otherwise obtained are discountenanced. This is also established by Pearce and Kanyangale (2009, p. 69), who stated that “modern organisations shared their values and what they represent through their mission, vision and value statements”. The participants said:

'Yes - for the organisation, it is not just getting the result; how you get the result is also important to the organisation, so safety is the key thing, and whatever you're doing, safety must come first'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'Okay.... Safety-wise, we say Safety is key, and there is no option, no alternative to doing anything'... [Ownny Snr Petroleum Engr]

Two interviewees said Goshen Gusher Energy is a process-driven organisation that still considers Safety as a prominent organisational culture, regardless of what transpired:

'Was a well-structured organisation and you know, policies in place, policies followed, not much, I mean, I didn't doubt for once, what the company represented and what it said and actually did'... [Sitie Facilities Engr]

‘Okay, you know, if I’m taking from what I know, the emphasis on that is still, and in my sincerity, I think the organisation is very sincere about that’....
[Yommy....SCM Specialist].

Some interviewees also recognised that people are central to organisational culture development and propagation. This was emphasized by Furnham and Gunter (1993), cited in Lim (1995, p. 16), who stated how “organisational culture was used to explain economic success through a highly motivated workforce committed to a common set of core values”. The participants said:

‘I think effectively the processes we put around organisational culture. By process, I mean, it’s the people at the end of the day who is going to put the process in place, and so, do you have a process? and if you have a process, then do you have people to enforce the process?’... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

‘In our organisational culture, our company, there is an emphasis on people first; now in relative terms, people may say it doesn’t seem like that, or there is a lot of talk without walking the talk’... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

‘You would also want to keep your best employees because these are the people that also help to keep your culture and your brand’... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

According to O’Toole (2002, p. 231), “safety culture has been identified as a critical factor that sets the tone for the importance of safety within an organization”. The culture is “often seen as a subset of organisational culture, where the beliefs and values refer specifically to matters of health and safety” (Clarke, 1999, cited in O’Toole, 2002, p. 234). Safety climate, on the other hand, “is seen as a coherent set of perceptions and expectations that workers have regarding safety in their organisation”, according to Gyekye (2005, p. 292). Also, Gyekye declares that “one aspect of organisational behaviour which is likely to affect workers’ perceptions of organisational safety climate, and in turn influence safe work behaviours, and accident frequency is the extent to which workers perceive their organisations as being supportive, concerned and caring about their general well-being and satisfaction”.

Organisational culture is reinforced by the reward and consequence system, as pointed out in the following comment by one of the participants:

'Yes, organisational culture is mainly reinforced by the reward and consequence system. The company puts out a structure; this is how we do things, and this is our culture. That culture will not maintain itself; it will be reinforced by what you reward and discouraged by what you condemn or punish. So, if a company says this is our culture, this is what we do, this is what we would like to see done if you go against it and there are no punitive measures, then that will not stand, and if you do well and there's no recognition of the same, it will also weaken'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

This supports Kerr and Slocum's (2004, p. 130) position that "reward systems express and reinforce the values and norms that comprise corporate culture. They believe it represents a compelling means for influencing an organization's culture".

People in the organisation have also realised that safety rules must be followed for their sake because safety is everybody's responsibility. Just as is the case with most organisations across the globe as declared, for example, by Kumar and Kumar (2018), who say collaboratively that "the authority, responsibility and accountability of employee are clearly defined for achieving the objective of organisation safety goal; and that Safety is everyone's responsibility" (p. 3623 and 3626). Some Participants said words:

'Impacted because the individuals understand that their safety is important, and they want to go back to their families safe'... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'Ensure that things are done right because no matter how pressured you are to work, it is the life you have that you can use to work... because when an employee breaks down as a result of pressure, at some point, they will tell you that your health or your safety is your responsibility... so, you have to know that limit and play around it'.... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

A few interviewees also believe that outsiders view the organisation as reputable because of its corporate social responsibility. In addition, the company does everything in its power to make its brand or image very attractive, as reflected in the value of its stock on the stock exchange:

'It's somebody who just took a look around and said I like your brand in the society'.... the Company literally allows its work or its interaction with the society to announce itself. So yes, there's a corporate brand out there. Once you mention the name of the company, everybody knows them for this good or that one and so on. They have a responsibility to the society in which they operate, and everyone who works with that company has the responsibility of maintaining that brand and ensuring that company meets its corporate responsibility on a day-to-day basis'... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Because of the perception they have managed to create, a strong brand, a good place to work, an exciting working environment and a strong reputation for taking care of their employees' welfare... our stock is still good, we are still strong, we are not the strongest, but we are still strong'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Davies and Miles (1998, p. 16) also describe a firm's reputation "as an intangible asset; the nature of which depends upon everything the firm does as an entity, particularly the signals and communications it chooses to give to the marketplace. When well-managed, the symbol of that reputation, the corporate name represents the organisation favourably to its public and can be particularly valuable in doing so to its customers".

Now, as insiders, with a more profound knowledge of the company, it appears that the initial impression of the company had changed for many interviewees. They say the company is no longer the same and that they will not encourage people to join the company. Saying the perception outside is not the same as inside, and the smokescreen should not fool people. Some of the Participants said:

'In fact, what I will say to anybody that comes into the system is that - quickly get the most, not the best, get the most out, which is what I didn't do, I thought I had time, so I will say to the person get the most you can as if the company is going to fold up tomorrow...Get it out quickly - that is what I will say. Because, looking back, that is one of the things I should have done. I should have taken a very bold step when I came in, but I thought, well, there's no hurry, I still have time'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'But as an insider, I see things a bit different. The reputation is still there from an outsider's perspective. Right now, I see clearer as an insider, everything that glitters is not gold'... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'But that was like some years back, I might say, you know, my first five to seven years in a company, but all that has changed now, we don't understand what is going on now – I don't understand what is going on; the structure, even if it's there, the culture, even though they try to do a lot of face-saving measures but, you know, everybody knows it has changed – it's no longer what it used to be'... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

One of the participants also recognised the interplay between organisational culture and the national culture of the people:

'So, we have the organisational culture, we also have the culture of the people in a particular location (national culture), but I also think that that also comes to play within our organisation'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

She believes the interaction has a significant influence on the organisation and is worth mentioning.

The next central theme that emerged is downsizing, and the findings supporting this theme are presented in the following section.

4.5 Concept of Downsizing - for Business Survival and Continuity

Now to the concept of downsizing, a theme that emerged naturally. It was a surprise, though, to see how all respondents didn't see it as a very terrible phenomenon but acknowledged or thought of it as what, in their words, is a 'natural occurrence', 'normal', 'considered for financial reasons', 'maybe necessary for company survival' etc. Moreover, the responses didn't come with the usual emotional outburst characterised by the subject. Instead, they were fluent and acknowledged it as follows:

'It's a natural occurrence in the life of an organisation.... when an organisation is growing, they tend to take more people, when an organisation is mature, and looking for opportunities to enhance profitability and returns to shareholders, they consider rightsizing either because they are getting rid of some assets because or they want efficiency and productivity to be increased; so, they no longer need some roles within the organisation so, I think it's a natural occurrence'.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'My view about downsizing - this is something that happens with every organisation.... when an organisation starts to struggle financially, and something has to be done. Then it's something an organisation would consider doing. It gets to a point where the organisation believes that they have more people than they need, so it gets to a point where the business, the organisation cannot sustain the current operating expense (OPEX) or the number of employees they have any more, and they need to decide to downsize... that can happen to any business that is going through financial difficulties'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'Downsizing is beneficial to the company, maybe not so beneficial to the personnel who is laid off'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

All these were based on their knowledge of the concept and experience of their organisation's recent series of downsizing exercises.

According to the participants, downsizing may not have been necessary with proper human resources (HR) strategic planning where the organisation's personnel needs are managed such that the timeline of employees' work careers will always be suitable for the company. Some of their comments are as follows:

'For me, I think my views are... I'm not one that really loves to talk about downsizing or rightsizing, and I think with proper planning, an organisation or a company should be able to plan the way people come in and exit. I think with proper planning, one can eliminate rightsizing by forecasting into the future to know when people are leaving and when you have to rightsize; and downsizing is when your companies have not planned properly'..... for me, I think the right way to do it is to ensure that people are recruited at the right time, and people leave the system at the right time and with the proper management one can really avoid downsizing'... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'Does not make any business sense for you to have ten people for a job that seven people can do. If rightsizing is not done, then it means there's a gap in managerial analysis that was done in the past. What I will say is that the management should look inward and be sincere with themselves; the foot soldiers cannot create positions that are not needed. Somebody somewhere must have done something that is not right'... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

The same views were expressed by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) in their May 2018 (p. 2) guide on workforce planning practices, in which they stated that "workforce planning is a business process to align changing organisation needs and people strategy; and that when such planning becomes weak, organisations become reactive, and tend to rely on hiring and firing in response to short-run changes in organisational needs".

People cost-cutting through downsizing also comes to the rescue for companies perceived to need a boost, financial or otherwise, because it is the easiest thing to do, according to two interviewees:

'So, Employee cost is not the biggest. However, one should also ask which is easier in all these costs that the organisation incurs – I mean, there are several costs the business would incur. So, which is the easiest for that business to let go of, and usually, the employee is the easiest. When you're doing things, you always want to start with the easiest'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'But as it is in industry, and other industries, the quickest way to reduce cost is rightsizing or downsizing in a certain area, which is employees'..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

Cameron (1994, p. 192) stressed that “management underwent the act of downsizing when it sets to improve organisation efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, ” which some interviewees also addressed.

Many of the respondents said before it gets to people cost-cutting, other areas of the business ought to have been evaluated, and the cost managed. As posited by Akeem (2017, p. 19), “an impulsive reaction under the current business environment and circumstances, impacting every organisation, is just to cut all costs to the minimum level, also noting that every aspect of an organisation’s cost structure must be carefully examined to eliminate unnecessary discretionary and non-value-adding costs, while yet retaining its competitive position”. In their direct quotes, some participants said:

'I do not think that they have explored all the viable options as per cost saving'... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

'I think it's that, before it gets to that, if everybody will focus on what is taking their cost higher, what is raising their cost and everybody is ready to make that sacrifice, there might be a way around it'.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'But as I said before, when it comes to personnel, it isn't a pleasant thing. And I have also mentioned before that personnel shouldn't always be the first to be handled when it comes to downsizing. Projects that are not beneficial, at least in the nearest term, have the option of being pushed over and postponed till when it will be beneficial'... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'The only difference I have to that is that sometimes I have the belief that my company may not really look at the real reasons for not making a profit. There has to be an actual evaluation done'.... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

In the case of Goshen Gusher Energy, it is believed that recession caused the downsizing exercises, given that the organisation hardly ever sacks or lays off staff under any guise. According to one respondent:

'Now, in our company, rightsizing or downsizing is not something that is done. The only thing is that in the last few years, four to five years, the thing has started, and it started because of the recession, but I think it's more of a strategy. With the recession, it's not been there at the forefront as it used to be, and my perspective (perception) about it is because the drivers are a bit different because companies are trying to survive'..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

However, they believe how it is done determines the impact it has on the organisation at the end of the day. Some say there is the right way to downsize, while others warn about the possible negative impact of the exercise on people and the organisation at large. One thing they are all certain about is that it should not be frequent.

Along the right way, they said;

'Again, for me, talking about rightsizing and the organisational culture is a case of first, we have to say, what am I trying to gain? Am I in for business? Am I in to just get people occupied? So, until, you know, leadership or management come to realize that, what exactly am I trying to gain in all this? Is there a way I can rightsize and still do it safely? Is there a way I can rightsize and still make sure that my key components, the key aspects decision, are still going to give me value for money? Am I doing it without straining certain departments? Am I doing it, and everybody, at least, agrees that this is how it should be done? Am I doing it just to please a certain set of people?'.... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'So, if it's going to be done, it should be done with ultimate transparency and sincerity, you know, but once that is not there, I don't know how it can be done, and yet, people will still believe' [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'And it also depends on who you are laying off and who you are not....which spectrum of the employees you're downsizing. So, when some organisations downsize, they start with new employees; some organisations focus on the ones that are close to retirement, so as to keep the ones that have the energy and time to spend to deliver for the organisation' [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'It's very normal in an organisation when it's done with an open intent, kind of like, the metrics, if they go by it, is very clear – performance-related - nobody has any problem with it, I don't have any problem with that' [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

Some of the interviewees recognized that downsizing, unfortunately, could also be done in the wrong way:

'I would have said maybe they should not politicise or maybe they shouldn't politicize the downsizing exercise because it very, very critical exercise and it's something that needs to be thought through'..... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'It's being done in a way without planning, and without respect for human feelings for the people that it affects' [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

'Some people felt.... Individual perceptions came into play, and some felt subjective rather than objective, performance related' [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Rightly or wrongly done, downsizing should not be done so frequently or rapidly because they believe the organisation may never recover from the impact in the long run:

'I think that it shouldn't be done too frequently because it takes a while for organisations to adjust'.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'I think if it must be done at all, it must not be done frequentlyNo, it should not be as frequent'... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'I feel the frequency was not conducive; even if it should be done, I think more spacing would have helped. If we had the spacing of like three years, it would have been nice a bit. Some knowledge would have been gained into the system before another cycle'... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

One respondent also believes some sort of metrics should be set for post-exercise evaluation of the effectiveness of the exercise or process:

'Rightsizing should be done against some key metrics - whether productivity, even employees overall health'.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

Much as downsizing was not a desirable exercise as elucidated in the preceding, other interviewees thought it would not have had such an impact on people except for certain economic situations in the country and the world at large:

'Seriously, if jobs were available everywhere and people could hand-pick, the company will just be more careful in wadding the big stick because you know that the stick doesn't represent such a threat'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'Capitalising on the fact that people can't just walk away from work, so anything that they throw at you, you will do it if it's comfortable; but if it's not comfortable, then you find another level because there are so many people out there, who even want to take what we have'..... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'I prefer to be somewhere else, but because of the economy, I have to keep working here'.... 'The industry itself exists in a global economy. What happens

to the global economy actually happens to the oil and gas industry, so everything is interconnected'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

Some interviewees also stated that the company may not have taken the downsizing route to economic recovery if they engaged in oil and gas exploration or if more assets had been acquired to stem the tide of declining oil production from existing assets:

'I do believe the organisation ventures into many other businesses, and as things begin to shrink, they will decide that we want to remove focus from certain areas and focus on core business, and in focusing on core business, the non-core businesses supported by the employees will be left, essentially saying that the employees that support them would have to go as well'..... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'This sometimes can also be affiliated with selling off assets. When you divest assets, some of the assets that you manage and you have personnel who move with the assets to the new company purchasing the assets, in a way that is also called downsizing, it is never a positive thing even though from the economic point of view it looks like it's okay'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Maybe set up some assets, buy some assets; they could have just bought some assets to spread the risks. At least after the first one, I think after the first one was when a lot of opportunities were lost'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

However, one interviewee thinks there are positives from the exercises. For one, it makes people more focused, and as such, could enhance productivity:

'First, you said it makes people more focused; they redouble their efforts and make sure they don't get on that list anytime soon or in the future once it comes up.... However, some employees end up re-doubling their efforts if they truly have not been pulling their weight'..... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

The negatives from the exercise were acknowledged by three respondents who said:

'It has a negative impact, yes....and you will have a negative impact because, in your discussion, you will try to justify how your selection was not objective or justified'..... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'It's a risk the company has to take, or it's a risk the company considers worth taking as painful a pill as it is to swallow. It has to be done. It's still people; however you look at it, whatever the category, people are still always going to be the most valuable asset. By this, we actually lose some of the best brains which we have spent time and money recruiting and possibly have trained to a certain level'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'So, if they downsize, the work will definitely be affected negatively, but then, irrespective of what the company wants to achieve, they have their target objective - that is what they are driving towards'..... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

McAuley et al.'s (2014, p. 211) argument that "the social and economic cost of downsizing outweighed any short-term organisational advantage and profoundly affected the morale of those who stayed in the organisation" agrees with the previous comments made by some of the interviewees.

The preceding conversations established the participants' awareness of the concepts of organisational culture and downsizing; and the possible effects of downsizing on organisational culture as experienced. What comes next is the exposé of their experience with frequent downsizing.

4.6 'Impact' of 'Frequent Downsizing' on Organisational Culture.

The next area I focused on during the interviews is the impact (positive or negative) of frequent downsizing exercises (emphasis on the word frequent) on the company's organisational culture. The company prides itself on the quality of people, partnerships and performance, and so anything that affects these affects the company significantly.

The interviewees had varying but interesting lived experiences reported as follows:

4.6.1 Leadership Impact

A couple of the respondents thought the organisation's leadership had a significant impact on organisational culture. They believe leadership is the primary role model for the culture and that people will respect whatever they see done by management since organisational culture is first a top-down process. Decisions, communications, processes, operations, events etc. all speak to what is in the mind of leadership and what the people must follow:

'Yes, what is critical is for management to walk the talk; both in their behaviours and in their decision-making and making employees, you know, fully accountable, you know, for their actions and in following the expectations of management' [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'The impact?.... Number 1 will be Leadership. So, whatever the organisation or the company feeds from the Leadership, that's what they blow up'..... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'If there are no people to enforce the process, then the process might as well not be there. So you want to ensure that the people (and by people, I mean leadership) - so it does not just have a process but you have a Leadership that wants to foster culture and then you people who are also willing and to push that culture through the organisation' [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'Yes, organisational culture is mainly reinforced by the reward and consequence system. The company puts out a structure; this is how we do things; this is our culture. That culture will not maintain itself; it will be reinforced by what you reward and discouraged by what you condemn or punish. So if a company says this is our culture, this is what we do, this is what we would like to see done; if you go against it and there are no punitive measures, then that will not stand, and if you do well and there's no recognition of the same, it will also weaken' [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'If they respect the culture and they promote the culture in their behaviour with people. An organisation that has a culture of integrity and does not do things that way or the management does not do things that way do not promote the culture. I think those are the major things which the management should do. The fact that the Leaders role-model the culture (must show in their behaviour) and also communicate that culture regularly to the people - to their subordinates'... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

Al Khajeh (2018, p. 3) emphasizes that "leadership style influences the culture of the organisation which, in turn, influences the organisational performance"; he projects Harris *et al.*'s (2007) definition of leadership style "as the kind of relationship that an individual uses to make people work together for a common goal or objective". This aligns with the shared experiences of the participants stated above.

Participants talk next about the impacts of frequent downsizing on the company's organisational culture.

4.6.2 Loss of Organisational Culture

It was the view of most of the interviewees that frequent downsizing has more of a negative impact on organisational culture. Their opinions showed that this could lead to deep organisational culture erosion.

Impact on People and the Organisation, Generally Speaking

Participants shared their thoughts on how frequent downsizing impacts People and the Organisational culture generally:

'Frequent movement of people affects organisation's culture... also when it's a bit too frequent, what happens is that you get a crop of people that do not know the half historical perspective of how things are done, and so you might lose certain things, certain cultures or certain persons with the movement?'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'And when you do, you don't want to do that too rapidly because you can lose part of the organisation's culture in the process'.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'There might be a positive impact, but mostly, the impact is negative on organisational culture'..... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

Impact on 'Safety' as a Culture

Some participants were also specific about the impact on certain dominant organisation cultures within the company, like safety, to drive home their points:

'Now the organisation is lean when it comes to human resources. And that translates to the fact that people work longer hours which also is not safe... It's definitely impacting the health of the employees, and that we know ties into safety issue that is the culture... even though the organisation is saying that our number one priority is safety... you know, they are also not looking at the fact that employees need to be healthy to deliver on the job'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'A lot of things regarding safety is....there have been incidences, and there have been near-misses, but because there've not actually been, you know, actual accidents or what should I call for it, so you think oh, you are good to go, but you are having a lot more people stressed, even in places where it's not like high risk, like you being out on the field; you are having a lot of people being stressed - having more strain and....but because you do not see that actually...you're not seeing it in the numbers as actual events that happened, you think oh, you're good with it but there are a lot of cases where all these are having an impact on people if you are talking about it, safety-wise. Equipment? - I'm sure all the equipment are still working as they should, but with the human factor, you have a lot more near-misses with the human factor'... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'Now, you will expect that there will be guidelines for people who work offshore. You can't send somebody out alone to man a station for safety reasons so that

in case something happens, his buddy will be there to assist him. We are beginning to slack in that regard. In the name of downsizing, there are some places where they are beginning to have one person man a station that was not like that in the past. So I hope we are not waiting for a safety incident before we begin to retrace our steps'..... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

Impact on 'Trust' as a Culture

Finally, they shared their views on how trust is impacted as a type of organisational culture within the company as follows:

'One thing that downsizing does is that, first, it makes people lose trust in the organisation...First, it erodes trust. I might be wrong, but from my perception, the trust is eroded; people don't, you know'.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'So all of that affects the organisational culture, a lot of people have kind of lost trust in'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

Berberich (2016, p. 37) also shared insights from other researchers' submission that "trust between survivors and their organisations, in the organisational context, is important, as lack of it may influence survivors' attitudes and behaviours unfavourably; and that mistrust against the management and the organisation is one of the most frequent concerns expressed by downsizing survivors". He closed his argument with Sahdev's (2003) submission that "survivors' trust was suffering because, according to their understanding, managements' focus was more on the satisfaction of shareholders than on the employees".

Participants talked next about the impacts on the company's reputation.

4.6.3 Loss of Reputation

I also gathered from them that the company seems to be losing a lot in terms of reputation due to this frequent downsizing. The participants also said they would not have joined the company if they knew what they know now before seeking employment opportunities here. They said:

'If we start having negative reviews in the area which we operate and if people stop trusting us....at the same time, some new entrants into the industry who once upon a time felt like "oh this is where I want to be" will actually see it like there's no stability here; so I might as well move'... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'And if he gets home, the feedback he will give his family is that this company has sent me packing. The number of people that will not like the company will increase... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

These comments support the study of Watson and Kitchen (2008, p. 123), who submit that "reputation *does not occur by chance* - it relates to leadership, management and organisational operations; and is also connected to communication activities and feedback mechanisms". Furthermore, they claim "reputation is also linked to the organisation's identity, performance and the way others respond to its behaviour and that reputation is a "collective representation" of images and perceptions, not a self-promoted message"; and that it involves "relationships with all stakeholders, and is gained, maintained and enhanced or detracted from overtime".

Discussions of the impacts on the organisation's productivity follow.

4.6.4 Loss of Productivity

The general or ultimate intent of downsizing is to get the organisation to improve productivity. Still, as related by all the respondents, frequent downsizing makes the whole process counterproductive, as revealed in the following comments describing some of their views:

'Also, when it's a bit too frequent, what happens is that you get a crop of people that do not know the half historical perspective of how things are done, and so you might lose certain things, certain cultures or certain persons with the movement?'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

'So to wrap up, more or less. Is frequent downsizing good? No! Because the impact will be on performance, loyalty and trust in the system'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

'It can affect the productivity of employees and, in the long run, affect the profitability of the company..... I feel for the company - a lot of things have been left undone, and some people are no longer dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's because there are fewer people to do the job, and so because fewer people do the job, some things are being left undone and the ones that are done – some of them are not done very well, the right way they should be done'..... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

Berberich (2016, p. 4) supports these comments with the argument that “even though many organisations may be convinced that their strategy to downsize the workforce is an efficient measure to save costs and increase performance, findings from previous and contemporary research did not agree on the positive outcomes of downsizing”.

The conversations went further to the impact of frequent downsizing on the workforce's well-being and career outlook, based on their personal experiences.

4.7 Impact of the Frequency on Employees and Career (-Impact on Wellbeing and Career Outlook)

I sought the experience of the participants on the impact of the frequent downsizing on their well-being and that of their colleagues. This theme generated the most conversations because of the weight of the implications for their well-being and perceived future in the organisation. Their comments were categorised in the subsections that follow:

4.7.1 Employee's Wellbeing (Physical, Psychological, Medical and Mental Health)

All the interviewees reported experiences ranging from Increased Workload, medical and mental issues, psychological issues, loss of loyalty and discretionary efforts, low performance, fear and immunity to impact.

Workload Increase

According to the respondents, the rate of staff departures increased the workload on them and their colleagues. This put a lot of stress and strain on people as they had to deliver business plans and *unadjusted* targets with leaner resources. Matters became even worse as this increased workload induced exit plans – many employees quit the organisation due to increased workload. Many positions were collapsed for one person to handle resulting in a couple of people working uncompensated extra hours. Work-Life Balance standards went out of the window as many could not even get annual vacations due to workload and pressure. Some Participants, in their reflections, said:

‘It gave me more work to do because the.... it was done, and no new people were brought in to replace old people that left, and you know, you have to move quickly and learn - I had to move my job to another job and start learning quickly on the new job. It affected me because I had to do it with a skill which I had to learn quickly...and it was not like a gradual move but more like an instant move, compared to if it was done well...so the company had to do it, but it gave more work to do since they didn’t replace people’... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

‘New workforce may be overwhelmed because more work is coming to some people who if you haven’t put the right tools in place, to make sure that they are not overburdened’.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘The impact on me as a person meant more workload because the persons that were let go were not replaced and so jobs were re-distributed among the existing workforce increasing the workload’..... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

‘Began to see a lot of stress signs, people begin to have high blood pressure, people not being comfortable, like I said earlier, multiple roles and stuffs like that. It begins to tell on their health, and it begins to tell on their attitude at work’..... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

Berberich (2016, p. 45) aligns with these views, asserting that one of the main reasons why survivors were not satisfied with their job anymore resulted from “the higher

workload they had to deal with in the time post-downsizing”; and also stating Virick *et al.*’s (2007) declaration that “the additional workload had a negative impact on survivors’ job satisfaction because it disrupted their work-life balance”.

Medical and Mental Issues

The resultant medical and mental issues could not be avoided as people were always under a lot of pressure from the increased workload, as reported by three interviewees, thus:

‘...You know you put too much pressure, you can see that people are falling ill, those kinds of things’... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘The impact on others is that the stress; they are a lot more people complaining about one health issue or the other; a lot more people hanging back after work...this is having an impact on people – so you have people breaking down a lot more, you have people hanging around the office a lot more and your life isn’t actually well-balanced..... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

‘So, as an individual, yes, sometimes, some people do have some medical issues – I’ve heard, and I’ve seen – yes, medical issues, heart attacks and things like that. Yes, yes, some people have had it; depression, mental state, you know, mental illness, more or less, but in a minor way, not that the people went full-blown; a lot of fatigue - in fact, medical cases, fatigue, illness’..... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

Psychological issues

They all also touched on the impact of frequent downsizing on their psyche - as it engendered reduced commitment, distraction, loss of focus, apprehension, loss of confidence, the spread of low morale, feeling of rejection, lack of concentration, lack of motivation, more work and no reward, loss of trust and faith, and not having the right state of mind for safety. One comment that summarises these, alluding to the impact on Safety, is:

‘that could also lead to safety issues; that is another thing we didn’t talk about. People may be apprehensive while doing their jobs because they are not concentrating on the task at hand, and they are thinking, oh, am I the one next in line; that also affects their state of mind. I think in that area, I think that will be impacted, you know, looking at it in terms of even the people - ‘thinking’ or having the fear factor in them’.... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

Some participants said the frequency is discouraging and frustrating; and that people are always in deep thought, being present at work but absent-minded:

‘Even though they are here, you’re seeing them; they’re not really with you again...so, what people do, as a coping strategy is that, instead of giving whatever you’re doing 100% attention, they begin to have plan A and plan B’.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

‘Those impacts - they range from so many things - illness, demotivation, resignation, there is a variety of them....my own perspective in life is not to get people to the point where they resign before they resign....so I will say that it affects motivation, in some places, it affects trust and belief’.... it’s been reoccurring, and they are now quite settled about it; abnormality is now normal’..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

‘That kind of thing causes distractions; people are not so focused anymore.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

‘hmm, how did I feel, how did it affect me?... just loss of confidence, a feeling of uncertainty, to some level, depression’..... [Sitie Facilities Engr]

Moore *et al.* (2004), cited in Berberich (2016, p. 105), found that “survivors who had experienced repeated rounds of downsizings suffered more anxiety and psychological distress than those who had experienced it only once. Moreover, the likelihood of experiencing burnout was found to be higher among survivors of multiple downsizing exercises”. They suggest that “repeated downsizing episodes had a cumulative negative effect on survivors’ well-being, as the continual fear of potential job loss

together with the pressure from increased workload led to chronic levels of stress over time, and thereby weakened the individuals' mental coping resources".

Frequent downsizing also led to a loss of highly skilled employees and distractions to the remaining staff. However, the frequency is now somewhat regular, thus making the abnormality normal:

'And it could also affect the morale of the people they're working within that organisation...it has a lot of impact on the organisation if it is done frequently. The organisation will lose the confidence of its people. The people that work there will now have the feeling it could be their turn anytime, and that could affect their commitment to the organisation. So it should not be done frequently; because if it's done frequently, the organisation could lose the commitment (like I said before) of their people'... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

'The frequency is not good, It's not encouraging, and it is rather frustrating'..... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'When it affects this way, as I said before, it's now distracting them from the work that they are still doing for the company - so the company stands to lose. The concentration that was there before is now a bit lacking'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

In alignment with the previous, Moore *et al.* (2003, p. 251) submit that "repeated, acute events, such as repeated contact with downsizing, present a different situation than does a single downsizing episode or a long-term, relatively constant level of threat. Repeated events may be associated with different types of coping responses, job reactions, and health outcomes". They state further that, "in research more related to layoffs, Kalimo *et al.* (2003) found that experiencing multiple downsizings in the past was correlated with several health outcomes". Berberich (2016, p. 64) also referred to the findings of some researchers that "survivors were sinking into depression in the aftermath of downsizing and suffered from mental health problems".

Loss of Loyalty and Discretionary Efforts

Many of the participants also indicated that 'loss of, or drop in loyalty levels' (even loyalists feeling less committed, dedicated and loyal), 'no discretionary efforts', 'divided attention', 'listlessness', 'less commitment to work', 'diminished work idea contributions', 'diminished attitude to work', are also hallmarks of frequent downsizing:

'Because there's nobody to do the job and what happens is that, when people are not happy at work, you will not get discretionary performance....what those things do is that, it takes a lot of things from the organisation, what people would have contributed to do, people will say, okay, let me just,...so that's what everybody is doing, people are looking at, okay, let me enhance myself, let me make myself more....Yea, I think those episodes have reduced a lot of things, so people are just putting in the minimal thing, minimal, just to say - this is what you want, take it. Not something to say – let's take it to the other level'..... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'With the whole thing that's happening with the right sizing and the downsizing, they are feeling less committed, less dedicated, or less loyal to the company'..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

'Level of loyalty drops because people are no longer loyal to the system because they feel the system can no longer sustain them on a long term, that's one'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

In a related submission by Rehman and Naeem (2012, p. 2430), citing the report from a study conducted by Vecchio (1991), "survivors remain loyal as long as the working environment is suitable, wages are enough to satisfy their needs, and chances are available for career advancement. Survivors, once very loyal towards the organisation, will remain loyal to that organisation if they are satisfied with both the internal culture and the external environments of the firm, but if after the downsizing, they encounter such an environment which is not in conformity with their perceptions and with the absence of job security, the employees may tend to lessen their loyalty level and resultantly leave the organisation".

Also, according to McKenna (1991), cited in Rehman and Naeem (2012, p. 2430), “loyalty is a vital and critical contributor to the success or failure of any organisation”. Rehman and Naeem further state that “survivors of downsizing perceive a reduction in their bond with the organisation, and even some extra efforts from the management to maintain the desired level of loyalty of survived employees may not work” (p. 2430).

Low Performance

Rapid downsizing could be counterproductive as this kills creativity and can result in low performance due to distractions. The gap results in a drop in productivity as it is difficult to fill gaps created immediately reveals these two respondents:

‘It should be a measured approach, it shouldn’t be done too rapidly, you know, and on the financial side too, if you downsize or right size too rapidly, it may affect that efficiency, that productivity or those financial indices that you are trying to improve... personnel performance is waning either due to distractions or external sources...there are some that are either not experienced enough or prepared enough to go into these senior roles’.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘It kills a lot of creativity as well, you know, what’s the point of doing that if the company is not really having.... you what I mean, anyways’..... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

Berberich (2016, p. 5) posits that “under-performance may stem from the fact that attitudes and behaviours of those remaining in the organisations have changed for the worse since they perceived a psychological contract violation caused by downsizing”.

Fear Factor

Participants also stressed that frequent downsizing breeds fear and Job insecurity, and the onus is on the organisation’s Leadership to drive out fear in employees,

‘When the frequency gets so high, at some point you begin to wonder whether you have a job because you never can tell who is going to be impacted in terms

of who the company is interested in letting go of or holding on to'.... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'You have a group of people that are basically, would I say, scared of the process; that has put an aura of fear around the environment for some people'..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

'So, it puts fear in the organisation, whether for the right reasons or the wrong reasons'.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

These comments are aligned with the findings from Berberich's (2016, p. 64) research which also supports the study of Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) that identified job insecurity "as a major cause of the deterioration of survivors' psychological well-being and increase in various stress-related complaints". Berberich's (2016, p. 193) work also demonstrates that "the majority of survivors showed a high degree of insecurity and were mainly fearful about what was coming next and worried about being the target of a further wave of downsizing. This is with survivors' reactions corresponding to their assumption that, in times of organisational downsizing, the remaining workforce expresses more serious concerns about the continuing existence of their job, rather than losing important aspects associated with it".

Developing Immunity to the Impact

The current frequency of downsizing has created a contrary situation whereby people have developed an immunity to its impact. It has now become people's reality. Past downsizing experience helps emotions, so people are prepared mentally after many severances. They have their minds made up to quit in anticipation of the next event. In fact, they now look forward to the next downsizing opportunity to end their careers with the organisation, as stated in the following reflections:

'Because of that frequency, many employees have made up their minds even to prepare ahead of the company and say whenever the company is willing to let people go, they've trained their minds; instead of boxing themselves inside the company and thinking whether they have a job; so, they're already prepared to leave the company'.....[Pees Petroleum Engr]

'When people start hearing about something frequently, it will come to a time when it won't make meaning to them again...but yet again people are getting immune to it by saying do whatever you want to do, it is not the end of the world I still have my life to live'..... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

'You see people becoming bolder and say, this is an opportunity. So even now, people are looking for it as an opportunity to say, this is an opportunity for me to go and look for alternatives; so, it's no longer a big deal again, as long as the package is right, I can use it to start something else... if you've ever been a victim of downsizing, you begin to take those things seriously'.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

These views are supported by Berberich's (2016, p. 15) research in which he reports the findings of a significant number of the available studies that suggest that "surviving repeated waves of downsizing enhance survivors' coping ability and makes them more resilient over time". According to Noer (1997), cited in Häsänen (2010, p. 23), "acceptance is not the same as happiness but is, instead, a way of breaking free from the organisation and preparing for the next chapter in life".

Despite the negative impacts reported above, some respondents still saw little positive effects on people's financial prudence and a nudge to improved performance.

Positive Impact of Frequent Downsizing

The substantial negative impact of frequent downsizing notwithstanding, the repeat exercise helped some people improve their financial responsibility. Some people moved to more senior roles as a consequence while it prodded others to enhance their performance improvement, and so there are good sides to this:

'I mean, how did it affect me? Well, it made me kind of... I became a bit more conservative in financial planning. That is one, which is not really bad, to be honest'.... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'However, it also helped some people in the sense that they were promoted to newer positions of responsibility. It gave way for growth in the organisation, so people moved up to higher positions'.... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

'The impact on those not targeted - they will see it as, the next time could be me, so they have to reapply themselves so much more'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

Should not be Often

Most interviewees agreed that downsizing should not be done often; because they believe frequent downsizing is meaningless and unnecessary. The work system was unprepared for the high-frequency shock because of the staff's value erosion. According to them, the frequency of downsizing exercises presents an indication of poor planning and execution; it also gives the impression that something is fishy:

'It should not be done too often... because when you employ people most times, you employ them when they are just out of school - they don't have the experience, you train these employees, so they become your asset and then you don't want just to let them go after some years because you are getting new employees...so, it's not something that should be done often - because it will affect the culture and quality. The organisation might not be getting superior deliverables anymore if they do it often'..... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'If we are going to downsize, it has to be planned. Having it frequently to me is just meaningless. It means the last one was not properly done'..... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

'That way, the organisation would not be able to get the BEST value from its people as a result of that action. Thus, it shouldn't be done frequently'.... [Ijay.... IT Specialist]

This aligns with the thoughts of Noronha and D'Cruz (2006, p. 91) in their submission that “the duration and frequency of downsizing programmes must be carefully considered, given the trauma associated with the experience”.

Low Decision-Making Quality

One of the downsides to frequent downsizing is the resultant low-quality decisions that the organisation will begin to make due to the departure of skilful decision-makers from the organisation, according to this participant:

‘Begin to see even those impacts in decisions being made because there are some decisions we made that right now are more like short-term kind of decisions because people that are meant to spend quality time assessing and analysing the impact of these decisions are no longer available’....
[Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

Stewart *et al.* (1999, p. 65) also claim that “one of the major consequences of downsizing has been the loss of valuable corporate knowledge embedded in the minds of former employees”. This is also supported by Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 54), which affirms the extant literature findings that “many employee downsizing efforts fail to retain critical skills, capabilities, experience and knowledge; resulting in deteriorating levels of quality, productivity and effectiveness”.

4.7.2 Employee's Career Aspiration

Employee career aspirations and reviews were also a significant fallout of conversations on the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the participants. Their experiences were captured as follows:

Downward Career Review

Initial plans for almost all respondents were to have a long career in the company, but there was a change of career direction due to frequent downsizing exercises. People lost interest in working for extended periods and so had a drop in career aspiration; hence their career lengths were reviewed downwards. The change in outlook was also

occasioned by the perceived threat to the long existence of the organisation. So, they have begun to think short-term, now aiming for early retirement:

‘Oh yes, it did. Of course, it did. Not just me. If we take a random sample of my peers, those of us that came in about the same time, at least, you would have gotten about 60%... let me just use a conservative number....that’s even being conservative. I thought it was just myself; only for me to rub minds with one or two of them in their houses, at the dinner table, and all that, only to hear that they were also considering it..... the initial plan wasn’t really to leave the company, to be honest, I wasn’t going to go anywhere. The company was very rewarding, the right things were being done, and I mean, I was getting the rewards for my efforts; why would I leave the company? ... but that would have been staying at least 20 years or thereabout or more with the company...it’s comfortable, it’s a good company’... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

‘So this gave me a more.....it resonated with me that, look, I may even retire earlier, sooner than I expect’..... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘but we have a lot of younger folks now who are thinking – you know what? I really don’t need to work here for long anymore; I can cut out instead of me looking over my shoulders next few months that is it going to happen to me or is it not?’..... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

Stagnation and lack of career progression

The rate at which the organisation was being torn apart gave no room for regular promotions apart from those who had to step up to fill vacant leadership roles. The resultant lack of career progression, despite sustained good performance, is frustrating to the workforce. Frustration from stagnation has caused low productivity and many career reviews, eventually making some people quit. In their words:

‘There is one particular employee that I spoke with who said (he just left and we met at one of the shopping malls), he said every year for the last seven years, his ranking has been ‘1’ or ‘2+’ but no promotion – so, he just thought to

himself, what am I doing here? And he just walked away'.... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'So, that's where stagnation comes in, and all the rest. So, that in a way, it leads to stagnation; those right sizing and all that, trying to downsize your personnel, leads to stagnation because even the ones they have, you want to make sure their.... you don't want their income to grow. So, those kinds of things - they all lead to that feeling.... in that kind of scenario where you are rightsizing, you are not going to give so much room for promotion....as high as seven to eight years who have not been promoted - who have had consistent performance over time and like in my case personally, I've worked for almost six years now without promotion'.... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'And again productivity is badly affected as promotion is not as it used to be before. There's a lot of stagnation, and it is not the best place to be right now. Out of our set, I have not actually seen anybody that has been able to move from one position to the other'... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

These views are supported by Ayinde *et al.* (2012, p. 66), who posit that “in the period of radical changes such as downsizing, employees may feel that their attachment to the organisation has changed, usually decreased”. They also shared insights from other studies that “commitment has a positive effect on work performance, turnover, employees' willingness to assist co-workers, and organisational productivity in the long run” (p. 65). They went further to say, “committed employees do better work than uncommitted employees, and no organisation can perform at its best unless each employee is committed to the corporate objectives and works as an effective team member, and that commitment could therefore be considered a hallmark of a healthy organization” (p. 65). According to Ngirande *et al.* (2014, p. 250), “if survivors perceive the downsizing process to be fair, they respond positively to it by becoming more committed. However, if downsizing survivors judge the process as unfair, employees become less committed to the organisation”.

Unconducive Environment and Loss of interest in Work

Four of the respondents surmised that the work environment used to be stable and predictable. Still, due to the frequency of the exercises, the work environment had become unstable, so the atmosphere was no more conducive. Work is no longer attractive, and so people have lost interest in work, as revealed in the following:

'I will say the peace or comfort with which we were doing our jobs before now is no longer there. This was not what we were told when we entered the company ten years ago. We were told that job security is internally guaranteed'.... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

'Do I really want to continue this job? Would I want to continue in this unstable environment, so to say'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'It used to be an industry where things were stable, but a couple of years ago, a lot of things happened, prices went down, and people had to start thinking of other options.....this used to be a very stable industry where things were predictable'... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

In support of these comments, Kuenzi and Schminke (2009, p. 635) report Schneider's (2000) claim that "climate research examines the subjective perceptions of individuals regarding their work environment and how these perceptions drive their behaviours and attitudes". They claim that "when perceptions of a work unit's employees are aggregated, they reflect organisational climate". Also, in the same light and according to some researchers cited in Häsänen (2010, p. 11), "during organisational changes in which uncertainty and job insecurity are present, the work climate deteriorates, and this may divide the workforce into different groups - those who perceive that they will lose their job, those who are uncertain about keeping their jobs and those who perceive that they will survive the organisational change".

Another common but dangerous aftermath, as revealed by all participants, is the impact on business continuity occasioned by the lack of focus of employees.

Looking and Preparing for Opportunities outside the company

Due to the frequency of downsizing, many employees have furthered their education to position themselves for opportunities out there. The people are now mentally prepared to quit and have initiated more exit strategies. They have become disgruntled, and so to secure their future, they have started looking outside the company, seeking better opportunities due to the pervasive uncertainties. Many employees now have side or alternative business ventures. Their focus on outside business has therefore become a performance hindrance:

'From my interaction with people, I've come to realize that every employee (maybe that's an exaggeration), a lot of employees now have something else they are doing - something else to fall back to, everybody is now thinking, what if the organisation tells me to leave today, what will happen to me? So that thought has come into a lot of people, so you find a lot of employees doing something else outside their day job; so they are starting small businesses on the side because a lot more people are awakening to the fact that tomorrow they can be out of the system'... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'In fact, I got an offer in another company, just that the number of years I had was what came up in question.....they actually almost offered me a job, but they were like, "why do you still want to leave? You are just 13 years, and you are very close to your pension." It does not matter what I told them, you know, they are human resources; I actually came out open with them and told them, "you know what? The truth is this - I want you to carry my years over", but they said that they couldn't do that. That's the long and short of it'.... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'Another perspective is people who start to look outside, in case they have to go, it means they won't feel so bad, and again if their other streams of income seem better than the company's, they will likely check out. This means they are preparing or even praying for another call. I know two employees that were nominated for one of the exercises, and they have both ventured into alternative businesses and looking at other streams of income because they feel that an

uncertain tide might yet blow again, and they want to be better prepared’... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

In alignment with the preceding, Mujtaba and Senathip (2020, p. 215) posit that “the remaining employees in a downsized organisation might start exploring their options of working elsewhere”. They re-echoed Heathfield’s (2019) submission that “after a layoff, no employee totally relaxes; they are waiting for the next round of downsizing or cost-cutting layoffs, which may include them”. In like manner, Bragg (2002), cited in Ayinde *et al.* (2012, p. 65), asserts that “employees believe that employers do not value loyalty and are willing to sacrifice workers to maintain the financial bottom line or to cover up for management blunders. Employees often refer to, as evidence, what usually happens during downsizing exercise and the way employers treat them as an expendable commodity when times get tough”.

Two interviewees also obtained Masters in Business Administration (MBA) degrees amid the storm, as stated in the following accounts:

‘Maybe I will align with the fear because I will take myself, for example - I personally went to do an MBA, and I can attribute that MBA to the frequency of downsizing or rightsizing. The idea was to position myself better, in case I’m affected by rightsizing or downsizing, so that I can be able to migrate to other industries if it becomes necessary’..... [Nero.....Engineering Mgr]

‘As for me, it’s making me think of options – I’m thinking of getting an MBA personally, thinking of business while not trying to have any conflict of interest, because that is one important thing – you don’t want to have a conflict of interest with the organisation. But then it makes me think of a 2nd option; I think it may be my turn, and I might be told to go, and then I need to survive, so I need to think of other alternatives’... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

This correlates with Noronha and D’Cruz’s (2006, p. 90) submission that “survivors display lower commitment and loyalty to the organisation and turn their attention to nurturing their own skills” and affirmed by Anderson and Proulx (2014, p. 8) in their assertion that “downsizing survivors experience decreased commitment to

organisations as they lose trust in their employers". They say, "resentment, insecurity, and uncertainty linger and affect focus and motivation - and that fear can take hold and can limit creativity and confidence".

Loss of Organisational Capacity

The frequency of downsizing also dealt a big blow to the organisational capacity of the company. The company experienced, as mentioned, unplanned exits, seeing their best (and most valuable) staff quit. The Participants wonder why an organisation will send off productive staff. The phenomenon keeps the feeling of leaving fresh in people's minds. And as someone said, the issue is not so much with the departure of people – like he said, "People come, People go" – the problem is the frequency of downsizing:

'The truth of the matter is for every company, people come, and people leave. That's a given. Any company that has downsized in the past will be downsizing in the future...but the question is, how frequent?'.... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

'But I think the thing is when you begin to downsize, your best hands will begin to look for alternatives, you know, and keeping them will become more challenging'.... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'It's about even giving people the feeling of wanting to go, at the end of the day, to be honest, the company is actually decreasing its worth whether it likes it or not because your best hands will go elsewhere; and other IOCs, to be honest, are waiting to welcome them with open arms'.... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

According to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020, p. 216), "the reality is that downsizing leads to the loss of experienced talent, and it disrupts the social networks needed to promote creativity and flexibility within the organisation's culture; which can significantly hamper the company from moving forward".

Impact on the Organisation

In all these, the company ultimately bears the brunt of the frequent downsizing exercises. The resultant divided attention hurts the company. Having people look out, mark time or quit before their time is not pragmatic for the company. From a business

perspective, Employees should work until retirement so the company can reap all the benefits of their investment. This is in congruence with Hill's (2018, para 13) assertion that "when employers take retention of older workers seriously, organisations gain significant benefits" and comments from Randstad Risesmart's blog that "bold leaders...will recognize that the long-term health and viability of the company will depend heavily on the ability of leadership to retain, develop and engage talent" (para 3). In their own words, some participants said:

'Really, it is better for them to retire and leave so that you will, as a business or as an organisation, know you have taken the best from the asset you have, looking at it from a business point of view'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

'In that case, it has a negative effect on the company when you have people marking time, ready to go and trying against all odds to get on the list. Should there be another opportunity? That's because they found joy elsewhere...from the business owner's perspective, divided attention is not good'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

These comments are validated by Anderson and Proulx (2014, p. 14) in their submission that "limited financial benefits can be shown as organisations' net effect of this downsizing practice, from the extant literature. Organisational leaders must therefore be made aware that downsizing rarely achieves the efficiencies they hope to gain. They must be informed of the harmful collateral damage caused by downsizing".

Next are conversations around the theme reflecting uncertainties frequent downsizing generates in the organisation.

4.8 Uncertainties - About the Future

From what I gathered from the interviewees, all that the drama has done is nothing but create a lot of uncertainties about the company's future, which is taking its toll on the employees and the company as a whole. Their comments were centred on the rumours of future downsizing that was always in the air, the fear these rumours created in people's minds, not seeing the end of the exercise in sight, the bleakness of their

future with the company and the reflections on the organisation in totality. The details of their expressed feelings in this respect are as follows;

Rumours are always in the Air

There are always rumours of an upcoming downsizing exercise along the corridor, in the staff restaurant, wherever two or three people are gathered together, at social functions with staff members and even in their respective homes, according to the following accounts of experience:

‘Considering the amount of downsizing that has been done in the last three years, we have had like 3 or 4, and there's still rumour that another one is on its way, so one could just imagine the impact of that’... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

‘.... You know, one thing is that once it has happened, there will always be a rumour somewhere that it will happen again; whether it is real or not, but it's always in the air’..... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

‘But, what is happening now is almost being carried as a rumour every year’..... [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

The Fear in People

The rumours constantly breed fear in people to the point where every day is a new day, and people are scared to speak out on issues as the case was before now, according to these respondents:

‘The impact it's had on me.... I feel I might come tomorrow and be told to go; I might be told tomorrow that “the number we need is less, even though you're performing at the right level we need to sacrifice some people, some people need to go”.... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

‘But in a case like this, you better keep quiet and do whatever your boss tells you to do so that your name will not be included in the black book’..... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

No End in Sight

However, the end of these exercises is not in sight, as the company, through the frequency of the practice, has not put her people's minds at rest. Some participants said:

'There is really nothing that says it will never come again...now, people know that it has not ended, you know, and there doesn't seem to be clear transparency on how and what the criteria for selecting who will be going next....whenever there is that type of ambiguity, it gives the opportunity for different postulations of theories' [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'Honestly, I will say I don't see an end. Do I know why I don't see an end? I really don't have an idea why; maybe because of the sector I'm in, the economy of the country currently, and what is going on, I don't see an end to it, and so I will say, it might continue, the frequency I cannot tell, but I think it's something that will continue' [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'We are not out of the woods yet, and the air of uncertainty hasn't blown away' [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Bleak Future

But it doesn't end there, as these rumours only reveal a bleak future for the company. No job security, and people are not sure what the future holds; it makes it more difficult to encourage others to hold on to their jobs, as elucidated by some interviewees:

'But it does not look like it would have a future that long - we don't seem to have any other investment or any other plans for expanding our facilities' [Sitie.... Facilities Engr]

'The frequency had an impact for that period. This was because the duration between the first one and the second one was a bit short. If it were something that was done with the view of years apart, it would have helped people settle their minds and improve on themselves, but where you have such uncertainty,

year one, year two, year three you are considering it, everyone would start asking themselves what really is going on'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

'It leaves people with an air of uncertainty that you might lose your job anyway and so it's not a good feeling'.... [Chuks.... Production Operator]

Gandolfi (2008), cited in Ngirande *et al.* (2014, p. 250), states that “downsizing survivors often experience feelings of uncertainty concerning their future in the organisation such that they become less satisfied with their jobs resulting in low organisational commitment and this consequentially leads to high turnover”. De Vries (2006, p. 5) also posits, referring to the works of Pulakos *et al.* (2000), that the vital aspects of performance in those situations are “how easily workers adjust to and deal with the situation, how efficiently and smoothly they can shift their orientation or focus when necessary, and to what extent they take reasonable action, in spite of inherent uncertainty and ambiguity in the situation”.

Not looking like a growing Company - *Not Good for the Company*

According to three interviewees, all the drama only gives the impression that the company is imploding, making it difficult to see any signs of growth. In fact, one respondent said it looks like it is being packaged for sale:

'But the old are leaving, they are not being replaced, and the new are not coming in, it does not look like a growing thing; it doesn't look like something that is growing....this looks like being packaged for something you are going to sell, you know. That's mere looking at it because if you are not bringing in new people, it means you are not looking at the future. So, if you are pumping money in, that means you just want it to look good so that it will be attractive to the next bidder, so that's it'..... [Yommy....SCM Specialist]

'It doesn't look like they want to close down, but the impression they are giving to us is that it's no longer as productive as it used to be'..... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'Another factor is the fact that the company presently is slowing down in terms of investment..... I don't see that much commitment compared to other companies. We hear in the news that the other competitors are investing heavily in deepwater exploration, but my company is not investing anywhere'..... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

New entrants that have not worked for long are also quitting, says one respondent, a development that is not portraying the company in good light. This is due to the cloud of uncertainty hanging around the company and the fact that these uncertainties have not been cleared by the organisation's Leadership, as expounded by this respondent:

'In the situation that I know, some of the entrants decided I don't want this, and they moved on. After a few months, they resigned and said they didn't want to be here - the number one key to this is communication. When I'm uncertain, and the person who is in charge is not communicating with me, I don't know his thoughts, and he doesn't know what I'm thinking, the cloud of uncertainty thickens. It doesn't make things any better, but if within the period maybe year one, year seven or whatever year - creating this uncertain cloud or creating this uncertainty over the people who are left behind or your valuable asset isn't the best but the thing is sometimes you have to understand that even those at the top of the leadership chain in the company are not vulnerable to this; they are actually exposed'..... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

All these comments reflect possible organisational death, which finds credence in literature through the works of researchers like Häsänen (2010) and Sheppard (1994), amongst others. Häsänen (2010, p. 8) first submits that "there is a lack of consensus regarding a definition of organisational death; stating that different terms have been used to represent organisational death, such as organisational mortality, exit, failure, bankruptcy, decline and retrenchment; and in some cases downsizings".

According to Sheppard (1994), cited in Häsänen (2010, p. 8), "the most straightforward way to define organisational death is to simply say that the organisation dies when it stops performing those functions we would expect from it". Häsänen (2010, p. 9) further affirms that "organisational death occurs when employees are faced with the

certainty of job loss due to closing down, which perceptions of the threat of closure may have preceded. This definition incorporates propositions that when there is a threat of closure, employees stop investing themselves in the organisation, and thus the organisation will lose some of its value to them”.

The interactions on the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture, as experienced by the participants, come to a close with their reflections on the organisation’s Leadership, taken in the following final theme that emerged from the interviews.

4.9 Leadership Actions, Inactions or Reactions

A lot has been going on, and the organisation’s Leadership cannot claim ignorance of what has transpired since the series of downsizing episodes began. The Participants claim this awareness led to particular reactions from Leadership. They said Leadership also experienced some shock from the whole recurring events, as detailed in the following depositions.

4.9.1 Leadership Reaction and Communication

Leadership has noticed cracks in the system, according to the testimonies of the following interviewees. They also said that Leadership backtracked at some point and reversed some of their decisions in this regard:

‘And I think that after that particular incident, the company has realized some of the cracks and has now been able to tighten the system and made it more effective to cater for the remaining people in the system and to ensure that they are safe’.... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

‘Management had to reverse their decision and brought back the resources that are required to operate at that optimal level’.... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

‘Now that’s the company backtracking because previously the company had said they had too many people and were downsizing’.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

Some participants also said all these have led to reactive corrective actions as opposed to the expected proactive efforts from the organisation's Leadership:

'Leadership is being able to take preventive and corrective actions; that is, making decisions that drive that corrective or preventive action and, in this case, yes, there was a mistake made. I believe the consultant who was engaged did not provide the right kind of information to Management to make that decision; but having made that decision and seeing that if they are not careful, they may save money, but at the end of the day, have a process safety incident which comes back to the company's value I talked about. In this case, the company was able to demonstrate that in the relationship between financial reward and safety, safety is more of a priority to the company'... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'They demonstrate that in the relationship between financial reward and safety, safety is more of a priority to the company'..... [Ofonzo.... Snr Facilities Engr]

'Let's put it this way, in one aspect, I will say, a lot is a reaction, being reactive'.... [Nero.... Engineering Mgr]

It was also pointed out that the organisation is now also dealing with health issues, evident by the traffic to the hospital and the severity of personnel health conditions or cases:

'The organisation has been talking a lot about work-life balance, how to cope with stress, so that is the way the organisation is dealing with the issue of having lean staff that are being over-worked. They are also teaching the staff how to deal with stress, to deal with difficult times while still trying to make safety their number one, in that regard'.... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

As mentioned earlier, there were a lot of impetuous reactions to filling vacant Leadership positions occasioned by the unplanned departure of the incumbents. The company has been faced with low leadership quality because the people promoted

were not all ripe for the jobs and, as such, were misfits in some instances. One respondent explained that she thinks the company will realize this and maybe make corrective plans in that respect:

'I think that at some point, the company will realize that; maybe they need to re-strategize and change direction, maybe the direction they are heading to right now, as in, they've downsized and people with skills have left, the people they have now in leadership are 'half-baked', they probably would start some new initiatives to address or correct that – that's was what I think.....in the system now, and this is my opinion again, is that you see Leaders that haven't even...they're not fully grown, so they do not have anything to give...they found themselves in that position because they were put there; they didn't grow into it. They were put there'..... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

Moving forward, some other respondents believe that the organisation needs to recreate the enabling work environment to restore the peace and confidence of the workforce:

'Should create an enabling environment; out of all the factors, you know, at the centre was - enabling environment'.... [Nero.... Engineering Mgr]

'I think the first agenda will be to restore the peace and the confidence of the workforce as per their employment'.... [TeeKay.... Snr Production Operator]

In addition, the respondents said the organisation should communicate better, clearing the air about their intentions to remain in business; by making any unshared plans for the future more visible, to ensure employees are not focusing on rumours. They need to demonstrate to the workforce that the Leadership explored all available options before getting to 'people-related' options:

'The right thing for a company to do is to ensure that they communicate properly and let employees know when they're having challenges and that they bring everybody to the table to discuss how to move through those challenges and that.... the last thing I want to touch is the people, and I would have

demonstrated to the people that I've exhausted all other options before I ever get to that.... should ensure that they are not focusing on rumours or on fictitious fears that they may be the next in line...because it might not be true that they are going to be the next in line but because they feel they had a colleague or a friend who just left the system, they might be the next in line'...[Billy Petroleum Engr]

'The Leadership can come up with a clear, definite vision that is well communicated across the board; I think there's still hope for the company as it were'... [Lakeside.... IT Specialist]

People resign because of bosses, not the company, as they do not get enough motivation and support from them, said one respondent in the following reflection:

'Is that people resign because of bosses not because of the companies...it's usually because of supervisors that people resign because, as you said, they don't give them enough support, they don't give them enough encouragement'.... [Nero.... Engineering Mgr]

In reacting to organisational capacity and knowledge gap issues, the company had to outsource to fill some gaps. However, there may be a justification to recruit to address the problem as fresh employees may bring positive vibes into the company, according to the following participants:

'Talking about calibre, at some point we used to think there were some classes of people that they will not let go, but I think that one that happened last, anyone and everybody that wanted to go was allowed to go'.... [Pees Petroleum Engr]

'Let's outsource half of the work.... there was a position where somebody left, took the package and left, retired, and they brought him back. It's not one, it's not two, and it's not three, because that gap was too large to be filled'.... [Nero.... Engineering Mgr]

'I can ease the load on them by bringing in fresh blood.... but it's now up to the management of the company to take a look and say we have this amount of work, are we actually delivering or are we just flogging the donkey until the donkey is almost dead...if I let go of some folks and bring in new blood, it will keep innovative ideas fresh. Those who are there resting on their oars get challenged to get up and stop being complacent because there's a new kid on the block, so to speak. If this is the case, it is beneficial to the company. More products, more Ideas and so on'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

In this regard, the workforce needs to be engaged better for ideas on improving the organisation as stakeholders, according to some interviewees. They also said staff members' willingness to depart the company could first be sought through surveys to manage the process better:

'I will go to my people and ask them for help, and if we can't think of a solution together, I will keep the people and discuss with them how can we move through this – do we take pay cuts, can we have delays in salary payments, etc. I will be as transparent as possible to the employees, let them see, and then we can cut wastages; I can take a pay cut myself; you know, in big companies, CEOs earn a lot'.... [Billy Petroleum Engr]

'One thing I have seen is, sometimes you send out a survey, and the survey says, what if you have another opportunity to move elsewhere, will you move? What will be the overriding reason? The survey comes back as anonymous you don't know who to track. But to make it more engaging, I could contract it to an HR firm outside, and they run these surveys and come back with the results; I could see that, oh, there are people who exist like this who will prefer to move on'.... [Emmy.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

It was also reported that Leadership keeps talking about safety in a bid to show their intentions to maintain the safety culture; as in the following reflection:

‘But Management is ensuring that they don’t let down their guard on reminding on the need to work safe irrespective of what pressure’ [Pees Petroleum Engr]

4.9.2 Shock to Leadership

Three of the interviewees also attested to the shock to Leadership due to the departure of particular categories of staff – an outcome they didn’t see coming and, as such, could not be averted:

‘I would say the first in the series of severance packages... when it happened, the employees woke up to the fact that (to realize that) ‘they are here today doesn’t mean they are here tomorrow’ [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]

‘So, for me, yes, you could say it bothered me a bit because I was like.... well, not that it was a bother, it was just an eye-opener that this wasn’t the plan and this wasn’t like the intention, but this is what happened. I think that’s the same thing that happened for management or leadership that this wasn’t their plan, but this is what happened, and they cannot go back on their word that this had to happen’ [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr]

‘Yes, the VSP (Voluntary Separation Package), as it was called, really shocked management because a lot of people they didn’t plan to lose actually decided to opt for the package’

Al Khajeh (2018, p. 2) affirms Xu and Wang’s (2008) claim that “the role of leadership in an organisation is crucial in terms of creating a vision, mission, determination and establishment of objectives, designing strategies, policies, and methods to achieve the organisational objectives effectively and efficiently along with directing and coordinating the efforts and organisational activities”. Also, according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020, p. 222), “conducting a layoff is a difficult process under most circumstances, and once the organisation has strategically determined to lay off a part of its workforce to improve its financial situation, the human resources group must plan and organize to carefully assess which employees will be laid off following the goal

and relevant laws". Organisational leaders must be mindful that employees are people and that they have feelings, responsibilities, loyalties, families, and corporate knowledge and skills and are the essence of an organisation. Without people, an organisation is nothing.

While some executives and managers might be tempted to jump on the bandwagon of quick cost reductions through layoffs, Cunningham (2016), cited in Mujtaba and Senathip (2020, p. 211), emphasizes that "the economy can easily turn around; therefore, decision-makers should think twice before letting experienced human resources leave the organization". Slav (2016), also cited in Mujtaba and Senathip (2020, p. 211), advises that "the oil and gas industry's global layoffs of 350,000 workers in 2016 were heavily influenced by the temporary ups and downs of prices and production (supply and demand); consequently, laying off too many people too quickly can put firms in an awkward position of having to rehire workers, if they are not patient, careful and strategic in their decision-making".

4.10 Conclusions and Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted during my exploration of the impact of the 'frequency' of downsizing exercises on a company's organisational culture. The results were from the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews of the thirteen participants in the research. The findings were slightly juxtaposed with extant literature presenting them.

The findings gave rise to a modified and better representative conceptual model (Figure 2) presented in section 5.4. This sets the stage for the discussions that ensue and helps to understand how the different themes contribute to understanding the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organizational culture.

In the following chapter, I present the discussion of my interpretation of the findings from the interviews conducted, showing the impact of the "frequency" of downsizing exercises on organisational culture, grounding them in theory. The discussions are centred around the modified conceptual model I developed to aid the comparison with extant literature. The chapter ends with my recommendation for future studies, contribution to praxis and conclusions from the thesis.

Chapter 5

Discussions, Contribution to Praxis and Conclusions

“A good discussion increases the dimensions of everyone who takes part.” - Randolph Bourne (1886 - 1918)

“Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.” - William James (1884)

5.0 Introduction

This research set out to investigate the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture in a company operating in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria through the lived experiences of survivors. The preceding chapters have shown details of my research journey from conception to the details of findings.

In this concluding chapter, I will share my interpretation of the findings from the interviews. After that, I shall discuss the findings along the lines of the themes generated (though modified slightly) and presented in Chapter 4. The chapter sets out with a preamble to the discussion of findings, after which I will be doing a quick re-introduction of the organisation and a recap on the broad concepts of organisational culture and downsizing, as well as the frequency of downsizing exercises. After that, I will proceed with detailed discussions of the different themes or factors illuminating the impact of the “frequency” of downsizing on organisational culture as experienced by the participants in the research.

After all the interpretation of the findings has been concluded, the study's aim, purpose and objectives will be reviewed to ascertain their achievement. Following this, I will be stating the limitation of the study and my recommendation for future studies after. I will subsequently share my contribution to praxis, where I highlight from the discussions the salient points from my research. The research conclusions follow thereafter. Finally, the chapter ends with my reflections on the whole research journey.

5.1 Discussions of Findings

After the broad concept refresh in sections 5.2 through 5.3, the discussion of findings begins in section 5.4. The discussions will be centred on a general conceptual model I have developed to aid the conversation as I relate them to extant literature. It is the upgraded version of Figure 1, which was created as the initial framework from my preunderstanding, as presented in Chapter 1. The conceptual model emerged from interpreting the findings from the interviews conducted and reported in the preceding chapter. Figure 2, shown in section 5.4 below, presents this framework used for understanding the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture.

The model will guide the discussion on the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture in section 5.4. The twelve-component model covers a wide range of factors involving the employees' work-life and impacting the organisation's mission and vision. I will discuss, in detail, how each model component relates to the employees and, by extension, the organisation and its culture. Essential concepts such as uncertainty, employee psychology, increased workload, quality of decision making, turnover intention, organisational culture and societal impact, and so on, will be discussed in more detail as I go through the interpretations of the lived experiences of the participants in my research, recorded and presented in Chapter 4.

The relationship between the themes, showing the interconnectedness of the factors of frequent downsizing exercise impacting organisational culture, is established and further developed into a modified framework shown in Figure 3. This will be presented in subsection 5.4.13, after the discussion of each theme, towards the end of the chapter. The framework shows how some factors do not only have a direct impact on organisational culture by themselves but also trigger the effects through others.

As already established, people are the bearers and drivers of organisational culture; and so in whatever ways frequent downsizing affects them, it affects the organisation's culture. As such, the discussions will focus on the impact on the organisation's members. Accordingly, I begin the discussions by revisiting the organisation and the situation it finds itself in as the official story for the research.

5.2 The Organisation – *It's all about People - At least, it should be*

Goshen Gusher Energy, a pseudonym for the international oil company (IOC) operating a joint-venture (JV) operation with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, has gone through a series of downsizing exercises to cut its operational expenses to profitable levels and remain competitive in the face of uncontrollable harsh economic downturn worldwide. Goshen Gusher Energy prides itself as an employer of choice that wants to be recognized for its people, partnerships and performance - recognizing human energy as the source of achieving high performance. So it appears that in the face of crises, the recognition (internally and externally) for its people seems to be in doubt by the repeated downsizing actions of recent times, which were presumably aimed at turning the fortune of the organisation around. This call for concern necessitated the quest for understanding the real issues affecting performance and the impact the method of economic survival may have on the organisation at the end of the day. This is the official story and basis for this exploration. In the core part of the discussion, what follows is an exposé of the ways that the participants in this research supported or deviated from this story.

Several themes emerged from the experiences of staff members that 'temporarily' survived each of the repeated downsizing exercises shared during the interviews conducted. First, the results showed that participants were all aligned on the importance of organisational culture to a company. Their views were aligned with Gardner (1999, p. 26), that describes culture as "a social energy that moves people to act". He believes, like Sinek (2009, p. 106), "a company is a culture; a group of people brought together around a common set of values and beliefs". Their thoughts were also in sync with Hofstede's (1991) submission, reported in Gray (1998, p. 23), that "organisational culture is referred to as an organisation's psychological asset" and Schneider's (1994) view, also as presented in Gray (1998, p. 14), that organisational culture is "the way we do things in order to succeed". So what comes next is a look at (or review of) Goshen Gusher Energy's organisational culture, as recounted by the participants.

5.2.1 Organisational Culture.

Participants recognized safety culture as the most dominant culture in the organisation and stated unequivocally that organisational performance is always weighed against safety. Performance emphasis is not solely on results but on how safely they are obtained. Company policies, strategies, processes, goals, etc., all have a safety undertone. This is also considered so because of the peculiarity of the oil and gas industry. The respondents believe the atmosphere must be conducive for the culture to thrive. This supports the claim that “climate also influences the habits people adopt; if the climate for safety is positive, everyone wears safety gear and follows safety procedures even if individually they wouldn’t normally think very often about being safe’, and indeed, many studies have shown that a positive safety climate decreases the number of documented injuries on the job” (Beus et al., 2010, cited in Robbins and Judge, 2018, p. 517). This climate is a creation of Leadership but needs everyone’s cooperation to succeed. There were testaments from participants that the organisation’s Leadership has put a lot in place to elicit compliance with all its safety culture initiatives. Members of the organisation’s Leadership have been held accountable as role models of different processes. Most of these are visible through talks, mentoring activities, safety week and safety milestone celebrations, etc. Management should therefore be aware of the interconnections between all the processes in the organisation and how everything revolves around the organisational culture.

The organisation has done a lot around all physical aspects of organisational culture but needs to be more cognisant of their impact on the main actors in the organisation. Nongo and Ikyanyon (2012, p. 22) declare that “corporate culture is pervasive and powerful as it either encourages or hampers change in the organisation; as it is either the glue that binds employees to the organisation or the wind that blows them away”. In an attempt to solve a financial cum productivity problem, organisations should not destroy the organisational culture and its executors in the process. As already established in section 2.1.3, downsizing is a phenomenon that affects organisational culture.

5.2.2 Downsizing of the Organisation.

Agwu *et al.* (2014, p. 2) state that “no singular definition of downsizing exists across studies, but in a layperson’s or non-expert’s point of view, downsizing means a contraction or shrinkage in the size of a firm’s workforce”. All the participants in this research understand the concept of downsizing and why it is not strange in the annals of an organisation. While some agree it is inevitable, others believe that the process has to be examined critically, focusing on its impact on organisational culture. Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 54) report Cascio’s (1993) definition of downsizing as “planned eliminations which excludes individuals discharged for a reason and individual departures via normal retirement or resignation”. These excluded individuals were also out of the scope of this study. Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 55) also stressed, referring to other researchers’ works, that “employee downsizing is driven by managers’ belief that this strategy will increase organisational efficiency and productivity”. Participants in this research also agree that downsizing comes in times of economic bottlenecks, when costs need to be cut for the organisation to stay afloat but believe that downsizing is done in such situations because it is the easiest thing for management to do; even as employee cost is not the biggest of all operating expenses. As one participant puts it, ‘*when you’re doing things, you always want to start with the easiest*’. So, it becomes easy to rationalise why it is done, even if it is at the expense of other vital features of the organisation.

Also, as indicated in the literature, employee downsizing is not a short-term solution to performance problems; “rather, it is a comprehensive and complex process causing dramatic changes to the existing informal organisational structure” (Schmitt *et al.*, 2011, p. 56). Managers of firms are believed to employ downsizing as a tool due to their lack of creativity and pro-activeness. I argue they use an off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all, globally used tactic to solve a company-specific issue simply because it’s the easiest thing to do. Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 56) went further to state that “employee downsizing not only leads to sustainable performance improvement but also that it has sustained harmful effects on organisational profitability” and also that “employee downsizing impacts the surviving employees’ emotions, behaviours and attitudes”. This now takes the conversation deeper to the concept of frequency of downsizing, as

the occurrence of this, if not curtailed, impacts the organisational culture negatively, as exposed in upcoming discussions.

5.3 Frequency of Downsizing - *People come, People go.*

The preceding are testaments of the thoughts of organisation members about short periods between downsizing events. Incidentally, no one stood against the fact that downsizing should be done at all. My interpretation of these as a whole is that downsizing is not new, and as one participant puts it, people will always come and leave the organisation. No one stays forever, so the issue is not necessarily about people going. What bothers them is the frequency of the events, especially since they believe it affects organisational culture. I recall that they defined organisational culture acceptably, so I trust they were not just casual about their comments on the effect of frequent downsizing on organisational culture. They were unanimous on this issue. Some participants commented, emphasizing planlessness as a reason for the never-ending story. They reminisce on the severity of the shock to them and the system, the impact of some high performers' forced attrition, while commenting that the desired results may not be achieved at the end of the day. The effect of the resultant increased workload vis-à-vis the unadjusted business plan targets, reflective of how things stand now, was also a concern. The impact of all these manoeuvres on the organisation's internal processes was also voiced out.

It takes some time for people to recover from one organisational downsizing episode, let alone recurring episodes. This is consistent with Moore *et al.*'s (2003, p. 251) argument that "repeated, acute events, such as repeated contacts with downsizing, present a different situation than does a single downsizing episode or a long-term, relatively constant level of threat; and that repeated events may be associated with different types of coping responses, job reactions, and health outcomes". One can only imagine the extent of the impact on the well-being of "survivors" if they are always in a state of despair.

How will they be valuable in meeting the goals and objectives of the organisation in this situation? I wondered. This thought correlates with the fond sayings of the CEO of a company in Cascio and Wynn's (2004, p. 433) research, that "de-motivated

engineers do not create breakthrough products” and Charles Hampden-Turner of London Business School, quoted in Catlette and Hadden (2012, p. 14), in a declaration that “... the trouble with crushing workers is that then you have to try to make high-quality products with crushed people”. So, how does Goshen Gusher Energy plan to continue as a high-performing organisation with the continuous intensity of threats to its employees? - is the question to ask. Since Goshen Gusher Energy has a people-centric organisational culture, its performance should be evaluated on how well they treat people and preserve its organisational culture along with any performance improvement initiative they take - the higher the frequency of downsizing (or the more people come and go), the more the company’s organisational culture is being eradicated or weakened.

According to Noronha and D’Cruz (2006, p. 91), “the manner in which the organisation handles the downsizing programme provides survivors with important insights into organisational culture and values, which in turn has implications for survivors’ affective and motivational states”. The impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture as lived by participants in my study will therefore be discussed in detail in the following section.

5.4 Impact of Frequent Downsizing Exercises on Organisational Culture

I recall Sinek’s (2009, p. 106) assertion that “a company is a culture; a group of people brought together around a common set of values and beliefs”, and so, I argue that organisational culture has everything to do with people, and so whatever affects people affects the organisation as a whole and consequently, its culture. Smircich (1983, p. 347) also talks about “viewing organisational culture as a property of organisations - something the organisation has - or as something the organisation is”. It is on this premise that I discuss the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture.

Figure 2, below, shows a summary of the areas where frequent downsizing exercises impact organisational culture as per revelations from the lived experiences of this study's respondents. In addition, it presents the framework used for understanding the

impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture. The ensuing discussions will follow the areas depicted by the diagram.



Figure 2 – Framework showing the Impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture

5.4.1 Organisational Performance

All the participants believe the frequent downsizing actions have implications on the organisation's culture as it relates to keeping them together and focused on achieving their objectives. Organisations are social beings created with a purpose in mind. According to Vadi et al. (2002, p. 7), "every organisation is a collective creation, which consists of a variety of people, their behaviour, attitudes and relations between one another; and to accomplish a task, an organisation demands the collective efforts of many of its members. The outcome, however, depends on both individual efforts and how well the organisation has managed to integrate the efforts of its members". In the space of these interactions and over time, the organisational culture keeps the organisation going. So the importance of culture and the need to safeguard it cannot be over-emphasized.

The participants believe the situation with frequent downsizing in the organisation has degenerated to the point where focus on tasks diminishes, and commitment to work is no longer as strong as it used to be. They say "things are no longer the same", which in this context is interpreted to mean their work delivery, and consequently, the organisation's productivity is being hindered – a dilemma the organisation faces now.

“Long-drawn and repeated downsizing endeavours give rise to chronic uncertainty, fear, and paranoia that diminish employee productivity. Therefore, the duration and frequency of downsizing programmes must be carefully considered, given the trauma associated with the experience”. (Noronha and D’Cruz, 2006, p. 91).

Whilst an organisation's culture is meant to continue improving its performance, a contrary situation with repeated downsizing exercises has occurred here, which shows a weakening organisational culture, as its power to elicit high performance is waning. According to Hampden-Turner (1990), highlighted by Gray (1998, p. 17), “if culture cannot successfully mediate dilemmas, the organisation collapses”. This is consistent with Agwu’s (2014, p. 3) submission that “the effect of organisational culture on employees’ performance partly depends on its strength (how widely and deeply employees hold corporate dominant values and assumptions”. Organisational culture should therefore be viewed as a whole, a veritable tool, in resolving organisational issues like productivity because it is the very essence of the organisation's being.

Poor organisational performance may continue, except all the uncertainties surrounding these frequent downsizing exercises are cleared. Accordingly, it becomes imperative to discuss how uncertainty has made these employees show a diminishing commitment to work and how it has impacted the quality of their productivity and work delivery - the organisation's ultimate purpose.

5.4.2 Uncertainty – Is this the last, or should we expect another?

The interviewees made many comments showing their frustrations with the system, especially regarding the uncertainty of their current and future work relationships with the organisation. As one of them puts it, “*uncertainty is always in their minds*”. DiFonzo *et al.* (1994), cited in DiFonzo and Bordia (1998, p. 296), defined uncertainty as “the psychological state of doubt about what an event signifies or portends”. Sinek (2014, p. 186) states that “feeling uncertain and insecure, our ability to create relationships and trust in any scalable or meaningful way is near impossible; and when that happens, our work suffers, the culture suffers, and the whole organisation suffers”. This uncertainty is heightened by the persistent unconfirmed rumours permeating the entire organisation with a resultant negative impact on organisational culture.

Rumours are always in the Air

Participants alluded to the fact that rumours of further downsizing exercises were always in the air. Grapevine researcher Davis (1975), cited in DiFonzo and Bordia (1998, p. 296), stated that “a major cause of rumour is lack of information about things important to employees”. Many researchers, including DiFonzo *et al.* (1994), cited in DiFonzo and Bordia (1998, p. 297), have also shown that “rumours are generated under conditions of uncertainty”. Put metaphorically, “rumours grew in soil fertilized with uncertainty according to them”. DiFonzo and Bordia (1998, p. 297) report that “rumours are a symptom of the uncertainty that often accompanies organisational change and persist or even flourish when poor communication strategies fail to assuage this uncertainty adequately”. This then continues to extend the tear in the organisational culture fabric.

The uncertainty generates mixed emotions in people, with some having a sense of privilege and safety while others are in despair. Leadership has neither confirmed nor refuted the rumours about such looming events. So, I understand the stance of two interviewees who said people should not let down their guards during these periods. One proverbially noted that “*when a servant sees his fellow servant buried in a shallow grave, he knows the same fate awaits him*” and “*the broom that swept away the people that made space for you is still there*”. Similarly, another said, “*if you see something happening to your neighbour, it means you shouldn’t sleep with your eyes closed*”.

Uncertainty and Trust

Apart from the uncertainty frenzy generated by the downsizing exercises, organisation members consequently lost trust in management. Trust is one of the cardinal points of Goshen Gusher Energy’s organisational culture. Modern behavioural psychologists describe “trust as the result of the reliable pairing of antecedent events with behavioural consequences” (Daniels, 1989, cited in DiFonzo and Bordia, 1998, p. 300). According to DiFonzo and Bordia (1998, p. 300), “trust is also violated when management says one thing (all is well) and does another (we are restructuring)”. As one respondent puts it, “*downsizing makes people lose trust in the organisation*”. The objectives of follow-the-leader syndrome are lost during those moments. The journey typically ends when followership loses trust in leadership. All these formulations of

revealing behaviour and collaborative planning are implicit in the notion that uncertainty and trust cannot coexist. During organisational change, trust is violated when management says nothing but enacts change; such change ends up being conveyed to employees through outside sources.

All of these affect the workforce physically and emotionally. So the conversation proceeds to the following sub-section on employee psychology, where the impact of frequent downsizing on the workforce's psychological, medical and mental well-being, consequent upon the development of uncertainties in their minds, would be discussed.

5.4.3 Employee Psychology (Workforce Psychological, Medical and Mental Wellbeing)

When asked, “so, how does that now make you feel as an employee?” - the “that” being the frequent downsizing exercises - two participants reported anxiety and fear as the most prevalent feelings. Anxiety, depression and illnesses are some physical manifestations of the impact on people. This supports most of the findings available in extant literature. However, the participants did not experience this after the first downsizing exercise. The signs started showing when they became more frequent with no end in sight. What was most disturbing during the interview process happened when one of the participants said he experienced depression. I was stunned by the revelation of his experience with anxiety which I could tell from the tone of his voice and the emphasis he placed on it. I had not come across anyone with such experience in person, but his declaration was validated by knowledge of people in the system that have experienced mild mental illnesses and depression. That was quite disquieting for me, knowing that spiral effect on people’s well-being as the consequences extend beyond the organisation’s environment to the larger society.

The respondents also felt that reference to them as survivors is only temporal as this status changes with every passing downsizing exercise. You are a survivor today but gone the next. At every moment, they feel they are in the line of fire. The situation creates perpetual anxiety with no end in sight. Thus, the stress syndrome has become a recurring decimal in their work life. In a publication by the Mental Health Foundation on “Living with Anxiety - Understanding the role and impact of anxiety in our lives”

(2014, p. 10), a lot of revelations were made about anxiety and its associated impact. They say anxiety “can be a vague, unpleasant emotion experienced in anticipation of some ill-defined misfortune”. This is no surprise as the cloud of uncertainty about the future of work for employees pervades. They also associated anxiety with “alterations to our mental state, experienced as worry or apprehension perhaps, and physical symptoms such as raised heart rate and adrenaline” (p. 9), which is not in converse with the experience of the participants in my study.

All these have a direct and unseen impact on people psychologically and mentally. The resultant impact will be on organisational performance as many members will either be absent from work or not mentally (or emotionally) fit even when present, with a reduced commitment to work. According to Durrah et al. (2019, p. 2), “in this digital age, employee health has been understood by researchers as an important element for organisational growth”. In their research, Haslam et al. (2005, p. 212) found that “the physical and psychological symptoms of anxiety and depression were reported to impair work performance and increase the risk of accidents”. In this respect, Brockner et al. (1995), cited in Hopkins and Weathington (2005, p. 477), suggest that “future organisational success depends on the reactions of those who survive the employee downsizing”. Employee downsizing’s psychological effects have been proven “to influence employees’ morale, work productivity, motivation, commitment and job performance” (Cascio, 1993, cited in Schmitt et al., 2011, p. 64). Consequently, there is a risk that employee downsizing could disrupt the culture of trust and safety, which in turn could reduce the employees’ willingness to apply their retained knowledge to present decisions.

It even gets deeper. What sent me thinking more is the reflection on the comments of some participants that seem to imply a “Ghostiness (a term I coined to describe survivors being like ghosts) of the company” – the aftermath or impact of the series of downsizing events, as it pertains to the condition of the minds of the survivors and the consequent reflection on the organisation. One respondent said, *“even though they (employees) are here, you’re seeing them, but they’re really no more with you again”*. People are in the place of work, but they are already thinking of other businesses. You see them in person and do not know what is on their minds. This is consistent with Stark and Flaherty’s (2010, p. 26) talk about “the two ways people quit organisations

– physically and mentally; Physical is understandable and preferred as the second way (mental) is the one that strikes fear into the heart of every manager: the employee who mentally quits but stays with the organisation”. This, of course, is a consequence of frequent downsizing which is evident in another respondent’s recount of the situation *“getting people to the point where they resign before they resign”*. The inference I draw from these comments is that the organisation members may be gone in terms of their allegiance but only “marking time” to leave eventually, as remarked by another participant thus; *“in that case, it has a negative effect on the company, when you have people marking time, ready to go”*. The lingering cloud of uncertainty causing a negative psychological and medical impact on employees, which is a misnomer in the company’s annals, is now becoming more enshrined in their DNA.

Organisations may start to show more responsibility if they are held accountable in one way or another. As one of the interviewees said, *“downsizing should be done against some key metrics - whether productivity or employees’ overall health”*. The solution to these problems may just be in that statement. If organisations take time to evaluate the impacts of the exercises on the well-being of the staff members (their most treasured asset), maybe, just maybe, they will start to appreciate and change their strategies. Any form of accountability will help to regulate this.

The discussion extends further to the increased workload on survivors, another creation of frequent downsizing exercises that also has a noticeable impact on the workforce wellbeing, in the following subsection.

5.4.4 Increased Workload - No longer how we do things

Another impact of frequent downsizing is increased workload for survivors. Participants expressed their displeasure about the frequent downsizing exercises’ resultant ‘increasing workloads’. Increasing because the practices have been going on for a while, and they don’t know when this will stop. The impact on the general health and well-being of members, as well as on safety culture propagation, was reported. The increased workload, impacting employees’ health, is also a violation of one of the pillars of Goshen Gusher Energy’s organisational culture, which is protecting people and the environment. They said this has also made it difficult to

achieve a work-life balance as they have to work longer hours under pressure to achieve their goals. This supports Schmitt et al.'s (2011, p. 56) declaration that “in the aftermath of such downsizing efforts, the surviving employees frequently have to double their efforts to compensate for the reduced human resources”. Organisational culture typically defines how things are done around here, but the “things” and the “how” are fast disappearing due to the coping mechanisms of reduced staff strength and increased workload. The organisation, once designed for and built around a more significant number of people, is now left in a state of imbalance.

Haslam et al. (2005) stated that most of the respondents in their study “believed that unmanageable workloads contributed to their anxiety and depression”; while a few others believed the unmanageable workloads had contributed to the development of their mental health problems” (p. 212). These were also evident in Goshen Gusher Energy, especially as they were unrewarded. One of the participants in my study said that in reaction to that, the organisation’s Leadership offered a get-out-of-jail card in situations where they felt they were overworked. But really, the question to be asked is, “who will get it done?” if it is essential and the business plan targets are not reviewed. As I reflect further, seeking deeper understanding, what becomes more glaring than ever is that even the performance of the past (the reason for the downsizing exercises) can no longer be achieved; if it would, at what or whose expense? For instance, three people cannot do what ten people used to do and achieve the same result. A balancing act is therefore needed as a compromise of keeping the people alive with a reviewed or redefined performance metric.

Maintaining the status quo has led to people being in a less than pleasant situation, psychologically and medically too, as testified by all participants. In addition, there has been an increase in the frequency of hospital visits by staff members from work overload, resulting in work overload for the company’s hospital staff. It, therefore, becomes evident that the organisation is no longer the same in this context, as either it is seen as a death trap (sending people to their early graves) or a “lower-performing” organisation, which was not originally in its DNA.

Due to its manifest consequence on the organisation's most dominant culture – Safety culture; the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the safety culture will be discussed in the following subsection.

5.4.5 Impact on Safety Culture - Consequence of Anxiety resulting in Inattentional Blindness

The organisational culture of Goshen Gusher Energy is written in a document known as the “Goshen Gusher Energy Way”. It breaks down the culture into the bits that make the whole (tenets, behaviours, etc.) – It clarifies who they are, what they believe, how they achieve and where they aspire to go. It institutes a common understanding not only for them but for all who interact with them. The Goshen Gusher Energy way discusses the five pillars of its people-centric organizational culture: protecting people and the environment, diversity and inclusion, integrity and trust, high performance, and partnership. The most dominant of these is safety, *delivering a world-class performance that focuses on preventing high-consequence incidents*. This is available to both regular and contract employees.

Safety culture actualization is people-dependent, i.e., it depends on the behaviours of organisation members. To encourage people to live the culture, certain slogans (type of symbolism) were adopted to make anyone who works in the organisation look out for and take ownership of abnormal (unsafe) conditions and champion the rectification of the anomaly. According to Panda and Gupta (2001, p. 15), “company creeds (such as symbols, which imbibe solidarity among the employees and provide a sense of direction to the organisational efforts) are communicated in the form of slogans”. For example, the most famous slogan in Goshen Gusher Energy is ‘***If you SEE it, you OWN it***’. The company further instituted a reward and recognition system to go along with this, to inspire the behaviour of constant participation. This way, safety incidents were reduced as everybody took safety as their responsibility (according to the testimony of the respondent that said “*the company will tell you that your health or your safety is your responsibility*”); whether in the office area (where slips, trips and falls are rampant) or in the oil field (where incidents could be in catastrophic dimensions).

The slogan is of a conditional nature which can be viewed in at least two ways. You have to *SEE* (discover an abnormal condition) it first, to own (take responsibility to fix it); and you have to decide (deliberately) to *OWN* (take responsibility to fix it) if and when you see (discover an abnormal condition) it. Either way, the efficacy of the slogan depends on the individual. As reported by two interviewees, people see things and don't think they are important enough to own them these days. Participants in the study said the slogan is not even as perceptible as it used to be. The legacy is not being passed down as in the past. An organisation that was once agog about this chant is now listless with it.

The respondents said that people walk away from taking ownership of unsafe conditions because it is perceived as an extra workload to the already burdensome tasks allocated to them. So they walk away, hoping someone else will "see" it and "own" it. This, of course, in some circumstances, can lead to a safety incident that may make the organisation lose its reputation. And so, it can be construed that the prevalence of anxiety and other frequent downsizing impacts discussed earlier have corrupted the organisational climate at Goshen Gusher Energy. The increased workload makes it difficult for people to see a wrong and accept the responsibility to fix it because it becomes yet another layer of work to the already exhaustive workload they bear. So, safety-conscious behaviours start to fall through the cracks; before you know it, it is extinct. That explains why they say the safety culture perpetuating slogan is not as audible and visible as it was in the past. Here we see another negative impact of frequent downsizing on safety culture; in another instance, they have said things are no longer the same.

Why have things degenerated to this point? I asked as I reflected on the preceding, but the reason was not far-fetched. The organisational climate, which Berberoglu (2018, p. 2) defines as "the aggregate of psychological climates, which are the perceptions of individuals about their work environments or "how it feels to work around here", has changed and so have the people". As Berberoglu (2018, p. 2) also asserts, "employee behaviour in organisations is a result of their characteristics as well as the environment which they work in; and in this regard, organisational climate is an important aspect to understand employee's work-related behaviour. The climate strongly influences employee attitudes regarding their sense of belonging, personal

relationships and work performance". The organisational climate change, consequent upon the frequency of downsizing exercises, in this case, has changed the safety consciousness of many employees, which is an erosion of the organisational culture.

What makes people look without seeing what is before them is not the non-conspicuousness of the thing, situation or condition but their inattentional blindness, which the state of their minds may cause. Anxiety, depression and disorders of the mind make that possible. Inattentional blindness, according to Most (2010, p. 1102), refers to "the common failure to notice visible items when attention is otherwise preoccupied, even though people look directly at them". So, we see the negative impact of the preoccupation of the mind as a consequence of anxiety occasioned by frequent downsizing within the organisation. Ann-Christin *et al.* (2018, p. 1) also confirm this stressing that "the phenomenon of inattentional blindness involves the relationship between attention and visual perception". The participants said, "*people are lost in thoughts most of the time*" and so are not fit to carry out observations, let alone operate any type of machinery safely. In the words of one of them:

'People may be apprehensive and then while doing their jobs and because they are not concentrating on the task at hand and they are thinking, oh, am I the one next in line; so that also affects the state of mind'....[Billy Petroleum Engr].

This, therefore, presents a situation where activities contributing to the organisation's safety culture are hampered.

Again, as part of its work processes, the company requires that a job safety or hazard analysis (JSA or JHA) be carried out before any operation is initiated. A significant part of the process involves team members' participation, with rapt attention (presence of mind), in looking around the proposed work area in order to find and remove safety hazards before any work can be permitted. Inattentional blindness can cause a substandard analysis to be done, which exposes the workers to unplanned incidents. Thus, anxiety occasioned by the frequency of downsizing exercises exposes the organisation to a gradual erosion of its organisational culture – its safety culture, and if not addressed, its reputation.

Gray (1998, p. 3) extends Sathe's (1985) belief that the strength of the "sharing attribute" in any culture can be inferred from observation: "one clue to the extent of sharing is how extensive the cultural manifestations are from which the inferences are made; that is, what proportion of people in the organisation demonstrate that they share the same physical attributes, slogans, practices, and feelings. In general, a high proportion indicates that beliefs and values are widely shared". Gray (1998, p. 14) stated further that "an organisation's core culture corresponds closely to an individual's core character". This is what makes the non-conspicuousness of the slogan to be of great concern - the demonstration of the safety culture may be waning as it has become less perceptible. In the words of two respondents:

'What is actually in people's consciousness is what you hear. You don't hear it often again; we really don't hear it as often again' It was actually ingrained before. In fact, I remember when you first came, it was a culture that was instilled into everybody, but I really don't hear it again. It's not as pronounced as it used to be'.... [Yommy.... SCM Specialist].

'So, a lot of people see things and it's like, this is not like important enough for me to own or they will mention it, and that is the end of it, and so it's you imbibing that 'do I really own it?'... [Ownny.... Snr Petroleum Engr].

It is a sign of culture erosion through inattentional blindness occasioned by uncertainty-generated anxiety from frequent downsizing exercises.

The lean organisation is also bereft of experienced personnel that have departed in certain units of the organisation. As was noted by two participants, the organisation has already recorded near-miss incidents in its operations due to attrition of experienced personnel and its current lean nature. One respondent talked extensively about an area of operation which should have been spared from downsizing because of its sensitive nature but was not. One participant, however, mentioned that the organisation's Leadership shifted grounds on a particular occasion due to the near-miss incident experienced; which could have, in the long run, if not checked, led to fatalities and, in extreme cases, catastrophic incidents that could dent the image of the organisation.

Here we see a situation of “themes within a theme”, which shows their interactions. We see, here, the impact of work overload demotivating people from taking ownership and seeking remediation for unsafe conditions, the psychological state of anxiety causing inattentive blindness to unsafe conditions, the degradation of the good organisational climate that existed hitherto, the people not being as excited about the perpetuation of the safety culture through perceptible safety slogans and the impact of knowledge base depletion or memory loss due to absence of experienced personnel, which could have resulted in safety incidents of imaginable proportions.

In the end, the overarching principle is the enlightened self-interest of one’s “Safety” being one’s “responsibility”, so when all else breaks down, self-interest prevails over the organisation’s focus. This then leads us to the dialogue on the impact of frequent downsizing on the collectivism aspect of organisational culture in the following subsection.

5.4.6 From Collective to Individual Pursuit - Loss of Focus and Concentration.

Another undesirable emerging outcome or occurrence is the loss of the collective vision - employees’ hearts. The collectiveness which characterizes organisational culture has diminished to individualism because organisation members no longer see themselves as a part of the larger organisation.

A factor in organisational culture definition is collectivism – “the power that resides in managing a unique corporate culture abides in the ability of a strong, unique culture to reduce collective uncertainties (that is, facilitate a common interpretation system for members), create continuity (perpetuate key values and norms across a generation of members), create a collective identity and commitment (bind members together) and elucidate a vision of the future” (Trice and Beyer, 1993, highlighted in Cameron and Quinn, 2006, p. 5). Individualism, on the other hand, is “an attitude that emphasizes the importance of the individual over the group identity. Collectivism is the opposite tendency that emphasizes the importance of the “we” identity over the “I” identity” (Triandis, 1995, cited in Vadi et al., 2002, p. 10). Dropping personal goals and

aspirations for a collective is a strong organisational culture characteristic. As such, an organisational climate creating a contrary situation should not be motivated.

Almost all the participants attested to the fact that most staff members are looking for other opportunities outside the company. Loss of interest in the collective well-being of the organisation can be inferred from the various statements as they fight for their survival. As a consequence of the degradation of the organisational climate by uncertainties, occasioned by the frequent downsizing, participants in my study started to see a detachment from the collective way “we” did things. This was so as organisation members started losing focus on organisational goals and objectives by concentrating a significant part of their efforts on looking for other means of actualizing their purposes, which are different from Goshen Gusher Energy’s.

In the words of two respondents:

*‘so you find a lot of employees **doing something else outside their day job**; so they are **starting small businesses on the side** because a lot more people are **awakening to the fact that tomorrow they can be out of the system**’... [Bee Snr Earth Scientist]*

*‘Another perspective is **people who start to look outside**, in case they have to go... I know two employees that were nominated for one of the exercises, and they **have both ventured into alternative businesses and looking at other streams of income** because **they feel that an uncertain tide might yet blow again**, and they want to be better prepared’.... [Chuks.... Production Operator].*

These were also corroborated by two other participants who said, “*that kind of thing causes distractions, **people are not so focused anymore**”, and the “**level of loyalty drops because people are no longer loyal to the system because they feel the system can no longer sustain them on a long term**”. These support Knudsen *et al.*’s (2003, p. 268) submission that “downsizing may also change the work environment by altering the relationships among co-workers”. They also acknowledged the arguments of Kets de Vries and Balazs (1997) and Shore (1996) that “insecurity generated by downsizing creates a much more competitive*

environment for employees, one in which each employee is primarily concerned with saving his or her job and that it could be interpreted as a shift from a collective commitment to an individual based orientation". The collective "we" factor starts to disappear gradually into the "I" factor as organisational members no longer see achievement through the "we" lens. They relapse into the natural self-preservation mode.

An organisation is also likened to a team or a chain - and "the chain is only as strong as its weakest link" (Reid, 2004, p. 112 and 473); and so when a team player starts to feel disenfranchised/subjugated or starts to alienate self from the team spirit or consciousness, the whole team loses its strength and focus. Employees' focus on outside business has thus become a performance hindrance as it shows a mental or emotional detachment or departure from organisational culture; the focus has shifted from the "collective" to "personal". And the conversation goes on. The discussion proceeds to the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational memory - the asset developed collectively by employees and owned by the organisation.

5.4.7 Organisational Memory and Mentoring – Loss of Organisational Capacity

According to Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 57), organisational memory refers to "stored information from an organisation's history that can be brought to bear on present decisions". According to the respondents, the reduced level of the organisation's memory vault as it relates to technical expertise, mentoring experience and will, and erosion of the organisational culture are consequences of the frequent downsizing exercises. As one of them puts it, *"when downsizing is a bit too frequent, what happens is that you get a crop of people that do not know the half historical perspective of how things are done, and so you might lose certain things, certain cultures or certain persons with the movement?"*. They believe the creative knowledge that leads to high performance is stored as a component of organisational culture. This view is also supported by Weick's (1995) submission, cited in Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 60), that "firms retain knowledge on a macro level, such as in organisational culture and institutional artefacts". And so, it shows that the state or efficacy of culture can be assessed through its retained knowledge and that knowledge-eroding events, such as frequent downsizing exercises, will impact the organisational culture.

Frequent employee downsizing not only runs the risk of destroying valuable organisational knowledge at the individual and social network levels but may also profoundly disrupt established procedures, routines and the organisational culture. These more indirect effects can have severe long-term consequences. The informal socialization process during onboarding or organisational culture perpetuation is thus negatively impacted. Furthermore, as the organisation loses critical employees in their numbers, valuable work skills and mentoring opportunities are also lost.

As mentioned, inefficiencies and or failure to implement employee downsizing strategies properly have negative consequences for an organisation. One of these effects is “the loss of vital organisational memory, as layoffs directly influence a firm’s stock of existing knowledge” (Dougherty and Bowman, 1995, cited in Schmitt *et al.*, 2011, p. 59). This frequency of downsizing exercises is creating organisational amnesia in Goshen Gusher Energy. Some interviewees said a lot of irreplaceable knowledge, history and experience were inadvertently removed from the organisation because of the way and manner the downsizing occurred. They said the process was not such that duplicates of expertise were assured before releasing some subject matter expertise in certain core operations.

As presented in extant literature by Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p. 54), “many employee downsizing efforts fail to retain critical skills, capabilities, experience and knowledge; and deteriorating levels of quality, productivity and effectiveness are the results”. Granted that Goshen Gusher Energy, a process-driven organisation, has a lot of standard operating procedures (SOPs) documented, many people with experience using these SOPs have left with the system, hence the substantial operational gaps that are showing up. Succinctly put, it is one thing to know “what”, and it’s another thing to know “how” to use it effectively. The gap continues to show in more sensitive areas of operation that could lead to process safety incidents and cause Goshen Gusher Energy significant reputational damage. A near-miss incident occurred due to a reduced number of knowledgeable people operating a facility, as recounted by one interviewee. The “reduced number” in his testimonial is not only referring to headcounts but knowledge base.

The impact of the rapid attrition of personnel is also evident in the response of another interviewee who said that people leave with the knowledge they have and that they don't transfer it properly to the people staying behind. The process did not guarantee proper knowledge transfer to retain, as much as possible, a quality organisational memory bank. This correlates with Schmitt *et al.*'s (2011, p. 61) claim that "when key employees leave, they leave with the knowledge that the organisation has failed to retain". Schmitt *et al.* corroborate this with Fisher and White's (2000) submission that "losing an employee through employee downsizing carries the risk that the information held in that employee's memory, as well as its value, will be lost if this is not retained elsewhere within the organisation" (p. 57). So, the observations reported in extant literature are confirmed here in the lived experience of the participants in my study.

Wiping of Organisational Memory and Corporate Espionage

Goshen Gusher Energy also runs the risk of Corporate Espionage and organisational memory loss. For those who sought work outside the organisation in similar organisations, corporate espionage could not be ruled out either inadvertently or deliberately on the part of the sought-after organisation. An interviewee shared how he sought and got a job offer from another company but did not leave Goshen Gusher Energy because the other company was reluctant to carry over his years of service. The same participant also spoke about four people with similar circumstances who eventually left the company. Companies don't take on mid-career employees without verifying the claims in their *resumés* during interviews; and in this process, company secrets are revealed

To put this in perspective, I relate this to my reflection of an experience (as a preconception) in this respect. I once worked with an experienced hire from a competitor in the early 1990s who fell out with our colleagues and superiors because he did not respect the enshrined ways things were done in the Drilling department then. No one opposed his intentions of sharing better ways, but what put them off was his constant reference to how his former employer did things. He says, "this is not the way it's done in Shell", so often until his supervisor says to him in obvious annoyance that "this is not Shell!!!". This is a classic example of how a company's competitive edge could be taken to another organisation, and the stories of how things are done there will be revealed through inadvertent espionage.

According to *Kovach et al.* (2003), cited in Vashisth and Kumar (2013, p. 85), “the phenomenon of job-hopping leads to an environment of espionage, although this may be a warning sign and not the cause of espionage”. This situation opened the organisation to the disclosure of their competitive edge - how things are done (their organisational culture) and their brand effect. This position is supported by Drab (2003, p. 6), who submits that “a common information-gathering technique is the “phantom interview” used to elicit information from employees of other companies during bogus job interviews”. This is consistent with Tunggal’s assertion in his web write-up on ‘What is Corporate Espionage?’ (Updated Oct 02, 2020, “How is Industrial Espionage Carried Out?”, para. 2) where he submits that “disgruntled employees or a former employee who now works for a competitor can inadvertently or directly reveal proprietary information and corporate secrets”.

One must also recognize that the tacit knowledge they leave with is a threat to the organisation, even if soft and hard copies of their secrets or operating processes are not removed. Remember, this is the way they have been doing things for a long time, and the way they have always done things cannot change overnight. They go along with your hallowed organisational culture – your competitive advantage.

The preceding may not occur without employees considering turnover, so turnover intentions created by frequent downsizing exercises form the basis of discussions in the following subsection.

5.4.8 Turnover Intentions

Many interviewees recount that the repeated downsizing exercises and negative influence generated have caused many staff members to seek paths of exit from the company against their original planned departure or retirement date. In the views of Tett and Meyer (1993), “the intention to quit is described as a conscious and deliberate willfulness to leave the organization or the desire of a person to leave an institute or organisation” (Batholomew and Onuoha, 2018, p. 8). The intention to quit is “deciding to seek other alternatives in another organisation” (Krueger and Rouse, 1998, cited in Batholomew and Onuoha, 2018, p. 8). There is a preponderance of evidence from all

the participants that this is what is going on in Goshen Gusher Energy. The current spate of downsizing has become a reality for employees in this organisation. According to them, it has created a contrary situation whereby people have also developed an immunity to its impact. The case came to a point where people had to develop coping mechanisms to build resilience to weather the persistent storm. Resilience is first to protect their psyche, so they don't become nervous wrecks. This then propels them to prepare to exit the organisation. According to the respondents, the frequency has influenced people to develop thick skins to the extent of planning their exits ahead of the company's broadcast of upcoming downsizing exercises. To avoid experiencing constant panic or anxiety attacks, most employees have prepared their minds by making plans for alternative financial streams of income, then looking forward to another exercise to get the severance package and move on with their alternate plans.

Also worthy of note is the general disposition to uncertainty avoidance by the people in the local organisation. Freud supports this view in his submission that "humans learn to cope with anxiety prompted by "real" threats either by avoiding situations likely to contain the threat or by physically withdrawing from them" (Mental health foundation, 2014, p. 11). Looking outside for alternative employment indicates, or portrays, imminent intention to quit. It depicts propulsion from the current focus on organisational culture (with its goals and objectives), climate and commitment to the existing organisation. Seeking other job opportunities is one of the building blocks of resilience to the trauma the debilitating downsizing episodes generate.

This changes the game for an organisation seeking to improve its performance and remain in business. Without its people, there is no organisational culture; and so they cannot operate at the right level to influence performance positively. So one can understand why people that are pensionable may opt to leave. What is more puzzling is the effect on the younger folks (expected to represent the organisation's future), prodding them to make exit plans. Participants were shocked at the number and calibre of people volunteering to leave. They are also aware of the shock to Leadership but are more disturbed about the decision of the organisation's Leadership to let them go. This indicates a bleak future for the organisation, which the leadership should recognise and address.

Organisational Cynicism

Many interviewees emphasized that there is a lot of “influencing” going on through social interactions amongst organisational members. Their interpretation of the situation in the company influences these conversations held within and outside the organisation. In the words of one participant, *“I thought it was just myself; only for me to rub minds with one or two of them in their houses, at the dinner table, and all that, only to hear that they were also considering it”*. Dissatisfied and frustrated staff members are spreading negative views, thus, influencing those that regard them as opinion leaders. This is consistent with Dean *et al.*’s (1998, p. 345) submission of “the existence of an assumption that people can form an attitude about their employing organisation based on the behaviour of the people in the organisation”. More disturbing is that the participants claim to speak the minds of many organisation members and not theirs alone. This shows that, through socialization among peers, the strategy is developed and continues to be circulated in the organisation. Some participants spoke with conviction about its prevalence, and my interpretation of their words is that those alternative and distracting ‘going concerns’ motivating them to turnover already exist or are in their conceptualization or formation stages presently.

A quote supposedly paraphrasing what C. S. Lewis wrote in the 7th chapter of his book, *The Great Divorce*, keeps running through my mind as I reflected on these sayings that point to the impact organisational cynicism can have on an organisation. The quote or saying that “no clever arrangement of bad eggs ever made a good omelette” explains how Goshen Gusher Energy, or other organisations that engage in repeated organisational downsizing, are endangered. It takes only a rotten egg or a disgruntled staff to cause disaffection among a group or the organisation as a whole. The saying is also contextually similar to the expression, “one bad apple can spoil the bunch”. That famous phrase refers to a situation in which one person’s hostile demeanour or caustic behaviour can affect a whole group of people, influencing them to have a similar negative attitude or to engage in the same bad behaviour. The phrase comes from the idea that one rotten apple amongst a bunch of other apples can cause the others to go bad.

Also, in the words of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and social revolutionary, who lived between 1818 and 1883, “cynics are made, not born!” Though the date of the statement is not known, the saying correlates with Waring’s (2009, p. 4) submission that “people do not deliberately decide to become cynical, but rather, it results from experience; it is neither a preconceived nor sought-after emotional response, but one which grows in the absence of more desirable attitudes”. This means that cynicism develops through experiences with organisations and organisational agents. According to Dean *et al.* (1998, p. 346), “expressing interpretations of organisational events that assume a lack of integrity on the part of the organisation may be a behavioural tendency that characterizes organisational cynics”. This is further elaborated on by Waring (2009, p. 4) who declares that “a major contributing factor to the creation of cynical thoughts resides within any organisational change; labelling cynicism as a negative attitude spawned by repeated or unsuccessful change initiatives”. Thus, cynicism is “understood to originate within significant organisational change and in the crevasse between expectations and perceived reality” (p. 5).

In addition, Dean *et al.* (1998, p. 344) also state that “researchers see employee cynicism as a result of violations of psychological contracts and describe cynicism within the realm of attitudes; and that, outcomes of cynicism could include such constructs as organisational commitment” (p. 350). Cynical employees can influence the entire organisation and hinder it from reaching its goals. Consequently, keeping disgruntled people in the organisation deliberately or inadvertently has a counter-productive impact on the organisation as cynics influence others to interpret everything in the company negatively. Cynicism can make employees hopeless, less committed to their work, and less satisfied, and in the end, the employees will decide to quit the organisation.

Organisational Cynicism and Intention to Quit

Organisational cynicism is “the belief that an organisation lacks honesty, causing a hard-hitting reputation and critical behaviours when it is combined with a strong negative emotional reaction” (Abraham, 2000, cited in Batholomew and Onuoha, 2018, p. 7). It is also referred to as being unsatisfied with the organisation. Tett and Meyer (1993), cited in Batholomew and Onuoha (2018, p. 8), also submitted that “intention to quit occurs when employees voluntarily leave their jobs and that there’s

no doubt, organisational cynicism is one of the most obvious contributors to employees' intention to quit". Also, according to Hopkins and Weathington (2005, p. 478), "an accumulation of negative perceptions increases the risk of turnover among the survivors, which will undermine the envisioned savings through employee downsizing". In addition, Batholomew and Onuoha (2018, p. 8) assert that "the higher the cynicism in an organisation, the higher the employees' intention to quit such an organisation, and vice versa". And so, it becomes clearer why the informal socialization and conversations amongst peers are influencing such decisions and actions in Goshen Gusher Energy, as reported by the participants.

As declared by Fatt *et al.* (2010, p. 66), "employees in an organisation have always been a key asset, as their departures could have a significant effect on the implementation of the organisation's business plans and may eventually cause a parallel decline in productivity. As such, employee retention was important to the long-term growth and success of the company". Quoting Mello (2006), they submit that "retaining the best employees would ensure customer satisfaction and effective succession planning". They stated further that "It would also improve investors' confidence, as they were concerned with the organisation's capacity to perform in such ways that would positively influence the value of their investment in the company. Hence, there was no question that uncontrolled employee turnover could damage the company's stability and, consequently, the national economy".

Organisational Pride

Many respondents expressed views about how good it was working for the organisation initially. These comments imply the pride and fulfilment the employees had working for the company. The perks such as salary, training, working environment, long career path and other fringe benefits constitute what contributes to the sense of pride. One respondent said, "*oh, well ... this company is a very rewarding company, financially*". The pride of place in the society working here is also a key factor, as in this respondent's comment, "*I had a very strong impression of them because of the reputation they carry and performances; I chose this company because of the reputation I know the company to have outside*". These positive feelings towards the organisation make people commit to long-term relationships with their employers. This

was the case at Goshen Gusher Energy initially, according to the preceding. When these feelings deteriorated, cynicism set in.

According to Durrah *et al.* (2019, p. 4), “contrary to what organisational cynicism usually means, organisational pride has positive connotations”. The concept of organisational pride is a driver of positive job behaviours and the main differentiator in competition, as a strategic asset of the company and a vital factor for the success of the business. They state, however, that “cynicism fills a gap left where pride either should have flourished or diminished as expectations were not reconciled with reality”. “An employee with this denied pride will develop an emotional gap that creates a chance to promote a negative stance as an employee drifts away from positive thinking”, they submitted.

“In the good old days” is an expression often used for a time in the past when you believed life was better (according to the online Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus). In the Nigerian setting, older folks often use it when reflecting on past treasured memories reminiscent of good experiences. And so, I argue that inherent in the expression of participants’ experience with frequent downsizing exercises through their comments that “things are no longer the same” is a reflection of the fact that the organisational pride, for many people in Goshen Gusher Energy, has turned to organisational cynism. The battle against cynicism, according to Waring (2009, p. 9), “must therefore be fought, not against the resultant attitudes of people, but against the conditions that allow perceptions to slide away from pride and into negative expressions”.

Organisational Justice

The feeling of partiality in the way and manner the exercise was designed and implemented was prevalent in the minds of Goshen Gusher Energy employees as the process continued. Employees suspected some people were targeted for other reasons besides sustained poor performance. They believed there was no visible uniformity in the application to different cadres of the organisation as people in the management cadre were rarely touched. They saw injustice in the process, especially for an organisation they believe is top-heavy. Playing politics here ensures only their favourites remain, as the process was seen as a vehicle to eliminate staff members

some management staff hold personal grudges with. This is consistent with Shah's (2000, p. 102) argument from existing literature that "perception of justice is influenced by employees' perceptions of whether layoffs were necessary, the appropriateness of the decision criteria used in identifying redundancies, and whether victims were fairly treated and adequately provided for after being downsized". Sharing the same view, Datta *et al.* (2010, p. 308) also say "in the context of downsizing, perceptions of fairness related to downsizing decision making and implementation processes have a significant bearing on subsequent behaviour". The subjective connotation of situations like this in employees' minds makes the process challenging to handle. Depending on the strength of the individual and the ability to resist undue peer influence or pressure, these lines of thought can quickly enlist one to cynicism.

From the preceding, the current impression of the organisation by employees ties with thoughts of new organisational stories which occupy the mind of employees. This is addressed next in the following subsection.

5.4.9 Organisational Stories – The New Normal.

Stories, "being a form of expressive symbolism, are instrumental in creating a sense of common identity and community and contributing to the stability of organisational culture" (Panda and Gupta, 2001, p. 16). One respondent attested to the fact that downsizing is a strange phenomenon that was not observable in the organisation until recently. What story shall we now tell? This is the first question that occupied my mind as I reflected on the eccentricity of the recurring event being instituted. The company rarely experienced attrition, but the phenomenon now pervading the organisation's atmosphere has changed the company's narrative. Again, what stories do we now tell new entrants or the public who now see us in a different light?

Stories "circulate through many organisations, anchoring the present in the past and legitimating current practices. They typically include narratives about the organisation's founders, rule-breaking, rags-to-riches successes, reductions in the workforce, relocation of employees, reactions to past mistakes, and organisational coping" (Boje, 1991; Ricketts and Seiling, 2003, cited in Robbins and Judge, 2018, p. 524). Shipp and Jansen (2011), also mentioned in Robbins and Judge (2018, p. 524),

professed that “employees also create their own narratives about how they came to either fit or not fit with the organisation during the process of socialization, including first days on the job, early interactions with others, and first impressions of organisational life”. Past organisational stories centred on how good it was to work in Goshen Gusher Energy – the fascinating careers, little or no attrition, good work environment, Job security, uncompromised safety attitudes and behaviours, reward and recognition, as well as remuneration. Throughout the downsizing periods, the narratives of the organisation have changed. The frequent downsizing exercises start to come to the fore in the stories that form organisational culture. Recall that organisational culture is formed through stories, among other things. Sustained attrition is now part of the culture (the way things are done here – to succeed). Incidentally, employees that were less than two years old in the system when all these started have experienced the impact for more than half of their career, and so this characterises their experiences in the organisation.

Here I see a changed perspective, occasioned by the change in the narrative of the organisational culture of Goshen Gusher Energy. Whereas in the past, people had long-term career views of the company, the reverse is fast becoming the case, from the respondent’s testimonies. Almost all the interviewees have reviewed their career outlook downward. One can only imagine what influence their informal socialisation will have on new entrants, should the company resume hiring in the future, what stories they will tell and their views about where they think the organisation is headed. One respondent stated she would say to anybody who comes into the system to get the most as quickly as possible as if the company will fold up tomorrow because she regrets not doing so herself. The new normal will redefine how we see ourselves, how our successes are evaluated and reviewed, and ultimately, “how we do things here to succeed” – our organisational culture. All of these are a reflection of how the organisation is viewed within and without.

This then leads to discussions of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational reputation and brand - a complete representation of how the company is represented and perceived. As established in the literature review, corporate branding is a crucial element of the organisation, and so its impact on it will be discussed in the following subsection.

5.4.10 *Brand of the Organisation and Organisational Reputation*

A lot of activities are going on at the same time. People are leaving with their tacit knowledge and unpassed-down experience, the organisation's memory bank is depleting, people are changing jobs, jobs are being collapsed, many are experiencing work overload, a few are being promoted while others are experiencing stagnancy - the organisation is evolving so fast to remain the same, organisational culture-wise; and it is getting noticed outside the organisation.

The organisational culture is not just what is seen and understood within the organisation but reflected to the outside world through employees, company activities, corporate social responsibilities (CSR) etc. It is the brand of the organisation as well. For instance, participants claim they joined the company because of the positive corporate image and the way the organisation members portrayed Goshen Gusher Energy. They were enticed by the quality of life of their employees. Participants say Goshen Gusher Energy has managed to create a strong brand and an exciting work environment and earned a strong reputation for taking care of their employees' welfare. However, they would not have looked forward to working in the organisation if they had a premonition of what (the frequent downsizing exercises) is currently happening. In fact, some said they would discourage anybody who asks for their advice on possible career prospects in the company.

Fombrun (1996), reported in Schulz and Johann (2018, p. 40), defines corporate reputation as "a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describe the firm's overall appeal to all its key constituents when compared with other leading rivals". Schulz and Johann (2018, p. 40) posit that "a firm's reputation is not static but evolves continuously" and that "one prevalent management practice that is likely to impact a firm's reputation is corporate downsizing". They also stated that research has shown that downsizing tends to negatively affect a company's stock-market performance and, thus, shareholder wealth. Though a participant in my study agreed with this position, he alluded to the company's stock price being strong and not affected yet by current activities. Other researchers like Djordjević and Djukić (2008, p. 51) also stress the importance of corporate reputation as "one of the most important firm's intangible assets". They say

that “under the conditions of intensified competition, corporate reputation is becoming a source of competitive advantage”. In their words, “corporate reputation is the public assessment of the key identity and image of an organisation making a favourable long-term position” (p. 53). “It is based on the experience of the defined public with a company and is a result of its whole behaviour, symbol and communication with the environment” (p. 53). They affirm that the critical factors of corporate reputation “are corporate culture, business strategy and internal and external communication” (p. 54).

The various expressed feelings, as experienced by the participants, show how negatively the company's reputation may be at the moment. Reactions to the mass exodus of people also send wrong signals to the larger society. It increases unemployment, and the disgruntled victims do not have good tales to tell their families and friends who may have envied their employment in the company. This may result in Goshen Gusher Energy having negative reviews regarding the area of operation, and the communities may stop trusting the organisation, according to one of the participants in this research.

Djordjević and Djukić (2008) stated how important it was to know “that strategies that organisations realize have significant influence outside the organisation boundaries. Strategy, such as downsizing, produces many negative effects on the community: unemployment, losing revenue, pressure on the social funds, etc.” (p. 60). They claim that “if organisations decide to downsize, especially through massive layoffs, they send a message in the environment that employees are considered purely as the cost. Consequently, employees do not consider such an organisation a valuable workplace in the external labour market. Therefore, downsizing minimizes the organisation's ability to attract, develop, and keep talented people”. Also, they say, “there is evidence that some of the most competent employees who survived layoffs left the organisation voluntarily since the new organisational culture that appeared is not congruent with their values” (p. 61). According to respondents, this is similar to what is happening in Goshen Gusher Energy presently.

It was also noted by Schulz and Johann (2018, p. 43) that “if a firm has downsized significantly in the past, downsizing again is likely to increase uncertainty on the part of stakeholders”. They also add Brauer and Laamanen's (2014) argument that “large

reductions in the workforce augment the negative effects of the so-called survivor syndrome” (p. 43). This is evidenced by the experiences conveyed by the participants in my study. Schulz and Johann (2018, p. 43) also claim that “the overall impact of downsizing on a company's reputation is greater in firms that have downsized extensively in the past”. One can only imagine what would happen to the “Goshen Gusher Energy” brand should a catastrophic safety-related incident happen due to unsafe conditions created by these frequent downsizing exercises, as discussed earlier. The environment an employee works in is a pivotal factor for the output and result of the employee. Employees who work in a conducive and growth-oriented environment sub-consciously yield better results, which helps in the organisation's development. This perspective will be further expounded on in the following subsection.

5.4.11 *Organisational Climate and Impact of Leadership Actions.*

Organisational culture derives its origin from the founders of the organisation. It is created by the Leadership and employees of the organisation, and so, it is recognized that Leadership has an impactful role in creating, maintaining, shaping and propagating it. They are responsible for creating an enabling environment for it to thrive. According to Xenikou (2019, p. 2), “an essential aspect of leadership is to influence the shared cognitions and behavioural norms that organisational members hold, and therefore, effective leaders put a lot of effort into culture formation, maintenance, and change”. Nelson (2018, ‘Spread Motivations’ para.) also declares that “a leader’s motivations and wants trickle down to employees as they are the soldiers employed to carry out their will; and depending on what one is motivated by, one’s organisational culture will surely respond in kind”. A lot has been going on in Goshen Gusher Energy in the wake of these repeated downsizing events, which are not hidden from the Leadership. Participants say Leadership created cracks, which they later noticed in the system and had to backtrack from at some point due to the sensitive nature of the issue. This could have led to an unforgettable accident. Participants believe the organisation’s Leadership should have been more proactive and focused on operating safely as the culture dictates instead of being consumed with attrition to meet a lean organisational size.

It must also be brought to the fore that Leadership behaviours sometimes influence employee decisions to quit their jobs and leave the organisation. The employees quit when they no longer get the requisite motivation and support from their team leaders. This is even escalated when you have unqualified people at the helm of affairs. As one of the participants testified, “*people resign because of bosses and not because of the company*”. This view is supported by Bodjrenou *et al.*'s (2019, p. 278) report of Kim and Beehr's (2018) submission that “leadership behaviour is a significant predictor of affective organisational commitment”. They also buttressed Voet *et al.*'s (2017) assertion that “transformational leadership behaviour of direct supervisors is a significant contributor to organisational commitment and affective commitment, especially in the context of change management or the implementation of change”. Employees must be appropriately engaged and supported to continue working and delivering the right results.

As observed by Kim and Kim (2017), cited in Bodjrenou *et al.* (2019, p. 279), “leadership in the form of effective mentoring through “job-related coaching and assistance in overcoming career challenges” increases organisational commitment”. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case in Goshen Gusher Energy due to the reoccurring attrition. Some respondents testified that experienced personnel and mentors had left the organisation, and as a result, many people were promoted to leadership positions unprepared; and so are unable to effectively provide the technical leadership required to deliver quality work and progress their careers. According to Nelson (2018, ‘Morale’, last para), “when people are left without appropriate or any guidance, the standard of work lowers, and organisational culture suffers”. This has also caused disaffection among the employees because of the rationale used for such selections and the lack of cooperation from the disgruntled team members.

It appears, though, in a reactive mode that, based on health issues, evident by the traffic to the hospital and severity of personnel health conditions or cases, the organisation has started talking to people about having a work-life balance, as testified by a few respondents. The Leadership has been talking about how to deal with stress, whereas the situation could easily have been averted. The atmosphere of “chaos”, as a respondent puts it, which was management's inadvertent creation needs to be addressed by management. The enabling work environment needs to be re-created

to restore the peace and confidence of the workforce. Appelbaum and Donia (2001), cited in Noronha and D'Cruz (2006, p. 91), advocate that "downsizing should take place in one shot in the shortest time possible so that the organisation can quickly regain its equilibrium and provide a stable working environment". Participants say Leadership can do this through loud and clear communication and systematically and consistently assuring employees of their intentions instead of relying solely on the rumour mill and suppositions. They need to clear all areas of uncertainties so people can settle down to actual business with rapt attention. The focus and loyalty of the organisation need to be restored. According to Panda and Gupta (2001, p. 14), "the ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on the particular story that he or she relates or embodies and the reception to that story on the part of the followers". The leader should see that "the organisational stories floating around in the organization must be in sync with organisational values" (p. 14). The leader must also "have a grip over the informal communication channels such as gossip in the canteen or any other informal gatherings so that those stories do not have negative connotations. It would mar the culture of the organization. Such stories should be countered with positive action that demonstrates otherwise" (p. 14).

The response to the severance package should have been a wake-up call to the Leadership. A company that otherwise had a meagre attrition rate should not be facing this type of employee exodus voluntarily. The company initially said they reserved the right to approve any self-nomination, but at the end of the day, everyone that showed interest was released from the company, as testified by respondents. The number notwithstanding, the calibre of people that opted out sent some shivers down the spine of many employees and made them wonder if all was well. Respondents said it showed them that nobody is indispensable. This is not a very good indication that all these are about performance improvement. An organisation that intends to remain competitive will not initiate a process that lets go of its best hands for any reason. In the final analysis, "people factors" are frequently the critical source of competitive advantage – the factor least visible to the naked eye and most difficult to emulate. We simply must accept that most businesses aren't so much about capital, expertise or even product-driven as they are people-driven. (Catlette and Hadden, 2012, p. 13)

Finally, amid all these uncertainties, which the Leadership has not cleared, is the all-important question that many employees face - that is if there is still a future with the organisation. This discussion is taken next in the following subsection.

5.4.12 *Organisational Suicide or Death - Are these signs of the end?*

Workforce reduction without replacement or any indication of such does not portend any intention of growth. From my understanding and experience, the normal process is for organisations to shed weight by reducing, systematically, the high-earning staff at some point in the organisation's life and replacing them with younger, more energetic and innovative people; and in order not to lose the organisation's culture during the process, they ought to have initiated a process to socialize new entrants with the old, or at least signify intentions towards that.

As Watson (2019, para. 1) suggested, "the definition of downsizing may also encompass the closing of plants and facilities where downsized employees once worked". Häsänen (2010, p. 8) also affirms that "different terms have been associated with organisational death, such as organisational mortality, exit, decline and retrenchment, and in some cases downsizings". Hamilton (2006), cited in Häsänen (2010, p. 8), on the other hand, defines it as "the substantial loss of customers, clients, and market value that causes an organisation to cease operations in its current form, relinquish its existing organisational identity, and lose the ability to self-govern". Freeman and Cameron (1993, p. 14) also state the views of other researchers that "downsizing is synonymous with growth-in-reverse".

As declared by some respondents, this thinking or view culminates into the overall perception of the workforce - why they intend to leave as they can no longer see a future. One participant said it *"looks like the company is being packaged for sale, and that Leadership just wants it to look attractive enough for the next bidder"*. This looks like organisational death and as Arman (2013, p. 2) argues, "the most common use of the organisational death metaphor, either explicitly or implicitly, is when organisations lay off workers, downsize, or close workplaces and factories". She says the meaning of the term organisational death is "literal in the sense that the physical and social arrangements of (or part of) an organisation cease to exist" (p. 3). Referring to other

researchers, she states further that “the term is also used to vividly communicate how job losses, organisational and individual life changes, and emotional impacts are experienced by those involved” (p. 3). The supportive comments by participants are profound in meaning as they portray, in summary, what the company appears to be thinking or where they may be heading, especially as they say Leadership has been mute about it. Failure to communicate also “creates a sense of false hope in employees, propelling them to a stage of denial and inertia about their options. Over time, employee distrust and organisational paralysis emerge” (Noronha and D’Cruz, 2006, p. 91).

A few respondents also voiced their notice of the lack of new investments and a slowdown in seeking such opportunities. In the oil industry, certain levels of visible investments (capital projects) are made before an oil field can be developed. These investments are infrastructural and signal the intention for field development, especially after the final investment decision is made. Confirming this position, Gupta and Grossmann (2017) state that “a field can only be developed if a corresponding facility is present...”(p. 3) and this step “involves capital-intensive investment and operations decisions that include facility installations...”(p. 4). The company portfolio of such investment is thinning out hence the comments about no show of plans for facilities expansion or new projects in that regard.

One then wonders if this is not a sign of the end. Ultimately, the company decides “to stay or not to stay at the end of the day”, as one participant thinks. Goshen Gusher Energy is a multinational company with organisational footprints around the world. The Nigerian operations may no longer have a strategic fit for them for the long term and so may be winding down gradually. This is not very clear according to the participants. Participants say the company leadership express something else, but their body language communicates otherwise.

5.4.13 *Web of Interconnections of Frequent Downsizing Impacts on Organisational Culture.*

A pattern ensued from the discussion of themes in the preceding subsections that showed how each theme is not single-acting on organisational culture but influenced

by others. A trend of manifestations of ‘themes within themes’ was established during the discussion of each piece. Much as a few of the themes can have a direct impact on organisational culture independently, there is a web of interconnections amongst them (that shows how one theme leads to another) which needs to be recognized to appreciate the weight of impact they have on employees and the organisation; and why this phenomenon should be accorded the proper attention. This web of interconnectedness or interdependencies shows the amplification of the sustained impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the workforce due to its ubiquity and prevalence in the organization. This is consistent with one participant’s experience where he said the first downsizing exercise had no impact on him but that the effects started to show with repeated activities.

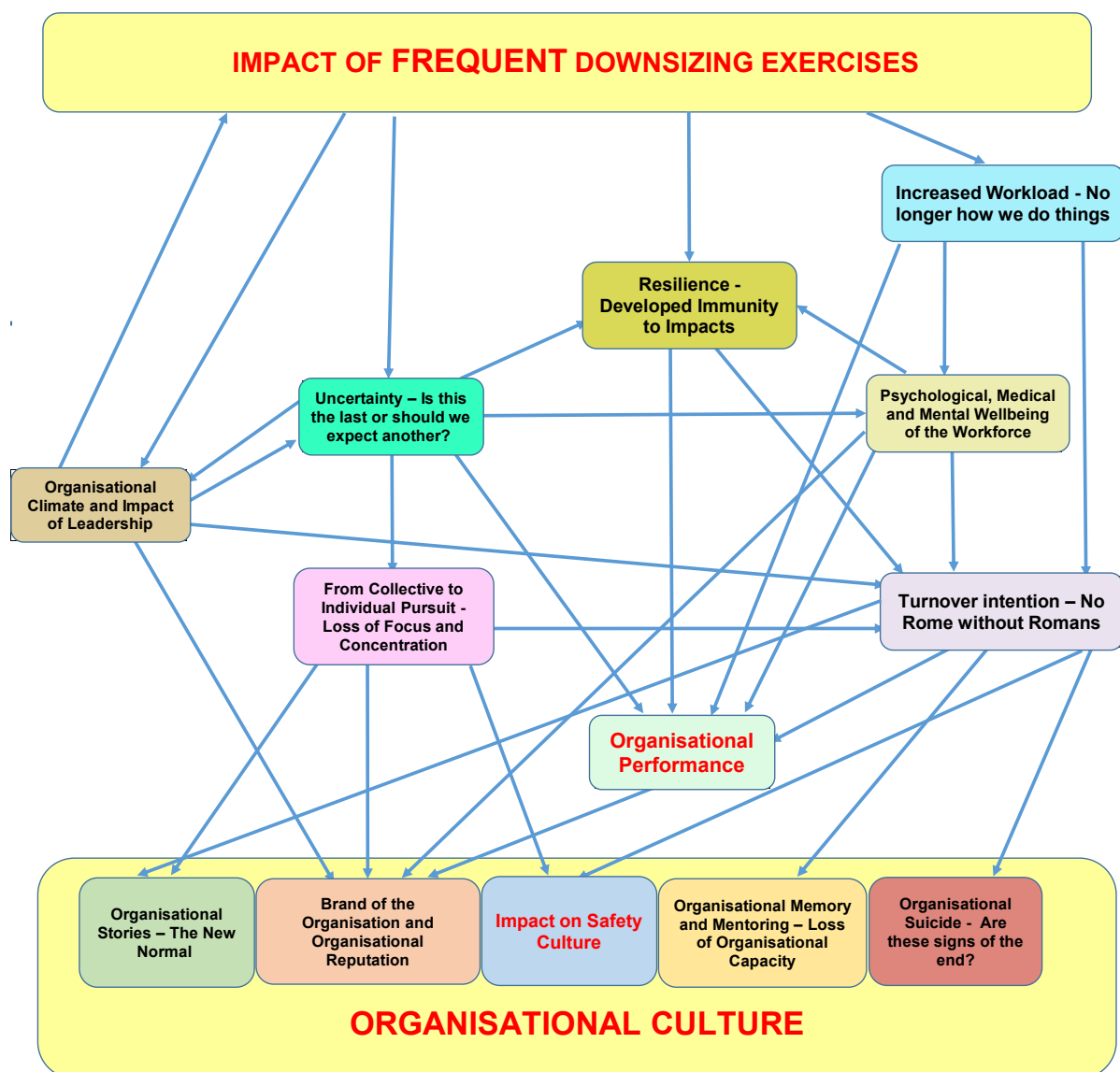


Figure 3 – Modified Framework showing Impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture developed by the Researcher (Lewis A. Williams)

Figure 3 shows these themes' numerous interconnections or links and how they influence each other in a network or loop. For instance, frequent downsizing exercises produce **uncertainties**, as discussed above. The uncertainties then create an **unconducive work environment** which has a negative **psychological impact** on people, resulting in **increased turnover intentions** and poor **organisational performance** leading to a negative effect on the **organisation's brand and reputation** – its **organisational culture**. Similarly, following another path, frequent downsizing exercises lead to increased workloads which has unpleasant medical and adverse psychological effects on people, increases turnover intentions and results in poor organisational performance with a negative impact on the organisation's brand and reputation. Here, we see a pattern of appearance of a theme within a theme, which may accelerate the tear in the organisation's fabric. In no particular order, many other paths can be followed to establish the impacts on organisational culture. Thus, each factor cannot really be isolated for alleviation due to their interdependences, except the downsizing exercises stop.

5.5 Limitations of the Study and Recommendation for Future Studies

The study was carried out in just one of the international oil companies (IOCs) operating in Nigeria, and so a generalization of findings may not be made yet for the Nigerian oil and gas industry. Also, the experiences of the executors of the phenomena studied were not reflected in the research due to restricted access mentioned earlier in the thesis. That notwithstanding, the findings will be valid for any organisation that considers financial performance before people, deploying frequent downsizing exercises to meet economic crises' challenges. Therefore, it would have been more expedient to explore the concepts in similar organisations experiencing the same operating cost challenges in the industry. This would perhaps have helped to establish the trends observed in this study fully.

The study, I presume, may also have been more interesting if the views of the victims were sought. Some of them would have survived one or two of the cycles, so their feelings may be very revealing before, during and after a few of the exercises. Where possible, similar qualitative research interviews should be conducted in the future to

capture the views of people in this group and the organisation's top management. Also, in future situations similar to the Covid-19 pandemic, where physical access to participants may be restricted or difficult, technology could be leveraged to conduct online, face-to-face interviews.

Possible positive outcomes of downsizing to be further investigated

Covid-19 Pandemic Consideration

At the onset of the research, the Covid-19 pandemic was not envisaged, and its impact was not considered in the study. The actual research work was carried out in the pre-Covid years, while the final research report was concluded during the pandemic when Goshen Gusher Energy and other organisations worked remotely for a sustained period. This inspired thoughts that downsizing or frequent implementation of the same could have a positive spin. Therefore, a similar future study should be conducted with particular reference to the covid-19 pandemic period.

Move to Greener Economy

Omuta (2014, p. 45) submits that “despite the huge resources that the Niger Delta region is endowed with, and despite the equally huge contribution that it makes to the overall development of Nigeria, the environment of the Niger Delta region continues to be neglected and indeed abused. The land, water and air are polluted beyond permissible levels by the international oil companies that exploit oil and gas for the Nigerian state. The people are poor and unemployed, uneducated and hungry, and have no access to safe water, health care and clean energy. Rather they depend on natural capital for fuelwood and the ecosystem for food and supplementary income. Therefore, it is no longer contestable that the region's economic development is not sustainable”.

Oyebanji *et al.* (2017, p. 216) also report that “the quest for sustainable development and the emergence of a green growth economy has continued to dominate the central issue of economic development policy and the need to find a long-lasting solution to environmental issues emanating from the need to grow and develop the economies”. They claim the environment is “a source of sustenance for more than 50% of the economically active high and increasing population of the African race and other

developing economies as they largely get their source of livelihood from agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, foraging and forestry” (p. 216). They defined Green growth as “a policy framework that combines the environment and the economy and is aimed at increasing the level of economic growth through income and investment to reduce poverty through the provision of green and clean jobs and improved well-being of its citizen and also to develop a management policy to checkmate, control activities carried out within an environment” (p. 217). They say that “with the economic downturn in Nigeria, the need to move away from the quantitative gross domestic product form of growth to a qualitative green growth path become imperative even in the face of serious environmental challenges like environmental degradation, oil spillage, bad weather, shortage of food, water and energy, carbon emission and health-related issues which occurs as a result of over-dependence on mono natural resource product and its exploitation being witnessed across the resource base area of the southern part of the country” (p. 217). Oyebanji *et al.* (2017, p. 222) stressed further that “increased investment in green growth technology will ultimately lead to a decrease in carbon dioxide emissions and energy depletion. However, the increase in deforestation despite the increase in the level of green growth shows that the investment in green growth technology is not adequate to ensure a significant reduction in the exploration of solid fuel as the source of energy, especially in rural areas and some parts of the urban area”.

It is expected that “Nigeria should take important steps to guide development towards a greener path” (Bubou *et al.*, 2010, p. 3). According to Omuta (2014, p. 45), “transitioning from the present brown economy (economic development that relies heavily on fossil fuels and does not consider the negative side effects that production and consumption have on the environment) to a preferred and more sustainable economy and growth is confronted by some challenges which include governance failure as a result of weak political will, knowledge gap and policy-implementation gap”.

As the global move to a greener economy continues to gain traction, political-will will be strengthened, and the Nigerian government may start to make more frantic efforts to close the policy-implementation gap. These moves may change the dynamics of the oil and gas industry as the industry may experience more massive redundancies and consequent layoffs. Organisations may see downsizing as necessary to comply

with global timelines to achieve a green economy. As such, positive outlooks to downsizing or frequent implementation of the same may emerge. This should also be taken into consideration in similar future research. The foregoing notwithstanding, oil and gas organisations should start thinking of what this transition to a greener economy means for their businesses and start strategizing on their next plan of action to develop technologies that permit oil exploitation with a much-reduced impact on the environment, re-train their workforce accordingly and make infrastructural re-investments if they want to remain in the energy industry.

5.6 Contribution to Praxis

The effect of downsizing recorded in this research is not altogether new; but the impact of its repeated actions, primarily as it reflects on the organisational culture of a company (the competitive edge) operating in the Nigerian oil and gas industry, is what is not readily available in the literature. The research revealed that frequent downsizing has negative impacts on organisational culture. The themes generated are not entirely unique to the study except that the consequence of anxiety, inattentional blindness impact on safety culture (which is representative of the organisational culture in this case) and changes in organisational stories have not been associated with frequent downsizing exercises before now. Furthermore, degradation from the 'collective' to 'individual' pursuits, consequent upon frequent downsizing, has also not been reported in the literature. Thus, the trailblazing study has helped to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing the study results, showing how frequent downsizing impacts the organisational culture of an organisation operating in sub-Saharan Africa.

The results showed that downsizing may not have had much impact on organisational culture if done once and for all or if another came many years later. The reported effects resulted from the high rate of occurrence. The frequency made the Nigerian workforce irrepressible, and after a while, they started looking forward to future events, which is not a reaction commonly reported in extant literature. The expectation of future events became a coping mechanism to protect their psyche from damage but continued to erode the potency of the organisation's culture.

Tied with this is the contribution of the developed framework (depicting the links between the different effects) as an aid to understanding the gravity of the impacts of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture. It shows how consistent downsizing exercises escalate or amplify the trauma experienced and extends the period of experience by survivors, which ordinarily may have been short-lived, had it been done once or repeated after several years, when the organisation is stabilized or near equilibrium.

Another revelation was the contamination of the organisational climate and environment by repeated downsizing exercises which made it difficult for the organisational culture to thrive as a performance-enhancing tool. The lingering experience creates unending uncertainties that directly impact the psychological and physical well-being of employees and, by extension, the company's organisational culture. On the other hand, when “trust and cooperation thrive internally, we pull together, and the organisation grows stronger as a result” (Sinek, 2014, p. 24). This also aligns with Sinek’s (2014) submission that “if we work in an environment in which Leadership is more forthcoming, in which layoffs are not the default in hard times and in which incentive structures do not pitch us against one another, the result is trust and cooperation (p. 7).

The study also reemphasised the need for organisations to always recognise the importance and strength of their organisational culture as the generator of energy to create the suitable climate that propels or engenders organisational commitment by employees; and so protect it and endeavour to use it effectively and productively, especially in times of financial crises. Frequent downsizing exercises send wrong signals to employees, especially in a people-centric organisation like the one studied. The repeated actions gave the impression that the people's feelings were insignificant. So they are easily sacrificed in a bid to achieve a lean organisation in their pursuit of organisational efficiency. In contrast, people are needed to retain a high-performance-yielding corporate culture.

5.6.1 Action-Learning Roadmap for Implementation

Based on the study's outcomes, the following shows the roadmap to making the learnings visible to upper management by creating awareness of the negative impacts on organisational culture and adoption/implementation of measures to lessen the effects of frequent downsizing on the workforce and organisation at large. I plan to share with them how routine downsizing exercises have negative impacts on the organisational culture in the following areas

- The focus of People on Work
- Work Overload – Impact on Work-Life Balance
- Impact on Safety culture
- Physical and psychological well-being of people in the Organisation
- Attrition rate – Intention to quit – which may lead to corporate espionage and cynicism
- Poor Leadership Quality
- Rapid depletion of organisational knowledge stock

My conversation will not end there as I will present the following table, which addresses the issues enumerated above with possible courses of action the organisation's Leadership can take to eliminate or significantly reduce the impacts.

Issues	Possible Solution(s)
The focus of People on Work	Improve Communication to enhance commitment to work. Eliminate the rumour mill so people know where they stand in the organisation.
Work Overload – Impact on Work-Life Balance	Manage Business Plans to reflect the new size of the organisation to prevent work overload and ensure work-life balance for the entire workforce
Impact on Safety culture	Staff each function adequately, ensure no work-overload, communicate to address

	employee concerns to remove anxiety and inattention blindness
Physical and psychological well-being of people in the Organisation	Appropriate Workload, Elimination of Anxiety generating conditions, Open and Honest communication, improved work climate
Attrition Rate – Intention to Quit – which may lead to corporate espionage and cynicism	Engagement to restore organisational commitment.
Poor Leadership Quality	Recognise that everyone is a potential Leader and develop the potential in them
Rapid depletion of organisational knowledge stock	Develop an aggressive training plan and good mentoring programmes across the board.

Table 4 – Possible solutions to frequent downsizing impact on organisational culture

Since the research was not commissioned, I plan to work my way through the management ranks to present the findings, which feed into the resultant roadmap that follows in the following manner.

I plan to:

- Utilize the operational excellence moments during daily/weekly meetings at the functional and departmental levels to introduce the topic of organisational culture, highlighting the significance to business growth and survival
 - Linking it to People and commitment to work
 - Connection with company brand and regard for same in the society
 - Demonstrating the impact of downsizing and its frequent exercise on people and the organisational culture depicted in Table 4 above
- Socialise with management-level peers to align on the best method to escalate to the upper management level due to the sensitivity of the subject
- Escalate the presentation to the upper management cadre with the support of my management-level peers

- Finally, seek the right moment to share the same presentation at executive leadership team meetings
 - Seeking opportunity for a mini short-termed commissioned selective revalidation survey/study to prove concepts
 - Highlighting the impacts and possible mitigations to them, as in Table 4 above

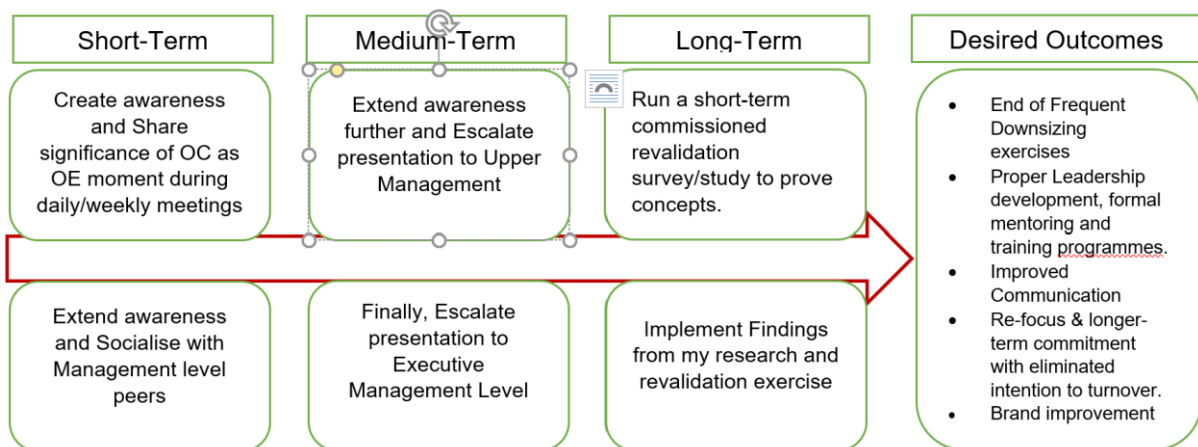


Figure 4: Roadmap for Leadership Awareness of Impact of Frequent Downsizing on Organisational Culture.

Due to industry sensitivities around safety, the organisation will not survive recurrent downsizing if it intends to sustain production safely at its current levels. Most field jobs are safety-oriented and require a minimum level of staffing to operate safely. Continued attrition will lead to a shutdown of operations; otherwise, catastrophic incidents will ensue. To accommodate this as a norm in the office, however, opportunities can be sought in the non-core areas only to the extent to which the business plan will not be impacted, and work overload will not be generated. Otherwise, operations must be scaled down to accommodate the shift in practice. Even then, a culture shift and a new way of doing business have to be announced and embraced by all. Rapid organisational culture changes leave organisations with no identity and should be avoided.

5.7 Conclusions

“It’s more fun to arrive at a conclusion than to justify it.” - Malcolm Forbes (1978)

Many organisations have used downsizing with mixed success rates in the past few decades. Despite the relatively low success rate, it remains the readily available tool in times of perceived financial turmoil because it is the easiest thing to do, as found in this study. My study demonstrated the existence of the usual suspect of the effects of downsizing on survivors. Many people experienced anxiety, job insecurity, and psychological and medical issues, amongst others reported in the preceding chapters. The participants did not show any elaborate or significant reaction to this at the onset but began to feel and exhibit symptoms when the phenomenon became prevalent. The trauma of the repeated exercises started to evoke unpleasant psychological and physical conditions. Nevertheless, and surprisingly, resilience to the impact was developed by some employees as a coping mechanism, as they overcame the effects of uncertainties and the anxiety generated by the frequent downsizing exercises. The organisation being essentially a Nigerian workforce, with high uncertainty avoidance, the turnover intention started increasing with many employees voluntarily opting for severance from the organisation.

The factors or themes generated in this study are not isolated but connected, and this interconnectedness amplifies and sustains the impact on organisational culture. The various interconnections were depicted in a conceptual model (Figure 3) I developed and discussed earlier in this chapter. The model shows the different paths through which frequent downsizing exercises can impact the organisational culture in the network of factors. For instance, uncertainties generated by frequent downsizing exercises create all sorts of psychological manifestations like anxiety. Anxiety coupled with the excessive workload, in turn, generates inattentive blindness to unsafe conditions, causing a compromise to the consciousness of the established safety cultural (- the organisation’s dominant culture) practices. The psychological impacts also, in some situations, result in medical conditions that make it difficult for employees to focus and deliver the business plan, resulting in poor organisational performance - an indication of weakness in the organisational culture - a tool meant for exceptional high organisational performance. In other cases, it caused people to seek early exit

paths from the organisation, thus withdrawing all their discretionary efforts for excellent organisational performance and contributions to its longevity and posterity.

My study also shows that people in the organisation embody the organisation's culture and that the culture itself can be impacted by any policy direction an organisation takes that affects their staff's psychological well-being. There are two parts to organisational culture; one is visible, while the other is invisible – psychological. The invisible is the most delicate as it can create an organisational climate that affects commitment and, ultimately, organisational performance without the consciousness of management. For example, the organisation that my research was conducted in is a company that was admired (had a high reputation) for its people-centric organisational culture but resorted to regular downsizing exercises to solve a phantom problem, a strange phenomenon to its culture.

It has also been shown that frequent downsizing exercises lead to the deconstruction of the “collective” archetype in organisational culture. This was evident in my study as actors started to fend for themselves via developed personal agendas to protect themselves without recourse to the collective paradigm hitherto employed for survival. Their new perception of the organisation became the new driving force for existence. This may be counterproductive for the organisation if not given the right level of cognisance and adequately managed. The binding glue here “changes to the wind that blows everyone away” (Nongo and Ikyanyon, 2012, p. 22). Succinctly put, frequent downsizing destroys the collectivism in organisational culture and reduces it to individualism; at the same time, it turns affective commitment into continuance commitment. This eventually leads to increased turnover intention and possibly the organisation's demise.

My views are premised on the fact that culture is predicated on people's psyche – in teams, organisations, society and the nation. People are connected on these platforms and influence each other directly or indirectly through informal socialization. Whatever has psychological effects on people in any setting will ultimately affect the organisational culture, the result of which will be seen in the kind of performance they record. This is supported by Hofstede's (1991) submission, reported in Gray (1998, p. 23), that organisational culture is “the psychological assets of an organisation, which

can be used to predict what will happen to its financial assets". The use of downsizing as a means of forecasting an organisation's future performance cannot be inferred from this statement, except, of course, if this has been used historically by the organisation and is already instituted as part of its culture. Sufficient evidence must support its proven positive transformational effect on organisational performance over time.

As they say, when it rains, it pours. Rapid downsizing leads to the fast depletion of knowledge and mentoring stock of organisations. Evidence from Ann Morrison's study, reported in Kazi and Zadeh (2011), shows that "the presence of insufficient role models and mentors in an organisation can lead an organisation to integrate backwards and is a barrier for people working in that organisation" (p. 1206). This was manifested in the organisation under review, as acknowledged by the participants in my study. Rapidly changed culture can also mean the demise of one culture and the birth of another. The social actors may need to unlearn the old and learn what the new organisation is or wants to be. They may also be socialised out of the organisation if unable to unlearn and relearn as quickly as required. The people that were a cultural fit for the old may not be fit for the upcoming. The dominant safety culture of this company still needs to be reinforced in whatever way the company chooses to go because of the attendant risk or dangers of operating in the oil and gas industry. What is not for sure is if the staff will be motivated enough to continue to care for one another by conducting attentive behavioural-based safety observations to eliminate at-risk behaviours of others and correct unsafe conditions; and not look out for themselves only due to the ever-increasing work overload being experienced.

The study has also aligned with the position that organisations cannot function successfully without a strong culture that propels them to perform effectively and that people (psychological or otherwise) are the key to achieving that success. This means that whatever happens to people will affect the organisational culture and consequently the performance; as such, the way organisations handle issues that relate to the collective well-being of their employees is critical. Worthy of note is the interconnectedness of people and issues. What affects one affects most - drawing from the staff union's famous collective mantra, "injury to one is an injury to all". How organisations relate to employees individually has spiral effects on others. The impacts

of dissension might not be visible enough until it degenerates into industrial actions through strikes, work-to-rule or other versions or expressions of industrial disharmony. Still, it can be silent in their psyche and may rub off on others in solidarity through various socialization modes. They can be informally socialized out just the same way they were socialized into the culture. Organisational culture is particularly impacted this way as the cooperation of employees is required to make it work successfully.

Rampant downsizing exercises are detrimental to the functioning of a company's organisational culture and performance. It is a contaminant to the organisational climate and environment that engender misdirected organisational commitment; and hence poor performance. One should be able to tell the strength or effectiveness of an organisation's culture by the dedication of its employees and organisational performance.

Reputation, they say, recruits, but reality retains; it is the reality of the people in the organisation that determines their intention to commit to the organisation. An organisation that wants to improve its bottom line must treat its people well. Leadership decisions and actions play a significant role in retaining a high-performance-yielding organisational culture. Organisational culture can only be sustained by people if leadership creates and support the avenues for it. It is imperative to note this fact as management's policies and procedures for implementing these are ratified and enforced. Thus, creating and maintaining a focused, fired-up, and capably led workforce is one of the best things you can do for your bottom line (Catlette and Hadden, 2012; Stark and Flaherty, 2010). Leaders of great organisations do not see people as a commodity to be managed to help grow the money. Instead, they see money as a commodity to be managed to help grow their people Sinek (2014, p. 27).

5.8 The aim, purpose and objectives of the study reviewed

Concerning the organisation under review, the study's main aim has been to examine the impact of the recent downsizing exercises on the survivors' perception of the organisation's culture. The research investigated

- the extent to which the remaining members of staff (survivors) believe they are treasured and want to remain in the company's employment;

- the extent to which the survivors still believe in the company's organisational culture and want to have long and fruitful careers without future forced interruptions; and
- the impact of frequent downsizing exercises on the organisational culture.

The research also sought to see if

- the survivors were still motivated to work for and commit to the organisation's success and to see if the perception of the impact on business performance could be discerned.

During the research journey, many people made submissions based on personal experiences in the organisation and shared perceived collective views. None seemed like conjectures; they were sure of the positions they took, which I could also identify with as an inside researcher. Some even highlighted how general organisational issues were discussed outside the organisation's environment, in their social spaces, in their homes, and amongst friends and family; which, of course, took the discourse to levels unimaginable as the brand or reputation of organisations could be improved or dented in this wise.

To understand the impact of these downsizing exercises on the organisation, the specific questions to be answered were:

- **What were the impulses to downsize as the primary focus of cost-cutting, given that 'people' are a central aspect of the company's core values?**

As reported in section 4.5 of Chapter 4, one respondent believes employee cost is not the highest, but the organisation took this route because it was the easiest thing to do. This is arguably so, given the manner and frequency of the exercises. Another respondent also believes it happens because it is the quickest way to reduce costs. These points of view were also shared by Cameron (1994, p. 194), who states that "organisational downsizing is the alternative of the first choice for most organisations". This sounds like the default response to harsh economic realities. This aligns with Sill's (2018, p. 13) concurrence with De Meuse et al.'s (2004) submission that "management often downsizes because they don't have another solution - despite evidence that it does not work".

- **To what extent is there an understanding of organisational culture and the impact of downsizing at senior levels of the organisation?**

One could argue that the impact on the organisation's culture was not considered while embarking on the series of downsizing exercises which portrays either a common understanding of organisational culture, the low value placed on it, or both. There was no clear demonstration of the knowledge of its importance or significance. Sub-section 4.4.1 (Clear understanding of organisational culture) of Chapter 4 shows a clear demonstration of the knowledge by the respondents. Still, leadership's actions don't portray the same – especially concerning the relationship/connection between people and the organisational culture (or brand).

Reports in section 4.5 (Concept of downsizing - for business survival and Continuity) as well as 4.6 ('Impact' of 'frequent downsizing' on 'organisational culture') of chapter 4 also point out all the negative impacts that arguably could have been averted if a complete understanding existed at senior levels of the organisation. This is more so as loss of reputation and eventual demise of the organisation could result from these actions, as discussed extensively above in section 5.4 (Impact of frequent downsizing exercises on organisational culture) with more particular focus in sub-section 5.4.10 (Brand of the organisation and organisational reputation) and 5.4.12 (Organisational suicide or death - Are these signs of the end?).

- **What is the impact of reducing experienced staff as part of the downsizing in terms of organisational knowledge and organisational learning?**

The impacts were numerous and elucidated by the respondents. The effects resulted in reported safety near-misses, promotion of less qualified people into leadership positions, poor decisions and even work overloads. The impacts were presented in chapter 4 under sub-sections 4.3.2 (Brain drain - Experience, Organisational Memory (knowledge) Retention and Mentorship), 4.7.1 (Low decision-making quality) and 4.7.2 (Loss of organisational capacity) and discussed extensively in sub-section 5.4.7 (Organisational memory and mentoring – Loss of organisational capacity) above.

- **What impression of the organisation did the sudden increase in employee intention to turnover and eventual turnover give at senior levels of the**

organisation, given the organisation previously had a meagre attrition rate?

As stated in sub-sections 4.9.1 (Leadership reactions and communication) and 4.9.2 (shock to Leadership) in the preceding chapter, some respondents attested to the surprise to Leadership due to the departure of particular categories of staff – an outcome they didn't see coming and as such could not be averted. There were many impetuous reactions to filling vacant Leadership positions occasioned by the unplanned departure of the incumbents. As mentioned above, the company was faced with reduced quality of leadership because the people promoted were not ripe for the position and, as such, were misfits in some instances. Respondents also said Leadership noticed cracks in the system caused by their actions and so backtracked at some point and reversed some of their decisions. The resultant workload increase leading to personnel health-related issues (evident by the traffic to the hospital and severity of personnel health conditions or cases) and safety near-misses generated were also pointers to negative impressions of the frequent downsizing exercises carried out. These led to Leadership talking more about safety to show their intentions to maintain the safety culture. This was discussed widely in sub-section 5.4.8 (Turnover intentions) above – touching on organisational pride, justice and cynicism as possible outcomes; and 5.4.11 (Organisational Climate and Impact of Leadership Actions).

I believe the aims and objectives were largely achieved. A qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews of participants, was employed in the research to acquire details of their lived experiences during the repeated downsizing exercises the organisation carried out. The collected data was then analysed to unearth a deep understanding of the unobservable impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture. Therefore, a positivist and objective method could not have been used for the deep dive.

5.9 My Personal Reflections

The research experience has been exciting despite the initial hesitation to carry out qualitative research. I have, before the course of this research, been a positivist, who researched through quantitative means or approaches; but this pursuit of

understanding the impact of frequent downsizing on organisational culture motivated me to follow a different path – a path I considered most appropriate to achieve the desired deep dive into the peculiar subject of the research. This new experience has made me a new and more interesting person as I have become more versatile, with my broadened research skills, having discovered the qualitative side of myself. Conducting research using hermeneutic phenomenology with grounded theory methodology has been a worthwhile experience that I hope to use again for similar studies in the future.

The long, tortuous path of manual thematic analysis also helped my understanding of the feelings of individuals in work settings. I initially wanted to experience the analytic prowess of software, especially in coding and theme generation /categorization, but due to superior supervisory counsel, I opted to go the way of first principles, which helped me to remain immersed in the research all the way. I also know this research could have been done with ethnography, which would permit long observations to be carried out in addition to the semi-structured interviews conducted under a different circumstance (i.e. if I was an outside researcher). So, I look forward to such opportunities for developing my ethnographic skills in the future.

I believe more still needs to be discovered about organisational culture despite its prevalence and current level of global acceptance and understanding, especially across national cultures and the different phenomena that affect it. It was interesting to discover how people should have been prioritized over financial indices, which is contrary to what many corporate organisations do - sacrificing people for financial numbers. How frequent downsizing exercises can have strong (and sustained) effects on people and lead to loss of reputation for organisations was also very revealing.

I found the research just concluded ground-breaking, and so I would like to carry out more such research on organisational culture in the nearest future. Furthermore, I will seek to share the results from the study globally so the lessons learnt from this research can be used as the basis for a better appreciation of the value of organisations' cultures.

References

- ADEDEJI, A.N., SIDIQUE, S.F., RAHMAN, A.A. and LAW, S.H. (2016). *The role of local content policy in local value creation in Nigeria's oil industry: A structural equation modelling (SEM) approach*. Resources Policy, **49** (6), 1– 73.
- ADOM, D., YEBOAH, A. and ANKRAH, A. K. (2016). *Constructivism Philosophical Paradigm: Implication for Research, Teaching and Learning*. Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, **4** (10), 1 – 9. European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (www.eajournals.org), ISSN: 2052-6369 [Online].
- AGWU, M.O. (2014). *Organisational Culture and Employees Performance in the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) Nigeria*. Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management, **14**, 1 - 10.
- AGWU, E. M., CARTER, A. and MURRAY, P. J. (2014). *Downsizing as a Strategic Tool for Effective Organizational Management: A Case Study of Nigerian Banks*. International Journal of Research in Management, Science and Technology [E-ISSN: 2321-3264] **2** (1), 1 – 9. (www.ijrmst.org)
- AJJAWI, R. and HIGGS, J. (2007). *Using Hermeneutic Phenomenology to Investigate How Experienced Practitioners Learn to Communicate Clinical Reasoning*. The Qualitative Report, **12** (4), 612 - 638. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2007.1616>.
- AKEEM, L. B. (2017). *Effect of Cost Control and Cost Reduction Techniques in Organizational Performance*. International Business and Management, **14** (3), 19 - 26.
- AL KHAJEH, E. H. (2018). *Impact of Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance*. Journal of Human Resources Management Research, **20** (18) 1 – 10.
- ANDERSON, S. and PROULX, J. (2014). *Stress-Related Outcomes of Organizational Downsizing: A Systematic Review of 21st Century Literature*. MBA Signature Project. The University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown. 1 – 50.
- ANDRADE, A.D. (2009). *Interpretive Research Aiming at Theory Building: Adopting and Adapting the Case Study Design*. The Qualitative Report, **14** (1), 42 - 60.
- ANN-CHRISTIN, S., CHAIBI, A., and McCARTHY, P.W. (2018). *More Than Meets the Eye: Inattentional Blindness*. International Journal of Radiology and Imaging Technology, **4** (2), 1 – 5. <https://doi.org/10.23937/2572-3235.1510037>.
- ANSAH, M.O. and LOUW, L. (2017). *The influence of national culture on organizational culture of multinational companies*. Cogent Social Sciences, **5** (1), 1 – 15.

ARMAN, R. (2013). *Death metaphors and factory closure*. Culture and Organization, Routledge, 1 – 17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2013.851679>

ATTA-PANIN, J. (2015). *The Role of Profits – Is Profit Maximisation Tenable in the Modern Business Environment?* Journal of Entrepreneurial Organizational Management, **4** (135), 1 – 5.

AYINDE, A. T., AJILA, O. and AKANNI, A. A. (2012). *Locus of Control and Job Status as Mediators of Employees' Perception of Downsizing and Organizational Commitment in Selected Ministries and Parastatals in Nigeria*. [online]. Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, **2** (8), 65 – 74. ISSN 2222-2863.

AYONMIKE, C. S. and OKEKE, B. C. (2015). *The Nigerian Local Content Act and Its Implication on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and the Nation's Economy*. [online]. International Journal of Education Learning and Development, Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (www.eajournals.org), **3** (1), 26 – 35. ISSN 2054-6300.

BAMGBOJE-AYODELE, A. and ELLIS, L. (2015). *Knowledge Management and the Nigerian Culture – A round peg in a square hole?* The African Journal of Information Systems, **7** (1), 1 - 20.

BATHOLOMEW, P. and ONUOHA, B. C. (2018). Organisational Cynicism and Employees' Intention to Quit. International Journal of Management Science (<http://www.aascit.org/journal/ijms>), **5** (1), 1 - 9. ISSN: 2375-3757.

BELL, A. C. (2003). *A Narrative Approach to Research*. Canadian Journal of Environmental Education, Spring 2003, **8** (1), 95 – 110.

BERBERICH, J. (2016). *An Exploration of Survivors' Experience of Organizational Downsizing: A Sensemaking Perspective*. PhD Thesis. Faculty of Business, Education and Professional Studies, University of Gloucestershire, 1 – 377.

BERBEROGLU, A., (2018). *Impact of organizational climate on organizational commitment and perceived organizational performance: empirical evidence from public hospitals*. BMC Health Services Research, **18** (1), 1 – 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3149-z>.

BODJRENOU, K., XU, M. and BOMBOMA, K. (2019). *Antecedents of Organizational Commitment: A Review of Personal and Organizational Factors*. Open Journal of Social Sciences, **7** (5), 276 – 289. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.75024>.

BRAUN, V. and CLARKE, V. (2012). *Thematic Analysis*. Chapter 4. In: Cooper, H., Camic, P. M., Long, D. L., Panter, A. T., Rindskopf, D. and Sher, K. J. (Eds). *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2: Research designs*. Washington, DC, American Psychological Association, 57 - 71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>

BRYMAN, A. and BELL, E. (2011). *Business research methods*. Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 3rd ed., 1 – 765, ISBN 978–0–19–958340–9.

BUBOU, G. M., OGUNGBEMI, A. A., JONAH-ALU, L. A. and EJIM-EZE, E. E. (2010). *The green economy paradigm: How can Nigeria make the shift?* In Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Renewable Energy for Sustainable Development in Africa. Organised by National Centre for Energy Research and Development (NCERD) in collaboration with ENEA, Italy. Abuja, 27 - 29 July. 1 – 15.

CAMERON, K. S. (1994). *Strategies for Successful Organizational Downsizing*. Human Resource Management, **33** (2), 189 - 211.

CAMERON, K. S. and QUINN, R.E. (2006). *Diagnosing and Changing Organisational Culture Based on Competing Values Framework*. Josey Bass, San Francisco, 1 – 242.

CASCIO, W. F. (2005). *Strategies for responsible restructuring*. Academy of Management Executive, **19** (4), 39 – 50.

CASCIO, W. F. and WYNN, P. (2004). *Managing a Downsizing Process*. [online]. Human Resource Management, Winter 2004, Wiley Periodicals, Inc., **43** (4), 425 – 436. Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com).

CATLETTE, B., and HADDEN, R. (2012). *Contented Cows Still Give Better Milk, Revised and Expanded: The Plain Truth about Employee Engagement and Your Bottom Line*. 2nd ed., John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1 – 208.

CIUK, S. and LATUSEK, D. (2018). *Ethics in qualitative research*. Chapter 21. In: Ciesielska, M. and Jemielniak, D. (Eds). Qualitative methodologies in organization studies. Vol. 1: Theories and new approaches, 1 – 20, ISBN: 9783319652160.

CHARMAZ, K. (2008). *Constructionism and the Ground Theory*. In: Holstein, J. A. and Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.). Handbook of Constructionist Research. The Guilford Press, NY. 397 – 412.

CIPD (2018). *Workforce Planning Practice*. [online]. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. May Guide. 1 – 10.
https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/workforce-planning-guide_tcm18-42735.pdf.

COLE, C. S. G. (2007). *The emotions of individuals during strategic and organisational change: a hermeneutic approach*. DBA Thesis, Sheffield Hallam University, 1 – 263.

CRESWELL, J.W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3rd ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA. 1 – 270.

CROWLEY-HENRY, M. (2009). *Ethnography: Visions and Versions*. Chapter 3. In John Hogan, J., Dolan, P. and Donnelly, P. (Eds). Approaches to Qualitative

Research: Theory and Its Practical Application - A Guide for Dissertation Students. Oak Tree Press, 37 - 63.

DATTA, D. K., GUTHRIE, J. P., BASUIL, D. and PANDEY, A. (2010). *Causes and Effects of Employee Downsizing: A Review and Synthesis*. Journal of Management, Sage Publications, **36** (1), 281 - 348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309346735>.

DAVIES, G. and MILES, L. (1998). *Reputation Management: Theory versus Practice*. Corporate Reputation Review, 16 – 27. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1540064>.

DAWN, S. K. and BISWAS, S. (2010). *Employer branding: A new strategic dimension of Indian corporations*. Asian Journal of Management Research. [online]. Open Access publishing platform for Management Research. 21 - 33.

DEAN, J. W. Jr., BRANDES, P. and DHARWADKAR, R. (1998). *Organizational Cynicism*. The Academy of Management Review (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/259378>), **23** (2), 341 – 352.

DENISON, D. R. (1984). *Bringing corporate culture to the bottom line*. Organizational Dynamics, **13** (2), 5 - 22.

DESSON, K. and CLOUTHIER, J. (2010). *Organizational Culture – Why Does It Matter?* IAEA-CN-184/315. Presented at the Symposium on International Safeguards International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna, Austria. 1 - 9.

De VRIES, S.C. (2006). *Employees' Coping Strategies and Adaptability in a Multiple Downsizing Context*. White Paper. Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, Department of Communication studies, Twenty University, 1 – 47.

DiFonzo, N and Bordia, P. (1998). *A tale of two corporations: Managing uncertainty during organizational change*. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Human Resource Management, Fall / Winter, **37** (3 & 4), 295 – 303.

ĐJORĐEVIĆ, B. and ĐUKIĆ, S. (2008). *The impact of downsizing on the corporate reputation*. Facta Universitatis - Series: Economics and Organization, **5** (1), 51 - 62.

DOOLY, M., MOORE, E., and VALLEJO, C. (2017). *Research ethics*. In: Moore, E. and Dooly, M. (Eds). Qualitative approaches to research on plurilingual education. 351 - 362. Research-publishing.net, <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2017.emmd2016.634>.

DOWLING, M. (2006). *Approaches to reflexivity in qualitative research*. Nurse Researcher, **13** (3), 7 – 21.

DRAB, D. (2003). *Economic Espionage and Trade Secret Theft: Defending against the pickpockets of the new millennium*. The Xerox Corporation, White paper, **4** (1), 1 – 10.

DURRAH, O., CHAUDHARY, M., and GHARIB, M. (2019). *Organizational Cynicism and Its Impact on Organizational Pride in Industrial Organizations*. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, **16** (7), 1 – 16.

EFFIONG, J. (2010). *Oil and Gas Industry in Nigeria: The Paradox of the Black Gold*. Research in Social Problems and Public Policy, **18** (1), 323 - 349.

EHIGIE, B. O and EHIGIE, R. I. (2005). *Applying Qualitative Methods in Organizations: A Note for Industrial/Organizational Psychologists*. The Qualitative Report, **10** (3), 621 - 638.

ELLIS, C. (2007). *Telling Secrets, Revealing Lies: Relational Ethics in Research With Intimate Others*. Qualitative Inquiry, **13** (1), 3 – 29.

EMERSON, D. (2013). *Organizational Culture, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions: The Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support*. VCU Theses and Dissertations. Paper 2965. [online]. 1 – 259.

EVELY, A. C., FAZEY, I., PINARD, M. and LAMBIN, X. (2008). *The Influence of Philosophical Perspectives in Integrative Research: a Conservation Case Study in the Cairngorms National Park*. Ecology and Society, Resilience Alliance Inc., **13** (2), 52 – 67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26268007>.

FATT, C.K., KHIN, E.W. and HENG, T. N. (2010). *The Impact of Organizational Justice on Employee's Job Satisfaction: The Malaysian Companies Perspectives*. American Journal of Economics and Business Administration, Science Publications, **2** (1), 65 – 72. ISSN 1945-5488.

FLOWERS, P. (2009). *Research Philosophies – Importance and Relevance*. Leading Learning and Change, Cranfield School of Management, **1** (1), 1 - 5.

FREEMAN, S. J. and CAMERON, K. S (1993). *Organizational Downsizing: A Convergence and Reorientation Framework*. Organization Science, The Institute of Management Sciences, February 1993, **4** (1), 10 – 29.

GARDNER, R. L. (1999). *Benchmarking organizational culture: Organization culture as a primary factor in safety performance*. Professional Safety, **44** (3), 26 – 32.

GEANELLOS, R. (1998). *Hermeneutic Philosophy Part 1: Implications of its Use as Methodology in Interpretive Nursing Research*. Nursing Inquiry, **5** (3), 154 - 163.

GERRING, J. (2007). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, New York 1st ed., 1 – 265. ISBN-13 978-0-511-26876-2.

GOUD, P. V. (2014). *Employee Retention for Sustainable Development*. International Journal of Innovative Technology and Adaptive Management (IJITAM), **1** (5), 10 - 16. ISSN: 2347-3622.

GRAY, R., (1998). *Organisational Culture and the psychological contract: A review of the literature*. Kumpania Consulting Practitioner Papers, 1 – 49.

GUPTA, V. and GROSSMAN, I.E. (2017). *Offshore Oilfield Development Planning Under Uncertainty and Fiscal Considerations*. Optimisation and Engineering, **18** (1), 1 – 43.

GYEKYE, S.A. (2005). *Workers' Perceptions of Workplace Safety and Job Satisfaction*. International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics (JOSE), **11** (3), 291 – 302.

HÄSÄNEN, L. (2010). *Organizational death and employee motivation: Investigating a plant closure in a multi-plant organization*. [online]. Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Sweden, 1 – 68, ISBN 978-91-7447-156-4.

HASLAM, C., ATKINSON, S., BROWN, S. S. and HASLAM, R. A. (2005). *Anxiety and depression in the workplace: Effects on the individual and organisation (a focus group investigation)*. Journal of Affective Disorders, Elsevier B.V., **88** (1), 209 – 215, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2005.07.009>.

HATCH, M. J. and SCHULTZ, M. (2008). *Taking Brand Initiative: How Companies Can Align Strategy, Culture, and Identity Through Corporate Branding*. Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, San Francisco, CA. 1st ed., 1 - 266. ISBN 978-0-7879-9830-1.

HAYASHI, J. P., ABIB, G. and HOPPEN, N. (2019). *The Qualitative Report Validity in Qualitative Research: A Processual Approach*. Qualitative Report, **24** (1), 98 - 112.

HILL, A. (2018). *The new retirement: Work till you drop: when will you retire — and do you want to?* The Guardian, UK Edition. [online]. Last modified 26 June. <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2017/jan/30/work-till-you-drop-when-retire-ageing-workforce>

HOPKINS, S. M. and WEATHINGTON, B. (2005). *The Relationship between Justice Perceptions, Trust, and Employee Attitudes in a Downsized Organisation*. The Journal of Psychology Interdisciplinary and Applied, **140** (5), 477 - 498.

ISHAKA, D., and OGBANJE, J. I. (2017). *Over-Dependence on Oil and its Implication for Development in Nigeria*. HUMASS: McU Journal of Humanities, Management, Applied and Social Sciences, **1** (2), 25 - 43.

JANIĆIJEVIĆ, N. (2011). *Methodological Approaches in the research of organizational culture*. Economic Annals, **LVI** (189), 69 - 99.

JOOTUN, D., MCGHEE, G. and MARLAND, G. (2009). *Reflexivity: Promoting Rigour in Qualitative Research*. Nursing Standard, **23** (23), 42 - 46.

KARAMI, A., ROWLEY, J. and ANALOUI, F. (2006). *Research and Knowledge Building in Management Studies: An Analysis of Methodological Preferences*. International Journal of Management, **23** (1), 43 - 52.

KAZI, G. M. and ZADEH, Z. F. (2011). *Reality of Cultural Diversity and its Impact on Organizations Behavior*. Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business, **3** (7), 1199 - 1208.

KERR, J. and SLOCUM, J.W. Jr. (2004). *Managing corporate culture through reward systems*. Academy of Management Executive, **19** (4), 130 – 138.

KHAN, M. A. and LAW, L. S. (2018). *The Role of National Cultures in Shaping the Corporate Management Cultures: A Three-Country Theoretical Analysis*. [online]. Organizational Culture, Jolita Vveinhardt, IntechOpen, 35 – 59.

KIGER, M. E. and VARPIO, L. (2020). *Thematic analysis of qualitative data*. AMEE Guide No. 131, Medical Teacher, **42** (8), 846 – 854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>.

KIM, W. (2003). *Economic crisis, downsizing and 'layoff survivor's syndrome*. Journal of Contemporary Asia, **33** (4), 449 - 464.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS (2010). *Introducing Organizational Learning*. [Online]. <http://knowledge-management-tools.net/organizational-learning.html>.

KNUDSEN, H. K., JOHNSON, J. A., MARTIN, J. K. and ROMAN, P.M. (2003). *Downsizing Survival: The Experience of Work and Organizational Commitment*. Sociological Inquiry, **73** (2), 265 – 283.

KORSTJENS, I. and MOSER, A. (2018). *Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing*. European Journal of General Practice, **24** (1), 120 - 124.

KOWSKE, B., LUNDBY, K. and RASCH, R. (2009). *Turning 'Survive' into 'Thrive': Managing Survivor Engagement in a Downsized Organization*. The Journal of The Human Resource Planning Society, **32** (4), 48 - 56.

KREISMAN, B. J. (2002). *Insights into employee motivation, commitment and retention*. [online]. Business Training Experts, 1 - 24.

KUENZI, M. and SCHMINKE, M. (2009). *Assembling Fragments into a Lens: A Review, Critique, and Proposed Research Agenda for the Organizational Work Climate Literature*. Journal of Management, **35** (3), 634 - 717. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308330559>.

- KUMAR, V. and KUMAR, R. (2018). *Factors That Influence Safety Performance and Strategies for Promotion of Safety Culture in Power Plant*. International Research Journal of Engineering and Technology (IRJET), **5** (3), 3622 – 28, e-ISSN: 2395-0056.
- LAVE, J., and WENGER, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 18th Printing, 2008, 1 – 138. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355>. ISBN 978-0-521-41308-4.
- LIM, B., (1995). *Examining the Organizational Culture and Organizational Performance Link*. Leadership and Organization Development Journal, **16** (5), 16 - 21.
- MABUZA, L. H., GOVENDER, I., OGUNBANJO, G. A. and MASH, B. (2014). *African Primary Care Research: Qualitative Data Analysis and Writing Results*. African Journal of Primary Health Care and Family Medicine, **6** (6), 1 – 5.
- MAXWELL, J. A. (2002). *Realism and the roles of the researcher in qualitative psychology*. In: Kiegelmann, M. (Ed.). The role of the researcher in qualitative psychology. Qualitative psychology nexus, 2. Tübingen, Huber. 12 – 31. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11780/3402>,
- McAULEY, J. (2004). *Hermeneutic Understanding*. Chapter 16. Article in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. Essential Guide to qualitative methods in organizational research. Sage publications, London, 192 – 202.
- McAULEY, J., DUBERLEY, J. and JOHNSON, P. (2014). *Organization Theory: Challenges and Perspectives*. 2nd ed, Pearson Education Ltd., 1 – 437.
- MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION (2014). *Living with Anxiety – Understanding the Role and Impact of Anxiety in Our Lives*. Mental Health Foundation, London, United Kingdom, 1 – 46.
- MOORE, S., GRUNBERG, L. and GREENBERG, E. S. (2003). *Repeated Downsizing Contact: The Effects of Similar and Dissimilar Layoff Experiences on Work and Well-Being Outcomes*. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, **9** (3), 247 – 257.
- MORAN, D. (2013). *Edmund Husserl and phenomenology*. Chapter 3. In: Bailey, A. (Ed). Philosophy of Mind: The Key Thinkers. 1st ed., Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 37 – 58.
- MORGAN, G. and SMIRCICH, L. (1980). *The Case for Qualitative Research*. The Academy of Management Review, **5** (4), 491 – 500.
- MORSE, J. M., BARRETT, M., MAYAN, M., OLSON, K. and SPIERS, J. (2002). *Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, **6** (1), 13 – 22.

- MOST, S. B. (2010). *What's 'inattentional' about inattentional blindness? Consciousness and Cognition: An International Journal*, **19** (4), 1102 – 1104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.01.011>
- MOTTIER, V. (2005). *The Interpretive Turn: History, Memory, and Storage in Qualitative Research*. Forum: Qualitative Social Research, **6** (2), Art. 33, 1 – 9. <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs>, ISSN 1438-5627.
- MUJTABA, B. G. and SENATHIP, T. (2020). *Layoffs and Downsizing Implications for the Leadership Role of Human Resources*. Journal of Service Science and Management, **13** (1), 209 - 228. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jssm.2020.132014>
- NELSON, A. (2018). *The impact of leaders on organizational culture*. [online]. Article by Interact Blog.
- NGIRANDE, H., TERERA, S. R. and MUTODI, P. (2014). *Downsizing Effect on Employee Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment*. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy, **5** (9), 248 – 255.
- NIGHTINGALE, A. (2009). *A guide to systematic literature reviews*. Determining Surgical Efficacy, Surgery journal, Elsevier Ltd, **27** (9), 381 – 384.
- NONGO, E. S and IKYANYON, D.N. (2012). *The Influence of Corporate Culture on Employee Commitment to the Organization*. International Journal of Business and Management, Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education, **7** (22), 21 – 28. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v7n22p21>. E-ISSN 1833-8119.
- NORONHA, E. and D'CRUZ, P. (2006). *A Necessary Evil: The Experiences of Managers Implementing Downsizing Programmes*. The Qualitative Report, **11** (1), 88 - 112.
- O'BRIEN, R. (2001). *An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research*. In R. Richardson (Ed.), *Theory and Practice of Action Research*, Joao Pessoa: Universidade Federal da Paraíba. [English Version], (<http://www.web.ca/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html>). 1 – 18.
- ODULARU, G. O. (2008). *Crude oil and the Nigerian economic performance*. Electronic Scientific Journal Business oil and gas Business, **7** (1), 1- 29.
- OGBONNA, C. (2010). *Cultural issues about doing business in Nigeria: Case study for Thurmo Oy*. Degree Programme in Business Thesis. Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences. 1 – 55.
- OMUTA, G. E. D. (2014). *Transitioning to Sustainable Development and a Green Economy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects*. CPED Monograph Series, No. 9, 1 – 53.

ORB, A., EISENHAUER, L. and WYNADEN, D. (2001). *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. Journal of Nursing Scholarship, **33** (1), 93 - 96.

O'TOOLE, M. (2002). *The relationship between employees' perceptions of safety and organizational culture*. Journal of Safety Research, **33** (1), 231 – 243.

OYEBANJI, I. J., ADENIYI, B., KHOBAL, H. and LE ROUX, P. (2017). *Green Growth and Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria*. International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy, **7** (4), 216 - 223. ISSN: 2146-4553.

PALAGANAS, E. C., SANCHEZ, M. C., MOLINTAS, M. P. and CARICATIVO, R. D. (2017). *Reflexivity in Qualitative Research: A Journey of Learning*. The Qualitative Report, **22** (2), 426 - 438. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2017.2552>

PANDA, A. and GUPTA, R. K. (2001). *Understanding Organizational Culture: A Perspective on Roles for Leaders*. Vikalpa: The Journal of Decision Makers, **10** (1), 1 – 19.

PATNAIK, E. (2013). *Reflexivity: Situating the Researcher in Qualitative Research*. Humanities and Social Science Studies, **2** (2), 98 - 106.

PEARSE, N. and KANYANGALE, M. (2009). *Researching Organizational Culture Using the Grounded Theory Method*. The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, **7** (1), 67 – 74.

RANDSTAD RISESMART BLOG (2013). *Investing in employees to reap the rewards*. [online]. Posted 01 November. <https://www.randstadrisemart.com/blog/investing-employees-reap-rewards>.

RAHI, S. (2017). *Research Design and Methods: A Systematic Review of Research Paradigms, Sampling Issues and Instruments Development*. Int J Econ Manag Sci 6: 403, 1 – 5. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2162-6359.1000403>.

RASHID, Z. A., SAMBASIVAN, M. and JOHARI, J. (2003). *The influence of corporate culture and organisational commitment on performance*. Journal of Management Development, **22** (8), 708 - 728.

REHMAN, W. and NAEEM, H. (2012). *The impact of downsizing on the performance of survived employees: A case study of Pakistan*. African Journal of Business Management, **6** (7), 2429 - 2434.

REID, T. (2004). *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. Universal digital library, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1 – 514.

REMENYI, D. (2002). *Research Strategies – Beyond the Differences*. Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods, **1** (1), 38 - 41.

REYNAUD, B. and DEGORRE, A. (2007). *Workforce Reduction and Firm Performance: A Comparison between French Publicly-Listed and Non-Listed Companies, 1994-2000*. 1 - 35. Unpublished.

ROBBINS, S. P. and JUDGE, T. A. (2013). *Organizational Behavior*. 15th ed., Pearson Education, Inc., Prentice-Hall, NJ, USA. 1 – 676. ISBN-13: 978-0-13-283487-2.

ROBERTS, B. (2014). *A study into the importance of people in the workplace: the role people play in achieving business excellence*. M. Sc. in Management for Business Excellence. University of Warwick, UK. 1 – 104.

ROWE, J. and CADZOW, R. (2014). *Core Values Are the Bedrock of a Culture of Compliance in Health Care Agencies*. Home Health Care Management & Practice, SAGE Publications, **26** (3), 163 – 166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1084822313518557>.

RUDELJ, S. (2012). *Model of the Preferred Organizational Culture*. Strategic Management, **17** (1), 27 - 41.

RULE, P. and JOHN, M. (2015). *A Necessary Dialogue: Theory in Case Study Research*. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, **10** (30), 1 – 11.

SAMUEL, M. O. and CHIPUNZA, C. (2009). *Employee retention and turnover: Using motivational variables as a panacea*. African Journal of Business Management, **3** (8), 410 - 415.

SANDELOWSKI, M. (1998). *Writing a Good Read: Strategies for Re-presenting Qualitative Data*. Research in Nursing and Health, **21** (4), 375 – 382.

SAUNDERS, M., LEWIS, P. and THORNHILL, A. (2009). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 5th ed., Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, England. 1 – 614.

SCHMITT, A., STEFANO-BORZILLO, S. and PROBST, G. (2011). *Don't let knowledge walk away: Knowledge retention during employee downsizing*. Management Learning, **43** (1), 53 – 74.

SCHUH, K. L. and BARAB, S. A. (2008). *Philosophical Perspectives*. Chapter 7. Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology. 3rd ed., 67 - 82.

SCHULZ, A. C. and JOHANN, S. (2018). *Downsizing and the fragility of corporate reputation: An analysis of the impact of contextual factors*. Scandinavian Journal of Management, **34** (1), 40 - 50.

SCHWANDT, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. 3rd ed., SAGE Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, California, 1 – 322, ISBN: 9781412986281 [online], <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986281>.

SHAH, P. P. (2000). *Network destruction: The structural implications of downsizing*. Academy of Management Journal, **43** (1), 101 - 112.

SHAW, J. D., JOHNSON, J. L. and LOCKHART, D. E. (2005). *Turnover, Social Capital Losses and Performance*. The Academy of Management Journal, **48** (4), 594 - 606.

SHEPPARD, J. P. (1994). *Strategy and Bankruptcy: An Exploration into Organizational Death*. Journal of Management, **20** (4), 795 - 833.

SILL, Jr., B. R. (2018). *Downsizing*. DBA Thesis. Horizons University, 1 – 135.

SINEK, S. (2009). *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. Portfolio, Penguin Group, NY, USA. 1 – 256.

SINEK, S. (2014). *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*. Portfolio, Penguin Group, NY, USA. 1 – 363.

SINHA, C. and SINHA, R. (2012). *Factors Affecting Employee Retention: A Comparative Analysis of two Organizations from Heavy Engineering Industry*. [online]. European Journal of Business and Management, **4** (3), 145 -162. ISSN 2222-2839.

SMIRCICH, L. (1983). *Concepts of Culture and Organisational Analysis*. Administrative Science Quarterly, **28** (3), 339 - 358.

STARK, P. B. and FLAHERTY, J. (2010). *The Only Leadership Book You'll Ever Need: How to Build Organizations Where Employees Love to Come to Work*. The Career Press, NJ, USA, 1 – 224. ISBN 978-1-60163-118-3.

STEWART, K. A., STOREY, V. C. and ROBEY, D. (1999). *Plugging the Knowledge Drain: Strategies and Technologies for Acquiring Knowledge in Lean Organizations*. Journal of Information Technology Management, **X** (3 - 4), 59 - 68.

SUTHERLAND, M. M., TORRICELLI, D. G. and KARG, R.F. (2002). *Employer-of-Choice Branding for Knowledge Workers*. African Journal of Business Management, **33** (4), 13 - 20.

SWEENEY, M. (2011). *Managing Downsizing: Key Considerations*. Online Article of School of Management, Cranfield University, August Edition, 1 - 2.

SWEENEY, M. (2016). *The Effects of Downsizing on Organisational Culture in the Newspaper Industry*. PhD Thesis. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection, Walden University Scholar Works. 1 – 238.

TETT, R. P. and MEYER, J. P. (1993). *Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and turnover: Path analyses based on meta-analytic findings*. Personnel Psychology, **46** (2), 259 – 293.

TRACY, S. J. (2010). *Qualitative Quality: Eight 'Big-Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research*. Qualitative Inquiry, Sage pub., **16** (10), 37 – 51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.

TULI, F. (2010). *The Basis of Distinction Between Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Social Science: Reflection on Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Perspectives*. Ethiop. J. Educ. & Sc., **6** (1), 97 – 108.

TUNGGAL, A. T. (2020). *What Is Corporate Espionage?* [online]. Accessed 10 October. <https://www.upguard.com/blog/corporate-espionage>.

VADI, M., ALLIK, J. and REALO, A. (2002). *Collectivism and its Consequences for Organizational Culture*. Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Tartu. 1 – 40.

VAN DEN BERG, P. T. and WILDEROM, C. P. M. (2004). *Defining, Measuring, and Comparing Organizational Cultures*. Applied Psychology: An International Review, **53** (4), 570 – 582.

VASHISTH, A. and KUMAR, A. (2013). *Corporate espionage: The insider threat*. Business Information Review, SAGE Publications, **30** (2), 83 – 90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382113491816>.

VNOUČKOVÁ, L. and KLUPÁKOVÁ, H. (2013). *Impact of Motivation Principles on Employee Turnover*. Central European Review of Economic Issues, **16** (1), 79 - 92.

WARING, B. (2009). *Displaced Pride: Attacking Cynicism at the United States Air force Academy*. Research Report. Air Command and Staff College, Air University, Alabama. 1 – 57.

WASHINGTON, C. E. (2010). *Mentoring, Organizational Rank, and Women's Perceptions of Advancement Opportunities in the Workplace*. The Forum on Public Policy, 1 – 26.

WATSON, C. (2019). *What Is the Meaning of Downsizing?* [online]. CHRON. Last Updated 28, January. <https://work.chron.com/meaning-downsizing-6715.html>

WATSON, T. and KITCHEN, P. J. (2008). *Corporate Communication: Reputation in action*. Chapter 7. In: Melewar, T. C. (ed). Facets of corporate identity, communication, and reputation. 1st ed., Routledge, UK. 121 – 140.

WHITEHEAD, L. (2004). *Enhancing the Quality of Hermeneutic Research: Decision Trail*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Journal of Advanced Nursing, **45** (5), 512 – 518.

WHITTEMORE, R., CHASE, S. K. and MANDLE, C. L. (2001). *Validity in Qualitative Research*. Qualitative Health Research, **11** (4), 522 – 537.

WILLIAMS, C. (2007). *Research Methods*. Journal of Business and Economic Research, **5** (3), 65 – 71.

WOJNAR, D. M. and SWANSON, K. M. (2007). *Phenomenology: An Exploration*. Journal of Holistic Nursing, Sage Publications, **25** (3), 172 – 180.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0898010106295172>.

XENIKOU, A. (2019). *Leadership and Organizational Culture*. In: Newton, C. and Knight, R. (Eds.). Handbook of Research Methods for Organizational Culture. Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, MA. 1 – 35.

ZORN, M. L., NORMAN, P., BUTLER, F.C and BHUSSAR, M. (2017). *If You Think Downsizing Might Save Your Company, Think Again*. [online]. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/if-you-think-downsizing-might-save-your-company-think-again>

Appendix 1: Interview Plan with the Semi-Structured interview questions

The participants/interviewees will be briefed and guided generally as follows:

- Brief Introduction on the purpose of the study and the action learning interview process, stating why it must be recorded and giving assurances that all gathered information will be treated in the strictest confidence without reference to them in any way.
- A convenient time will be scheduled with a promise that it will not take more than 30-90 minutes
- An excellent location like the company clubhouse poolside or similar will be used.

Targets Along Company Structure

- Senior Staff: A – F (Targets: 12 Persons)
- Middle Management: G – H (Targets: 3 Persons)
- Management: I – K (Targets: May be difficult)

Semi-Structured Action Learning Questions

- ✓ How long have you worked for the company, and what is your outlook/forecast for disengagement (how much longer do you see yourself working here?) and why?
- ✓ Why did you choose this company over others in the industry, and why haven't you switched all these days?
- ✓ How does the company fair relative to peers in the industry, in your own opinion? (relating it to when you joined, now and how you see them in the near future)
- ✓ In light of the above, what do you understand by organisational culture (OC) or corporate brand?
- ✓ What would you say is the OC of your company? Or how would you describe your company's OC?
- ✓ What, in your opinion, affects or makes it strong?

- ✓ What are your views about downsizing, rightsizing or whatever it is called these days?
- ✓ Do you think it is beneficial for the company? - Should it be done at all? And how often should it be done, if you consider it necessary?....why, why, why?
- ✓ Why do you think it is done? Is there any other way the company can achieve its objectives without laying off? How do you think it affects OC as you described it before? Why?
- ✓ What impact did the last exercise and frequency have on you? Why?
- ✓ What impact do you know it had on others? How could you tell?
- ✓ Do you know if there's an end to it? How can you tell?
- ✓ What impact does it have on your outlook on the company? Will they still retain their competitive edge as described earlier (if he did)? Why?
- ✓ Thanks for your time and interesting perspectives – I really do appreciate this. Do you have any questions for me? I may get back to you anytime soon to clarify if need be.

Appendix 2: Initial Thematic Breakdown For one of the Interview Transcripts.

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Codes</u>
<u>About Company</u>	Signs of Long existence and outlook
	Love the company and the work
	Excitement about new technologies, CSR
	One of the biggest players in the industry
	Very low attrition rate
	Signs of Long existence and outlook
	Economic reasons and company stability
	Fares well in competition
	Long existence and outlook influenced the decision to join
	Long existence and outlook influenced the decision to join
	Long existence and outlook influenced the decision to join
<u>Career Review</u>	The career could be cut short by downsizing
	Change in outlook if long existence is threatened
	Change in outlook if indications of short-term existence appear
<u>Initial Career Hopes</u>	Prospect of working longer
<u>Downsizing</u>	Downsizing is beneficial
	Downsizing sometimes is a necessity
	Downsizing is normal
	Downsizing resulting from Asset divestments
	Projects without immediate benefits could be deferred instead
	Industry subject to the global economy

	Frequency – Difficult to tell
	Severance package suitability
	The economy compels people to keep working
	Projects without immediate benefits could be deferred instead
	A risk the company is taking dealing with PEOPLE
<u>Impact on Organisational Culture</u>	The brand is impacted by negative reviews & diminishing trust
	Instability becomes obvious to new entrants
<u>Organisational Culture</u>	Attractive brand
	The brand is known and respected
	Corporate Social Responsibility
	New entrants rarely show intention to leave.
<u>Impact of the Frequency of Downsizing Exercises</u>	Distraction sets in
	Focus outside
	The frequency created the Cloud of uncertainty
	Performance improvement after offer rejection
	Impact on the psyche, feeling of rejection.
	Apprehension
	PEOPLE looking for outside opportunities
	Workload increase
	Loss of bright brains
	Brain-drain due to the unstable work environment
	The work environment is unstable.
	Loss of recruitment & training investment
<u>Uncertainty about Future</u>	High level of uncertainty

	Uncertainty only exists in the mind of people
	A cloud of uncertainty hovering
	Lack of communication thickens the Cloud of uncertainty
	The cloud of uncertainty Created is not the best
	Some new guys left because of the cloud of uncertainty
<u>People</u>	PEOPLE – most valuable Asset
<u>Experience & Mentoring</u>	Loss of experience
<u>Leadership</u>	They may need to recruit to address the issue
	Swallows pride to retrace steps
	Up to the company to address the resultant increased workload
	Company backtracking
	Fresh hands may bring positive vibes into the company
	Willingness to leave can be known from surveys
	The question begging for an answer