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# Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress

Ransford George Davidson  
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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Ransford George Davidson

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2018

Abstract

Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress

by

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MBA, Florida International University, 2014

BS, Northern Caribbean University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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## Abstract

Job-related aspects of the work environment, such as work pressure, workload, leadership, and management support cause occupational stress and increase costs to organizations. Grounded in the job demands-resources model theory, the purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. The interview process included 5 managers employed at a bank in the Caribbean who successfully implemented strategies that reduced employees' occupational stress. The data collection and analysis process involved face-to-face, semistructured interviews and analysis of organizational documentation. Using the exploratory approach in data analysis, data were systematically integrated, evaluated, and summarized through a process of coding and generating themes and patterns. During the coding process, 4 major themes emerged: organizational protection and leadership, supportive organization, occupational health and well-being, and prevention. Business managers who develop and execute strategies centered on these themes might reduce job-related stress factors and the negative consequences of occupational stress. The study results might prompt business leaders to develop prevention strategies to address the causes of potential stressors linked to work conditions. The implications for positive social change include the potential for improving employee health and reducing health costs to employees, their families, and communities.

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## Dedication

I give all honor, praise, and glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the faith, resiliency, and confidence to overcome overwhelming odds and succeed. This doctoral study is also dedicated to my parents, Gwendolyn Davidson and Nalford Davidson, who created a solid spiritual foundation for me to build on and to become a positive catalyst for change in the world.

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If it had not been for the Lord who was on my side, my successes would have been merely imaginative. First, I must acknowledge my Lord and Savior who made all things possible and for giving me the strength of character to complete another journey. To Dr. Robert Hockin my chair, thank you for your dynamic and inspiring leadership and quality guidance extended, to assist me in achieving another goal. Dr. Bob Miller and Dr. Neil Mathur, thank you for the thoroughness and depth of your reviews which significantly contributed to the overall quality of my work and ensured adherence to established research protocols.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

For more than a decade, occupational stress has become a global phenomenon because of increased complexities in the work environment and the level of job demands placed on employees (Kortum & Leka, 2014). Leaders must explore effective strategies to enhance the quality of work life for employees and mitigate the effects of workplace stress (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). The significance of stress for reducing productivity and increasing health cost is well recorded in research and is an issue that has yielded the global society incalculable amounts in indirect and direct costs annually (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2016; O’Keefe, Brown, & Christian, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees’ occupational stress. Existing research is sparse regarding how to leverage leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress. Consequently, there is a need to gain knowledge in the field and examine stress antecedents (Idris, Dollard, & Tuckey, 2015).

### **Background of the Problem**

In 2014, the United Kingdom economy lost 9.9 million productive working days because of occupational stress, costing businesses more than 6 billion pounds (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work [EU-OSHA], 2014). Additionally, more than \$300 billion is expended annually in the United States because of stress-related causes such as (a) absenteeism, (b) employee turnover, (c) diminished productivity, and (e) medical, legal, and insurance costs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2014). In Europe, the economic and social impact of occupational stress is at a significantly high-

level; at least 40 million employees are affected, costing the European Union at least 20 billion euros yearly in worker compensation and reduced productivity costs (EU-OSHA, 2014). Statistics also revealed that psychological stress-related causes such as worker absenteeism and productivity losses cost the Australian economy more than \$10 billion per year (Safe Work Australia, 2013).

Stress is evolutionary, and it has intensified psychosocially and physiologically in various sectors of society regarded as high-stress zones such as (a) banking, (c) public health services, (d) construction, and (e) retail (Khanna & Maini, 2013). Progressing globalization and rapid advancement in technology and work processes have affected the nature of work and employees' well-being (Yao, Fan, Guo, & Li, 2014). Even though a body of evidence confirms renewed emphasis on employees' health and well-being, sustainable and effective stress prevention practices remains a complex matter (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2014). As a result, developing, implementing, and evaluating organizational leadership strategies designed to reduce employees' exposure to stress and enhance well-being is important (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

Occupational stress contributes to productivity losses, accounting for 40% of all work-related ill-health cases (Health and Safety Executive [HSE], 2017). More than \$300 billion is expended by organizations each year for employee lost productivity and health care costs because of occupational stress (EU-OSHA, 2014). The general business problem is the increase in the occupational stress phenomena in the banking industry negatively affects employee productivity. The specific business problem is that some

managers in the banking industry lack strategies to reduce employees' occupational stress.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. The targeted population comprised of five bank managers from a single bank in the Caribbean who successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. The implications for positive social change include the potential for improving employee health and reducing health costs to employees, their families, and communities. Employees' work-life balance initiatives may also be enhanced, which can lead to increases in their participation in civic duties to improve social conditions.

### **Nature of the Study**

The three research methods include qualitative, quantitative, and the mixed method (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). I chose a qualitative methodology for this research. Qualitative researchers use open-ended interview questions to achieve depth in research inquiry and to gain access to profound insights on the various phenomena from rich narratives and interviews (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). In contrast, quantitative researchers use closed-ended questions to test hypotheses and predict the outcome of a phenomenon (Star, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). Mixed method research includes both qualitative and quantitative elements (Venkatesh et al., 2013). To explore strategies that some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress, I did not test

hypotheses that form a part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed method study; therefore, I chose a qualitative design.

I considered three research designs for my qualitative study on strategies for reducing occupational stress: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. Phenomenology involves researchers seeking to understand the unique lived experience of individuals (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). A phenomenological design is not the optimal choice because phenomenologists seek to identify and explore the meaning of shared experiences within a group. Business researchers use ethnography to explore shared patterns of behavior within a cultural setting (Petty et al., 2012). An ethnographical design is not the appropriate choice because ethnographers focus on describing the everyday life and practices of cultural groups, and extended time for observation is required within the field by living alongside those within the culture to develop understanding (Petty et al., 2012). Case study researchers use case study design to facilitate the execution of multiple level analyses on a phenomenon and to understand the complexities surrounding the issues (Yin, 2014). A case study design is an appropriate choice because case study researchers seek to gain an in-depth understanding of complex problems and the dynamics present within single settings (Yin, 2014). Using a qualitative method and case study design in this research allowed me to explore strategies some bank managers use to reduce occupational stress.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress?



### **Interview Questions**

1. In your role as a leader in the organization, how do you define occupational stress?
2. How does reducing occupational stress fit into your organization's overall strategy?
3. What effect has reducing occupational stress had on your organization's performance?
4. What strategies are you using to reduce occupational stress?
5. What challenges did you encounter when implementing occupational stress reduction strategies, and how did you address the implementation challenges?
6. What method(s) did you find worked best to reduce occupational stress?
7. How did your employees respond to your different techniques to reduce occupational stress?
8. What effect has reducing occupational stress had on your organization's staff well-being, and how do you know?
9. What additional information would you like to share regarding reducing occupational stress?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Job demands such as high work pressure, emotional demands, and role ambiguity can have a profound impact on employees' well-being (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). In contrast, job resources such as social support, performance feedback, and autonomy, can provide inspirational motivation leading to work

engagement and organizational commitment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). To address the effects of work stress, Demerouti et al. (2001) developed and introduced the job demands-resources (JD-R) model in 2001, and three years after the introduction of the JD-R model, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) presented a revised version highlighting demands as the primary determinants of burnout, with resources acting to reduce burnout and serving as a moderating influence on the adverse effects of demands. The key constructs underlying the JD-R model theory are (a) demands, (b) resources, (c) burnout, and (d) engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

The JD-R model is a dual process theory whereby job demands and job resources interact to influence two psychological processes: job burnout and job engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The propositions advanced in this theory enabled me to explore strategies to manage demanding job conditions affecting employees' engagement and to discover resources leaders can use to reduce occupational stress. Thus, by applying the concept of the JD-R model, leaders can discover how job demands and job resources work together to reduce employees' stress and influence organizational results.

### **Secondary Theory**

Transformational leadership can have significant effects on occupational success; it may reduce employees' health impairments and enhance subjective well-being (Vincent-Hoper, Muser, & Janneck, 2012). Burns (1978), in his theory of transformational leadership, explains leadership based on the premise that leaders can inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals. Burns identified key constructs underlying the theory: (a) idealized

influence, (b) intellectual stimulation, (d) inspirational motivation, and (e) individualized consideration. These propositions of transformational leadership theory enabled me to explore strategies regarding leaders' transformational leadership characteristics as it pertains to reducing employees' occupational stress.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Employee productivity:* Employee productivity is employed workers' capacity to meet or surpass agreed upon job assignments supported by the provision of adequate job resources such as technology, efficient task design, and procedures (Phipps, Prieto, & Ndinguri, 2013).

*Employee well-being:* Employee well-being is a term that describes the positive physical and emotional, affective state of a worker who flourishes because of a safe, supportive workplace. The employee engages in satisfying work and enjoys a fulfilling work life (Schulte et al., 2015).

*Job burnout:* Burnout is a mental or emotional response to work stress characterized by employees' feelings of emotional exhaustion, which may negatively affect job performance and job satisfaction (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004).

*Job demands:* Job demands are the physical, psychosocial, and organizational aspects of the job such as work pressure, emotional demand, and role ambiguity, which may harm workers physically and psychologically and lead to job burnout (Yeh, 2015).

*Job resources:* Job resources refer to endowments and facilities provided by organizations such as social support, autonomy, and task identity that assist employees in

achieving work goals, reducing job demands and fosters job engagement which may lead to improved performances (Yeh, 2015).

*Occupational stress:* Occupational stress refers to the harmful physical and psychological state that results from an imbalance between job demands, job resources, and the capabilities or needs of an employee (Salem, 2015). Workers are affected when resources are limited and their ability to cope with the job demands of the work environment is challenging.

*Organizational commitment:* Organizational commitment is a measure of the strength of an employee's identification with his or her organization (Fu & Deshpande, 2014).

*Transformational leadership:* Transformational leadership is leader behaviors that transforms and inspires followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest to achieve common goals (Ghasabeh, Reaiche, & Soosay, 2015).

*Work engagement:* Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by high energy, dedication, and engrossment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

*Work-life balance:* Work-life balance is a collaborative effort between employee and employer to attain worker psychological well-being and improvement in harmonious living by effectively managing the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and external environment (Walia, 2014).

## **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions of a study refer to claims that are assumed to be true but cannot be verified by the researcher (Bernard, 2013). First, I assumed participating managers would provide honest, eclectic, and detailed responses to the interview questions posed. I also assumed the interview questions would allow me to elicit responses that would contribute to existing research on leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress. Research on occupational stress may encourage leaders to discover effective organizational practices that could enhance the quality of work life for employees (Raitano & Kleiner, 2004). Additionally, I assumed transformational leader behavior influences effective organizational leadership and is a source of reducing workplace stress. Finally, I assumed leaders in the organization selected for the research recognize transformational leadership as a necessary behavior in ensuring employees are healthy, motivated, and productive.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study considered outside the control of the researcher (Akakandelwa & Jain, 2013). A potential weakness of this qualitative single case study included the use of a purposeful sample population of only five individuals, which impacts the generalizability of findings. A second limitation was that the study participants were from one banking institution located in the Caribbean; this has implications for the research's validity. A third limitation was the level of accuracy and profoundness of responses from some respondents because of time constraints in participating in interview sessions. A fourth limitation was that I focused my research in

the geographical region of a single parish in the Caribbean, and limited the study to the population of that parish. Results of the study may generalize only to banking professionals in the Caribbean. Finally, transformational leadership is just one category of the taxonomy of leadership styles considered as a focus of this study. Researchers may engage in future studies on other qualified leadership styles and explore the potential influence on occupational stress reduction and employee's well-being.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are those set of characteristics outlined by a researcher that defines the bounds of the study (Bernard, 2013). The scope of the study was a qualitative inquiry into leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress by observing how job demands and job resources interact to influence two psychological processes: job burnout and job engagement. Research questions in the current study were designed to explore leadership strategies aimed at occupational stress reduction among professional banking employees. The study did not include any banking employees outside of the Caribbean. Banking industry leaders with less than 5 years' experience were not in this study. I delimited the scope of this qualitative study to a small population of five participants who embraced effective leadership strategies in influencing the development of positive psychosocial capacity among employees. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce occupational stress.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may be of value to businesses by providing recommendations that might encourage organizations to leverage transformational leadership initiatives to

develop, influence, and shape leaders' behavior while mitigating the effects of workplace stress (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). Conclusions from this study could help business leaders to identify insights into the leadership skills, techniques, and interventions required for managing workplace stress. Managing workplace stress can reduce health impairment costs, enhance employees' well-being, and improve the productivity level of the workforce (Dunkl, Jimenez, Zizek, Milfelner, & Kallus, 2015; Larsson, Ljungblad, Sandmark, & Åkerlind, 2014). A lack of effective leadership in the workplace can lead to increased health risks and lowered team performances (Zwingmann et al., 2014).

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings from this research could help organizational leaders contribute to the effective business of practice by creating a cultural climate that influences the development of positive psychosocial capacity and inspires amplified self-awareness of professionals to perform at a high level (Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012). Leaders may be inspired to balance job demands and job resources in such a way that employees remain healthy, motivated, and productive (Schaufeli, 2015). The results from this study can aid managers in discovering effective human resource practices to enhance the quality of work life for employees and improve organizational leadership capacity (Raitano & Kleiner, 2004).

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include the potential for improving employee health and reducing health costs to employees, their families, and communities. Employee work–life balance initiatives can also be enhanced and lead to increases in

their participation in civic duties to improve social conditions. Improving work–life balance could enhance worker psychological well-being and harmonious living. Thus, employees can effectively manage the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and external environment and can contribute more to society (Walia, 2014). Leaders who review findings from this research could develop a heightened awareness of the potential effects of workplace stress on social support and be encouraged to implement interventions to reduce stress, promote improved health, and foster an improved culture of social responsibility in communities, among employees (Dimitrov, 2012).

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The advancement in technology and changes in organizational structure and personnel because of market competition have prompted scholars and managers to observe how leadership and work stress influence employees' behavior (Yao et al., 2014). To meet 21st-century job demands, and reduce the effects of stress on job functioning, paradigmatic shifts in leader behaviors are required. Health-promoting and transformational leadership styles are essential in effecting employee recovery from work-related stress while positively influencing working conditions (Dunkl et al., 2015). Transformational leadership is a dynamic leadership style that transforms and inspires followers to perform beyond expectations (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). This study was designed to engage an exploration into leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress. Occupational stress is the harmful physical and psychological state that results from an imbalance between job demands, job resources, and the capabilities or needs of an



employee (Salem, 2015). To understand the occupational stress phenomena, I conducted a literature review to facilitate a critical analysis and synthesis from various sources such as peer-reviewed journals, books, dissertations, and government agencies' reports. A significant amount of literature has been published in the organizational behavior and human resource management domains, on employees' work stress and leadership (Yao et al., 2014).

The literature review consists of peer-reviewed journal, articles, and books written by experts in the field of leadership and occupational stress. I gathered research resources from multiple databases in Walden University Library including Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, and ABI/INFORM Complete. I also used the Google Scholar search engine as a research tool. Key search terms included *stress*, *occupational stress*, *occupational stressors*, *workplace stressors*, *job stress*, *job demands*, *job resources*, *job burnout*, *job engagement*, *job performance*, *employee well-being*, *employee health*, *work-life balance*, *transformational leadership*, and *work engagement*. By using this strategy, I identified scholarly articles from diverse research fields relating to my study. The literature review comprised of 180 journal articles, books, government reports, and dissertations, 92% of which were peer-reviewed and 90% published within 5 years of the study. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce occupational stress. The organization of the literature review provided depth and breadth in the study of occupational stress and supported the conceptual frameworks and key tenets grounding the study. I used Demerouti et al.'s (2001) JD-R model theory and Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership to

understand the complexities surrounding highly demanding job conditions affecting employees' engagement and to understand leadership characteristics as it pertains to reducing occupational stress.

### **Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model Theory**

Demerouti et al. (2001) introduced the JD-R model in 2001. For more than a decade, the theory has attained prominence in occupational stress among researchers, gaining recognition as a leading job stress model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). According to Schaufeli and Taris (2013), the JD-R model was developed on the assumption that the balance between positive and negative job characteristics influences employees' health and well-being, with positive job characteristics representing resources and negative characteristics representing demands. The theory was initially published with the aim to gain knowledge on the causes of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Two processes influencing the development of burnout were proposed: (a) prolonged inordinate job demands with inadequate time for recovery may overburden employees, leading to sustained exhaustion and (b) a lack of resources prevents meeting job demands and reaching work goals, which leads to employee disengagement or reduced motivation. Demerouti et al. defined the term *job demands* in the JD-R model as those physically, socially, and organizationally challenging aspects of the job that require continuous mental or physical efforts and affect certain psychological and physiological costs. In contrast, Demerouti et al. defined *job resources* as those physically, socially, and organizationally related aspects of the job that may lower job demands and related psychological and physiological costs. Job resources may also (a) induce employees'

growth and development via a motivational process and (b) be operable in accomplishing work goals.

The JD-R model was revised in 2004 and highlighted job demands as the primary determinants of burnout, with job resources acting to reduce burnout and serving as a moderating influence on the adverse effects of demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The early JD-R model and the revised version are analogous in that both models claim that high job demands and poor job resources influence burnout. However, the revised version developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) positioned burnout as a two-dimensional construct rather than unitary. The revised model was expanded to include work engagement in addition to burnout and highlighted both constructs as serving as mediators in the relationship between job demands and health problems and job resources and turnover intentions (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). *Work engagement* refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by high energy, dedication, and engrossment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The gradual depletion of burnout and its impact on the relationship between job demands, employee health, and employee well-being represents the health impairment and energetic aspect of the revised JD-R model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013).

The revised JD-R model also supports a motivational process whereby job resources are considered to have motivational qualities that are inherent. Consistent with this belief are the assumptions contained in the effort-recovery theory developed by Meijman and Mulder (1998). Meijman and Mulder delineated work environments that benefit from an abundance of resources foster employees' willingness to expend

considerable effort, dedicate themselves, and commit to work tasks. Similarly, within the conservation of resource theory, two competing tenets are proposed: resource conservation and resource acquisition (Hobfoll, 1989). These tenets were designed to elucidate how and why individuals manage resources to cope with stressors. Asserted in the resource conservation tenet is that resource loss is disproportionately more salient when compared to resource gain (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, the likelihood of individuals investing current resources into situations in which gains are improbable is low. In contrast, within the resource acquisition tenet, Hobfoll (1989) supported the need for individuals to invest resources to (a) prevent resource loss, (b) effect recovery from losses, and (c) gain resources. Notwithstanding the observed relationships is the need for employees to expend personal resources (e.g., effort and energy) to meet demands with a potential for resource gains. Drawn from the conservation of resource theory is the understanding that individuals become vulnerable to strain when resource loss is evident or threatened, or resource gain is inadequate after resource investment (Dawson, O'Brien, & Beehr, 2016).

The JD-R model, the effort-recovery theory, and the conservation of resource theory are useful for understanding occupational stress, and they emphasize the motivational qualities of job resources in enhancing employees' well-being. The JD-R model, however, extends beyond this unified assumption in all three theories by highlighting work engagement and burnout as constructs mediating the relationship between job demands and job resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Thus, the extrinsic motivational role of job resources is essential in enhancing employees' willingness to

expend effort. Employees' willingness fosters the attainment of work objectives and reduces the effects of job demands (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). By applying the concept of the JD-R model, leaders can determine how job demands and job resources work together and predict critical organizational results.

Despite the popularity of the JD-R model, two unresolved issues have challenged the assumptions of the theory (Hu, Schaufeli, & Taris, 2013). First, empirical support for the theorization that job resources and job demands interact to produce employee well-being is inconsistent. Second, within the JD-R model is an outline of the type of job characteristics that influence psychological states; however, there is no clear explanation on why these characteristics influence psychological states. The issues required advancement in theoretical development to validate the link between job characteristics and employee well-being (Hu et al., 2013). Hu et al. (2013) endeavored to address these unresolved issues by proposing that equity mediates the effects of job characteristics on employee well-being. Equity in this instance refers to the perception of the balance between employees' job investment and job returns, as equity mediates the relationship between job demands and job resources (Hu et al., 2013). Employees invest their time and skill to meet job demands, and any perceived imbalance in returns could lead to reduced well-being.

Based on information derived from the literature, the JD-R framework has gained recognition as a significant job stress model (Hu et al., 2013). Employing the JD-R model in this research helped me to explore occupational stress to understand how positive and negative job characteristics influence employees' health and well-being and the leader

behavior required to assist in reducing the stress phenomena. To date, multiple scholars have executed studies on occupational stress (George & K. A., 2015; McTiernan & McDonal, 2015; Mohammad Mosadeghrad, 2014; Sinha, 2016). However, researchers have not focused on how to leverage transformational leadership initiatives to develop, influence, and shape leaders' behavior while mitigating the effects of workplace stress. For this reason, the JD-R model conceptual framework grounds this study, and the propositions advanced in theory could enable scholarly researchers to explore strategies to manage highly demanding job conditions affecting employees' engagement and to discover resources leaders can use to reduce occupational stress.

Many scholars have used the JD-R model to explore, elucidate, and predict how the relationship between job demands (workload, psychological strain, role ambiguity) and job resources (social support, job autonomy, ongoing communication) affect employees' well-being and work performance (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). For example, Brough et al. (2013) used the JD-R model to predict the effect of psychological strain and work engagement on employee health and performance. Additionally, Topcic, Baum, and Kabst (2016) used the JD-R model to examine the relationship between high-performance work practices and individual stress among employees. In another study, Syrek, Apostel, and Antoni (2013) built upon the JD-R model to investigate the moderating effect of transformational leadership on the relationship between time pressure and employees' exhaustion and work-life balance. Results of their study demonstrated that in an environment where transformational leadership behavior is high,

the effect of time pressure on exhaustion and work–life balance was less impactful (Syrek et al., 2013).

In a work environment where workers encounter elevated levels of demand, transformational leadership is essential in maintaining work–life balance and controlling exhaustion (Syrek et al., 2013). For instance, Idris et al. (2015) performed a multilevel analysis to investigate how a climate for psychological health and safety, used as a management tool, influences employees' engagement and performance. The researchers focused on the motivational process component of the JD-R model and revealed a positive relationship between psychological safety climate (PSC) and job engagement when mediated by learning opportunities (Idris et al., 2015). Results also showed that job engagement mediated the relationship between PSC and performance. When leaders create a climate that values improvements in employees' well-being, PSC becomes an antecedent to improvements in favorable working conditions and performances (Idris et al., 2015). Therefore, the effect of PSC as an organizational factor validates the JD-R model and is a predictor of the motivational process embedded in the theory.

### **Occupational Stress**

For more than a decade, progressing globalization has had far-reaching implications on the nature of work, job conditions, and employees' health (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). New trends in the economy complemented by new production technology and new information have accelerated and increased the intensity of business processes, which has influenced a rise in the precariousness associated with working conditions and employees' health (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). The lines separating work from life have

become blurred as workers encounter increasing pressure to meet modern-day job demands and withstand the effects of global competition (ILO, 2016). Evidence from research has supported the assumption that organizational productivity is dependent on the lower-levels of employee stress in the workplace (Rahman, 2013). For example, the HSE (2017) highlighted that stress poses a serious challenge to employee well-being and accounts for 40% of all job-related ill health cases and 49% of all working days lost. There are multiple definitions of stress that reflect the evolution of researchers' knowledge and the direction of research (Alkubaisi, 2015). Selye (1973) defined the concept of stress in 1936 as the nonspecific response of the body to demands made upon it. Selye (1974) developed a model called the general adaptive syndrome, arguing that when an organism encounters a threatening situation, it results in a physiological reaction that occurs in three phases: (a) alarm, (b) reaction, and (c) exhaustion. More recently, the HSE defined stress as people's adverse reaction to undue pressure and demands placed upon them. Additionally, according to Ahmed and Ramzan (2013), stress is an undesirable reaction to intense pressure or other types of demands individuals encounter.

The term exhaustion has gained significance in the field of research, notably as a construct linked to burnout and work stress (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Khanna & Maini, 2013). Exhaustion is widely researched and is highlighted by Maslach and Jackson (1981) as the most prominent of the three dimensions of job burnout. Burnout arises from chronic stressors manifested in the work environment, which may result in employees' exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced efficacy (Maslach & Jackson, 1981); these are critical stress components that will be examined later in this research.



Excessive job demands induce exhaustion, which may lead to stress and reduced employee effectiveness (Maslach et al., 2001).

Stress levels have intensified in various sectors of society regarded as high-stress zones such as (a) banking, (c) public health services, (d) construction, (e) retail, and (g) shipping (Khanna & Maini, 2013). All sectors have been affected by technological advancements, the need for adaptation to changing policies resulting from globalization and continued liberalization of various industries, and the downsizing and rightsizing of businesses because of fierce market competition (ILO, 2016). The banking industry has not been unaffected, and frontline employees have encountered increased challenges to meet these growing job demands which have resulted in work exhaustion and increased job strains (Khanna & Maini, 2013; Zafar, Zahra, & Zia 2014). The introduction of new private and corporate banks in the industry along with the exponential growth in information systems technology are just two of the many challenges that have caused the stressful work–life situation for employees. Job role expectations have increased, and workers are expected to meet these new requirements to deliver high-quality services to clients while increasing profit margins to sustain business viability (Khanna & Maini, 2013). Under these circumstances, employees' exposure to various stress effects is an increasing concern. Hence, leaders must seek to understand the impact of work processes on employees' occupational stress, with an aim to implement strategic interventions and improve well-being (Biron & Karanika-Murray, 2014).

The occupational stress phenomena is a top priority for researchers and examining its antecedents should be a critical area of focus for academicians (Idris et al., 2015).

Khann and Maini (2013) recognized the significance of the stress phenomena in the banking sector and engaged in a quantitative study, examining work exhaustion among frontline banking employees working in public and private sectors banks. The researchers considered the research relevant given the impact of economic recession, high rates of unemployment, and elevated levels of job insecurity among employees of both sectors (Khann & Maini, 2013). These challenges have also resulted in the shaping of new bank policies, which continue to affect employees psychosocially. Khann and Maini conducted interviews with 100 frontline bank employees from the largest branches of PNB and ICICI Bank Ltd. As a statistical analysis measure, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to distinguish between the means of various organizational variables aligned to work exhaustion at both banks (Khann & Maini, 2013).

Organizational variables included (a) perceived workload, (b) role ambiguity, (c) job autonomy, (d) fairness of reward, and (e) work-family conflict (Khann & Maini, 2013). One of Khann's and Maini's primary study objective was to examine and address the problem of work exhaustion among frontline bank employees, given their importance in maintaining high-quality service delivery to clients. Multiple regression analysis was also used to unearth the leading causes of work exhaustion. Overall, the results of the study revealed the challenges surrounding managing their professional career while maintaining essential family responsibilities cause strain, which results in increased stress for banking employees (Khann & Maini, 2013). Among PNB employees, work-family conflict followed by role ambiguity was the most significant of variables influencing work exhaustion. Among ICICI bank employees, the work-family conflict was the most

prominent variable affecting work exhaustion, followed by perceived workload, and job autonomy (Khann & Maini, 2013). Similarly, Tabassum, Farooq, and Fatima (2017) engaged a sample of 125 banking professionals and concluded that work-family conflict and perceived workload positively predicts work exhaustion. Researchers consider these issues as precursors to psychological and physiological enervations which may lead to stress.

Khann and Maini (2013) study have implications for occupational stress management. Organizational leaders are encouraged to leverage strategies to manage bank employees work process and work schedule while introducing family-friendly workplace policies that aid the improvement of employees' work-life balance (Khann & Maini, 2013; Syrek et al., 2013; Walia, 2014). Leaders attentiveness to work-life balance creates the opportunity for the enhancement of employees' organizational pride and job satisfaction (Mas-Machuca, Berbegal-Mirabent, & Alegre, 2016). Managers should also provide task variety to employees to prevent lackadaisicalness and demotivation, and use the approach as a buffering or coping strategy against role overload. Research demonstrates an increase in task variety leads to lower employee job burnout and turnover intentions (Zaniboni, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli, 2013). In contrast, however, Häusser, Schulz-Hardt, Schultze, Tomaschek, and Mojzisch (2014) experimentation on task repetitiveness, pointed to its deleterious effect on employees' mental strain and well-being. Of note, therefore, is despite the potential enhancement of work performance because of task repetitiveness, the prospect for heightened employee occupational stress levels is evident.

Bank employees should also be clear about their role, responsibilities, and level of authority, through effective communication from management; by embracing this approach, managers can reduce role ambiguity and the extenuating effect this may have on increasing role conflict (Khann & Maini, 2013). In a regression analysis completed by researchers Yongkang, Weixi, Yalin, Yipeng, and Liu (2014) result was conclusive; the correlation between job stress and role ambiguity and role conflict was positive and significant. Menon, Praveensal, and Madhu (2015) echoed these sentiments when they reported role ambiguity and role conflict as prime stress determinants in chemical process industries located in the developing country India. Menon et al. (2015) also asserted that physical work factors and working environment are significant inducers of job stress. Similarly, Smit, de Beer, and Pienaar (2016) approached 320 employees in the iron ore mining industry and identified role conflict and role clarity as significant work stressors, with both constructs negatively related to job satisfaction. Consequently, managers are encouraged to take actions to reduce job stressors and gauge employees' well-being levels, while alleviating workers of associated health problems (Menon et al., 2015; Smit et al., 2016).

Ensuring job autonomy for bank employees on the frontline is also critical; this decision aids improvements in workers' motivational levels and they tend to be more empowered to deliver on services to clients (Khann & Maini, 2013). In challenging this view, Bolumole, Grawe, and Daugherty (2016) examined the influence of job autonomy and role clarity among a group of logistics service providers. Results corroborated with previous research outcomes on both variables. Findings revealed employees who had

increased clarity of their role and more autonomy in managing job functions displayed an increased level of willingness to be responsive to customers' needs, and are less impacted by stress factors (Bolumole et al., 2016). Jong (2016), also asserted that when job autonomy buffers the unfavorable effects of job stressors, employees reported higher levels of job satisfaction.

The difference in employees' work culture and the rigidity of hierarchical structures affect the banking sector. Consequently, leaders are required to increase the scope for flexibility, promote enhanced fluidity in organizational structures, and improve employees' job autonomy and decision-making capabilities at operational levels (Khann & Maini, 2013). Hence, the relevance of job resources as foci in enhancing health-relevant leadership behavior is important for organizations and employees (Gregersen, Vincent-Höper, & Nienhaus, 2016). Moreover, studies have affirmed that where a high-quality reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers exist, the correlation to employee well-being is usually a positive one (Gregersen et al., 2016). A one-way ANOVA statistical analysis was conducted by George and K.A. (2015) to examine the correlation between employees in three distinct sectors of banks and two variables; job satisfaction and job-related stress. George and K.A. collected data from 337 employees targeted from the public sector, private sector, and new generation banks. Results of the study disclosed the correlation between employees of the distinct sector banks and the two variables tested differed at various levels per sector (George & K. A., 2015). A significant finding was the differences that existed in work culture, and the organizational climate within the banks caused the variations. Aligned with other issues were job

security and work pressure (George & K. A., 2015). According to George and K. A., employees from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to have different perceptions regarding their job. Therefore, although banks operate within the same industry, the disparities in job satisfaction and job stress are because of the different organizational dynamics present within each banks' setting and requires leaders' attention. Individual banks should be keen on the unique strategies to be implemented to improve employees' job satisfaction and reduce job stress.

Therefore, organizations from various sectors must become cognizant of the adverse effects of occupational stress on employees' performance: taking the necessary steps to create a stress-free environment should be a priority (Ismail & Saudin, 2014). When workers are psychologically and physiologically exhausted, the level of dedication and commitment to their jobs dissipates (Khann & Maini, 2013; Maslach et al., 2001; Peng et al., 2014). These circumstances affirm the development potential of organizations within various sectors of the economy is more reliant on the strength of their intellectual and systems capacity, rather than the size of the physical assets (Khann & Maini, 2013). Of necessity, therefore, is the need for organizational leaders to create that psychological and organizational climate that promotes employees' well-being, improves job engagement, enhances job performance, and reduces depressive symptoms and work stress (Gayman & Bradley, 2013; Idris et al., 2015).

Factors that influence stress in an individual are known as, stressors (George & K. A., 2015). Stress is multidimensional and in research is examined under two broad categories (a) positive stress referred to as eustress, and (b) negative stress known as

distress. Eustress may result in the enhancement and stimulation of employees' performances. Distress may cause adverse effects on employees' health; thereby, resulting in lowered employees' and organizational performances (George & K. A., 2015). Researchers have provided significant focus to negative stress because of the deleterious effect it has on employees physiological and psychosocial well-being and organizational productivity (Finney, Stergiopoulos, Hensel, Bonato, & Dewa, 2013). Occupational stress, also referred to as job stress, differs from general stress; it comprises of an individual component and job-related and organizational elements (George & K. A., 2015; Hauk & Chodkiewicz, 2013; Mohammad, 2014; Yongkang et al., 2014). Workers are affected when resources are limited, and their ability to cope with the job demands of the work environment is challenging. Salem (2015) defined occupational stress as the harmful physical and psychological state that results from an imbalance between job demands, job resources, and the capabilities or needs of an employee. Specific job-related aspects of the work environment such as high work pressure, role ambiguity, role conflict, poor leadership, work inequality, emotional demands, and inadequate management support, causes occupational stress (Lokke & Madsen, 2014; Mohammad, 2014; O'Keefe et al., 2014). Occupational stress has emerged as a global concern and optimizing employees' health is imperative towards achieving social advancement and economic development (O'Keefe et al., 2014; World Health Organization [WHO], 2013).

## **Stress Impact on Productivity and Economic Costs**

Within the last two decades, the causes and effects of stress have been a focus in a multiplicity of research. The impact of occupational stress on workplace productivity and the broader economy has been considerable (ILO, 2016). Researchers investigating the effect of occupational stress on organizational performances have revealed significant outcomes associated with absenteeism, poor job performance, low productivity, depression, and turnover intention (Kozusznik, Rodríguez, & Peiró, 2015; Safaria, 2014; Yiwen, Lepine, Buckman, & Feng, 2014). All outcomes may have severe implications on human, social, and financial costs. For example, based on the history of research, absenteeism is well known because of its cost to organizations and society and widespread prevalence (Safe Work Australia, 2013). Multiple evidence revealed absenteeism has a relationship with work stress and psychosocial hazards such as (a) quality of leadership, (b) job control, (c) effort-reward imbalance, (d) workload, and (e) shift work. Social work issues such as bullying and discrimination were also mentioned (Derycke, Vlerick, Van de Ven, Rots, & Clays, 2013; Holmgren, Fjällström-Lundgren, & Hensing, 2013; Magnavita & Garbarino, 2013; Slany et al., 2013). Numerous large-scale types of research also corroborated findings from other studies that work-related stress affects job satisfaction and exacerbates poor working relationships, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and work-family conflict (Al Khalidi, & Wazaify, 2013; Kazi & Haslam, 2013). Evidence revealed that increased levels of stress increase employees' intention to quit and reduces job performance resulting in lost productivity (Al Khalidi, & Wazaify, 2013). A study also highlighted that increased intention to leave is associated with high



job demands, workload, salary, and work control (Suadicani, Bonde, Olesen, & Gyntelberg, 2013).

The direct and indirect cost associated with occupational stress is significant (Cardon & Patel, 2015). Multiple evidence has revealed the significant impact of stress on reducing productivity and increasing health cost, which results in billions of dollars in expense to organizations annually (O'Keefe et al., 2014; HSE, 2017). In Europe, employees' absenteeism and presenteeism cost Euro \$270 billion per year, lost productivity is Euro \$240 billion per year, and health costs amount to euro \$60 billion per year (Executive Agency for Health and Consumers [EAHC], 2013). The economic and social impact of occupational stress is also at a significantly increased level; at least 40 million employees are affected by work-related stress causes (EU-OSHA, 2014). Additionally, statistics also show that psychological stress-related causes such as worker absenteeism and productivity losses cost the Australian economy more than \$10 billion per year (Safe Work Australia, 2013). The latest statistics from the United Kingdom estimated losses resulting from work-related stress and other psychosocial factors at 12.5 million days. This figure represented 49% of total working days lost during 2016/2017 because of ill-health (HSE, 2017).

In the United States, because of stress-related causes more than \$300 billion is expended (CDC, 2014). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 75% of employees in America are of the view occupational stress is more prevalent compared to previous generations, while 25% perceive their jobs as causing the most stress (CDC, 2014). Therefore, it is apprehensible the relationship between occupational

stress and psychological and physiological disorders is consistent. Within the work environment, stress results in (a) absenteeism, (b) presenteeism, (c) disturbance in labor relations, (d) a reduction in staff motivation, and (e) increase in staff turnover. Decreased satisfaction and poor public image are also noted concerns (ILO, 2016). These adverse effects have a significant impact on work productivity, indirect and direct costs, and the level of competitiveness of organizations. Thus, controlling and reducing these occupational stress-related risks should be a strategic focus for managers and leaders in organizations, to enhance workers well-being and contain costs.

Occupational stress is a global phenomenon that emanates from the increased complexity of the work environment and the level of job demands placed upon employees (ILO, 2016; Salem, 2015). These experiences of stress may prove physiologically and psychologically harmful to employees, when the capabilities and resources available to the worker, cannot meet the demands of the job (Rich, 2016). Stress that occurs because of the imbalances between job demands and job resources can directly impact the productive capacity of organizations, leading to declining revenue margins (Sharma, 2015). Santhi and Reddy (2015) acknowledged these challenges and modestly but robustly, experimented to gain clarity and understanding on the causes and impact of stress in the banking sector. The study was quantitative in design, and the sample population encompassed 42 employees from Tirupati Cooperative Bank (TCB). The researchers acknowledged the physical and psychological adverse effects of stress on well-being, and the cost to India's national economy because of lagging in productivity (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). Data were collected utilizing well-structured questionnaires.

The following stress-related variables were an integral part of the study: (a) role overload, (b) intrinsic to the job, (c) role ambiguity, (d) role relatedness, and (e) role career. Role expectations and family role were also essential variables (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). Santhi and Reddy also acknowledged the rapid changes in the banking industry influenced by (a) policy changes resulting from globalization and liberalization, (b) increased competition from new bank entrants into the market and (c) downsizing of banks.

Another factor highlighted, related to the cost and challenges associated with the constant introduction of new and improved technologies. Results of the study revealed the highest percentage of employees were affected by job stress (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). Causes revealed were (a) difficulties experienced by employees in adapting to technological changes, (b) poor interaction and ineffective communication between subordinates and officers, (c) poor management, and (d) unnecessary managerial interferences in employees' work (Santhi & Reddy, 2015).

Santhi and Reddy (2015) research, is contributory to existing knowledge on the occupational stress phenomena; leaders are implored to engage the actions and behavior required to mitigate the cost of stress to organizations and its deleterious effect on employees' health and well-being. The study has implications for practice. To negate against stress challenges, Santhi and Reddy intimated the need for organizations to focus on strategies addressing (a) job security, (b) improving collaboration between subordinates and leaders, and (c) enhancing the effectiveness of communication. Recognizing, rewarding, promoting, and incentivizing employees for achieving performance goals, was also highlighted as an effective strategy. By engaging these

practical leadership approaches, organizational leaders position themselves to reduce employees' occupational stress while enhancing well-being. Employees augment their affective commitment and feel more satisfied on the job when they experience stronger engagements at work (Barnes & Collier, 2013). Albeit that weakness and limitations surrounding the generalizability of findings are evident in Santhi's and Reddy's research, existing studies are comparable. Studies that included an examination of similar stress variables disclosed corresponding results (Bolumole et al., 2016; Brough et al., 2013; Demerouti et al., 2001; Khann & Maini, 2013; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Locke & Madsen, 2014; Mohammad, 2014; Yonkang et al., 2014).

### **Occupational Stress Causes**

The challenges in the work environment reinforce the need for organizational leaders to identify causes of occupational stress among its workers and devise strategies to minimize its potential impact on the productive goals of the organization. Workplace factors causing stress are psychosocial hazards. Researchers view psychosocial factors according to the interactive relationships that exist between and among (a) organizational conditions and employees' capacities, (b) culture, (c) needs, (d) work environment, and (e) job content (ILO, 2016). This relationship reinforces the dynamics between human factors and the work environment, and how these factors affect workers' health, job satisfaction, and performance (ILO, 2016). Where the interaction between human factors and the work condition is negative, the risk of psychological and physical illnesses is high. Hence, because of the emotional disruptions and the biochemical and neurohormonal changes caused by the interaction, the level of risk increases (ILO, 2016).

Results of cross-sectional survey research on 307 Ghanaian miners highlighted that poor mining equipment, ambient conditions, job demands, and general mining conditions affected employees' well-being and quality of life (Amponsah-Tawiah, Leka, Jain, Hollis, & Cox, 2014). Notwithstanding, where a balance exists between working conditions and human factors the environment influences (a) a feeling of increased technical ability and self-confidence, (b) increased motivation, (c) job satisfaction, and (d) improved health (ILO, 2016).

A review of European literature reveals that health condition improves where there exist favorable circumstances in the work environment (Barnay, 2015). Experts in the scientific community view psychosocial hazard in its social and organizational context, wherein the design and management of work have the potential to cause mental and physiological harm. Of note, is the rise of new hazards resulting from the dynamic changes in the work environment and the introduction of new forms of work (ILO, 2016). This issue was reinforced by Cox (1993) who researched and elaborated on the peculiarities surrounding stressful work conditions (psychosocial hazards), which he broadly expressed in two categories; (a) the content of work, and (b) the context of work. For the *content of work*, Cox examined those psychosocial hazards aligned with the conditions of work and work organization. Psychosocial factors included (a) job content or task design (e.g., lack of task variety, an imbalance between demands and resources, underutilization of skills, and uncertainty), (b) workload, and (c) work environment and work equipment (Cox, 1993). Multiple research has been carried out investigating the effect of physical hazards on stress. Evidence revealed poor physical working conditions

give rise to increased levels of stress and fatigue, which affects workers mental and physical health (Cottini & Ghinetti, 2017; HSE, 2017; Yao et al., 2014).

In contrast to the *content of work*, the *context of work* was more concerned with those psychosocial hazards associated with the organization of work and labor relations. The hazards related to (a) organizational culture and function, (b) decision latitude and control, (c) career development, (d) role in the organization, and (e) interpersonal relationships (Cox, 1993). Organizational function and culture were deemed significant because of the view that critical aspects of the environment within organizations relates to task performance, problem-solving, and development (Cox, 1993). Hazardous situations linked to career development were (a) acquisitions and mergers, (b) budget cut back and retrenchments, and (c) insecurities surrounding workers' job future. Role overload, role insufficiency, role ambiguity, and role conflict, were highlighted as hazardous conditions associated with organizational functions. Where the general perception of these environmental aspects is below expectations, an association with increased stress levels is likely (Cox, 1993). Leaders should be more adept at reducing occupational stress causes through increased employee engagement, which will lead to reduced turnover intentions and increases in worker's productive capacity (Sharma, 2015). Sharma contributed to existing scholarly literature on occupational stress by seeking to identify the factors influencing stress among 750 blue-collar workers by conducting a principal component factor analysis. The existing leadership styles were also examined to determine the occupational stress relationship. Results of the study revealed five factors that caused occupational stress; working environment, opportunities

for growth and development, aspects specific to the job, job autonomy, and interpersonal relations (Sharma, 2015). Occupational stress was also high in an environment where an authoritarian style of leadership exists and low where a delegating style of leadership is practiced (Sharma, 2015). Leaders have the power to regulate and support employees' psychosocial working conditions by influencing workload, recognizing and rewarding efforts, granting or restricting autonomy on the job, clarifying job expectations, and providing timely feedback (Schmidt et al., 2014). Leader behavior may be a source of supporting resource or a cause for psychological distress in the work environment (Schmidt et al., 2014).

Considering the radical changes influenced by globalization, leaders' innovation management is of unparalleled importance to address the increased risks and complexities of the work environment (Jedynak & Bąk, 2018). These complications arise because of (a) exponential advances in technology (b) rapid acceleration in the growth of emerging markets, and (c) increased levels of globalized interconnectedness with cultural, and territorial differences (Sheppard, Sarros, & Santora, 2013). These changes have intensified organizational challenges, resulting in increased tension because of the imbalances between work and nonwork environment (Billing et al., 2014). Thus, employees' health and well-being are threatened because of the unprecedented economic, cultural, and psychosocial challenges (Sheppard et al., 2013). Of significance, is the effect of the recent global financial crisis and economic recession. This crisis has resulted in increased poverty, social exclusion, and increased rates of unemployment (Chowdhury, Islam, & Lee, 2013; Salgado, Figari, Sutherland, & Tumino, 2014; Sarfati,

2013). Evidence from research executed by Nikoloski and Pechijareski (2017) disclosed that 32.8% of respondents interviewed declared unemployment as a stressful situation, which causes health problems. Similarly, De Fazio et al. (2016) emphasized unemployment as a significantly stressful experience that could impair individuals' health and well-being.

Many organizations have had to engage various organizational strategies to remain viable such as (a) outsourcing, (b) mergers, (c) layoffs, and (d) restructuring (ILO, 2016). These activities have influenced increased fear of job loss, reduced opportunities for employee upward mobility, increased workload, role ambiguity, and lack of control. Additionally, experts also observed organizational change activities during times of crises led to a reduced focus on the management of workplace risk factors and heightened attention towards lowering costs (ILO, 2016). Reduced emphasis on workplace risk factors may increase employees' occupational stress. A growing body of evidence has highlighted the effects of psychosocial risks and workplace stress on employees' health, well-being, and organizational performance (ILO, 2016). Increased stress in the workplace may lead to lowered performances, reduced job satisfaction, absenteeism, lost productivity, burnout, and turnover intention (Amponsah-Tawiah, Annor, & Arthur, 2016; Osibanjo, Salau, Falola, & Oyewunmi, 2016; Pecino-Medina, Díaz-Fúnez, & Mañas-Rodríguez, 2017). These problems could have a substantial impact on organizational productivity, direct and indirect costs, and on a firm's level of competitiveness (ILO, 2016). Consequently, devising strategic leadership interventions to



control and reduce stress should be a priority for organizational managers (Osibanjo et al., 2016).

Research highlighted an increase in the work stress phenomena induces negative behavioral responses from employees (Yao et al., 2014). Therefore, if the level of stress in the work environment is not controlled workers will become exposed to corresponding stress consequences and stress reactions such as physical and mental fatigue, underperformance, absenteeism, demotivation, and intention to quit (Yao et al., 2014). Workplace stress has become a significant area of research in the field of management because of its costs to organizations and employees. Many researchers in the field have cited an increase in stress in the work environment has significant implications for employee and organizational performances. These implications include (a) reduced job performance rates (b) high turnover intention (c) low-levels of motivation or lack thereof and (d) ill-health (Arshadi & Damiri, 2013; Florea & Florea, 2016). Consequently, implementing stress reduction techniques should be a central area of focus for leaders in organizations, to attain organizational strategic goals and objectives.

**Work stressors.** A critical factor in reducing employees' occupational stress is developing knowledge and depth of understanding of the main job stressor elements affecting workers' performance and well-being. Work stressors are demands instigated by the external environment that exceed the resources available to an individual and may lead to strain reactions (Van den Brande, Baillien, De Witte, Vander Elst, & Godderis, 2016). These demands induce adverse psychosocial job conditions that affect employee well-being (Tang, 2014). Individuals' physiological and psychological well-being is

affected by the imbalance that exists between demands and resources and requires intervention to restore the balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Evidence shows stress cost organizations billions of dollars each year in lost productivity and ill-health related expenses (EU-OSHA, 2014; HSE, 2017). The growing competitiveness in the global environment and the rapid changes in organizations' internal operations have influenced heightened demands for increased levels of productivity (Burton, Hoobler, & Scheuer, 2012). Thus, organizations pursuit for improved efficiency and competitive advantage have resulted in increased stressors in the work environment (Burton et al. 2012). Despite these difficulties, supportive actions are required from leaders to buffer the stress effect and to create a climate conducive to improved employee health and well-being (Schmidt et al., 2014).

Leaders represent a crucial upstream causal factor of employees' perception of the levels of job stress and its effect on health in the work environment (Schmidt et al., 2014). Organizations should encourage a continuous process of direct interactions between leaders and employees, to identify potential sources of stress and tactically reduce existing stressors (Schmidt et al., 2014). This recommendation is evident in an exploratory study carried out by Schmidt et al. on the link between supportive leadership behavior and employees' health. Findings of the study disclosed that alert and attentive managerial leadership had a direct association with perceived stress among employees (Schmidt et al., 2014). In contrast, however, researchers Hadadian and Zarei (2016) discovered that toxic leadership influences employees' job stress. Toxic leadership behavior such as unreasonable work demands and undermining workers' achievements

could have harmful effects on employees' health. Unpredictability, abusive supervision, and an authoritarian style of leadership were predictors of job stress (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016).

Therefore, organizations should encourage leaders to adopt a pattern of leadership behavior conducive to improved workers' health and a reduction in stress reactions. Occupational stressors may hamper individuals functioning and result in (a) poor work performance, (b) reduced focus, and (c) lowered productivity. Depression and high rates of employee turnover are also some of the adverse circumstances to which organizations are exposed (Kozusznik, Rodríguez, & Peiró, 2015; Safaria, 2014; Yiwen, Lepine, Buckman, & Feng, 2014). The effects of occupational stressors can be detrimental to organizational growth and development. Consequently, finding solutions to address stressors and reduce occupational stress is a smart business decision that may lead to (a) increased job engagement, (b) higher levels of productivity, (c) improved job satisfaction, and (d) reduced absenteeism. Increased employee motivation and enhanced creativity and innovation, are additional areas organizations could benefit from (De Simone, Cicotto, Pinna, & Giustiniano, 2016; Gracia, 2015; McTernan, Dollard, & LaMontagne, 2013; Rich, 2016).

Occupational stress sources have been examined through various research models, analyzing its effects (Rich, 2016). Humboldt, Leal, Laneiro, and Tavares (2013) in a quantitative study collected and analyzed data extracted from 39 management consultants. A total of 12 primary occupational stress sources were identified with a high workload and work pressure, reported as the most frequent stressors in the workplace and

work environment setting (Humboldt et al., 2013). Researchers in numerous other studies highlighted work pressure, time constraints, and overwhelming workload as primary causes of work-related challenges (Tayfur & Arslan, 2013). Bakker and Demerouti (2007) offered a prime example in which they identified the pressure of time constraints on achieving work objectives, as one of the most portentous of stressors affecting employees' health and well-being. Consequently, employees and organizations encounter challenges such as sickness absence, lowered employee morale, and reduced organizational productivity. These problems develop because of the physiological and psychological strains encountered in the work environment (Wang et al., 2014; Wong & Spence Laschinger, 2015). Of concern is the significant economic and psychological cost these challenges may cause to organizations and employees' well-being (McTernan et al., 2013; Rich, 2016). Thoroughly documented in extant literature is the impact of stress on health, which reinforces the severity of the issue globally. A self-report survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 2012 revealed the extent of this severity; a high of 40% of the study population indicated stress is the primary cause of absenteeism and impaired health in the workplace (Molnar, Sadava, Flett, & Colautti, 2012). Researchers have proffered, however, that various patterns of absenteeism could reflect a range of demographic, health-related, and work factors (Magee, Caputi, Jeong Kyu, Lee, 2016).

Employees experience increased pressure at work because of organizational and specific job factors. The increase in information systems technology, industries' globalization trends, organization restructuring, and changes in the nature and pattern of work, have increased the level of complexity in the work environment (Cullen, Edwards,

Casper, & Gue, 2014; Sheppard et al., 2013). This manifestation of a new complex environment has given rise to an increase in the level of intensity associated with stress. Work stressors negatively affect employees' job satisfaction and job behavior, which may lead to reduced performances (Lamb & Kwok, 2016). This increase in intensity is evident in a longitudinal study completed by Lamb and Kwok (2016), investigating the relationship between work environment stressors and employees' performance and well-being. Results confirmed the deleterious effect of stressors on individuals cognitive and physical states. Employees' exposure to work stressors erodes coping ability, reduces focus and motivation levels, increases health impairment, and affects overall well-being causing near linear reaction in job performance reduction (Lamb & Kwok, 2016). Improving the quality of the environment will significantly improve workers' performance, which may lead to substantive gains in organizational profitability (Lamb & Kwok, 2016). Leaders should act swiftly in moderating detected environmental stressors, to create a healthy environment that supports and promotes occupational well-being. Leaders can influence workers and enhance well-being by providing the relevant job and personal resources (Gauche, de Beer, & Brink, 2017).

Researchers have identified the following components of stress as three of the critical stressors in the workplace: (a) role ambiguity, (b) role conflict, and (c) work or role overload (Akgunduz, 2015; Carnes, 2017; Hornung, Lampert, & Glaser, 2016). The concepts of role ambiguity, role conflict, and work overload have gained significant attention in research. The increased focus is because of the interactive effect on job satisfaction, employees' involvement, organizational commitment, and work performance

(Akgunduz, 2015; Faucett, Corwyn, & Poling, 2013; Gillet, Fouquereau, Lafrenière, & Huyghebaert, 2016; Rönnerberg Sjödin, Parida, & Wincent, 2016). Role ambiguity relates to the degree to which a lack of clarity or vagueness surrounding an individual's role expectations exists (Rönnerberg Sjödin et al., 2016). Role conflict exists when meeting the demands of one role prevents accomplishing the expectations of the other. (Akgunduz, 2015). Work overload occurs when an employees' ability to satisfy role expectations becomes impossible because of the imbalances surrounding time, energy, and resources (Akgunduz, 2015). Consequently, leaders should display prudence when managing stressors to prevent potential harmful effects on employees' well-being and organizational performances.

***Role ambiguity and role conflict.*** Role ambiguity and role conflict have received enormous attention from researchers who have attempted to determine the relationship between both constructs and depression (Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau, 2012). Studies were conducted utilizing various settings, samples, occupations, and countries. Schmidt et al. (2012) comprehensively reviewed and statistically aggregated 33 of these research by performing a meta-analysis relating role ambiguity and role conflict to depression. Of the 33 studies, thirteen (13) measured role ambiguity, five (5) measured role conflict, and fifteen (15) measured both variables (Schmidt et al., 2012). The search was completed systematically to identify scientific literature relevant to the role stressors that forms the focus of the research and to integrate findings concerning the relationship between both variables and depression, within the working context. Results of the study revealed role ambiguity and role conflict had a moderate but significant relationship to

depression (Schmidt et al., 2012). Hence, the need arises from an occupational context to understand the effects of depression on employees' well-being and organizational performance. Depressive symptoms that develop because of work stressors and ignored may lead to individuals' health impairment, lowered performances on the job, and work absence (Rao & Ramesh, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2012).

In another research, Schulz (2013) conducted a cross-sectional correlational design study on a sample of 1700 academic staff from Russell Group Universities in the United Kingdom. Schulz focused the research on the impact of role ambiguity, role conflict, and organizational climate on employees' job satisfaction. Organizational climate defined within the research context was concerned with how employees delineate and evaluate established processes and structures within their job environment, which impacts their perception of the organization (Schulz, 2013). A total of 26% of the sample population in the study responded to the survey, which represents 448 respondents. Results revealed role conflict, and role ambiguity had an adverse impact on staff job satisfaction. The researchers also discovered stress levels reduced and staff job satisfaction tended to be higher in an organizational climate described as supportive and facilitates staff control (Schulz, 2013). An organizational climate that promotes employee control and autonomy influences a reduction in stress. There exists a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and stress and is a relationship associated with low-levels of role ambiguity and role conflict (Schulz, 2013). The correlation established by Schultz, reinforces the need for organizational leaders to develop awareness of the causal relationship between work stressors, employee well-being, and work performance.

Developing an awareness of the impact of work stressors allows managers to anticipate potential job-related problems and design interventions to enhance the quality of employees' work-life experience, improve individuals' health, and reduce costs associated with occupational stress.

**Workload.** For more than ten years, researchers of occupational stress have also given significant attention to workload as a role stressor by analyzing its correlates and potential consequences on individuals' physiological and psychological well-being (Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, & Hartman, 2015; Xin Xuan, Zhou, Kessler, & Spector, 2017). The ineffectual administration of workload is a ubiquitous issue that leaders encounter in numerous work environments. Goh, Pfeffer, Zenios, and Rajpal (2015) reviewed 228 studies evaluating the effect of work stressors on health outcomes. The result of the meta-analysis revealed high job demands increased the probability of individuals' health impairment by 35%, while excessive work hours increased the rate of mortality by 20%. The immoderate workload is among the most common of work stressors; thus, understanding its consequences and correlates could benefit employees and organizations (Bowling et al., 2015). Given the workload stressor commonality among stressors, Goh et al. (2015) paid specific attention to a cross-section of potential correlates in their research. Goh et al. had a discourse on the hypothesized relationships that exist between the following correlates and workload: (a) social support, (b) lack of job control, (c) role ambiguity, and (d) role conflict. Following Goh et al. analysis on the hypothesized correlates, their research yielded several findings. Social support was determined to have a negative relationship with the workload. The provision of physical,



informational, or emotional support lessens the effect of high job demands and reduces employees' workload. An increase in social support reduces the burden of excessive job responsibility, and work is more equitably distributed among employees by providers of social support (Goh et al., 2015).

Results from the examination of role ambiguity and role conflict correlate supported Goh et al. (2015) prediction a positive relationship existed between both work stressors, and workload. Workload and other job stressors, partially reflected organizations' neglect for the health and well-being of its employees which influenced the positive relationship between the work stressors and workload constructs. Excessive workload is inhibition of employees' capacity to meet the demands of their jobs and satisfy work expectations (Goh et al., 2015). Statistical analysis on the lack of job control correlate, however, produced a null result and is suggestive employees' lack of control on the job may be reflective of the underlying nature of their job responsibilities, rather than organizations' management lack of concern for their well-being (Goh et al., 2015). Given the consequences of workload as it relates to employees physiological and psychological state, results of the analysis supported Goh et al. (2015) prediction. Goh et al. predicted there is a negative correlation between workload and the well-being of employees. Employees' physiological and psychological states were measured using the following well-being indices; job satisfaction, employee strain, depression, emotional exhaustion, and global health. The result of analyses disclosed a significant relationship between workload and the well-being indices (Goh et al., 2015).

Reducing workload may, therefore, prove satisfying to employees and may mitigate stressful situations affecting workers' and organizational well-being. Employee withdrawal variables categorized as absenteeism and turnover intention were also tested to predict the relationship with workload (Goh et al., 2015). Results were modest but statistically significant and supported the prediction of a positive correlation between workload and employee withdrawal variables. Additionally, an excessive workload may induce employee withdrawal behavior. Employees exposed to unpleasant working conditions in some instances engage withdrawal behavior as a mechanism to reduce the potentially harmful physical and mental effects (Goh et al., 2015; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Moreover, of importance is that organizations develop and execute sound human resource policies and practices to manage excessive workload and protect the health and well-being of employees (Heffernan & Dundon, 2016). Leaders should also be trained to observe high-pressure, high workload situation and to identify employees with the skills and capacity to meet the physiological and mental demands of the job.

***Challenge and hindrance stressors.*** Researchers have lamented the effect of job demands in constraining employees' achievement and limiting potential gains at work (Wood & Michaelides, 2016). These work-related demands are hindrance stressors that cause (a) anxiety (b) depression (c) psychological strain, and (d) lowered enthusiasm among workers (Dawson et al., 2016; Wood & Michaelides, 2016). Associated with hindrance stressors are employee withdrawal behavior, absenteeism, and turnover intention (Wood & Michaelides, 2016). Thus, strategic organizational interventions are imperative in ensuring coping mechanisms are in place to safeguard workers' health and

well-being (Müller, Heiden, Herbig, Poppe, & Angerer, 2016). Amidst the negative connotations associated with hindrance stressors, researchers have also linked job-related demands to potential gains for employees, referred to as challenge stressors (Wood & Michaelides, 2016). Challenge stressors are beneficial to employees' outcome and provide opportunities for learning and growth, and the attainment of set goals. Crane and Searle (2016) supported this belief after examining 208 working adults in a longitudinally designed study. Results revealed challenge stressors had a significant effect on employees' psychological resilience and well-being (Crane & Searle, 2016). Similarly, results of data collected from 164 Chinese employees highlighted the positive relationship that exists between challenge stressors and job performance (Lu, Du, & Xu, 2016). Challenge stressors induce continuity in employees' organizational commitment and reduce withdrawal behavior (Wood & Michaelides, 2016). These positive results have been revealed in empirical research and are grounded in the assumption there is a correlation between challenge stressors and high employee motivation. The opportunities for growth that challenge stressors present and the relationship between effort and reward encouraged the assumption (Wood & Michaelides, 2016).

*Stressor coping mechanisms.* As work-related demands increase, developing coping strategies to maintain employees' well-being and sustain organizational productivity are essential (Clark, Michel, Early, & Baltes, 2014). Coping strategy moderate the stressor-strain relationship and can reduce adverse outcomes derived from increased demands in the work environment. Clark et al. (2014) completed a quantitative study on strategies for coping with work stressors, using multi-step content analysis.

Results of the study highlighted diverse strategies designed to address stressors in the workplace such as (a) seeking support (b) changing behaviors (c) cognitive restructuring (d) recreation and relaxation, and (e) working to improve efficiency (Clark et al., 2014). These results have practical implications for organizational interventions aimed at reducing stressors and highlights the need for leaders to develop training programs for employees on stress coping strategies. Clark et al. (2014) in their study, did not highlight a single coping strategy as the best strategy to mitigate the adverse effects of work stressors. Furthermore, theory underpins the notion the potential exists for workers to benefit from using a combination of different strategies to cope with work stressors (Clark et al., 2014). Organizations should aim at providing increased resources for employees to address job demands and reduce adverse outcomes associated with job burnout and job strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The continuous change in organizations, make a recovery from stressors difficult. Workers are increasingly exposed to heightened job demands, as businesses continue to modernize. Employees are impacted cognitively and emotionally because of increased levels of workload, and the job insecurity arising from uncertainties that exist in the work environment (American Psychological Association [APA], 2013; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Researchers have acknowledged that greater work intensification leads to poor employee health and well-being (Fein, Skinner, & Machin, 2017). Hence, maintaining the highest physical and mental states are imperative in ensuring employees continue to be engaged, focused, and energized (Bakker, 2011). Recovery from work has gained significant attention in the field of organizational psychology and is an important

mechanism to boost employees' engagement and health when they encounter stressful job demands. Recovery from work refers to lessening or eliminating physical and mental strain side effects, brought on by high job demands and distressing occasions at work (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). In recent years, researchers focus on recovery from work has garnered significance in empirical research (Bakker, Demerouti, Oerlemans, & Sonnentag, 2013; Jalonen, Kinnunen, Pulkkinen, & Kokko, 2014). These research on work recovery confirmed employees' recuperation during leisure time predicted strain responses and job behaviors. A lack of recovery time increases workers' exposure to stressors and health impairment (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

One significant recovery experience from stressors is psychological detachment from work during time off. Mental detachment involves abstaining from job-related activities and mentally disengaging from work. This process is described in multiple research as archetypal to recovery experiences because of its strong relationship with employees' outcome (Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). In a qualitative study, researchers Sonnentag and Fritz (2015) used a longitudinal research design approach to review empirical evidence on the process of psychological detachment from work when individuals are off duty. The stressor detachment theoretical model proposed by Sonnentag (2010) grounded the study and emphasized the critical role of psychological detachment in the stressor-strain process. The model purports that psychological disengagement from work activities during nonwork hours, directly predicts strain and well-being impairment, and reduces or moderates the negative effects of job stressors (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Results from the study

supported the effect of job stressors, especially workload, in predicting low-levels of psychological detachment. A lack of psychological disengagement from the work environment was a predictor of increased strain and poor individual health, which affected employees' work-life satisfaction. Psychological detachment is proven in research to mediate and moderate the relationship that exists between job stressors, work pressure, and poor well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

Job stressors have been researched extensively for many years in various categories as (a) task-related stressors, (b) role stressors, and (e) social stressors (Debus, König, Kleinmann, & Werner, 2015; Liu, Yang, & Yu, 2015; Smit, et al., 2016). Researchers have provided more encompassing attention to task-related and role stressors such as (a) work overload, (b) time pressure, (c) role ambiguity, and (d) role conflict (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Task-related and role stressors may harm employees' well-being and hinder optimal performance on the job. Furthermore, job stressors impair psychological detachment which directly influences the level of employees' strain and well-being (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Employees who fail to psychologically detach from work when off duty, often experience elevated levels of strain reactions.

Safstrom and Hartig (2013) in a quantitative study performed hierarchical regression analyses on survey data collected from a sample of 173 university students. The researchers examined how psychological detachment mediates or moderates the relationship between job stressors and psychological strain. Results highlighted detachment as a predictor of low levels of perceived stress and elevated levels of life satisfaction. Sonnentag, Unger, and Nägel (2013) surveyed 291 White-collar employees

to examine the relationship between task and employee well-being, with psychological detachment as a moderator. Results from the study disclosed that employees' disengagement from work activities predicted low-levels of health complaints. Employees who experienced elevated levels of task conflicts reported lowered well-being (Sonnentag et al., 2013). Hence, promoting employees' psychological disengagement from work when off duty, may lead to improvements in their work-life balance, and a reduction in job stressors that affects organizational performances.

**Job burnout.** The JD-R model identifies burnout as one of two psychological processes influenced by the interaction between job demands and job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The theory highlighted job demands as the primary determinants of burnout, with job resources acting to reduce burnout and serving as a moderating influence on the adverse effects of demands (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The theory was initially published with the aim to gain an understanding of the extant knowledge on the antecedents of burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Proposed in the early JD-R model were two processes influencing the development of burnout. The first described how prolonged inordinate job demands with inadequate time for recovery might overburden employees, leading to sustained exhaustion. The second process delineated how a lack of resources prevents meeting job demands and reaching work goals, which leads to employee disengagement or reduced motivation (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Burnout is triggered when job demands are high, and job resources are poor which may lead to health challenges such as fatigue, depression, emotional exhaustion, and strain. Job Burnout has been defined as a mental or emotional response to

work stress characterized by employees' feelings of emotional exhaustion, which may negatively affect job performance and job satisfaction (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Peng et al., 2014). Employees experience burnout because of a prolonged reaction to chronic stressors linked to the job environment.

The term burnout gained significance in the field of research in the 1970s in the United States (Maslach et al., 2001). Freudenberger (1975) wrote pioneering articles and described burnout as depletion of an individual's emotional state or a decline in motivation. Freudenberger (1975) in his early writings was exploratory in his approach and aspired to articulate the burnout phenomena by observing and analyzing the experiences of employees in human services and health care services occupations. The goal was to render assistance and care to individuals in need and those exposed to emotional and social or interpersonal stressors. From an interpersonal perspective, burnout was studied based on an employee's relational conduct in the work environment rather than on individual stress reaction (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach (1978) also participated in the early process of investigating and evaluating emotional states in the work environment. Maslach interviewed a broad scope of human services employees on emotional stress in their job environment and discovered the essentiality and implications of coping strategies on job attitude and the attributes, belief, and values of professionals. Hence, researchers in their early study of burnout focused on occupations in the service and caregiving fields where the core of the job is dependent on the provider and recipient relationship.



Burnout has emerged as an essential field of study in research because of its impact, as a social problem. Researchers have conceptualized the phenomena as a mental syndrome response arising from chronic interpersonal stressors manifested in the work environment. According to Maslach and Jackson (1981), this response comprises three focal dimensions (a) exhaustion, (b) depersonalization or cynicism, and (c) reduced efficacy or accomplishment. Of the three dimensions of burnout, exhaustion is the most prominent and is widely researched and analyzed. Exhaustion induces individuals to react by way of separating themselves from work both cognitively and emotionally (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This reaction is a coping response aimed at addressing the weakening effects of work overload and pressure (Maslach et al., 2001). Depersonalization often takes effect when workers distance themselves cognitively and disregard service quality when engaging recipients of their service (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The indifference or cynical attitude in employee behavior occurs because of exhaustion and discouragement. Furthermore, where workers experience exhaustion or cynicism because of degenerative and excessive job demands, the condition erodes their level of effectiveness resulting in reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Depersonalization and exhaustion impede individuals' level of efficiency and affects confidence in executing job functions. Reduced efficacy appears to arise when demands exceed available resources; this may lead to employee burnout and stress. Social conflict, incessant demands, and excessive workloads induce exhaustion and cynical behavior on the job (Maslach et al., 2001). The study of burnout is critical for modern-day organizations because of its association with job performance (e.g., job withdrawal, absenteeism,

turnover intention) and employees' health (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001).

The three primary dimensions or components of burnout are prognosticative of stress-related health consequences such as depression, fatigue, anxiety, and lack of energy. Workers experience these outcomes because of the accelerated pace of work pressure and chronic exposure to job strains. Given the psychological, physiological, and behavioral implications of burnout on employees' well-being, management should intensify efforts to improve work-life quality (Lizano, 2015). To amass a deeper understanding of the effect of job burnout on human service workers' health and well-being, Lizano engaged a systematic review of 19 empirical research. Of the nineteen (19) empirical research included in the analysis, the psychological dimension of well-being was most widely studied to determine the effect of burnout. Researchers used Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) as the primary measurement for burnout and only those studies that included one or all three of the MBI dimension scales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, personal accomplishment), were used as a part of the synthesis (Lizano, 2015; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Findings from the study pointed to the harmful effect of burnout on the well-being of employees (Lizano, 2015). Kang, Heo, and King (2016) affirmed this adverse effect from the results of surveys examining 544 employees of luxury hotels in Korea. Results revealed when occupational burnout is high, job stress increases. Consequently, understanding the causal relationships is vital for leaders to control burnout effects and limit an increase in stress reactions.

Researchers have explored many instruments designed to assess the burnout phenomena. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), has emerged as the most widely used by researchers, because of its strong psychometric properties. The MBI was initially designed with a focus on occupations in human services and measured the three dimensions of burnout; emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). However, with the growth in empirical research in the field, the knowledge base on burnout expanded and researchers recognized its influence on other occupations outside of human services. Therefore, researchers developed new versions of the MBI and research in the field enhanced by more advanced methodological and statistical approaches which improved the level of empiricism (Maslach et al., 2001). Researchers viewed burnout as a form of stress that correlated with (a) employee job satisfaction, (b) employee turnover intention, and (c) organizational commitment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Maslach et al., 2001; Yanan, Lu, Tianhong, & Quanquan, 2014). The trend continues today as a fast-changing working environment influences an increase in the level of job demand for workers, which leads to stress. Employees are exposed to increasing time pressure in meeting unrealistic deadlines, unreasonable performance expectations, and stringent operational procedures and work processes that increase job burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Hence, understanding the antecedents of job burnout is critical for stress management.

Zafar et al. (2014) robustly contributed to the discussion on the job burnout phenomena by examining its antecedents among employees in the banking sector. The

sample population was considered relevant given the harsh economic conditions, the level of volatility surrounding banking sector policy frameworks, and the increased pressure on banking employees to drive profit growth and improve industry performance. Job functions are rigorous and target specific, and the mental and physiological framework of banking employees are tested to execute job responsibilities (Zafar et al., 2014). Random sampling technique was applied to survey 60 bank employees and data analyzed using the SPSS statistical tool. Hypotheses were tested to determine the factors causing employee burnout or the relationship between specific antecedents and burnout. Zafar et al. (2014) considered the following as primary factors leading to burnout in the banking sector; (a) work or role overload, (b) job demands and job resources, (c) locus of control, and (d) role conflict and role ambiguity. Other antecedents highlighted were autonomy, organizational policies, and work-family conflict (Zafar et al., 2014).

Consistent with the researchers' hypotheses, results confirmed a positive relationship between burnout and the defined antecedents (Zafar et al., 2014). Locus of control emerged as the primary antecedent affecting burnout among banking employees with a strong positive correlation of .788, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This outcome is consistent with workers inability to control external environmental factors affecting their jobs and target attainments; hence, they tend to develop a sense of hopelessness which increases their vulnerability towards stress (Zafar et al., 2014). Employees' performance and quality of service delivery to the clients they serve is affected by the perception they cannot control surrounding factors, which causes burnout. Additionally, the statistical analysis data presented depicted autonomy as the second

primary antecedent affecting burnout in the banking sector (Zafar et al., 2014). Many academicians and professionals have claimed the freedom to make own decisions on the job, improve employees' productivity and satisfaction levels. The rigorousness and sensitivity surrounding the nature of job employment in the banking sector coupled with the regulatory bureaucracies and strict rules, impacts employees' autonomy in decision-making processes. Autonomy is often minimized by managers to reduce susceptibility to potential operational risks and increase control (Zafar et al., 2014). This decision may lead to employee exhaustion and erode their effectiveness leading to reduced efficacy and stress (Maslach et al., 2001). When there is a lack of autonomy, employees develop a feeling of losing decisional and resource control which leads to the depersonalization of their relationship with their employers and customers.

Statistical results also supported a positive correlative relationship when burnout was compared to the work or role overload and job demands and job resources, antecedents (Zafar et al., 2014). This result reinforces the increasing demand in the banking sector as it pertains to the physical, psychosocial, and organizational aspects of the job, which may harm workers physically and psychologically, leading to job burnout (Yeh, 2015; Zafar et al., 2014). Therefore, organizational leaders in the banking industry should engage job resources such as social support, autonomy, and task identity. These resources will assist employees in achieving work goals and reducing the effect of job demands while fostering improvements in their performances (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Yeh, 2015). Bank managers heightened aggression and strategies to increase market share influences an increase in work pressure and attention

from employees to achieve work goals. This outcome is depicted in Zafar et al. (2014) research, in which the job demands and job resources correlative values were the highest when compared to other burnout antecedents.

Additionally, in a further review of statistical outcomes on the other antecedents (work-family conflict, role conflict, and role ambiguity) included in the research hypotheses, results were moderate when compared to correlative values for the locus of control, job demands and resources, autonomy, and work overload (Zafar et al., 2014). Instinctively, excessive work or role overload reduces employees time to socialize, negatively affects psychological detachment from work; thereby, increasing work-family conflict and mental strain (Maslach et al., 2001). Workers, inability to support family events, meet family responsibilities, and enjoy leisure time, affects them psychosocially and more often leads to occupational stress (Zafar et al., 2014). Employees' psychological disengagement from job activities during nonwork hours, is a direct predictor of strain and well-being impairment and reduces or moderates the negative effects of job stressors (Sonnentag, 2010; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). Of significance in the role conflict and ambiguity variables, is management inability to meet employees' expectations as it relates to clarifying roles, sharing critical information relating to the job, and outlining performance goals and responsibilities. Correlatively, a situation in which role conflict and role ambiguity are low, employees' stress levels reduce. Employees' job satisfaction also increases, and their perception of the organization is positively impacted (Schulz, 2013).

Zafar et al. (2014) examination of the burnout phenomena, contributed to an expanded understanding of its antecedents while encouraging bank managers to leverage leadership strategies that reduce occupational stress and increases employees' well-being and performances. In an environment where leadership is engaging, and burnout is low, employees display higher levels of energy, are more enthused about their work, and are highly focused (Schaufeli, 2015; Zafar et al., 2014). The study is contributory to the topic of occupational stress and helps bank managers to have a deeper understanding of how burnout influences employees' performance and well-being. Zafar et al. (2014) also proffered that because of the increasing demands of the banking sector, management should focus on; setting realistic job targets, and clearly outlining work functions and responsibilities. By focusing on these areas, leaders could eliminate role conflict and role ambiguities, while providing employees with the right balance of control and autonomy, needed to reduce burnout and stress (Zafar et al., 2014).

### **Occupational Stress Impact on Well-Being**

Stress effect varies and is dependent on individuals' responses. However, an increase in stress levels could contribute to the development of health impairments. Associated with health impairment factors, are mental and behavioral disorders such as (a) anxiety, (b) depression, (c) burnout, and (d) exhaustion. Individuals suffer from exposure to physical impairments that result in musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular diseases (ILO, 2016). Because of these impairments, researchers have a heightened focus on the effect of the emerging coping behavioral styles adopted which includes drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, unhealthy diet, inadequate sleep, and how

these relate to an increase in workplace accidents and noncommunicable diseases (ILO, 2016). An increasing number of researchers are examining the relationship between workplace stress and poor psychosocial conditions in the work environment. Researchers also examine this relationship, particularly as it relates to the association with the increased risk of occupational accidents (Bergh, Ringstad, Leka, & Zwetsloot, 2014; Sneddon, Mearns, & Flin, 2013; Stenfors, Magnusson Hanson, Oxenstierna, Theorell, & Nilsson, 2013). With an increase in work-related stress the likelihood of distractions, judgmental errors, and the inability to perform at optimal levels, proliferates. Evidence revealed a lack of organizational support, worker fatigue, high workload, and job demands, increases the possibility of occupational accidents and other associated risks (Julià, Catalina-Romero, Calvo-Bonacho, & Benavides, 2013; Näswall, Burt, & Pearce, 2015; Stenfors et al., 2013).

Researchers have asserted that where a stressful working environment exists, workers become exposed to harmful behavioral lifestyles which may lower well-being while increasing health risks. Existing evidence highlights a strong relationship between health-associated behavioral risks (e.g., alcohol consumption) and psychosocial risks such as job insecurity, high demands, and effort-reward imbalance (Bowen, Edwards, Lingard, & Cattell, 2014; Jung, Lee, & Kim, 2013; Silva & Barreto, 2012). Researchers have examined the link between work conditions, psychosocial risks, and alcohol abuse. Findings from the analysis validated perceived stress, workload, harassment at work, and effort-reward imbalances as critical determinants of alcohol abuse (Darshan, Raman, Ram, Annigeri, & Sathyanarayana Rao, 2013; Virtanen et al., 2015). Similarly, in a study



focused on employees in the construction industry, results corroborated with previous findings that workers exposed to workplace stress, often resorted to negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol consumption, smoking, and use of narcotics (Bowen et al., 2014).

Psychosocial risk exposures such as work pressure, high job strain, and excessive work hours were linked to smoking, with high job-demands and effort-reward imbalances reported as strong determinants (Bowen et al., 2014; Darshan et al., 2013). The consequence of these unhealthy behavioral practices caused by stress factors is significant (ILO, 2016). The World Health Organization (WHO) reported tobacco smoking as the leading cause of illness and impoverishment and results in the death of more than seven million people each year (WHO, 2017). Additionally, 3.3 Million people die each year from alcohol abuse, representing 5.9% of all deaths (WHO, 2015). Furthermore, stress causes resulting in poor diet and low physical activities contributes to obesity and are significant factors associated with non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer) (WHO, 2017). Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) accounts for 31% of all deaths globally; approximately 17.7 Million people died from CVDs in 2015 (WHO, 2017). Results of a study on sleep disorder also revealed a strong relationship between psychosocial risks such as high demand and low social support, and sleep disturbance (Magnusson Hanson, Chungkham, Åkerstedt, & Westerlund, 2014). Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) have also gained considerable attention as a research subject, because of its increased prevalence and link with work-related stress (ILO, 2016). MSD is a prime cause of physical disability and long-term

pain which affects millions of people globally. Research scholars have discovered a link between incidences of MSD and high job demands, high perceived work stress levels, lack of social support, long work hours, and low control (Jacukowicz, 2016; Roman-Liu, 2013). Furthermore, study findings indicated effort-reward imbalance has an association with MSD (Koch, Schablon, Latza, & Nienhaus, 2014). Executing leadership strategies that reduce employee occupational stress, may contribute to a reduction in noncommunicable diseases and an enhancement in employees' general health.

Occupational stress has become more prevalent based on research carried out in the field in Europe, North America, and developed countries. In Europe, a report on psychosocial risks revealed 25% of workers experienced workplace stress for most or all their working hours, while a similar percentage indicated their health was negatively affected (EU-OSHA, 2014). Additionally, many organizations in Europe expressed concern about psychosocial risk factors. Approximately 80% of managers highlighted their concerns regarding workplace stress; however, despite the severity of these concerns, data revealed that below one-third of organizations have procedures in place to mitigate these risks (EU-OSHA, 2014). Results from the 6<sup>th</sup> *European Working Conditions Survey* (EWCS) also affirmed the prevalence of intensive work; 36% of workers work most or all the time with exposure to intense work pressure to meet strict deadlines, while 33% worked at high speed. Furthermore, approximately 16% of workers revealed their exposure to adverse social behavior such as (a) physical violence, (b) bullying, and (c) sexual harassment (Eurofound, 2016). In the Americas, a *First Central American on Working Conditions and Health* revealed 12% to 16% of workers reported

constantly experiencing stress and strain. Additionally, 9% to 13% felt depressed, while 13% to 19% reported a loss of sleep because of poor working conditions (Benavides et al., 2014; Organización Iberoamericana de Seguridad Social [OISS], 2012). In the United States of America (USA), results of a 2015 *Stress in America Survey* revealed respondents rated their level of stress at 4.9 on a 10-point scale (APA, 2015). The most frequent sources of stress highlighted were (a) work (60%), (b) the economy (49%), (c) health concerns (46%), (d) and (e) money (64%) (APA, 2015).

Some studies associated stress-related illnesses such as musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and cancer with workplace-related stress (Eurofound, 2016; WHO, 2017). However, in recent years researchers have increased their attention to work-related suicide. Data are sparse on the link between suicide and work-related issues; however, currently available data are frightening. Multiple researchers have examined the relationship between job characteristics and the risk of suicide among employees. Among individuals analyzed, are workers exposed to issues such as high job demands, long working hours, inadequate social support, low latitude in decision-making, and work conflicts (including bullying and harassment) (Nielsen, Nielsen, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2015; Routley & Ozanne-Smith, 2012). One study revealed that of 642 work-related suicidal deaths, 55% were related to work stressors (including conflict with supervisors and workplace bullying) (Routley & Ozanne-Smith, 2012). Additionally, a Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2014 report on the *Realization of a Society of Health and Longevity* revealed depression and distress

arising from the work environment impelled approximately 42% of suicidal cases (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare [MHLW], 2014).

### **Organizational Protection and Leadership**

Defense against the deleterious effects of occupational stress starts at the organizational level (Quick & Henderson, 2016). Hence, organizations that are keen on protecting its worker's health through the provision of adequate job resources and leadership are investing in the future. Organizational protection and leadership, are critical within the context of occupational stress because it's an area that addresses various risk factors and stressors that can change the work environment (Quick & Henderson, 2016). The International Labour Standards emphasizes organizational protection, and its core convention is designed to protect workers physical and mental health, and well-being (ILO, 2016).

In this section of the literature review, the discussion on organizational protection and leadership was two-fold. First, I viewed organization protection within the context of employee work engagement, which is a critical dimension in the JD-R model conceptual framework grounding this study. Second, I examined leadership through the lens of a transformational leader behavioral style. Work engagement is considered an essential factor in reducing stress, as it serves as a mediator in the relationship between job demands and health problems (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). High job demands influence worker's burnout, and lead to adverse outcomes viewed as the stress process. However, job resources, influences work engagement which leads to positive results (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). From a leadership point of view, it is needful

to understand occupational stress, and the strategies and leader behavioral styles required to reduce its effect on health and well-being. Leadership and stress are inextricably connected; researchers have long debated leader behavior as a primary factor in determining employees' level of stress (Harms, Credé, Tynan, Leon, & Jeung, 2017). Observation of multiple research, highlighted some disagreements in the literature on leadership as it pertains to leaders' potential to be a source of stress for employees or a buffering agent against work stressors (Bass, 1985; Schmidt et al., 2014). Evidence from Harms et al. (2017) meta-analytic research, highlighted a strong association between increased transformational leadership and leader-member exchange behavior, and reduced levels of stress and burnout among followers. Conversely, abusive supervision had a strong association with higher levels of stress (Harms et al., 2017). Hence, it appears intuitive to associate leadership with stress. Therefore, we will now examine transformational leadership and work engagement within the context of occupational stress and incisively explore burgeoning literature covering both constructs.

**Work engagement.** Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) revised the JD-R model theory and proposed that work engagement in addition to burnout served as mediators in the relationship between job demands and health problems, and job resources and turnover intentions. The proposition advanced is high job demands influence worker's burnout and lead to adverse circumstances viewed as the stress process. Job resources, on the other hand, influences work engagement which emanates into positive outcomes, referred to as the motivational process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). The stress process relates to the extra mental and physical effort that must be exerted by

employees to meet job demands and job performance targets. Linked to the motivational process is the availability of abundant job resources which influence a positive psychological state of mind while motivating employees to achieve work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Meijman & Mulder, 1998). One assumption is job resources (e.g., autonomy, performance feedback, social support) induce intrinsic motivation because they nurture learning and increase employees' development and growth. Employees are also extrinsically impacted because job resources affect their achievement of work goals (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). However, where organizations lack job resources such as performance feedback, decision latitude, and social support, these factors contribute to increasing levels of stress and fatigue (ILO, 2016).

In revising the JD-R model, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) looked beyond the established negative psychological aspect of the theory to introduce a new positive psychological dimension within the context of work engagement. Work engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by high energy, dedication, and engrossment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Work engagement has been the subject of extensive discussion in many fields of study (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; De Simone et al., 2016; Gracia, 2015; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Evidence confirms that Kahn (1990) was one of the first among researchers who offered theorized perspectives on the work engagement phenomena. Kahn (1990) explicated that engaged employees are those workers with a total physical, emotional, and cognitive connection to their job roles and responsibilities (Kahn, 1990). These employees are absorbed in their work and display a sense of enthusiasm, vitality,

involvement, happiness, and vigor in job functioning and supporting performance objectives (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

Researchers have corroborated that an essential predictor of work engagement is job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Meijman and Mulder (1998) evoked this assumption in their research and contended work environments that benefit from an adequate supply of job resources foster employees' willingness to expend significant effort, dedicate themselves, and commit to work tasks. Multiple studies demonstrating a positive correlation between the job resources and work engagement constructs support the motivational process involving job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) affirmed this relationship when evidence from their study supported a positive correlation between performance feedback and social support, and employees' vigor and dedication.

In quantitative research performed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), the researchers discovered a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale instrument was used to measure work engagement and included the three engagement dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. *Vigor* implies mental toughness, high energy, and the temperament to expend considerable effort in accomplishing work goals. *Dedication* refers to an individual's substantial involvement in their work supported by feelings of significance, ebullience, and challenge (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). *Absorption* denoted being completely focused and immersed in job activities without the desire to detach (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). In facilitating the research, data were collected from four different samples of

Dutch employees and analyzed utilizing structural equation modeling. The relationship between the social support, performance feedback, and supervisory support job resources component, and absorption, dedication, and vigor components of work engagement was hypothesized (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Schaufeli and Bakker obtained sufficient evidence from the analysis to articulate that job resources was a predictor of work engagement. Moreover, work engagement also mediated the relationship between turnover intention and job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Research evidence also corroborated disengaged employees' exposure to a higher risk of developing stress (Fiabane, Giorgi, Sguazzin, & Argentero, 2013).

In responding to the continued shifts in workplace dynamics, developing an engaged workforce is critical for 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders and organizations (Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). Consequently, improving employees' work engagement through an understanding of its antecedents is currently a focal area of concern for organizational leaders (Rees et al., 2013; Sarti, 2014). Sarti (2014) acknowledged this concern by analyzing the job resources antecedent and its effect in determining employees' work engagement. Results of the multiple regression analysis suggested job resources significantly determine work engagement (Sarti, 2014). Increased opportunities for learning and supervisory support were statistically significant and influenced an increase in work engagement (Sarti, 2014). Similarly, Saari, Melin, Balabanova, and Efendiev (2017) in their seminal work highlighted satisfaction with leadership, learning opportunities, and job control as significant job resources determining work engagement. In fact, an extensive range of evidence on the causal factors of work engagement bolsters



the conclusion an engaged workforce can have a significant positive effect on employee functioning and organizational performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Barnes & Collier, 2013). Hence, leaders should seek ways to ensure the efficient management of human capital, to achieve competitive advantage and maintain company performance (De Klerk & Stander, 2014). A work environment where employees perceive a high-commitment to human resource management influences a reduction in job stress (Seung-Wan & Su-Dol, 2016).

In another study, Barnes and Collier (2013) aimed at expanding existing literature on work engagement by examining antecedents, and outcomes relating to the construct. Barnes and Collier extracted data from frontline employees working in various service contexts, and structural equation modeling was applied to test hypotheses aligned with the research focus. The study was considered relevant because of the increasing emphasis on work engagement as a predictor of employees' performance (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Barnes & Collier, 2013; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Additionally, frontline employees are significant contributors to the creation of value for modern day organizations. Based on the results of the study, Barnes and Collier provided empirical evidence supporting the following constructs as antecedents of work engagement; (a) service climate, (b) job satisfaction, and (c) employee affective commitment. Service climate and job satisfaction, when mediated by work engagement, influenced employees' adaptability and career commitment. Job satisfaction had the highest impact on work engagement (Barnes & Collier, 2013). Service climate is a term used to describe how employees perceive the processes, practices, and behaviors that are rewarded and

contributes to customer service quality within organizations (Wang, 2015). Thus, an attractive service climate, bolsters employees work engagement and motivation levels which positively impact their performances. Employees' affective commitment is also influenced by their increased desire to reciprocate the support garnered from organizations (Gupta, Agarwal, & Khatri, 2016). Through affectional commitment, employees' emotional bond is established which increases their willingness to go beyond expectations in job performance (Gupta et al., 2016). Barnes and Collier study, is of significance because it highlights the need for organizational managers to develop strategies to reduce occupational stress while creating an atmosphere within the work setting where employees feel a sense of enthusiasm, and motivation to achieve set goals.

Engaged employees are more physically, cognitively, and emotionally linked to their work and are enthused about achieving performance goals (Anitha, 2014; Bakker, 2011; Gupta et al., 2016). The notion that low-levels of work engagement lead to deviant behaviors from employees and an increase in turnover intentions is commonly assumed (Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2016). Shantz et al. (2016) engaged in quantitative research to examine this common assumption. Surveys were administered to a sample of 509 employees from a UK-based manufacturing company, to facilitate data collection and analysis. As a part of the statistical analysis applied, hypotheses were tested to check the association between work engagement, turnover intentions, and deviance behavior, and to examine the moderating effect of perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between the variables (Shantz et al., 2016). Perceived organizational support alludes to workers' general conviction regarding the degree to which organizations value

their contributions and prioritizes their well-being (Wattoo, Zhao, & Xi, 2018). Results of the study disclosed POS moderated the relationship between work engagement and employees' turnover intention and deviant behaviors. Of essentiality to the results, was that POS compensated for low-levels of work engagement (Shantz et al., 2016).

In a study of 210 employees of universities and colleges, Malik and Noreen (2015) also reported perceived organizational support as a significant moderator of occupational stress and workers' affective well-being. Employees' confidence increases and occupational stress decreases when organizations provide support (Malik & Noreen, 2015). Similarly, evidence also revealed the direct link that higher role stress has, to perceived organizational support (Kim & Mor Barak, 2015). For this reason, it is vital leaders seek to understand that employees who experience disengagement, have a higher propensity to leave the organization and to display deviance when they perceive that organizational support is lacking. Newman, Nielsen, Smyth, and Hooke (2015) also excogitated that employees have the proclivity to be satisfied in their work environment when they perceive their work context as supportive. Organizations should seek to promote an understanding of the different workplace issues and the correlation between employees' stress and well-being (Malik & Noreen, 2015).

Supporting the significance and relevance of work engagement in organizational research is underpinned because zealous employees display more positive characteristics such as happiness, which contributes to improved physical and psychosocial health (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Furthermore, it can be proffered that enthusiastic and inspired employees display higher levels of energy and more dedicated to executing job

responsibilities (Bakker, 2011; Gupta et al., 2016; Shahpouri, Namdari, & Abedi, 2016). Job and personal resources are both predictors of work engagement (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Personal resources relate to those intrinsic qualities of an individual characterized as (a) self-efficacy, (b) resilience, (c) optimism, and (d) self-esteem (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Results from previous research have highlighted the effect of the personal resource variables on work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Shahpouri et al. (2016) also contributed to existing literature by investigating the relationship between work engagement, personal resources, job resources, and turnover intentions among a population sample of 208 nurses. Shahpouri et al. (2016) used structural equation modeling as part of the quantitative research. In investigating the direct effect of variables, the findings of the study revealed the relationship between personal resources, job resources, and turnover intention was not significant (Shahpouri et al., 2016). Thus, the turnover intention is not directly influenced by personal resources and job resources. Results also disclosed job resources impact on work engagement was insignificant and unconfirmed (Shahpouri et al., 2016). Notwithstanding, results of the hypotheses testing the direct positive effect of job resources on work engagement and the direct negative impact of work engagement on turnover intention were statistically significant and confirmed (Shahpouri et al., 2016). The results of the study disclosed indifference to previous studies that highlighted the effectiveness of job resources on work engagement, and personal and job resources effectiveness on turnover intention (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013;

Takawira, Coetzee, & Schreuder, 2014). However, other results accentuate a level of consistency in the relationship between work engagement and resource variables, and the direct impact of work engagement on turnover intention (Memon, Salleh, & Baharom, 2016; Van Wingerden, Derks, & Bakker, 2015). Based on the evidence from research, it can be posited that work engagement is a significant mediating construct in the correlation between job and personal resources and turnover intention. Despite this relationship, multiple studies confirm occupational stress predicts employee turnover (Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2017; Hwang, Lee, Park, Chang, & Kim, 2014; Jaiswal, Dash, Sharma, Mishra, & Kar, 2015; Yang, Ju, & Lee, 2016). Information from Shahpouri et al. (2016) research has practical implications for organizational managers; the researchers offered a model that could help leaders to enhance employees' work engagement, improve workers' physical and psychosocial health, and reduce occupational stress factors that could impact job performance.

The advent of increased decentralization in the workplace has encouraged the need for improved proactivity and flexibility from employees (Maden-Eyiusta, 2016). New trends in the economy have accelerated the intensity of business processes, which has influenced an increase in the precariousness associated with working conditions, employees' health, and job stress (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Hence, of essentiality, is the need for organizations to provide the critical job resources (e.g., autonomy, task variety, feedback) to enhance employees work engagement and proactive behavior on the job. According to Schulz (2013), organizations that promote employee control and autonomy influence a reduction in stress and low-levels of role ambiguity and role conflict. Maden-

Eyiusta (2016) contributed to the knowledge base in this area by examining the mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between autonomy, task variety, and feedback developmental job resources, and employees' proactive behavior. The researcher also undertook to develop an understanding of the following job fit variables in the proposed model; demands-abilities (D-A) fit and needs-supplies (N-A) fit. D-A fit characterizes the degree to which an employee demonstrates the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to fulfill the demands of a job. N-A fit is a situation in which the psychological needs and preferences of an employee are satisfied with the characteristics of a job (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Maden-Eyiusta (2016) collected data from a sample of 225 staff employed in small and medium enterprises in Turkey. Hypotheses aligned to the research focus were tested utilizing hierarchical multiple regression analysis. Results of the study supported the hypothesis and affirmed the relationship between job autonomy, task variety, and proactive behavior, is mediated by work engagement (Maden-Eyiusta, 2016). Additionally, there was a positive and significant correlation between employees with low demands-abilities (D-A) fit, and autonomy, task variety, and work engagement, while the result was insignificant for employees characterized with high D-A fit. The positive effect of work engagement on employees' proactive behavior resulted for only those employees attributed with high needs-supplies (N-S) fit (Maden-Eyiusta, 2016). Similarly, Chen, Sparrow, & Cooper (2016) emphasized the importance of promoting employees' organizational fit to reduce stress while influencing higher job satisfaction. According to Maden-Eyiusta (2016), the provisional indirect effect of job resources on

proactive behaviors was strongest with the low D-A fit, and high N-S fit. Results of this study have garnered increased validity from the results of previous research in the field. Earlier studies highlighted work engagement as mediating the positive effect of various elements of job design on individual and organizational performance outcomes (Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Shantz et al., 2016; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). The structure of work has ramifications for employees' well-being and health (Tim et al., 2016). A study put forward by Chou, Li, and Hu (2014) highlighted the occupational stress consequences of job design and job-related activities; researchers observed that working overtime, engaging in work associated with high job strain, and a lack of support, are linked to employees' burnout.

**Transformational leadership and occupational stress.** Burns (1978) through his seminal work introduced the concept of transformational leadership and proffered that transformational leaders inspire followers to change expectations, self-actualize and achieve common goals. Burns (1978) postulated that transformational leaders energize and motivate followers to look beyond self-interests and work collaboratively to achieve supplemental team-level success. Ghasabeh, Reaiche, and Soosay (2015) defined transformational leadership as leader behaviors that transform, inspire, and stimulate followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest to achieve common goals. In the mid-1980s, Bass (1985) expanded on the original ideas postulated by Burns (1978) to develop Bass' transformational leadership theory. Bass (1985) believed transformational leadership is defined based on the impact it has on individuals; transformational leaders garner trust, respect, and admiration from their followers.

The transformational leadership theory encompasses four key dimensions; (a) idealized influence, (b) intellectual stimulation, (d) inspirational motivation, and (e) individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Through idealized influence, leaders model the behavior and actions they desire followers to adopt such as maintaining a commitment to high standards in achieving the vision of an organization (Bellé, 2014; Birasnav, 2014; Dust, Resick, & Mawritz, 2014). Intellectual stimulation relates to the way leaders appeal to the creativity and innovativeness of followers, by inspiring them to challenge old assumptions with new ideas and perspectives (Bellé, 2014). Inspirational motivation is representative of a leader's ability to articulate a vision profoundly and compellingly for the future that inspires and appeals to followers (Bellé, 2014). In individualized consideration, leaders maintain an awareness of the unique needs of each follower and address those needs through coaching, mentorship, and other activities (Bellé, 2014). According to Song, Kolb, Lee, & Kim (2012), the transforming effect of leader empowering behavior is inextricably linked to high employee performance and influences employee work engagement.

An abundance of research evidence, have shown the positive effect of transformational leadership on occupational stress, job satisfaction, and employees' productivity (Bass, 1985; Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Bellé, 2014; Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, Gagné, & Forest, 2015). Researchers Vincent-Hoper et al. (2012) supported these positive associations when they propounded on the significant effect of transformational leadership on occupational success as it pertains to reducing employees' health impairment and enhancing their subjective well-being. Of note, however, is the



transformational leadership effect on job stress does not always produce positive outcomes. Salem (2015) tested the relationship between transformational leadership (*individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and intellectual stimulation*) and Job stress. The population sample for the research consisted of employees from the hotel industry. Results affirmed a negative relationship between transformational leadership and job stress (Salem, 2015). The inconsistency with this result when compared to positive correlations, maybe because of the many job challenges employees are subjected to in the hospitality industry such as (a) work overload, (b) inadequate rewards, and (c) inequities on the job. Research evidence also highlighted that applying transformational leadership style does not guarantee employees' full engagement (Mozammel & Haan, 2016). For example, results of Mauno, Ruokolainen, Kinnunen, and De Bloom (2016) study disclosed that transformational leadership could improve employees' engagement; however, it may not function as a stress buffer in some instances. Similarly, in a study of 122 managers and employees in the banking sector in Bangladesh, statistics revealed there was no significant correlation between transformational leadership and the level of engagement with employees (Mozammel & Haan, 2016). The results of the study are not in alignment with the existing body of research (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013). However, these outcomes are confirmatory that various variables such as industry sectors may impact research outcome. These are critical areas to be examined by management and to further assess how transformational leadership style can be used to assist in maintaining productivity while reducing stress and burnout effects on staff (Salem, 2015).

Because of the increasing convergence of societies within the context of globalized markets, the demands on employees have increased significantly. Organizations strategy of implementing drastic changes to improve efficiency and enhance business competitiveness continues to heap work pressure on employees (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). The banking industry is no exception; banks come under severe pressure to design innovative products and services to meet the divergent needs of customers and increase business growth. Consequently, increased workload, role ambiguity, reduced autonomy, and work-life imbalances have challenged employees and often leads to increased levels of stress (George & K. A., 2015; Samartha, Vidyavathi, Begum, & Lokesh, 2013).

Additionally, other factors such as downsizing, demanding customers, the implementation of advanced technology, and work procedures, heightens employees' level of job insecurity and stress (Akram & Qayyum, 2014; Harney, Fu, & Freaney, 2018; Samartha et al., 2013). Based on these dynamic global and organizational changes, the occupational stress phenomena have become a growing international concern for government, organizations, and leaders (O'Keefe et al., 2014; WHO, 2013). In Europe, at least 40 million employees are affected by work-related stress which cost the European Union at least 20 billion Euros yearly, while the United States expends over \$300 billion because of stress-related causes (CDC, 2014; EU-OSHA, 2014). Accordingly, the appropriateness of transformational leadership in improving organizational innovation and growth is of high importance (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Bellé, 2014; Fernet et al., 2015). Consequently, employees' health, team functioning, and enhancing commitment

to achieving performance goals through management-based competencies, have taken on increased levels of relevance for researchers (Ghasabeh et al., 2015; Syrek et al., 2013; Vincent-Hoper et al., 2012).

Despite the array of empirical findings that corroborate the health-promoting impact of transformational leadership, researchers have presented valid and tenable arguments supporting the significant effect of transformational leadership on employees' health and well-being (Dunkl et al., 2015; Fernet et al., 2015; Zwingmann et al., 2014). First, the primary attributes of transformational leadership style such as employee empowerment, employee support and an excellent relationship between leader and subordinate could potentially mitigate the development of stress in the work environment (Dunkl et al., 2015; Dust et al., 2014; Fernet et al., 2015). Employee empowerment increases workers' job performance (Muhammad Khalil Ur & Nazia, 2018). Confirmedly, the result of a study performed by Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah (2016) highlighted employee optimism and hope as precursors to a reduction in occupational stress and its potential effect on workers' well-being. Supervisory support increases employees' well-being, lessens burnout and reduces stress levels (Dunkl et al., 2015; Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2015).

Multiple researchers have carried out analysis on the differentiated impact of the critical dimensions of transformational leadership. Franke and Felfe (2011) corroborated through their research findings that individualized consideration is closely linked to the emotional support, and has a negative relationship with employee strain. Second, transformational leadership has a positive effect on followers' self-actualization; it

influences an enhancement in employees' confidence level, self-esteem, and self-efficacy which are essential components of personal resources (Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Matzler, Bauer, & Mooradian, 2015). The JD-R model highlighted the effect of personal resources on improving employees' health. Personal resources reduce the level of demands on employees and mediate the effect of job demands on employees' strain and burnout (Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). Hence, employees' ability and capacity to successfully cope with meeting job demands is significantly enhanced when transformational leaders contribute to the growth of subordinates' resources. De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2017) supported this argument when they hypothesized on the buffering effect of transformational leadership and personal resources on task conflict and job satisfaction. Results of the analysis of data from a large organization revealed personal resources adversely affected task conflict and job satisfaction, which weakened when the level of transformational leadership increased (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017).

Additionally, Franke and Felfe (2011) emphasized how the individualized consideration and idealized component of the transformational leadership dimensions, impact subordinates' self-belief and self-actualization. Both dimensions foster improvements in perceived confidence and trust, which leads to a decrease in subordinates' perceived strain (Franke & Felfe, 2011). Finally, high-quality relationships and trust are enhanced when transformational leaders display empathy and appreciation to followers. Thus, a leader-subordinate relationship emboldened by trust, appreciation, and recognition, influences employees' health and well-being (Franke & Felfe, 2011;

Zwingmann et al., 2014). In contrast, leaders who demonstrate a lack of concern for subordinates and are not available to provide the required level of support to employees may create a working environment bereft with conflicts (Yang & Li, 2017). Schyns and Schilling (2013) acknowledged this problem and pursued increasing the knowledge base on the impact of destructive forms of leadership on subordinates. A meta-analysis was carried out on 57 research articles examining the adverse effects and outcome of bad leadership. Based on the findings of Schyns and Schilling (2013) study it can be propounded that a laissez-faire style of leadership stimulates conflict situations on the job and stymies employees' health and well-being. Contrary to this result, however, is the view on leadership avoidance and conflict in some countries differ from the conventional negative opinion in a Western context. Yang and Li (2017) highlighted this fact in research conducted on 245 subordinates of major companies, in the People's Republic of China. The result of the study supported a positive relationship between leaders' avoidance and employees' attitude and well-being. A team leader's failure to intervene in conflict situations proved useful in achieving a positive employee attitude (Yang & Li, 2017). These contrasting results affirm the effect and view of leadership behavior are affected by various cultural dynamics such as power distance (Ye, Ng, & Lian, 2015). Therefore, leaders should develop an understanding of the intricacies surrounding the influence of cultural values on conflict avoidance in multiple settings (Yang & Li, 2017). By enabling this understanding, leaders can reduce conflict situations that may lead to a decrease in occupational stress.

Laissez-faire leadership refers to superiors' abstention and refusal to act at a time when subordinates require leader situational intervention (Skogstad, Hetland, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2014). Studies link laissez-faire style of leadership to various occupational stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity; these stressors could potentially lead to employee depression, job strain, and reduced performance (Akgunduz, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2012; Skogstad et al., 2014). Hence, having an impelling leadership presence could minimize employee frustration and stress. This approach reinforces the nature and importance of the health-promoting effects of transformational leadership in employee support and building a high-quality relationship between leaders and subordinates (Dunkl et al., 2015; Dust et al., 2014; Fernet et al., 2015).

Zwingmann et al. (2014) engaged in a quantitative study to examine the health-promoting effects of transformational leadership on employees. The researchers presented new and expansive knowledge in the field of transformational leadership as the multilevel analysis spanned 16 nations examining its health effects. Data covering 93576 subordinates from 11,177 teams across large international companies were analyzed to assess how employees' health and well-being are affected by their perceptions of the leadership behavior displayed by supervisory level staff and to determine if transformational leadership promotes healthy employees (Zwingmann et al., 2014). Hypotheses were derived and tested based on the focus and nature of the research and transformational leadership assessed utilizing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Results from the multilevel analysis confirmed the status of transformational leadership as an effective global health-promoting leader behavior (Zwingmann et al.,

2014). More specifically, results of the study highlighted the health-promoting effect of perceived transformational leader behavior on employees' health and well-being in (a) Austria, (b) Brazil, (c) Croatia, (c) the Czech Republic, and (d) Germany, Hungary, Great Britain, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, and South Africa were other notable countries (Zwingmann et al., 2014). Leaders and international organizations are therefore encouraged to develop a climate of transformational leadership to reduce health-related absenteeism and lower cost associated with employees' ill-health (Zwingmann et al., 2014). Promoting transformational leadership in organizations could have a positive impact on reducing the burden of cost associated with employees' health (Schmidt et al., 2014).

In today's competitive environment the virtues of transformational leadership are increasingly relevant (Fernet et al., 2015; Ghasabeh et al., 2015). High-quality employee functioning is of necessity as organizational leaders move to ascertain sustainability and viability in business operations (Fernet et al., 2015; Metcalf & Benn, 2013). Employing motivational mechanisms to sustain employees' psychological health and optimize employee functioning has therefore taken on added significance for researchers. Fernet et al. (2015) attempted to deepen our knowledge of the role of transformational leadership in employee motivation and functioning. To explore these motivational mechanisms, Fernet et al. (2015) incorporated the JD-R model with a proposed integrative model highlighted in their study. The proposed model linked transformational leadership to workers' psychological health (burnout, distress), attitude (commitment, turnover intention), and performance through perceived job characteristics (job demands, job

resources) and employee motivation derived from autonomy and control (Fernet et al., 2015).

Results of Fernet et al. (2015) study supported the proposed model; transformational leadership is positively linked to optimal employee job functioning as it pertains to psychological health, job attitudes, and performance (Fernet et al., 2015). This relational link is enabled when transformational leadership influences (a) a positive perception of job characteristics because of an abundance of resources and fewer demands, and (b) employees' high-quality work motivation derived from autonomy and control (Fernet et al., 2015). Job demands can be a source of stress when adequate job resources are not available to facilitate task achievement and fulfillment of employee job functions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Transformational leader behavior can influence employees' perception of job demands. Of note, is the effect of job demands can be mitigated by providing employees with a compelling rationale for the benefits, rewards, or essentiality of demanding tasks (Fernet et al., 2015).

A frequently discussed concern for organizations engaged in human service is the burnout effect on employees caused by high-stress working environments (Freudenberger, 1975; Green, Miller, & Aarons, 2013; Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach and Jackson (1981) posited that burnout was conceptualized as a stress-related mental syndrome response, arising from chronic interpersonal stressors manifested in the work environment. These stressors consisted of three main dimensions (a) exhaustion, (b) depersonalization or cynicism, and (c) reduced efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Green et al. (2013) completed a study on 388 public sector staff. The



researchers highlighted employees' occupation as a high-risk capacity because of workers' exposure to burnout and emotional exhaustion, which impacted job performance and high-quality service to clients (Green et al., 2013). Green et al. revealed transformational leadership had a moderating effect on the relationship between employees' emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. Results affirmed the impact of transformational leader behavior in buffering the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on employees (Green et al., 2013). As a performance enhancement and organizational strategy, leaders are encouraged to invest in supervisors' transformational leadership development programs to reduce the rate of turnover and emotional exhaustion, which could lead to occupational stress if not carefully managed (Clark et al., 2014; Green et al., 2013).

In a study, Walsh, Dupré, and Arnold (2014) were intent on increasing the knowledge base by examining the process through which transformational leader behavior affects the psychological health of employees. Results revealed that how employees perceived psychological empowerment and organizational justice in their organizations, emerged as a mediator in the relationship between transformational leadership and employees' mental health (Walsh et al., 2014). Organizational justice has been widely explored in research for decades and carries two distinct dimensions; distributive justice and procedural justice (Mumcu & Döven, 2016; Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2013; Walsh et al., 2014). Distributive justice relates to employees' perception of fairness on how rewards are distributed (Hurst, Scherer, & Allen, 2017). Procedural justice relates to employees' perception of fairness in decision-making processes that

influences organizational outcomes (Crenshaw, Cropanzano, Bell, & Nadisic, 2013).

Procedural justice is linked to transformational leadership as it induces employees' trust and confidence in their leader (Walsh et al., 2014).

A few researchers have linked organizational justice with various dimensions of work stressors which reinforce the influence of employees' fairness perception on their health and exposure to stress (Yiwen et al., 2014). Work stressors can affect employee functioning resulting in below standard job performance, depression, and lowered productivity (Kozusznik et al., 2015; Safaria, 2014; Yiwen et al., 2014). Results of Walsh et al. (2014) study suggests that when transformational leaders assist employees in attaining the necessary resources, it impacts their psychological health. Transformational leaders promote employees' resource gain by fostering a culture of organizational justice and by psychologically empowering followers' through the provision of personal resources (Walsh et al., 2014). Exploring transformational leadership effect on occupational stress influences increased relevance in the study of organizational justice and employee psychological empowerment. Transformational leadership affects how followers perceive themselves and organizations, which has implications for employees' physical and psychosocial well-being (Walsh et al., 2014; Zwingmann et al., 2014).

### **Occupational Stress Reduction Strategies**

The prevalence and magnitude of occupational stress and its health outcomes is an affirmation of its impact in the global working population, based on the wealth of research evidence identifying various associated psychosocial risk factors at international and regional levels (ILO, 2016). Work stress and its related economic costs is an

illustration of the significant impact health outcome have on organizational safety, health, and productivity performance (EU-OSHA, 2014; HSE, 2017). Consequently, the stress phenomena cannot be observed in isolation but instead viewed as a collective, with significant implications for workers' well-being, families, and societies. Work-related stress impacts employees, their families, and work organization (Kaveri & Prabakaran, 2013). In many stress management approaches a key emphasis is individual-level interventions. However, given the magnitude of the problem, a broad-based comprehensive approach is needed to better understand the stress process (Grawitch, Ballard, & Erb, 2015). There has been increasing attention to the evaluation and management of workplace stress through the conceptualization of policies, legislation, and strategies (ILO, 2016). This increased focus is evident in the proliferation of research at international and local levels. The aim is to attract attention to the issue and design interventions to confront occupational stress at workplace levels. Thus, organizational managers, policymakers, and social partners should be motivated to continue to engage in strategies to reduce employee occupational stress.

**Employee awareness program.** Leaders in organizations should implement employee awareness programs addressing the harmful effects of workplace stress and the coping behaviors required to improve health outcomes. Improving workers' ability to cope with stress is viewed as a useful complementary strategy, supporting the wider organizational processes aimed at mitigating workplace stress (ILO, 2016; Montero-Marín et al., 2014). Strengthening employees' awareness and competence in addressing these risks in the work environment, enhances leaders' ability to (a) increase productivity,

(b) create a safe and healthy working environment to protect the health and well-being of employees, and (c) establish a positive and preventative culture within organizations. Workers' engagement and effectiveness are also enhanced (ILO, 2016). This positive outcome from employees' cognizance is supported by Pignata and Winefield (2015) research, examining how employees' awareness of stress reduction interventions affects their well-being and attitude at work. The result of the cross-sectional study corroborated with previous research findings and supported an association between employees' stress reduction awareness and high job satisfaction, affective commitment to organizations, and trust in management (Pignata & Winefield, 2015). Employers should also offer counseling, induct and mentor new staff, provide internal and external support for employees experiencing challenging life situations, and provide progressing support by enlisting the help of trade unions and co-workers during periods of unemployment (ILO, 2016).

**Prevention.** An effective strategy to manage occupational stress is prevention (Arnetz, Arble, Backman, Lynch, & Lublin, 2013). Organizations should confront the core or origin of potential stress causes by identifying and tackling psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions, the culture of the organization, and labor relations. The success of these measures was evident in research carried out by D'Ettorre and Greco (2016), in which the implementation of improvement interventions focused on function and organizational culture and directed through occupational safety training, minimized work-related stress risk among employees. Workers should also be engaged during the process of identifying psychosocial risks, to enlist their views and concern regarding

stress causes. By adopting this process of engagement, organizational leaders are now equipped to develop intervention strategies and address the issues at source. Empirical research highlights employee engagement as having a positive relationship with preferred work-related outcomes (Anand, 2017; Anthony-McMann, Ellinger, Astakhova, & Halbesleben, 2017; Muduli, Verma, & Datta, 2016). In fact, a study revealed employee engagement has implications for workplace stress and burnout (Anthony-McMann et al., 2017).

**Risk management implementation.** Managers should develop and implement applicable risk-management systems and approaches aimed at mitigating psychosocial hazards. This intervention will allow for continued evaluation, measurement, and improvement of OSH practices in the workplace. Dollard and Gordon (2014) affirmed the effectiveness of this approach from the results of an evaluation of a participatory risk management intervention in a public-sector company located in Australia. Dollard and Gordon highlighted the relevance of action plans implemented to reduce stress-related risk factors such as job design, the quality of work, and performance management. Results revealed the duration of workers' sickness absence decreased, and significant improvements in job design were highlighted (Dollard & Gordon, 2014). Conversely, results for quality and performance management was marginal and maybe suggesting the need for further risk management engagement to improve outcome (Dollard & Gordon, 2014). Primary stress management interventions are designed to eliminate or mitigate environmental risk factors that could prove harmful to workers' health and well-being in the future (Grawitch et al., 2015). Other effective strategies to reduce employees'

occupational stress includes adequate job control, regulating workload to ensure assignments are reasonable and equitable, providing social support, and training and educating workers to ensure technical skill and job aligns (ILO, 2016). Additionally, leaders should ascertain transparency and fairness in all work situations, and guarantee the required physical working equipment and tools are adequate to prevent an imbalance between job demands and job resources. An imbalance between job demands and job resources can lead to stress and directly impact the productive capacity of organizations (Sharma, 2015).

**Organizational climate and behavioral practices.** Pannu and Tikku (2014) also provided insights on management competencies required to manage work-related stress and to ensure the working environment is productive and safe. Pannu and Tikku, broadly expounded on critical areas of focus that should form a part of organizational stress intervention strategies. These areas included (a) leadership, (b) peer support, (c) organizational culture and policies, (d) work design, (e) reporting arrangements, and (f) job analysis. The organizational climate should be one that supports employee counseling, job enrichment, employee involvement in decision-making processes, and career planning. Research revealed a significant correlation between employees' perception of a favorable organizational climate and reduced burnout, anxiety, and depression (Bronkhorst, Tummers, Steijn, & Vijverberg, 2015). Likewise, Suandi, Ismail, and Othman (2014) examined the relationship between organizational climate, job stress and job performance among State Education Officers and confirmed a significant positive correlation. Where the organizational climate is high, employees' performance increases.

Conversely, where the organizational climate is low, the possibility of job stress is high (Suandi et al., 2014). Career uncertainty and stagnation influence the development of psychosocial hazards and work-related stress (ILO, 2016). Employee assistance program should also be implemented to reduce the burden of stress, supported by stress control workshops (Pannu & Tikku, 2014).

Grawitch et al. (2015) emphasized critical organizational practices aligned to a psychologically healthy workplace and the comprehensive approach required to manage the workplace stress phenomena. Key dimensions were discussed and related to the organizational behavioral practices needed to reduce work stress, such as (a) *employees' involvement*, (b) *recognition*, (c) *health and safety*, and (d) *growth and development* (Grawitch et al., 2015). Organizations are keen on establishing a positive work environment contributory to workers' health and well-being; however, assessing where to begin, can be challenging. Consequently, implementing individual-level interventions are not enough, and executing wide-ranging organizational strategies and processes are viewed as a part of a broader perspective to manage stress effects (Grawitch et al., 2015).

The American Psychological Association (APA) with the support of research consultants designed a Healthy Workplace Program (Grawitch, Gottschalk, & Munz, 2006). The program outlined five key psychologically healthy workplace dimensions and unique practices that contribute to employees' organizational functioning, health, well-being. These key dimensions included (a) employee involvement as it pertains to autonomy and inclusion in decision-making, (b) work-life balance (*practices supporting work flexibility and workers' non-work demands*), and (c) employee growth and

development (*training, career development*). Other dimensions related to health and safety (*managing diseases and promoting health and safety practices*), and recognition (*monetary and non-monetary rewards*) (Grawitch et al., 2006). These vital organizational practices support the development of workplaces described as psychologically healthy. The dimensions were designed to address contextual factors affecting organizations internally and externally such as culture, strategy, structure, and market environment (Grawitch et al., 2015).

***Employee involvement.*** Despite the many psychologically healthy workplace practices, stress management interventions are most aligned to the health and safety dimension, because of the relationship between a multitude of well-being factors and chronic stress (Hammer & Sauter, 2013). Whether concentration is on disease management, workers' assistance program or other health-conscious areas, the health and safety dimension is the most robust based on studies showing the positive impact on employees' stress and well-being (Grawitch et al., 2015). As it pertains to the *employee involvement* dimension, the extant literature shows a relationship between employees' autonomy and well-being factors at work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Stress theories such as the JD-R model, highlights autonomy as an essential job resource acting to reduce burnout and serving as a moderating influence on the adverse effects of demands on employees (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Importantly, when employees are given expanded control over their jobs as well as latitude in decision-making processes, positive well-being increases (Grawitch et al., 2015).



In executing interventions aimed at reducing stress, employee involvement is critical towards achieving desired results. Sorenson and Holman (2014) and Dollard and Gordon (2014) in their research assessing the effectiveness of stress interventions, strongly emphasized the need for employee involvement as a strategy in reducing stress and stressors in the work environment. Grawitch, Ledford, Ballard, and Barber (2009) observed that employee participation could be efficacious during (a) program development, (b) communication, (c) needs assessment, (d) implementation, and (e) evaluation. Hence, an increase in employees' involvement helps to reduce occupational stress. Furthermore, designing stress reduction interventions with employees' involvement optimizes the effectiveness of the outcome (Grawitch et al., 2015).

***Work-life balance.*** As it pertains to work-life balance, attention is taken away from the focus on autonomy to practices supporting work flexibility and employees' non-work demands. Work-life Balance is a collaborative effort between employee and employer, to attain worker psychological well-being and improvement in harmonious living by effectively managing the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and external environment (Walia, 2014). Research on work-life balance reveals that flexibility or balance between working hours, family, and social commitments, can have a positive effect on employees' health and stress levels (Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014). A survey of 24,096 employees from 27 European countries confirmed that employees exposed to poor work-life balance reported increased health problems (Lunau et al., 2014). In another study on work-life balance (WLB) across cultures, results disclosed WLB had a positive relationship with

the job and life satisfaction (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014). Conversely, other results revealed WLB had a negative association with anxiety and depression because employees are exposed to less mental pressure (Haar et al., 2014).

Researchers viewed satisfaction with work-life balance as a holistic measure of workers happiness with a balanced relationship between personal life, family, and work (Cahill, McNamara, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Valcour, 2015). Importantly, as evidenced in research WLB benefits organizations in positive ways such as reduced absenteeism, improved productivity and image, loyalty, and retention (Chimote & Srivastava, 2013). Hence, organizations should provide support to help employees cope with high job demands and reduce conflicts arising from the imbalance between work and non-work factors (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016). Overall, research in the work-life domain is indicative that various policies, practices, and interventions, can be implemented to reduce stress and effectively manage the balance between work and life (Grawitch et al., 2015). Employees have a favorable perception of their organization when supportive cultures, policies, and practices are incorporated (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016).

***Employee growth and development.*** Employee growth and development is also a critical stress reduction strategy and is an area that has been a point of focus in three key areas. First, extensive stress management programs (SMPs) are often designed to assist leaders in providing employees with the skills required to manage stress (Grawitch et al., 2015). Leaders utilizing SMPs should implement training focused on the development of specific skills set such as resilience, relaxation, and mindfulness (Hou et al., 2014; Sahlin, Ahlborg, Matuszczyk, & Grahn, 2014; Van der Riet, Rossiter, Kirby, Dluzewska, &

Harmon, 2015). Second, researchers have focused on issues surrounding resiliency and sustainability within the career development field. This emphasis is necessary because of the need for employees to adapt and cope with continuous changes through a process of learning (Grawitch et al., 2015). Finally, attention has been given to leaders as it relates to their level of sustainability and efficacy in coping with stress while engaging efforts to help reduce stressors among employees (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013; Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014). Thus, research on managing stress within the parameters of employees' growth and development has centered around (a) assisting employees to manage work stress situations, and (b) managing the stress associated with employees' career development and change. Addressing stress at work organization level with a focus on leaders coping ability and efficacy is also an emphasis (Grawitch et al., 2015).

***Employee recognition.*** Research is sparse on *employee recognition*, particularly as it relates to the dimension's influence on stress and stress reduction. Instead, researchers focus their attention on the link between employee recognition and engagement and motivation, with a focus on the buffering effects of stress. Multiple researchers have viewed a lack of employee recognition as a potential stressor. For example, the result of Kazi and Haslam (2013) study disclosed that increased levels of stress had a positive relationship with reduced well-being and performance, with a lack of recognition reported as one of the primary stressors. Similarly, Pelissier et al. (2015) posited that poor recognition was a risk factor for nursing home staff impaired mental well-being. However, Johnson and Lee (2013) asserted that recognition (e.g., promotion)

could be harmful to employees' well-being. Short-term gratification gained from promotion benefits (pay increase, job security, job satisfaction) may dissipate over time; thus, effecting a decrease in the employee's psychological health and well-being. Additional, employees may become exposed to increased job demands such as long work hours, expectations for increased productivity levels, and added responsibility to supervise the work of employees, which may increase work-related stress (Grawitch et al., 2015).

Research revealed occupational stress might be positively or adversely affected by employee recognition. Employees who are poorly recognized may perceive their contribution as undervalued which may lead to an increase in stress levels and deterioration of well-being. In conclusion, evidence from research highlights pivotal dimensions associated with a psychologically healthy workplace as critical tools, designed to strategically manage stress and reduce its effect upon employees' well-being (Grawitch et al., 2006). Approaches will vary dependent on different organizations' structure, culture, and expectations of the workforce. Nevertheless, leaders may leverage available interventions to (a) reduce the effect of stressors, (b) provide employees with the personal and job resources required to manage stressors, and (c) assist workers in overcoming the deleterious effects of chronic stress (Grawitch et al., 2015).

### **Global Occupational Stress Prevention Strategies**

Outside of the development of legal frameworks such as the International Labour Standards core Convention designed to protect workers physical and mental health and well-being, many organizations and countries have engaged national strategies addressing

the prevention and management of workplace stress and psychosocial risks (ILO, 2016). Various social actors such as international organizations and regional institutions developed these strategies (ILO, 2016). For example, a primary goal of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is to prevent and reduce work-related stress. The ILO has developed various tools such as the stress prevention at work checkpoint, which is an ergonomic tool designed with a set of best practice guidelines to audit and intervene for workplace improvements in preventing and mitigating work stress. The ILO has also collaborated with various regions in the world to implement training tools to assist both workers and employers in managing stress (ILO, 2016). The training tools form a part of a robust program aimed at developing an integrated response to stress, and to encourage action in the workplace that improves well-being. Through this program, the ILO also engages Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) policy design and action to reduce work-related stress by integrating workers' health promotion into workplace policies (ILO, 2016).

In addition to the ILO, other international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank, has been active in promoting strategies to prevent and manage work-related stress and psychosocial hazards affecting health. The *Global Framework for Healthy Workplaces* was launched by the WHO in 2010, to promote and protect employees' well-being, health, and safety (WHO, 2010). The framework comprised of critical areas within the psychosocial work environment such as values and attitudes, organizational culture, beliefs, and workplace practices affecting the physiological well-being of workers (WHO, 2010). These are critical global strategic

inputs in reducing occupational stress, because according to Kuusio et al. (2013), cultural differences may exist in psychosocial factors such as job demands, job control, and workload, and how these factors impact workers' stress and turnover intention.

Psychosocial risks have a close association with work-related stress; thus, prevention and management of the phenomena are crucial. The World Bank through its global work also supports psychosocial health as a focus for development, and this is an area incorporated into long-term policies, plans, strategies, and resources, to strengthen sustainability (World Bank Group, 2015).

Other regional organizations were also established to advance cooperation and adopt policies promoting stress prevention and well-being. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations from the Asia Pacific region, endorsed a regional action plan. The action plan was designed with an objective to increase workplace contribution in educating on healthy behavioral styles linked to coping with stress on the job and other environments (Association of Southeast Asian Nations [ASEAN], 2012). The action program also elicits member countries to immediately engage priority policies addressing work settings and lifestyles and adopting workplace initiatives conducive to increased health and well-being (ASEAN, 2012). EU-OSHA also contributed to the global effort in reducing stress by organizing a *Healthy Workplaces* campaign in 2014-2015. The campaign related to stress management and the provision of guidance and support to employees and employers in the management of various psychosocial risks (EU-OSHA, 2014). Therefore, these focused interventions have revealed that managing the

occupational stress phenomena is a part of a national strategy, and is a primary focus and concern for many countries.

Developing countries also view work-related stress as a priority and are also keen on collaborating with international and regional organizations to prevent psychosocial risks. In Jamaica, the Ministry of Labour joined with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the rest of the world in commemorating the 2016 World Day for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), with a priority focus on workplace stress. The Ministry highlighted the weak identification and mismanagement of workplace stress as a high concern while observing policies and initiatives to reduce its adverse effect (Jamaica Observer, 2016). The Ministry of Labour in Argentina adopted the *11 National Strategy for Health and Safety at Work* which included provisions aligned to psychosocial hazards and the development of specific regulations geared towards evaluating and preventing diseases caused by work-related stress (Superintendencia de Riesgos del Trabajo [SRT], 2015).

In France, an *Emergency Plan for the Prevention of Stress* was developed to understand and prevent psychosocial risks (European Parliament, 2013). Leaders in New Zealand established a *Workplace Health and Safety Strategy* in 2015. As a national priority, leaders examined psychosocial work factors (excessive workload, low job control, and aggression) which could lead to stress-related disorders, with an aim to create a healthy workforce (New Zealand Institute of Safety Management [NZISM], 2015). In Germany, a key focus of the *Occupational Health* strategy is work-related stress and constitutes priority objectives to (a) protect workers from a psychological

strain, and (b) lower work illnesses that result from musculoskeletal disorders (Eurofound, 2016). These key international and regional preventative strategies are necessary and supportive towards organizations' aim to reduce the occupational stress phenomena, given its considerable impact on the broader economy and workplace productivity.

### **Transition Summary**

To date, a multiplicity of past and present researchers have extensively explored various constructs and theories surrounding occupational stress (Brough et al., 2013; Demerouti et al., 2001; George & K.A., 2015; McTiernan & McDonald, 2015; Mohammad Mosadeghrad, 2014; Sinha, 2016). However, literature is sparse on how to leverage leadership strategies and initiatives to reduce the stress phenomena. Therefore, the research surrounding this study involved a qualitative inquiry into the strategies leaders use to reduce occupational stress. Engaging a case study approach in the mentioned field was influenced by the increased complexities detected in the job environment, which has prompted scholars to observe how leadership and work stress influence employees' behavior (Yao et al., 2014). Consequently, the first section of this study sufficiently grounded and elucidated the research by defining the problem statement, purpose statement, nature of the study, conceptual framework, significance of the study, and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Additionally, the review of the literature represented depth in research and involved an exploration of various dimensions linked to the research focus and the conceptual framework. These dimensions included (a) occupational stress, (d) job demands-resources model, (c) work stressors, (d)



job burnout, (e) work engagement, and (f) transformational leadership and occupational stress. Additionally, I included an elaborate discussion on occupational stress causes, impact on productivity and economic cost, global prevention strategies, and organizational protection and leadership. In this section, I imparted a rich account of the dynamics of leadership, job demands and job resources, and how these influence employees' job burnout and work engagement, which has workplace stress implications.

In section 2 of the research, I included a detailed description of the (a) role of the researcher, (b) research methodology, (c) population and sampling, (d) data collection techniques, and (e) data collection and analysis tools. In section 3, I provided an elaborate and compact overview of the research and presented a synthesis of the findings of the study. Additionally, I expatiated on how the results of the study can be applied by leaders in professional practice to solve business problems and enhance the potentialities surrounding positive social change. The study was concluded succinctly with valuable recommendations for action, recommendations for future research, and a reflection on my experience as a researcher.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section of the study, I include a comprehensive description of the (a) purpose of the study, (b) role of the researcher, (c) study participants, (d) research methodology and design, (e) population and sampling, and (f) ethical research. I also expatiate on the data collection techniques, data organization and analysis techniques, and the validity and reliability of the findings in the study. My goal is to enhance rigor in research by engaging established qualitative protocols, methods, and analytic strategies aimed at deriving insights on the phenomena under study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. The targeted population comprised of bank managers of a bank in the Caribbean, who successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. The implications for positive social change includes the potential for improving employee health and reducing health costs to employees, their families, and communities. Employees' work-life balance initiatives may also be enhanced, which can lead to increases in their participation in civic duties to improve social conditions.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In qualitative research, researchers develop the capacity to delimitate the foci and goals aligned with the research process. The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to explore various phenomena experienced by participants to acquire in-depth information and contextually ascribe meaning to their behavior and words (Pettigrew,

2013). Hence, a goal of the researcher is to deeply analyze, describe, and interpret meanings from participants' everyday life experiences and social interactions (O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014). The qualitative case study approach has gained prominence as a common research method. Researchers have adopted the design to contribute to knowledge on (a) individual, (b) group, (c) organizational, (d) social, (e) political, and (f) other related phenomena (Yin, 2014). Required in a qualitative case study is researchers' competence in different data collection procedures in gathering data from multiple case study evidence sources such as documents, interviews, direct observation, physical artifacts, and participant observation (Yin, 2014). Consequently, the researcher is recognized as the primary data collection instrument and is required to invest substantive time in the field of study to attain full comprehension of the phenomena under investigation (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

A researcher's role in research is to engage the process of data collection through established case study evidence sources, with emphasis on having a dialogue with participants and using an approach that's humanistic and egalitarian (Anyan, 2013; Yin, 2014). Therefore, pertinent interview questions were asked during face-to-face interviews and field notes appropriately documented. By establishing a position of mutual respect and equality, interviewers create a comfortable atmosphere that influences trust and rapport with participants (Doody & Noonan, 2013). I unearthed rich and reliable data from participants to support the focus of my study by communicating transparently, listening effectively, and by asking open-ended probing questions in a relaxed setting.

The Belmont Report protocol identifies rules established around three ethical principles and include (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (Manton et al., 2014). Before conducting my study, I completed the National Institute of Health certification to affirm knowledge of the ethical principles and practices essential to the research process and acquisition of the required competence to protect human subjects of research. Building participants' trust and holding their confidence are critical areas of the interviewing process required to establish and gain appropriate consent (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). As a part of maintaining and executing established interview protocols, participants received consent forms, following clearance from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB approval no. 03-26-18-0566538). The objective of the IRB is to protect individuals serving as subjects for research from harm and to give assurance (Beskow, Check, & Ammarell, 2014; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Obtaining signed consent forms was a basis for promoting confidence and trust in the research and affirmed participants' willingness to participate in the interview process. Participants should understand they have the flexibility to withdraw from the study if they so desire (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Establishing rigor in research is essential when executing analyses in a study and is an action that mitigates biases and concerns surrounding the data collection process (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). Hence, my role as a researcher was also to acknowledge my personal biases and devise strategies to mitigate the effects. Researchers' backgrounds contain biases, values, and ideologies surrounding the phenomena under study, which can affect the research process and the interpretation of findings (Cope, 2014). As a

senior manager with 18 years of experience in a large financial institution, I have had first-hand exposure and knowledge of occupational stress in the banking industry. This exposure has shaped my perception that some bank managers lack strategies to reduce occupational stress. Thus, isolating my personal views was important to ensure that the interpretation of the phenomena represented that of the participants. I also mitigated bias through a process of reflexivity and member checking. I reflected by noting my personal views and feelings on the phenomena in a reflexive journal. By using a reflexive journal, researchers can bracket their perceptions and subjectivity surrounding an issue (Polit & Beck, 2012). Additionally, researchers use member checking to engage participants on the accuracy of the data gathered and to validate the interpretation of their responses (Harvey, 2015).

To further mitigate bias, questions were constructed to facilitate semistructured interviews and to prevent coercing participants to predetermined conclusions. Following the interview process, the Microsoft Word software tool was used to transcribe participants interview responses verbatim. The software tool was also used to organize, summarize, analyze, and code the data. To ensure the inclusion of all relevant data and that transcripts accurately represented participants' personal views, I reviewed field notes, interview recordings, and coded interview transcripts. The interview transcripts were passed on to participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the information and provide clarifications where necessary.

## **Participants**

The participants of this qualitative case study consisted of a population sample of five managers from one banking organization in the Caribbean who successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. The eligibility criteria used to select participants included leaders who have worked in the banking industry for 5 years or more and have a minimum of 1 year supervising and leading banking employees. The sample size was chosen based on the anticipated reasonable coverage of the research phenomena and to gather enough data to support credible analysis, reporting, and sampling until redundancy was reached (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). I used a purposeful sampling strategy in selecting participants who met the study criteria. Researchers use purposeful sampling to illuminate a research problem and to identify and choose information-rich cases associated with the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample constituted a mix of young and more experienced talents at various managerial levels such as chief executive officer, senior manager, chief information officer, occupational health and safety officer, and group chief of people and culture. Identifying knowledgeable individuals experienced with the phenomenon led to information-rich informants who could communicate their feelings and belief in a manner described as articulate, expressive, and reflective (see Palinkas et al., 2015).

To gain access to the participants, I contacted the organization's chief executive officer via e-mail and outlined in detail my proposed study. A documented letter of cooperation was received summarizing the organization's willingness to engage in the research. The expected roles and expectations of the study participants were defined and

the potential positive impact on the participating organization articulated. I solicited permission from the organization through its chief executive officer to (a) contact managerial level staff via e-mail and telephone, (b) obtain managerial-level staff consent through the dispatch and execution of informed consent forms, and (c) record participants' interviews using audio devices. Additionally, I conducted member checking to engage participants on the accuracy of the data gathered and to validate the interpretation of their responses (see Harvey, 2015).

In establishing a working relationship with participants, the interviews were conducted in a social context and in a setting free from interruptions which increased relaxation and positive interactions. Qualitative researchers build trust and establish rapport by listening attentively, maintaining eye contact, showing empathy, and allowing the participants to elaborate on their ideas and feelings freely while securing a position of equality and reciprocity in respect (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Adopting an interview style without an indication of a predetermined agenda created a comfortable environment for an efficient process of engagement. To further build trust and enhance the working relationship, I advised participants from the onset on the steps that will be taken to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. In improving interaction and the quality of the overall interview process, questions should be aligned with the participants and fulfill the research objective (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

### **Research Method and Design**

Research constitutes a process of applying scientific methods to gain valuable insights into various phenomenon through participants' observation, interviews, data

collection and analyzation, and the extraction of meanings to understand real-world issues (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). It is important for researchers to understand the research process and method to be adopted based on their epistemological positions. By grasping the underpinnings and basic concepts of the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, researchers can apply the right techniques based on the nature of their study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). Accordingly, I enriched the study by analyzing and embracing assumptions on multiple realities surrounding the research focus. In this sense, as the research instrument, I was required to apply the right strategies to determine the appropriate research design needed to explore human realities subjectively (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). In researching a phenomenon of interest, researchers need to make reasoned choices in aligning the research method with the research design.

### **Research Method**

I selected a qualitative research method to gain a deep understanding of the occupational stress phenomena. In a qualitative study, researchers engage participants to achieve depth in research inquiry and to obtain access to significant insights on the various phenomenon (Merriam, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative research is subjectively based and involves a focus on human realities as opposed to objective realities. Qualitative researchers embrace assumptions on multiple realities ontologically; this is when they seek to understand reality and meaning from an individual perspective (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Qualitative researchers support



individual researcher participation, which can enrich studies and support maximum variation. When exploring a phenomenon, qualitative researchers endeavor to appreciate and understand patterns, images, expressions, as well as similarities and differences as obtained in research participants' lives (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Marais, 2012). These realities are conveyed and analyzed through different means including (a) interview transcripts, (b) media recordings, (c) diaries, and (d) field observations (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013).

Qualitative research methodology is grounded in the postmodern or naturalistic paradigm as opposed to the positivist view in quantitative research (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Therefore, qualitative researchers have the opportunity to (a) catalyze the development of theory, (b) enhance the relationship and communication between researchers and participants, and (c) empower research subjects to have a voice on issues. Additionally, researchers can stimulate social change efforts collaboratively and minimize imposing researcher assumptions that could affect the credibility of the research process (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013). These opportunities facilitate the development of transcribed narratives from interviews and the reporting of research in rich literary style to increase understanding of a phenomenon (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Qualitative studies are descriptive and exploratory and offer textual accounts reflecting the diversity of participants lived experiences (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Merriam, 2014).

By using a qualitative methodology, researchers aim to comprehend lived experiences devoid of statistical analyses. In a quantitative approach, researchers

objectively seek the truth through experimentation and with a goal to study a phenomenon by controlling for variables and context (Applebaum, 2012; Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). A quantitative researcher advances knowledge in research by measuring and reporting results numerically and engaging a sampling technique that uses scores of participants compared to smaller sample sizes in qualitative studies (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Although a qualitative researcher seeks to investigate participants' experiences, potential research subjects need to have expertise in the phenomena and have the capacity and knowledge to answer the research question (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013).

Initially, I considered the three most historically popular methodologies described by Fassinger and Morrow (2013) as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. However, I decided the qualitative method was best suited to the nature of my study. Using a qualitative approach allows researchers to use probing open-ended interview questions to achieve depth in research inquiry and to gain access to sagacious insights on the various phenomenon from rich narratives (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). Researchers engage a quantitative methodology to understand the experiences of a large population and to test hypotheses and predict the outcome of a phenomenon (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Star, 2014). Quantitative research is an appropriate method when researchers desire to test the relationship between variables to answer *where, how much, how many, who, and what* questions and asseverate the cause and effect relationships among various constructs (Fassinger & Marrow, 2013; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Mixed method research includes both qualitative and

quantitative elements, and its use allows researchers to preserve the strength and paradigmatic underpinnings of both approaches in a research endeavor (Fassinger & Marrow, 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2013).

Although both quantitative and mixed methods research methods could be considered to investigate the effects of leadership strategies in reducing occupational stress, my research approach was exploratory. Consequently, a qualitative approach was most suitable to study the phenomenon. I aimed to seek maximum variation in the field of study without controlling for variables and accounting for causal effects between constructs, which is described by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013) as typical in qualitative research. The qualitative approach facilitated exploration of the feelings, experiences, and views of bank managers from one banking organization in the Caribbean who successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. I embraced the ontological assumptions associated with the multiple realities surrounding the phenomenon. To explore strategies that some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress, I did not require objective measurement of data or the testing of hypotheses which form a part of a quantitative study or the quantitative portion of a mixed method study. For this reason, the qualitative research method was considered appropriate to explore the phenomenon.

### **Research Design**

Researchers have access to various research designs to choose from when performing qualitative research. These designs include (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenology, (c) grounded theory, (d) narrative, and (e) case study (Bristowe, Selman,

& Murtagh, 2015; Lewis, 2015; Roberts, 2013). The research design is the overall strategy that links critical components of a study such as data collection and analysis, to the research question (Yin, 2014). The theoretical propositions grounding a study reinforces the research design and aids the analytic generalization of findings to other situations (Yin, 2014).

I used a single case study design to facilitate a qualitative inquiry into leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress. As postulated by Yin (2014), a case study can be used by researchers to investigate and gain an in-depth understanding of complex and contemporary problems within a real-world context, through empirical inquiries. Case study researchers use case study design to facilitate the execution of multiple level analyses in delineating issues surrounding a phenomenon and understand the complexities surrounding the issues (Bristowe et al., 2015; Yin, 2014). A single case study design is an appropriate choice because of the contemporaneous nature of occupational stress and the need for an incisive investigation to gain an in-depth understanding of leadership strategies to reduce the phenomena. Researchers recognize a single case study design as a more practical and suitable approach in the strategic management domain for testing theories (Gaya & Smith, 2016). Gaya and Smith (2016) in their study reasserted this position; the researchers propounded that qualitative single case study design is not only complementary to research in the strategic management sphere, but also offers rich-data for analysis and the understanding of complex issues in a real-world context.

In a case study, *how* and *why* questions are used to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities surrounding a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Qualitative case studies are typically exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory and researchers use archival records, direct observation, interviews, artifacts, and documentation as a part of their data collection and analysis strategy (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers can address a broad range of behavioral and historical issues by using and analyzing multiple sources of data in a case study. These sources include (a) individuals, (b) small groups, (c) programs, (d) organizations, and (e) policies (Reddy & Agrawal, 2012; Roberts, 2013; Yin, 2014). Utilizing multiple sources is advantageous, as researchers can increase the richness of data as well as discover possible convergences in findings (Boblin et al., 2013). Hence, by using a case study research design, researchers embrace the capacity to thoroughly excogitate participants' point of views and identify how multiple perspectives contribute to the phenomenon under study (Sangster-Gormley, 2013).

I used an exploratory case study design in this research. By using an exploratory research design, researchers obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study and engender new ideas (Yin, 2014). I considered descriptive and explanatory case designs; however, an exploratory approach was more appropriate to deepen understanding of complexities surrounding the issue under focus. In a descriptive case study design, researchers seek to contextually describe a phenomenon in its real-life context while the exploratory approach, researchers aim to explain *how* or *why* the sequence of events occurred and the related causal links (Yin, 2014). My goal was not to

describe or account for a phenomenon, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of a complex issue and to engender new ideas surrounding the research focus. Hence, an exploratory qualitative case study design was the most appropriate choice.

I contemplated three research designs for my qualitative study on leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, and (c) case study. However, phenomenology and ethnography were not the appropriate designs to answer the research question aligned to the focus of my research. Phenomenology involves researchers seeking to understand the unique lived experience of individuals (Arghode, 2012; Englander, 2012; Petty et al., 2012). I did not choose a phenomenological design because phenomenologists seek to identify and explore the meaning of shared experiences within a group. In ethnography, business researchers study shared patterns of behavior within a cultural setting with an aim to understand social norms (Petty et al., 2012; Prior & Miller, 2012; Venzon Cruz & Higgingbottom, 2013). An ethnographical design was considered not appropriate because ethnographers focus on describing the everyday life and practices of cultural groups, and extended time for observation is required within the field by living alongside those within the culture to develop understanding (Petty et al., 2012). I could have considered grounded theory and narrative as two other plausible qualitative research designs. However, in grounded theory, researchers focus on theory development through data gathering and analysis (Gibson & Hartman, 2014). By using the grounded theory design, researchers seek to develop theories that are efficacious, practical, and closely related to the field of study, which was not the aim of my research (Gibson & Hartman, 2014). In a narrative design,

researchers inculcate reason on multiple situations in which individuals are intimately involved. Researchers accomplish this approach by investigating stories and experiences to develop a narrative and an understanding of a phenomenon (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013; Holley & Colyar, 2012; Kajamaa, 2012).

Notwithstanding that some of the research designs expounded upon in previous paragraphs were not selected, the decision has by no means reduced the authenticity and validity associated with the different approaches in various studies. The case study design was more beneficial and appropriate, to explore a phenomenon using small sample size and to facilitate the execution of multiple level analyses to gain understanding on complex issues (Lalor et al., 2013; Yin, 2014). A case study design is an appropriate choice because of the need to gain an in-depth understanding of complex problems and the dynamics present within unique settings (Yin, 2014). By utilizing a qualitative method and case study design in this research, I thoroughly explored strategies some bank managers used to reduce occupational stress and contributed meaningfully to past and current discussions on the phenomena.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of my study was one banking organization located in the Caribbean. My sample comprised a mix of five bank managers serving in the capacity of (a) chief executive officer, (c) senior manager, (d) occupational health and safety officer, (e) chief information officer, and (d) group chief of people and culture. Participants met the eligibility criteria to have worked in the banking and financial services sector for five years or more, with a minimum of one-year supervising and leading banking employees.

As a part of the overall sampling strategy, involved in this qualitative case study were individuals who are knowledgeable about and familiar with the phenomenon of interest.

Sampling involves the selection of a sufficiently large representative part of an entire population, which is a suitable representation of the overall characteristics or attributes of the sample universe (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013; McCabe, Stern, & Dacko, 2013; Robinson, 2014). As a strategy to illuminate the research problem and identify and select information-rich cases associated with the phenomenon under study, a purposeful sampling strategy was considered appropriate for this qualitative study. In a purposeful sampling strategy, researchers can explore multiple perspectives by selecting participants with the capacity, knowledge, and experience to address the aims and objectives of the research (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; McCabe et al., 2013; Palinkas et al., 2013). Hence, the logic behind purposeful sampling surrounds the selection of information-rich cases from which researchers' can yield insight and depth of understanding, on issues centrally linked to the purpose of a research inquiry (Patton, 2015). In selecting a sample of participants, as a part of their research strategy researchers may choose from different types of purposeful sampling designs such as extreme or deviant, maximum variation, and homogeneous cases (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers engage homogeneous sampling to (a) profoundly describe a distinct subgroup, (b) reduce variation, (c) simplify the analysis, and (e) facilitate group interviews. Consequently, as the research progress and new insights emerge, embedded in the homogeneity sampling strategy is researchers' ability to compare and contrast, narrow the scope of variation, and focus on identifying similarities aligned to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al.,



2015). For this reason, the purposeful homogeneous sampling design proved efficacious in researching a mix of bank managers who formed a part of the sample universe.

I chose a sample size of five bank managers to explore their views and experiences. Unlike quantitative studies in which researchers use large sample sizes for statistical purposes, researchers use smaller sample sizes in qualitative research. By using smaller sample sizes, researchers aim to obtain information that can be used to understand the complexities, variation, depth, and context relating to the phenomenon of interest (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). The purpose of selecting a sample of five participants, was to ensure sufficient data could be collected to gather new knowledge on their experiences or to understand the phenomenon of interest surrounding this research (Gentles et al., 2015). Hence, by selecting five participants, I had the opportunity to undertake reasonable coverage of the research on leadership strategies to reduce the occupational stress phenomena. By using an appropriate sample, researchers can gather enough information to support credible analysis and reporting until data saturation or redundancy is reached (Marshall et al., 2013). Data saturation is a strategy used to obtain accurate and valid data and to determine when sufficient sample size is reached (Gentles et al., 2015). Researchers conduct individual interviews until; no new data is available, no new themes or new coding is feasible, and enough information is available to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gentles et al., 2015; Morse, J. M. (2015). In conducting the interviews, interviewees will be well-informed and will provide valuable insights into the phenomena surrounding this study (Yin, 2014). A key strategy to be engaged is to ensure face-to-face interviews are conducted in a social context and in

a setting free from interruptions, which increases participants' mode of relaxation and positive interactions.

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical integrity has emerged as a vital area of focus for research scholars and is a primary requirement for conducting research (Haahr, Norlyk, & Hall, 2013). Various research protocols such as institutional ethics approval have been introduced to ameliorate the ethical treatment of research subjects, while concomitantly enhancing the overall level of ethical integrity observed in management research (Greenwood, 2016). Of necessity, therefore, is the need for researchers to view the protection of the rights and welfare of research participants as their primary responsibility and yield to established ethical principles and standards (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). To protect participants, observing research ethics protocols is imperative and is an area centrally focused on four pivotal dimensions: (a) informed consent, (b) privacy and confidentiality, (c) protecting vulnerable subjects, and (d) avoiding openness to harm (Barker, 2013). Because of the increasing pace of research on human subjects, the risks associated with inadequacies regarding effective oversight have become more pronounced; hence, the compliance requirements are more rigorous. Consequently, various sets of regulations designed to protect human subjects have been introduced, with institutional review boards (IRB) having the primary responsibility to ensure the approval criteria as defined in the relevant regulations are adhered to (Cseko & Tremaine, 2013). Rules are established around three principles and include (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice. Therefore, as the researcher, I embraced established research protocols by maintaining the highest

ethical standards as required by Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), throughout my research. Following approval by IRB, I initiated the data collection process.

Moreover, consent forms outlining the nature and purpose of the study, procedures governing the interview process, and privacy and confidentiality protocols, were provided to research participants. By utilizing signed consent forms, I conveyed that participation in the research process is voluntary and that participants can withdraw if they so desire. The distribution of consent forms serves as a means of building participants' confidence and trust in the research process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Distributing consent forms proved useful in my effort to encourage meaningful participation. Before obtaining consent, of essentiality is the need to ascertain research participants are clear on the purpose of the study and the benefits and risks associated with their participation (Rodrigues, Antony, Krishnamurthy, Shet, & De Costa, 2013). This step is necessary to uphold maintaining high ethical standards and adhering to principles governing informed consent (autonomy, nonmaleficence, voluntariness, and justice) (Rodrigues et al., 2013). To minimize risks to human subjects I (a) used sound research design, (b) ensured equitableness in the selection process, and (c) protected the safety of participants by providing sound data monitoring. I also ensured confidentiality by putting in place measures to protect data and the privacy of subjects and executed measures to safeguard subjects who were vulnerable.

In qualitative research, the issuance of consent forms serves as reassurance to participants that adequate safeguards are in place to protect information collected during

the study and that sensitive data will be treated as classified (Pletcher, Lo, & Grady, 2015). Consequently, to protect participants' identity and the privacy of the banking organization, unique codes and identifiers were assigned. I did not disclose the identity of the participating organization and research subjects. Data extracted while conducting research is an information-rich source of long-term value, available as a resource to existing and future researchers engaged in a field of study (Cliggett, 2013). Hence, I will ensure the protection of the rights of participants and information collected by securely storing research data collected for five years, to prevent unauthorized disclosure or access. Thus, I stored information safely in password-protected computer files. Following the 5-year period, I will shred all data collected and information stored on the computer system purged. Given the high importance of safeguarding sensitive information in research to protect participants and organizations, I securely stored data in a locked container at my official place of residence.

### **Data Collection**

A pivotal role and focus for qualitative researchers relate to authentically capturing the views, feelings, and experiences of research subjects. Hence, the importance of the data collection and sampling processes in determining the level of quality in research and the generalizability of findings, cannot be overemphasized (Gibbs et al., 2007). Therefore, as the research instrument for this study, my role is also to ensure the processes involved in the research are conducted within the ambits of the research goal and have a close alignment to the outlined theoretical perspectives. Additionally,

while capturing and reporting on research subjects' positions and views, divulging and explaining the limitations of the study is a necessity (Gibbs et al., 2007).

### **Instrument**

I was the primary data collection instrument in this single case study. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data gathering and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Gathering rich-information was a pivotal step in the data collection process and required implementing a solid plan to achieve the goals of the research. The procedure entailed establishing data collection procedures that were suitable to the tradition, and the utilization of dependable instrumentation to establish validity in research (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). As a part of the plan, I conducted semistructured interviews with research participants. By using semistructured interviews, researchers can solicit responses and gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Clandinin, 2013). Identifying participants with knowledge about the research focus is necessary. This process of identification facilitated access to information-rich informants who communicate their views articulately and reflectively (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In collecting case study evidence, researchers have access to multiple sources from which data can be obtained to capture the distinctive perspectives of human subjects (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) highlighted the interview as an essential source. The sources I used as a part of my study plan implementation were interviews and company documents. Qualitative researchers engage empirical inquiries on issues surrounding human subjects to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex and contemporary problems within a

real-world context (Yin, 2014). In exploring matters related to research subjects, a primary objective was to collect data on actual human events and behavior, to gain understanding. Yin (2014) in his scholarly work propounded on six most commonly used sources of evidence to obtain meaningful information. These sources of information include (a) interviews, (b) documentation, (c) participant-observation, (d) direct observations, (e) archival records, and (f) physical artifacts (Yin, 2014).

Participant engaged in interviews can provide researchers with valuable insights into a phenomenon surrounding human affairs or actions (Yin, 2014). Researchers use qualitative interviews to gain in-depth knowledge of research participants' viewpoints and experiences on a topic of interest (Turner, 2010). Researchers can yield key benefits from utilizing qualitative interview method. These benefits include the opportunity to self-reflect and gain knowledge on a topic of interest (Wolgemuth et al., 2015).

Researchers can also use shared experiences to make connections with a broader community and to advocate for a cause (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). Interviews are among the most prominent strategies employed for qualitative data collection. Categories of interviews include (a) unstructured, (b) semistructured, and (c) structured. Centered around predetermined open-ended questions are semistructured interviews, which promote in-depth dialogue between the researcher and interviewees (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Clark et al. (2014) used semistructured interviews to explore strategies that individuals use to cope with work stressors and family stressors. Likewise, Ben Aissa (2015) discovered semistructured interviews were a good approach to learn how organizational leaders can address employees' psychosocial risk prevention and well-

being development. Schonfeld and Mazzola (2015) also identified semistructured interviewing as a practical approach for researchers to focus on addressing the theoretically-driven facets of literature in research, relating to the research problem. Therefore, I conducted my study using face-to-face semistructured interview protocol to explore strategies bank managers use to reduce occupational stress. Using face-to-face semistructured interview facilitated my deepened understanding of the research phenomena through increased insights. This choice of interviewing technique proved advantageous in my ability to establish rapport with participants while capturing their lived experiences.

The semistructured interview consisted of nine opened-ended interview questions aligned to the research question and facilitated the identification of themes during the data collection process. Of essentiality was the need to enhance the reliability and validity of the instruments for data collection. Yin (2014) elaborated on four principles of data collection considered critical in addressing problems associated with the validity and reliability of evidence. These four principles included (a) using multiple sources of evidence (triangulation), (b) creating a case study database, (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, and (d) exercising care when utilizing data from electronic sources. Achieving validity and reliability were essential in ensuring credibility in research. Validity refers to integrity in the application of research methods and the precision with which research findings represents an accurate reflection of data. Reliability relates to the level of consistency achieved within the applied analytical procedures (Long & Johnson, 2000). Establishing quality tests is therefore imperative in qualitative studies (Yin, 2014). Thus,

to enhance the reliability and validity of the instruments used, various strategies were engaged. I created a case study database using Microsoft Word document computer files to organize and record data collected. Nvivo 12 computer software was also used to arrange data and to facilitate the generation of themes and patterns derived from interview transcripts. Researchers should engage in organizing research data through the application of themes, patterns, and concepts to facilitate coding during descriptive data analysis (Bernard, 2013; Merriam, 2014). Furthermore, I used the member checking strategy by emailing interview transcripts to participants to engage research subjects on the accuracy of the data gathered and to validate the interpretation of their responses. Where interview discussions contained ambiguities, follow-up questions were asked to gain clarity and further insight. Process checks were also engaged at specific intervals following interviews to analyze adherence to interview standards and adjust for improvements if necessary. Yin (2014) encouraged process checks and highlighted the importance of the strategy in improving interview questions and methods. I exercised due care when utilizing data from electronic sources. I cross-checked the sources used, and information derived, to avoid issues of incompleteness with information presented and potential interpretive biases.

### **Data Collection Technique**

In research, a keen focus of qualitative interviewers is to obtain rich information from participants with an aim to comprehend human behavior and develop meaning (Rossetto, 2014). Hence, qualitative interviewers must be cognizant of their responsibility in building rapport through interaction with participants and creating an atmosphere in



which sensitivity to the integrity of the process and the well-being of interviewees, are promoted (Haahr et al., 2013; Rossetto, 2014). In gathering interview data, inferring the perceptions and beliefs of human research subjects can be challenging (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, as the researcher, I should seek to understand how participants view occupational stress and the impact their perspectives may have on their actions. Accordingly, I used face-to-face semistructured interviews and company documents as a part of the data collection techniques for this qualitative single case study. By utilizing various data collection sources, researchers enhance the validity of research through triangulation (Yin, 2014). Interviews were used to help comprehend strategies leaders use to reduce occupational stress.

The process to conduct the study began upon receiving Walden University IRB approval and signed consent responses from participants. To gain access to the research organization and participants via face-to-face interviews, I contacted the institution's chief executive officer via email and outlined in detail my proposed study. Once granted permission to conduct the study, I interfaced with each research participant via email describing the nature of the study, their expected roles, and the potential positive impact of the research on their organization. I scheduled and conducted interviews on-site at the research organization, after receiving their responses and consent. Each interview was performed at a date and time convenient for the participants and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Qualitative interview questions were opened-ended. Qualitative researchers use opened-ended questions to achieve depth in research inquiry and to gain access to enlightening insights from participants on a phenomenon of interest (Cleary, Horsfall, &

Hayter, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yilmaz, 2013). I obtained field notes to assist in thoroughly capturing the views and feelings of participants, and interviews recorded on electronic devices. Semistructured interviews comprised nine opened-ended questions aligned with the research focus on leadership strategies to reduce occupational stress, located in the Appendix section of this study. Interviews should be targeted and insightful and is a process that facilitates the identification of themes during the data collection process (Merriam, 2014; Yin, 2014). Using a semistructured interview was advantageous in that I solicited meaningful responses from research participants. By using semistructured interviews, qualitative researchers can achieve depth in understanding a phenomenon under study (Clandinin, 2013).

As a part of the data collection fulfillment process, I did not coerce participants. I communicated their participation in the research process is strictly voluntary and they can withdraw from the study if they so desire, at any time. Furthermore, to protect the interest, integrity, and privacy concerns of participants, it was made clear information will be held strictly confidential. During interviews, I established a position of mutual respect and equality, by creating an atmosphere that influenced trust and rapport with participants. Before I commenced the interviews, I removed all pertinent information relating to the interviewees such as name, email address, and telephone number. Unique code identifiers were applied individually to protect participants' confidentiality and eliminate potential harm to research subjects resulting from the study. I stored away securely, any document containing interviewees' pertinent information. Additionally, apart from conducting semistructured interviews, I reviewed the participating

organization's company documents to obtain facts on leadership strategies used to reduce occupational stress and enhance employees' well-being. After completing the data collection process, verbatim interview transcripts were emailed to individual participants to facilitate verifying the accuracy of information transcribed during the interaction.

### **Data Organization Technique**

I used a qualitative interview protocol to gain knowledge of the leadership strategies managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress, at one banking organization. Furthermore, an expanded focus was accorded to ethical considerations particularly as it related to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of information shared by participants during interviews. Maintaining confidentiality entails securely storing research data manually or electronically and achieving anonymization by destroying sensitive interview information to prevent potential disclosures that could harm research subjects (Mealer & Jones, 2014). Hence, I implemented unique code identifiers for each participant to maintain their privacy and eliminate any potential harm that may result from the study. Code identifiers ranged from P1-P5 and were representative of the sample of five participants chosen for this study. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to improve the efficiency of the interview process and enhance data analysis. Microsoft Word document and Nvivo 12 computer software were used to organize data and to facilitate the generation of themes and patterns derived from interview transcripts. Data collected from interviews and company documentation, were stored securely on my password protected Computer device as well as placed in a locked container at my official place of residence.

To enhance quality in the research process, establishing a plan and structure to organize data is an essential strategy when addressing significant amounts of information collected from interviews, field notes, documentation, and archival records (Merriam, 2014). Hence, of essentiality is the need for case study databases to be well organized to facilitate easy retrieval of, and access to, relevant data (Yin, 2014). To achieve this level of efficiency in data organization, interview transcripts, field notes, consent forms, and audio recordings will be filed and securely locked away for five years. After the five years' storage period has elapsed, all pertinent data will be destroyed by erasing electronic records and shredding stored documents.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involves systematically integrating, evaluating, and summarizing information through a process of coding, generating themes and patterns, and organizing the data to make it meaningful (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To analyze strategies bank managers use to reduce occupational stress in this case study, I used methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is a process of using multiple approaches in research to obtain richer data and assist in confirming the results and findings of a study (Wilson, 2014). Triangulation is a strategy that enhances case study research validity and results from the convergence of information from multiple sources on the same phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Wilson, 2014; Yin, 2014). By using methodological triangulation, I purposively involved multiple bank managers in the data gathering and analysis process. Hence, I identified similarities and differences derived from semistructured interviews and company documentation

surrounding strategies used to reduce the occupational stress phenomena among employees.

Data collected in this research from semistructured interviews and company documents, formed the basis for final analysis and presentation of the study. I addressed data derived from the planned collection methods utilizing established qualitative research protocols. In qualitative research, information should be appropriately coded, categorized, and interpreted to give meaning to the phenomena under study (Yu, Abdullah, & Saat, 2014). By embracing the qualitative research protocols, researchers can unearth rich descriptive data and identify emerging themes relating to a phenomenon of interest (Yu et al., 2014). Data analysis was executed in two phases: (a) primary analysis phase, and (b) secondary analysis phase. In the primary analysis phase, I carried out an analysis during data collection; raw data gathered from the multiple collection methods were processed and prepared for analysis. I transcribed audio-recorded interviews and expanded field notes collected into full reports. During this phase, I also conducted a mental evaluation on how to categorize the data into data analysis matrices.

In the secondary analysis phase of data analysis, I separated, disassembled, and reassembled the data. Qualitative data analysis can be a rigorous process for researchers. Hence, to make the process more manipulable, data analysis was accomplished in two steps in the secondary analysis phase as recommended by Yu et al. (2014): (a) manual data analysis, and (b) computer-assisted data analysis (CAQDAS). In the manual data analysis step, I sought to understand and analyze the data by looking at concepts and ideas and disassembled and reassembled the data into matrices. During the CAQDAS

step, data analysis matrices categorized during the primary phase was transmitted to Nvivo 12 computer software to; organize data, facilitate the generation of themes, and derive patterns from interview transcripts. Utilizing computer-based tools in data analysis makes analyzing large sized qualitative data simpler and increases researchers' efficiency in coding and categorizing information (Yin, 2014; Yu et al., 2014).

When engaging case studies, analytic strategies are required to derive promising patterns, insights, or concepts in research (Yin, 2014). In embracing a strategic approach, I focused on central themes derived from data analysis by relying on established theoretical propositions advanced in Demerouti et al. (2001) JD-R model and Burns (1978) theory of transformational leadership conceptual frameworks, explicated in this study. The theoretical propositions are the base of the objective and design of a qualitative case study which has an alignment with the research questions and reviews of the literature (Yin, 2014). Consequently, I focused on the theoretical propositions in shaping my data collection plan to ensure central themes correlated with the literature and conceptual frameworks outlined in this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Evaluating quality in research is essential in establishing soundness in the appropriateness of methods employed and integrity in conclusions drawn (Noble & Smith, 2015). For research results to be used in practice and incorporated in solving business problems, ensuring the credibility of findings is imperative. Researchers have therefore recognized the significance of achieving quality in qualitative research, which is dependent on the degree to which the result of a study can withstand the assessment of

rigor associated with reliability and validity (Yin, 2014). Hence, I addressed the reliability and validity requirements in this research by ensuring the analogous criteria for qualitative studies (*dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability*) are met and established using appropriate qualitative methods. Dependability refers to achieving data stability or data strength under varied conditions over time (Elo et al., 2014). Credibility denotes conducting a study in a manner described as believable; therefore, the value of findings is enhanced (Houghton et al., 2013). Transferability signifies the applicability of findings to other contexts, settings, or groups (Burchett, Mayhew, Lavis, & Dobrow, 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative studies, conformability is the extent to which study findings are devoid of researcher bias but accurately reflect the views, ideas, and responses of participants (Cope, 2014; Petty et al., 2013).

### **Reliability**

Member checking, transcript review, and data triangulation are critical qualitative protocols that promote reliability and validity in research (Hernandez, Nguyen, Casanova, Suarez-Orozco, & Saetermoe, 2013). Reliability is the demonstration of consistency with the analytical procedures employed across studies which influence comparable findings or produces the same results (Noble & Smith, 2015; Yin, 2014). In general, reliability is aligned to the consistency, repeatability, and dependability of findings revealed in a study and promotes the trustworthiness of data presented (Elo et al., 2014; Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015). In qualitative studies, dependability is a proposed evaluation criterion aimed at enhancing reliability in research. Dependability refers to achieving data stability or data strength under varied

conditions over time (Elo et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2013). To attain dependability, I ensured open-ended qualitative interview questions were aligned to the purpose of the study and arranged sequentially to elicit information and enhance consistency in the process. When researchers use open-ended interview questions, they establish ease in communication and a better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Donatelli & Lee, 2013; Mealer & Jones, 2014; Rossetto, 2014). I outlined the principles and criteria employed to select research subjects along with detailed characteristics to facilitate assessing results to other contexts. Additionally, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and provided transcripts to participants for validation. To further enhance reliability in the interview process, I employed member checking strategy by engaging research subjects on the accuracy of the data gathered. Through member checking, researchers can validate the interpretation of participants' responses (Harvey, 2015; Patton, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Qualitative researchers should be apt in evaluating the reliability of study findings by demonstrating good judgment about the soundness of research particularly as it pertains to the appropriateness and application of methods used (Noble & Smith, 2015).

### **Validity**

Validity refers to the integrity and application of specific procedures and methods employed in research and the extent to which findings accurately reflect the data (Mangioni & McKerchar, 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015; Yin, 2014). Validation is representative of research rigor and is a foundational strategy used by researchers in the social sciences to enhance research quality. Researchers strengthen validity when data collected can be defended, is dependable, and contestable (Venkatesh et al., 2013). In



qualitative studies, the validity of findings is established through various approaches to rigor and includes (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013).

Credibility refers to researching in a manner described as believable; hence, the value of findings is enhanced (Houghton et al., 2013). Furthermore, validity increases when a researcher employs credible research protocols, techniques, methods, and strategies. To establish credibility, I engaged a process of reflexivity, transcript review, and member checking. Qualitative researchers employ reflexivity, transcript review, and member checking techniques in research. These techniques are designed to; mitigate potential bias, engage participants on the accuracy of data gathered, and discuss emerging findings periodically with individuals experienced with the research focus (Harvey, 2015; Long & Johnson, 2000; Polit & Beck, 2012). Additionally, I initiated prolonged engagement in the field to establish trust and rapport with participants. Qualitative researchers who build trust and rapport with multiple participants, gain access to various sources of data to obtain an enriched account and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Black, Palombaro, & Dole, 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Wilson, 2014). As a strategy to improve credibility in data interpretation, I organized and efficiently managed multiple sources of data by using computer-based tools. Utilizing computer-based tools in data analysis makes analyzing large sized qualitative data simpler and increases researchers' efficiency in coding and categorizing information (Yin, 2014; Yu et al., 2014). Nvivo 12 computer software was used to organize data, generate themes, and derive patterns from interview transcripts to enhance the credibility of findings.

Furthermore, I established credibility by using triangulation as a strategy, to augment the case study research validity. Researchers achieve triangulation through the convergence of information from multiple sources on the same phenomenon (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Wilson, 2014; Yin, 2014). Methodological triangulation is a process of using multiple approaches in research to obtain richer data and assist in confirming the results of a study (Wilson, 2014).

In qualitative research, transferability denotes the applicability of findings to other contexts, settings, or groups (Burchett et al., 2013; Noble & Smith, 2015). Hence, I provided a thick description of the phenomenon, research and data collection methods used, and a clear account of the population and boundaries of the study. Providing profound details on the research phenomenon, population, and boundaries of the study, and data collection methods enhance the transferability and trustworthiness of the study (Elo et al., 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I ensured clarity and meticulousness in the research process from the onset, through sound record keeping. Having clear decision trails and consistency and transparency in the data collection and interpretation process enhances validity in qualitative research (Elo et al., 2014; Long & Johnson, 2000; Noble & Smith, 2015). I followed established interview protocols and analysis techniques by engaging participants with open-ended interview questions. By using open-ended interview questions, qualitative researchers achieve depth in research inquiry and gain access to sapient insights in a relaxed and interactive setting (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014; Rossetto, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013; Yilmaz, 2013).

To establish conformability, I ascertained data stability through respondent validation by probing during interviews and by utilizing member checking. Engaging respondents through member checking involves ensuring research findings reflect the ideas and experiences of participants and not the researcher (Harvey, 2015; Long & Johnson, 2000; Patton, 2015). Member checking involves engaging participants on the accuracy of data gathered, to validate the interpretation of their responses and ensure the information are credible (Harvey, 2015; Houghton et al., 2013). In qualitative studies, conformability is the extent to which research findings are devoid of researcher bias but accurately reflect the views, ideas, and responses of participants (Cope, 2014; Petty et al., 2013). Additionally, to enhance study findings conformability, I engaged the process of reflexivity, data triangulation, and transcript review. Mitigating bias will be addressed through a process of reflexivity. Reflexivity involves researchers noting their personal views and feelings on a phenomenon of interest in a reflexive journal, to bracket perceptions and subjectivity surrounding the issue (Black et al., 2013; Cope, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012).

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. Engaging a case study approach in the mentioned field is a consequence of the increased complexities detected in the job environment, which has prompted scholars to observe how leadership and work stress influence employees' behavior (Yao et al., 2014). Consequently, in section 2 of this study, I enhanced and expanded the depth of the research by describing

the (a) role of the researcher, (b) participants of the study, (c) research method and design, and (d) population and sampling. I also expounded on (e) ethical research, (f) data collection and organization techniques, (g) data analysis, and (h) the reliability and validity of the study.

Additionally, section 3 consisted of a comprehensive expatiation on how the study findings can be applied by leaders in professional practice to solve business problems and enhance the potentialities surrounding positive social change. The section also included the presentation of findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and future research, reflections, and a concluding statement. My goal was to achieve the execution of multiple level analyses on the phenomenon and provide business leaders with insights on strategies to reduce occupational stress.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. The data came from manager interviews and company documents at one bank in the Caribbean. The findings revealed strategies that bank managers used to reduce employees' occupational stress.

#### **Presentation of Findings**

The overarching research question for this qualitative single case study was: What strategies do bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress? To facilitate data collection and analysis, I used semistructured interviews with opened-ended interview questions aligned with the research question to get rich and reliable data and capture the perspectives of five participants. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to illuminate the research problem and to identify and select information-rich cases associated with the phenomenon under study (see Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample size was chosen based on the anticipated coverage of the research phenomena and to gather enough data to support credible analysis, reporting, and sampling until redundancy was reached (see Marshall et al., 2013). Company documents augmented the data collection process. To enhance the quality of discourse with research subjects, I observed the content of my interview protocol (see Appendix A).

Researchers should engage in organizing research data through the application of themes, patterns, and concepts to facilitate coding during descriptive data analysis (Bernard, 2013; Merriam, 2014). By embracing the qualitative research protocols,

researchers can unearth rich descriptive data and identify themes emerging and relating to a phenomenon of interest (Yu et al., 2014). I used qualitative analysis techniques in analyzing participants' responses. The information was coded, categorized, and interpreted to give meaning to the phenomena under study. To accomplish this process of identification, I used Nvivo 12 computer software to organize data and to facilitate the generation of themes and patterns derived from interview transcripts. From the coding exercise, 26 preliminary themes emerged. Figure 1 displays a matrix of the 26 preliminary central themes.

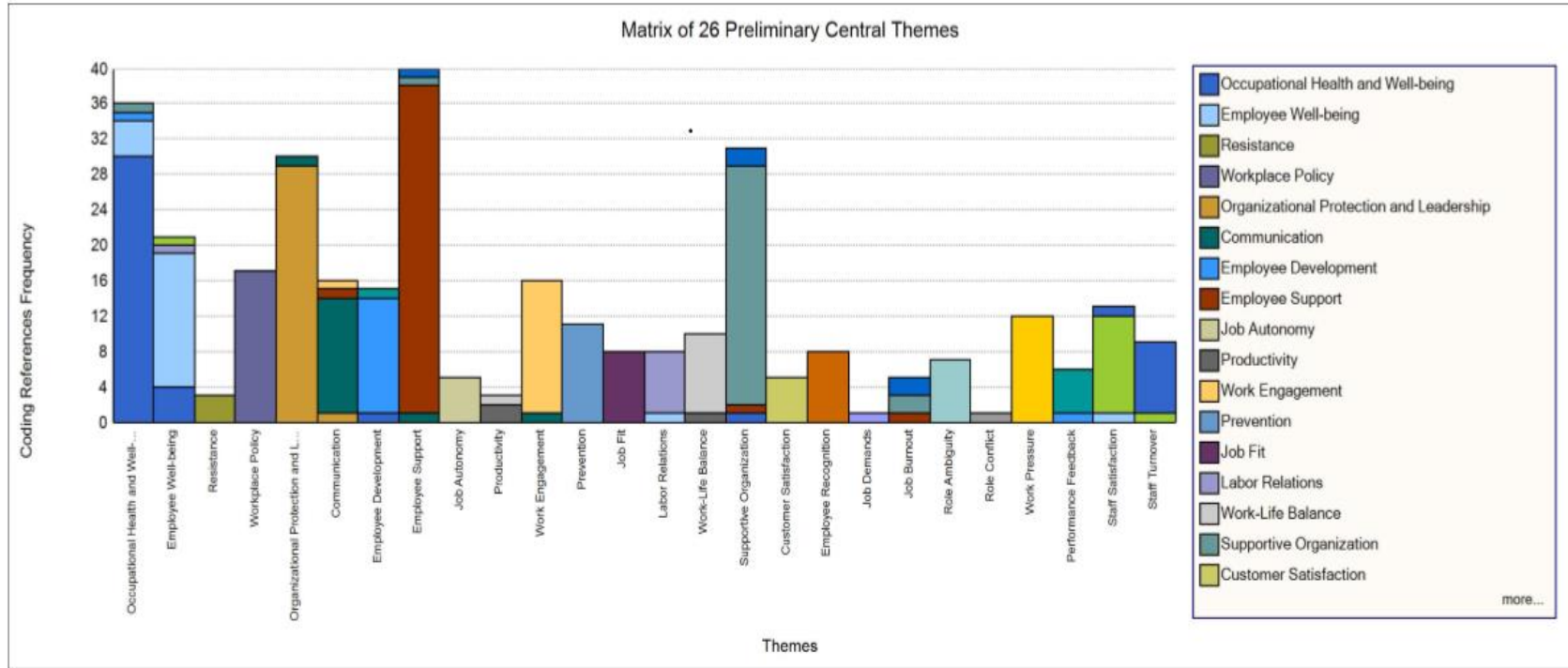


Figure 1. Matrix of preliminary central themes.

The figure shows areas of interest linked to organizational job resources and the central research question for this study: What strategies do bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress? Four main themes emerged from the 26 preliminary central themes (a) organizational protection and leadership, (b) supportive organization, (c) occupational health and well-being, and (d) prevention. These four emergent themes accentuated the direct effect of adequate job resources in attenuating the negative effects of job demands and reducing occupational stress. I focused on the main themes derived from data analysis by relying on key theoretical propositions advanced in Demerouti et al.'s (2001) JD-R model and Burns's (1978) theory of transformational leadership conceptual frameworks. Additionally, unique code identifiers (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5) were used to protect the privacy and identity of participants.

### Theme 1: Organizational Protection and Leadership

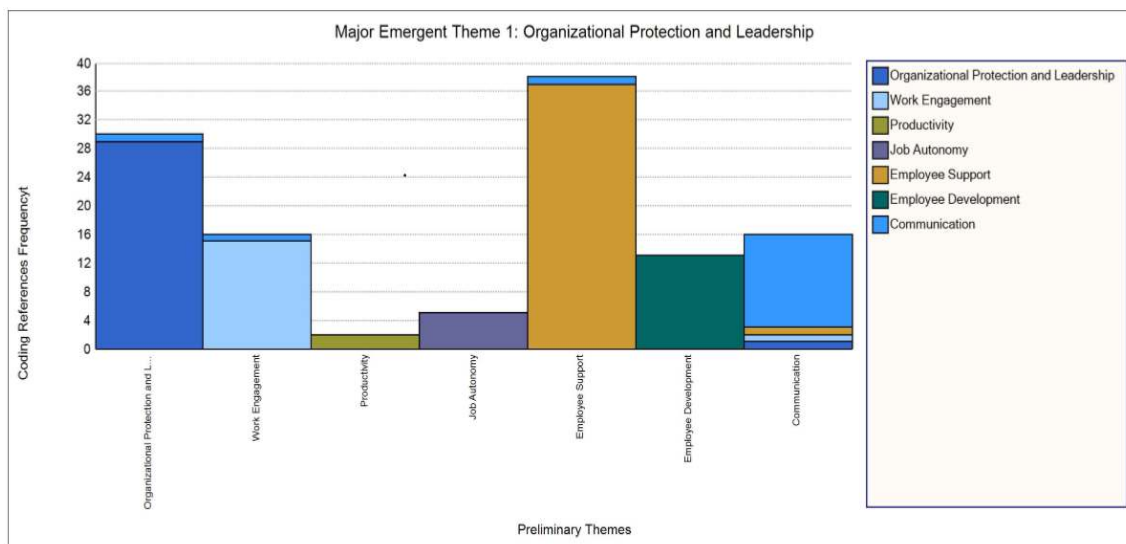


Figure 2. Major emergent theme 1: Organizational protection and leadership.



Organizational protection and leadership are critical to address occupational stress because they can be used to address various risk factors and stressors that can change the work environment (Quick & Henderson, 2016). In addition, defense against the harmful effects of occupational stress starts at the organizational level (Quick & Henderson, 2016). The International Labour Standards highlights organizational protection, and its core convention is designed to protect workers physical and mental health, and well-being (ILO, 2016). Through the emergence of the organizational protection and leadership theme, I was able to explore transformational leader behavior and employee work engagement within the context of occupational stress reduction. Leadership and stress are inextricably linked, and researchers have debated leader behavior as a primary factor in determining employees' level of stress (Harms et al., 2017). Work engagement is also an important factor in reducing stress, as it serves as a mediator in the relationship between job demands and health problems (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). High job demands influence worker's burnout and lead to adverse outcomes viewed as the stress process (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013); however, job resources (social support, employee learning and development, ongoing communication, supervisory support, and autonomy) influence work engagement, which leads to positive outcomes and is referred to as the motivational process. The stress process relates to the extra mental and physical effort that must be exerted by employees to meet job demands and job performance targets.

The organizational protection and leadership theme emerged from detailed responses provided by participants and a review of company documents to triangulate the data. Five banking industry leaders contributed valuable data highlighting leadership and

work engagement supported through various job resources as being essential for the reduction of occupational stress. In the transcription excerpts, the participants defined occupational stress, how occupational stress fit into their organization's overall strategy, and discussed how leadership and employee work engagement could help to reduce the deleterious effects of stress.

*Work engagement* refers to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by high energy, dedication, and engrossment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Research evidence has corroborated disengaged employees' exposure to a higher risk of developing stress (Fiabane et al., 2013). Leaders should be more adept at reducing occupational stress causes through increased employee engagement, which will lead to reduced turnover intentions and increases in worker's productive capacity (Sharma, 2015). The data from the interviews and company documents revealed all participants (P1-P5) believe it is essential to have an engaged team to reduce occupational stress, increase loyalty and productivity, and ensure the sustainability of the company. P1 mentioned that one of the clear strategic imperatives of the bank in reducing workplace stress has to do with engaging people so they are in a climate and a part of a culture described as supportive and collaborative, nurturing, and contributes to development. Schulz (2013) also discovered stress levels reduced and staff job satisfaction tended to be higher in an organizational climate described as supportive. Employees have a favorable perception of their organization when supportive cultures, policies, and practices are incorporated (Amazue & Onyishi, 2016).

P1 also asserted the organization instituted a series of leadership development programs as a part of its stress reduction strategy that engages everybody on what the culture is and focuses on their values such as people respect and integrity. P2 highlighted that as a part of the engagement process designed to limit stress, staff members participate in 15-minute huddles each morning before work commences. P2 further stated, “the objective of the huddle is to reassure staff and loosen the tension, so you are ready for work.” P2 also highlighted that “breaks are also introduced during normal working hours to reduce burnout.” Zafar et al. (2014) pointed to work or role overload as a cause of burnout in the banking sector. Job functions are rigorous and target specific, and the mental and physiological framework of banking employees are tested to execute job responsibilities (Zafar et al., 2014).

P1, P3, P4, and P5 agreed that creating a culture and an environment that embodies people respect has assisted in reducing workplace stress. P3 argued that “respect, this can be a stressor especially when people feel disrespected.” P3 in his contribution further stated that managers should show courtesy in all communication, give feedback, place equal value on the contributions of all team members in the attainment of goals, reprimand respectfully, and exhibit professional behavior as an ambassador of the organization. P4 and P5 highlighted the establishment of a network-wide respect campaign that was designed to engage employees in an environment of mutual respect, appreciation and shared values. Trust, appreciation, and recognition embolden a leader–subordinate relationship and improves employees’ health and well-being (Zwingmann et al., 2014). P4 expressed “the respect program is also a means by

which we reduce stress, in that we engage with staff members on a respectful basis regardless of who you are. So, those are some of the things that we do to reduce stress in the organization and so, it is an integral part of our strategy.” P5 also highlighted a strategy where respect ambassadors were assigned to each department and unit to promote the whole idea of respecting people regardless of level in the organization. P5 further stated, “the respect campaign made it easier for people to talk about difficult things because you are now speaking about difficult things in an atmosphere of acknowledged mutual respect.”

Barnes and Collier (2013) also acknowledged that creating an atmosphere within the work setting where employees feel a sense of enthusiasm, and motivation to achieve set goals, reduces occupational stress. P1 mentioned, “we do activities that create a climate of togetherness and family; the organization has always had a vibrant sports club, so we encourage persons to participate in all kinds of activities, and I feel that those who do are very invested.” P5 expressed that the engendering of a family atmosphere can create a more congenial working relationship. P5 further highlighted organizing social activities and events to coalesce as a team and reduce interdepartmental frictions, which diminishes occupational stress. Social support is a vital job resource that enhances employee work engagement and reduces stress. Clark et al. (2014) in supporting this argument observed strategies for coping with work stressors. Clark et al. highlighted recreation and relaxation and seeking support as two of the diverse strategies designed to address stressors in the workplace.

An important job resource for work engagement is communication. Poor interaction and ineffective communication between subordinates and officers cause job stress (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). Consequently, to decrease stress challenges, there is the need for organizations to focus on strategies aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of communication (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). All participants conceded that effective communication reduces workplace stress and increases employee engagement. P1 mentioned, “leaders get the best out of their people and can reduce workplace stress when they listen. The leaders who listen to their staff and know their staff well, really do get the best out of them.” P3 stated, “studies have shown that people become disengaged or catch what I call the virus of disengagement when they are not in the know.” P4 supported P1’s position by declaring “inadequate communication leads to stress on the staff.” P5 also highlighted the way we communicate could create stress. Therefore, communication is a valuable tool that facilitates identifying and mobilizing job resources to provide support to employees and enrich their lives (Kalish, Luria, Toker, & Westman, 2015).

Transformational and supportive leadership also emerged from the exploration of participants responses. Dust et al. (2014) stated that the primary attributes of transformational leadership style such as employee empowerment and employee support could potentially mitigate the development of stress in the work environment. A lack of effective leadership in the workplace can lead to increased health risks and lowered team performances (Zwingmann et al., 2014). Health-promoting and transformational leadership styles are essential in effecting employee recovery from work-related stress

while positively influencing working conditions (Dunkl et al., 2015). Ghasabeh et al. (2015) defined transformational leadership as leader behaviors that transforms and inspires followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest to achieve common goals.

People empowerment is an attribute of transformational leadership that can reduce stress in the work environment (Dust et al., 2015). P1 stated, “one of the clear strategic imperatives of the bank is people empowerment, and so people empowerment has to do with ensuring that every part of the person is catered to and supported so that they can do the best job possible and they have the knowledge, skills, and opportunity to succeed.” P1 further expounded, “the leadership style embodied is one that is inspirational, transformational, and results driven. And when you get into transformational, you are talking about; truly having an impact on systems, the way we do should be mission-driven.” P1 believed there is a renewed focus on ensuring leaders are prepared to lead teams that are empowered, and the leaders themselves feel empowered to motivate, challenge, support, and nurture their teams. P3 agreed and postulated, “a manager is expected to develop your team, you must be accountable, treat people with respect. You must be able to communicate, inspire, and envision.” P4 confirmed P1’s and P3’s observation about the leadership behavior embodied in the organization, stating the leadership style is more transformational and supportive. Schmidt et al. (2014) confirmed the link between supportive leadership behavior and employees’ health, stating that alert and attentive managerial leadership has a direct association with perceived stress among employees. P5 also affirmed P3’s assertion and highlighted that the strategic plan aligned

with the organization's balance scorecard methodology and is geared at supporting people development and staff welfare and helps to reduce occupational stress.

P1 and P3 emphasized the creation of personal and professional development opportunities for bank employees, embodying fully the organization's mission (see Appendix D). The goal is to achieve reliable and effective leadership and reduce organizational stressors. P1 stated that a series of leadership development programs are rolled out across the company starting with the bank at the executive and senior management level and then managers and supervisors, focusing on their values: people respect, integrity, dynamic leadership, and exceptional service (see Appendix C). P1 also mentioned, "emotional intelligence and awareness is something that we have to inculcate in our leadership team." Goh et al. (2014) supported this notion, stating that emotional support lessens the effect of high job demands and reduces employees' workload. P3 emphasized that they have instituted a 360-degree feedback program because often the management style and relationship with the supervisor can be a major stressor in the workplace. P3 argued, "this is a valuable tool, it does help in pointing to areas for improvement, areas of dissatisfaction, stressors, and irritants in the workplace concerning managerial behavior." P4 agreed on the need for dynamic leadership: "it's the leadership that sets the tone and reduce these stressors that people will normally have every single day." P5 reemphasized the importance of strong alignment at senior management levels by highlighting, "if there is a lack of alignment among senior managers, it could create disharmony which filters down in the organization."

The JD-R model conceptual framework has attained prominence in occupational stress among researchers, gaining recognition as a leading job stress model (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Demerouti et al. (2001) developed the JD-R model on the assumption, the balance between positive and negative job characteristics influences employees' health and well-being, with positive job characteristics representing job resources and the latter, job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Employing the JD-R model in this research helped me to explore occupational stress to understand how the job resources (social support, employee learning & development, ongoing communication, supervisory support) identified within the work engagement framework and from interviews, interplays with job demands (work pressure, role ambiguity, job burnout) to influence employees' well-being, and reduced occupational stress. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) revised the JD-R model theory and proposed that work engagement served as a mediator in the relationship between job demands and health problems. The JD-R model theory guided this research and helped to confirm an environment that supports employee work engagement through the provision of critical job resources, can reduce occupational stress and enhance employees' well-being. The JD-R model theory helped establish a framework to understand how an environment that lacks essential job resources impacts employee stress, productivity, and well-being. The transformational leadership theory also supported the research and helped to confirm a work environment supportive of people empowerment, inspirational leadership, employee development, and emotional intelligence, reduces employees' occupational stress. Transformational leadership is a dynamic leadership style that transforms and inspires followers to perform beyond



expectations (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). Transformational leadership style is essential in attaining employee recovery from work-related stress, while positively influencing working conditions (Dunkl et al., 2015).

The findings indicated organizational protection and leadership is a critical dimension and strategy in reducing employees' occupational stress and protecting workers psychological and physiological health, and well-being. The results suggested, improving employees' work engagement through the provision of critical job resources such as social support, employee learning and development programs, ongoing communication, and supervisory support, could bolster employee functioning and minimize the adverse effects of occupational stress. Job resources can provide inspirational motivation leading to work engagement and organizational commitment. Results revealed an improved communication strategy between managers and subordinates enhances employees' commitment to organizational values and vision and improves psychological well-being. The results further emphasized managers could improve employee work engagement and mitigate the development of stress in the work environment by embracing a transformational and supportive leadership style that includes people empowerment, emotional intelligence and awareness, leadership development, and leader behavior that inspires. The findings revealed leaders have a vital role in creating an organizational climate that's engaging, inspiring, supportive, family-friendly, and nurturing; thus, establishing a positive work environment contributory to improved workers' health and well-being and reduced workplace stress.

## Theme 2: A Supportive Organization

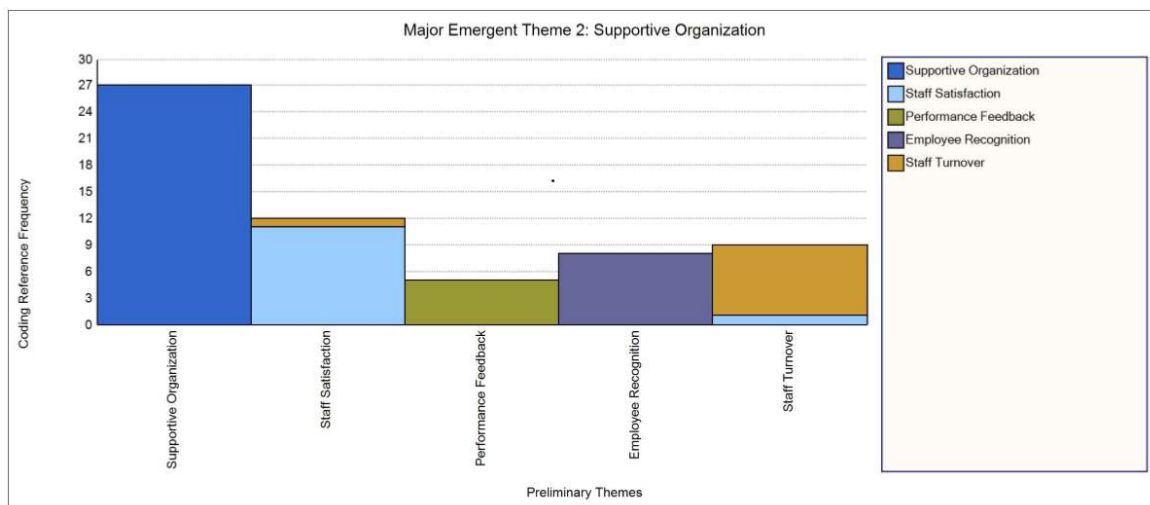


Figure 3. Major emergent theme 2: Supportive organization.

Another theme emerging from data was a supportive organization. Evidence revealed a lack of organizational support and job demands (*worker fatigue, high workload*), increases the possibility of occupational accidents and other associated risks (Julià et al., 2013; Näswall et al., 2015; Stenfors et al., 2013). Research scholars Malik and Noreen (2015) also found organizational support is a significant moderator of occupational stress and workers' affective well-being. Newman et al. (2015) excogitated, employees have the proclivity to be satisfied in their work environment when they perceive their work context as supportive. Consequently, organizations should seek to understand the different workplace issues and the correlation to employees' stress and well-being (Malik & Noreen, 2015). A supportive environment contributes to a reduction in stress levels and increased employee productivity (Hill, Chenevert, & Poitras, 2015).

The supportive organization theme emerged from participants' responses and company documents. Five banking industry leaders provided valuable data highlighting a

supportive organization as essential in reducing employees' occupational stress. The participants gave examples of tools and resources used to support employee well-being, employee development, employee satisfaction, and performance feedback and recognition and discussed how these measures reduced the deleterious effects of stress. All participants agreed the organization provides the tools and resources to reduce employees' occupational stress. P1, P2, P3, and P4 confirmed the organization's investment in an employee assistance program (EAP) designed to help employees through grief and personal trauma. P1 said "the employee assistance program has helped tremendously, and it has touched many persons. It's a counseling service, so we have a partnership with counseling agencies." P2 mentioned, "for occupational stress, we have an employee assistance programme, and this is where we help persons to deal with coping skills." Müller et al. (2016) supported coping skills stating, strategic organizational interventions are imperative in ensuring coping mechanisms are implemented to safeguard workers' health and well-being. P3 stated, "the EAP program introduces us to the importance of occupational stress, and one of the core providers offers a stress test which helps the staff to identify their stress levels." P4 mentioned, "we have had situations where employees are depressed, and we have paid for them to get psychological counseling for a period." P4 concluded, "the commitment and the investment in a fully functional HR department is a part of that stress reduction in that you have people who can respond to the needs of employees, to set programs in place to ensure the environment is one that is conducive to productivity and stress reduction."

P1, P2, P3, and P4 highlighted supporting employees' financial health and well-being as a stress reduction strategy. P1 identified the need for employees to practice proper financial management to reduce stress. P1 stated, "one of the big things that we found, that is causing persons to be stressed is the financial stress." So, we partnered with our foundation to share strategies about how to be financially independent. P1 also indicated, "we do funeral grants, and we try to support our team members whenever they have a loss or are grieving." P2 stated, "the organization pays an incentive twice for the year, and a lot of people budget on that incentive." P3 supported P1 assertion stating financial health contributes to stress and our foundation has a wonderful program that supports employees' financial empowerment. P4 highlighted a proper compensation system and housing solutions for employees as stress mitigators. P2, P3, and P4 also mentioned instituting programs to motivate employees and reduce stress. P2 indicated, "a reward and recognition system is in place for employees; it is designed to motivate staff from within to perform, and there is an incentive to get at the end." P3 presented the importance of the reward and recognition program in showing appreciation to employees and reshaping working relationships. P3 declared, "you use reward and recognition to encourage performance, behavior, competencies." P4 articulated, "we set programs in place to ensure the environment is one that is conducive to productivity and stress reduction." Santhi and Reddy (2015) identified recognizing, rewarding, promoting, and incentivizing employees for achieving performance goals, as effective stress reduction strategies.

Data from interviews and company documents supported participants notion that a focus on process and system improvements and quality management contributed to stress reduction. P2, P4, and P5 mentioned the organization's accomplishment in achieving the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9001:2015 certification status (see Appendix E). The ISO is an independent non-governmental international organization that addresses quality management and best-known standards. The standard aligns with quality management principles such as the process approach and systems improvements (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], n.d.). P2 shared, "the organization has a quality management system that is ISO 9001:2015 tested and it deals with quality management, how you manage your systems qualitatively." P4 declared, "if you have documented processes that are ISO tested and audited, and then you implement it, then that in itself is a process that will reduce stress in your organization." P5 highlighted the information technology strategies the organization developed over time concerning systems optimization and modernization to reduce and simplify work processes, improve workflow and reduce stress. P4 supported P5 declaration stating, "computerization is a form of stress reduction in that it makes the workplace more efficient for the employees and we have invested heavily in that area over time." P5 stated, "our IT system that we implemented have brought significant improvement to processes. If I look at the organization from a wide perspective, I believe that anything that we put into the environment that simplifies a process or seeks to address a real problem that our user community or our customer base is facing, those

probably have the widest reach regarding reducing occupational stress.” P5 added, “we’ve had a reduction in errors, we’ve had a reduction in cash shortage and overage.”

All participants agreed, as a part of a supportive organization, the company focuses on employee development as a stress reduction strategy. Grawitch (2015) mentioned employee growth and development as one of the organizational behavioral practices required to reduce work stress. P1 exclaimed, “as a part of learning, development, and culture, we want to ensure that every single person who begins the journey at our bank has an opportunity to grow, to succeed, to be their best self, and to move up the ladder in a seamless way.” P1 also stated, “we will engage leaders in a six months development program that will involve looking at time management, leadership styles, performance appraisals; all those tools that leaders will require to be effective and to succeed.” P2 said the organization has implemented training to ensure employees are aware of the systems, procedures, and policies to be followed. P2 also asserted, training helps to reduce the errors and omissions branch staff makes and reduce associated stress. Company documents revealed the organization’s strategic focus on employees’ personal and professional development administered through carefully designed learning and leadership development programs. P3 agreed and highlighted the 360-degree feedback and managerial development programs that were instituted to build leadership capacity and reduce stressors or irritants affecting employees. P4 expounded on the establishment of personal development programs such as security training for employees. P5 in affirming employee development strategies exclaimed, “when you see us focusing on personal development and people development and people empowerment, it serves to

reduce occupational stress.” Additionally, all participants believed reducing occupational stress has influenced favourable staff turnover results. P4 declared, our staff turnover is an industry best. P3 stated, staff turnover has been traditionally low. P1 and P2 disclosed, staff turnover has not been high and has lowered. Sharma (2015) noted, reducing occupational stress causes may lead to reduced turnover intentions and increases in worker’s productive capacity.

The conceptual framework for this research was the JD-R model. The JD-R model theory grounded this study and helped to confirm, supportive organizational strategies linked to employee well-being, employee development, employee satisfaction, and employee reward and recognition, are essential in reducing occupational stress and improving employees’ physical and mental health. The JD-R model theory was helpful for investigating those organizationally related aspects of the job that causes stress and the job resources required to induce employees’ growth, development, and well-being via a motivational process. Scholars determined the JD-R model theory supports a *motivational process*; whereby, job resources are considered to have motivational qualities (Demerouti et al., 2001). Accordingly, the JD-R model approach provided the mechanics to determine how job resources provided by a supportive organization, attenuates the impact of job demands on employees’ job satisfaction, well-being, and health. Employees invest their time and skill to meet job demands, and any perceived imbalance in returns could lead to reduced well-being (Hu et al., 2013). Consequently, applying the concept of the JD-R model theory was helpful for exploring the causes of

occupational stress and the application of supportive organizational strategies required to create a positive work environment for employees.

The exploration of the supportive organizational theme divulged the strategies managers need to address stress associated with employee well-being, employee development, employee satisfaction, performance feedback, and employee recognition. Findings revealed the provision of adequate organizational support could lead to reduced employee stress and increased affective commitment to the vision and mission of the organization. The results denoted, elevated levels of organizational support could result in a decrease in stress antecedents such as workload, work pressure, role ambiguity, role conflict, and job burnout. Findings indicated recognizing, rewarding, and incentivizing employees could serve as a stress buffer supported by increased job satisfaction, improved performances, and augmented affective commitment to the goals of the organization. Findings also revealed, the provision of organizational job resources such as employee assistance programs, counseling, process improvements, systems optimization and modernization, could lead to enhanced stress coping mechanisms, improved psychological and psychosocial well-being, and reduced stress. Results showed investment in a functional human resource department and a proper compensation and benefits system could increase responsiveness to the needs of employees and reduce work stressors and dissatisfiers. The results further suggested leaders have a vital role in employee development and maintaining a work environment conducive to positive organizational support and improved well-being. Results also revealed investments in international quality management systems and standards improves employees work



efficiency and job environment, increases psychological well-being, and reduces environmental stressors.

### Theme 3: Occupational Health and Well-being

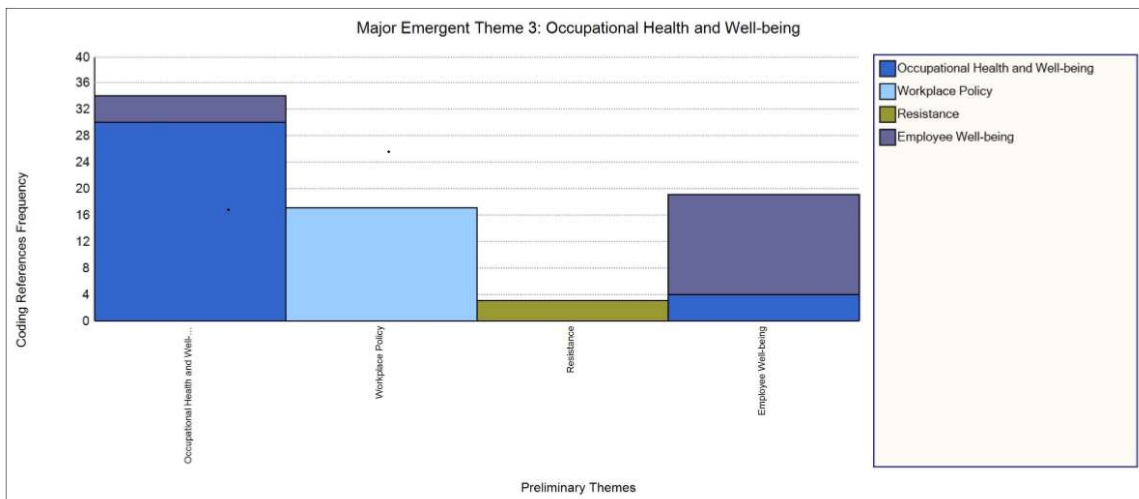


Figure 4. Major emergent theme 3: Occupational Health and Well-being.

Employees' health and well-being are threatened because of the unprecedented economic, cultural, and psychosocial challenges (Sheppard et al., 2013). Despite these challenges, supportive actions are required from leaders to buffer the stress effect and to create a climate conducive to improved employee health and well-being (Schmidt et al., 2014). Improving workers' ability to cope with stress is viewed as a useful complementary strategy, supporting the wider organizational processes aimed at mitigating workplace stress (ILO, 2016; Montero-Marín et al., 2014). Strengthening employees' awareness and competence in addressing stressors in the work environment enhances leaders' ability to create a safe and healthy working environment to protect the health and well-being of employees (ILO, 2016).

Data from interviews and company documents, revealed all participants (P1-P5) concurred that providing the necessary job resources to support employee health and well-being is a crucial element in reducing or eliminating occupational stress. P1 through P5 acknowledged the introduction of an employee health and wellness program designed to encourage a healthier lifestyle. P2 and P4 agreed, we have a gym facility and offer free aerobics classes for employees to de-stress. P5 said, “team participates in programs such as exercise and so on and where they participate we have seen improvements.” P1 and P3 concurred, the organization hosts a lunch and learn series where external speakers come in to challenge, motivate, and inspire employees on how to become healthier and practice a wholesome way of living. P3 also indicated the organization provides sick-bay facilities for employees as a part of its wellness program. P3 stated the organization wants to help persons to manage workplace stress and to minimize stress in the workplace as a part of its overarching health, wellness, and well-being strategy for the employees. P4 asserted, “we put in place the environment to reduce stress; we have invested in health and fitness clubs.”

Company documents and data from interviews also revealed the development and execution of workplace policies designed to protect employees and improve their health and well-being. P2 indicated, “we have a workplace health and safety policy built on the pillars of the international labor organization and labor laws. P2 opined, “you need to have a safe and healthy environment so that workers come in and perform at their optimal level.” P3 concurred with P2 stating, “we developed a policy which aligns with the National policy on occupational health & safety.” P3 indicated we have appointed an

occupational health and safety officer. P3 further stated, “even though we are not in the heavy industry, occupational stress happens everywhere, and so we wanted to make sure that we have an officer on board.” P2 and P3 agreed, “the organization does ergonomics assessments because that can be a source of stress in the workplace; persons, their equipment, the chair, the computer stations, monitoring building services for hazards.” Poor physical working conditions give rise to increased levels of stress and fatigue, which affects workers mental and physical health (Cottini & Ghinetti, 2017; HSE, 2015). P2 also disclosed, we view ergonomics in three dimensions; (a) the physical ergonomics that addresses physical infrastructure such as your lighting, your workstations, your environment, your humidity, your temperature, and (b) organizational ergonomics that addresses the technical systems implemented such as your organizational structure, and your job descriptions. The third dimension is cognitive ergonomics which examines your cognitive skills, how you address stress management, and your rewards and recognition program implemented to reduce the stress on the thinking skills. P2 further emphasized, “we make sure you have those things in place to reduce organizational stress.” P4 mentioned, “we ensure that we have a functional and coordinated response to the staff needs and it manifests in the policies that we have.” P4 also stated, “for persons who feel stressed and who feel that they need to find a way to express their discomfort, there is a whistle-blowing policy.”

P3 and P4 also indicated the organization has in place a sexual harassment policy and a policy against bullying to protect the safety, health, and well-being of staff and reduce occupational stress. P3 pointed out that sexual harassment could be a form of

stress on the job. P4 disclosed, if you have a culture or work environment that is hostile, where the demands are too high for the individuals so employed, where you have bullying, where you have an excessive amount of overtime, it leads to stress on the employee. P2 also pointed out the organization provides personal accident insurance policy to employees free of cost to protect against accidents on the job. P3 also mentioned, the organization issues health card to employees to support improvement in health and well-being. P3 declared, the health provider provides us with a quarterly report on activities on our health plan. From an occupational health and safety standpoint, we analyze data for areas affecting staff such as work-related musculoskeletal disorders, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease so the relevant “health support” can be provided to the employee. Some studies associated stress-related illnesses such as musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and cancer with work-related stress (Eurofound, 2016; WHO, 2017).

Demerouti et al. (2001) described the JD-R model as having two components (1) job resources and, (2) job demands. Demerouti et al. (2001) recognized *job demands* as those physical, social, and organizational challenging aspects of the job that requires continuous mental or physical efforts, and *job resources* as those physical, social, and organizational related aspects of the job that may lower job demands. Salem (2015) provided an explanation, in which an imbalance between job demands, job resources, and the capabilities or needs of an employee, influences occupational stress. For the enhanced occupational health and well-being strategy to be successful, the JD-R theory implied there must be a balance between employees’ job resources and job demands. Hence, the

JD-R model theory was appropriate for this study and supports the provision of adequate job resources as a strategy to improve employees' health and well-being and reduce occupational stress.

The data collected from interviews and company documents, supported the need for the provision of adequate job resources to attenuate the impact of job demands and improve employee occupational health and well-being. The findings revealed leaders who integrate workplace health promotion into workplace policies reduces occupational stress. Leaders who design and implement appropriate workplace policies develop an integrated response to stress and encourage action in the workplace that improves health and well-being. Results disclosed developing an overarching occupational health and safety policy could reduce potential occupational risks and the burden of stress in the work environment. Results also revealed that leaders who design and execute health and wellness programs and provide workers with health and wellness facilities, reduce employees' stressors and create a healthier working environment. Research findings denoted, leaders who strengthen employees' awareness and competence in addressing psychosocial hazards in the work environment, increase worker productivity and creates a safer and healthier work environment to protect the health and well-being of employees. Finally, findings disclosed committing job resources to be physical, cognitive, and organizational ergonomics, reduces work environment stressors and stressor effects on employees' performance and well-being, and improves quality management standards in the workplace.

## Theme 4: Prevention

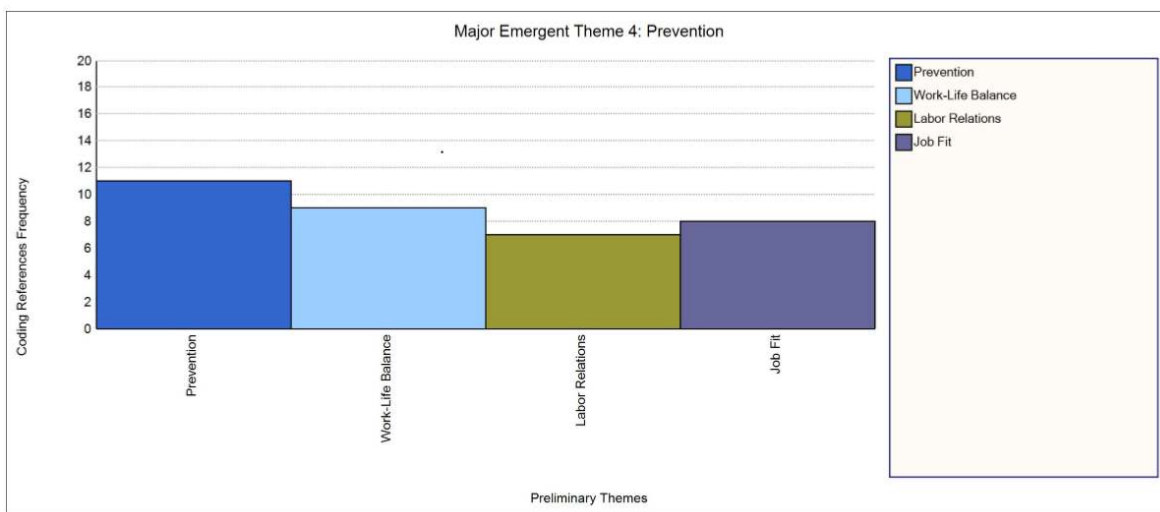


Figure 5. Major emergent theme 4: Prevention.

An effective strategy to manage occupational stress is prevention (Arnetz et al., 2013). Organizations should confront the core or origin of potential stress causes by identifying and tackling psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions, the culture of the organization, and labor relations (D’Ettorre & Greco, 2016). Physiological and psychosocial risks have a close association with work-related stress; thus, prevention and management of the phenomena are crucial.

During the interviews, research participants presented data on essential prevention strategies (*organizational culture, labor relations, work-life balance, and job-fit*) geared towards stress prevention, stress reduction, and improved employee well-being. P1 in addressing the importance of organizational culture opined, “it has to do with engaging people so that they are in a climate and a part of a culture that is supportive and collaborative, that is nurturing, and that contributes to development.” P1 further emphasized “the development and execution of programs that engage employees around

culture; what our culture is, who we are, and our focus on our values such as people respect, integrity, dynamic leadership, and exceptional service.” A review of company documents supported P1 claim and revealed a strategic focus of the bank as cultivating a culture of learning, execution, leadership, innovation, and respect. A review of company documents also revealed the organization is developing a “Book of Culture” (see Appendix F) for employees, to reinforce and nourish the organization’s rich history and culture aligned to the principles of respect, integrity, trust, and ethics. P1 concluded by stating, “it is critical that they are aligned with our values and are clear on what the purpose of the organization is and that their purpose will find congruence with the organization’s purpose.” P3 declared, “culture speaks to work setting, work style, management style, and how you treat people. All of that contributes to occupational stress.” In discussing employees’ health initiatives, P4 mentioned, “we are pioneers in that regard, and it remains a part of our culture.” P4 further stated the activities of the organization lead to reduced stress on the employees. P5 also mentioned, the organization engenders a family atmosphere which has created a more congenial working relationship.

Chen et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of promoting employees’ organizational fit to reduce stress while influencing higher job satisfaction. Interview participants shared this view and believed that stress reduces if employees are of the right job-fit and fit into the culture of the organization. P1 alluded to the organization recruitment strategy and stated, “in recruiting from an HR perspective we have to ensure that we are recruiting people who will indeed fit and want to do the job that they love. So, this whole business of occupational stress can be mitigated if we start the process right

because sometimes persons are placed in roles that are not perfectly suited role for them.” P1 further articulated, “it is important for us as an organization to be clear on the roles and the requirements of the roles and there is no ambiguity at all and supports the requisite skills that employees need to be successful.” In support of P1, Khann and Maini (2013) interviewed frontline bank employees and reported role ambiguity influenced work exhaustion and work stress. P2 agreed with P1 and declared, for each role, you have a job description and what HR does is to ensure we obtain the proper fit. P3 concluded, “When we are recruiting people for those stress areas we make sure that it’s on the table and that our selection process gets the right fit.”

The ILO (2016) declared, stress results in disturbances in labor relations. D’Etorre and Greco (2016) encouraged organizations to address stress causes by identifying and eliminating psychosocial hazards linked to labor relations. P3 and P4 agreed, the organization has strongly improved labor relations in the work environment which has served as a buffer against stress effects. P4 pointed out, our relationship with the trade union is also a part of that stress reduction strategy of the organization. P4 also disclosed that an improved process of interaction and engagement with the trade union has led to reduced tension and stress because we treat them as partners. P4 emphasized, “we have had a great relationship with the trade union as our partners and that as well percolated through the staff.” P3 also concluded the climate of labor relations has improved.

Banks come under severe pressure to design innovative products and services to meet the divergent needs of customers and increase business growth. Consequently, increased workload and work-life imbalances have challenged employees and often leads



to increased levels of stress (George & K. A., 2015). Research on work-life balance reveals that flexibility or balance between working hours, family, and social commitments, can have a positive effect on employees' health and stress levels (Lunau et al., 2014). When leaders support work flexibility and workers' non-work demands, work-life balance is enhanced. P1, P2, P3, and P5 believes the organization supports work-life balance to improve employees' well-being. P1 mentioned, "we give focus to this whole business of occupational stress by maintaining work-life balance and establishing programs and teams and a culture that supports peoples' well-being." P1 stated, "many organization all over are trying flexible work schedules." P5 agreed with P1: we have instituted the ability to work from home. P5 also stated, "depending on the role you play, you can execute from home, and we have provided the necessary tools and access that will allow employees to do this." P2 also mentioned the introduction of a "lights-out" policy designed to encourage staff to finish work activities on time and to influence a balance between work and non-work activities. P2 also highlighted that staff vacation leave, and overtime is strictly monitored to reduce employees' workload, work pressure, and stress irritants. P3 agreed with P2 stating, we have adjusted the leave policy whereby every employee must avail a minimum of 10 consecutive vacation days leave each year.

The JD-R model developed on the theoretical premise the balance between positive and negative job characteristics influences employees' health and well-being (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). The JD-R model is useful for understanding strategies used to prevent occupational stress. The JD-R model theory helps to determine the adequacy of job resources in supporting improvements in work environment factors and creating a

positive working environment that supports stress mitigation. Employing the JD-R model in this research helped to explore occupational stress to understand how positive and negative job characteristics associated with organizational culture, labor relations, work-life balance, and job-fit, influence employees' health and well-being, and the leader behavior required to assist in reducing the stress phenomena. To prevent occupational stress, the JD-R model was appropriate for this study.

The findings revealed leaders could prevent occupational stress when they support an organizational culture that's engaging, supportive, collaborative, nurturing, and contributes to employee development. Research findings reflected an improved process of interaction, engagement, and partnership with trade unions enhances labor relations as well as reduces tension and stress in the work environment. The findings disclosed, leaders who leverage strategies to manage employees' work processes and flexible work schedules while introducing family-friendly workplace policies that aid the improvement of employees' work-life balance, enhances productivity and reduces stress.

Data from participants interviewed revealed the introduction of workplace policies designed to; monitor employees' work hours, develop a greater balance between work and non-work activities and increase work-life satisfaction. Results revealed providing the relevant tools to support working from home, increases employees' work-life balance and job satisfaction, and reduces occupational stress. Consequently, leaders who develop strategies that reduce work-family conflict and perceived workload lower employees' work exhaustion. Additionally, results revealed job-fit as a viable recruitment strategy and an approach that could prevent employees' stress; employees should

demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to fulfill the demands of the job. From this theme, results demonstrated occupational stress reduces when leaders increase the scope for flexibility, promote enhanced fluidity in organizational structures, and improve employees' decision-making capabilities at organizational levels. A work-life balance strategy enhances employee job and life satisfaction (Haar et al., 2014). Finally, the findings disclosed, confronting the core or origin of potential stress causes by identifying and tackling psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions, the culture of the organization, and labor relations can mitigate potential stressors.

### **Application to Professional Practice**

The specific business problem and purpose of conducting this research was to explore strategies bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. The prevalence and magnitude of occupational stress and its health outcomes is an affirmation of its impact on the global working population (ILO, 2016). More than \$300 billion is expended by organizations each year for employee lost productivity and healthcare costs because of occupational stress (EU-OSHA, 2014). Work stressors can affect employee functioning resulting in below standard job performance, depression, and lowered productivity (Kozusznik et al., 2015; Safaria, 2014; Yiwen et al., 2014). Workers experience work stress when there is an imbalance between the requirements of the job and the capabilities, resources, and needs of employees (Kahn, 2016). Workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, and monotonous job are prime job stress antecedents (Akgunduz, 2015; Kahn, 2016). The findings of this study may assist business leaders in identifying occupational stress causes and the leadership skills, techniques, and

interventions required for managing workplace stress. I conducted interviews with five banking industry leaders to explore successful strategies used to reduce employees' occupational stress. The findings revealed four strategies leaders could develop and implement to reduce occupational stress.

### **Organizational Protection and Leadership**

The organizational protection and leadership strategy emerged from objective evidence and valuable interview data provided. The organizational protection and leadership theme helps business leaders to explore transformational leader behavior and employee work engagement within the context of occupational stress reduction. Business leaders can apply this strategy by identifying and addressing various risk factors and stressors affecting the work environment and enhance worker productivity. Work engagement is enhanced when job resources such as social support, employee learning and development, and communication are made available by leaders. Job resources significantly determine work engagement and assist employees in achieving work performance goals (Sarti, 2014). Disengaged employees are exposed to a higher risk of developing stress (Fiabane et al., 2013). Business leaders may learn from the contribution of participants by adopting a transformational and supportive leader behavior style to enhance worker psychological well-being and inspire and empower employees to achieve personal, professional, and organizational goals. The primary attributes of transformational leadership style such as employee empowerment and employee support could potentially mitigate the development of stress in the work environment (Dust et al.,

2014). A lack of effective leadership in the workplace can lead to depression symptoms, increased health risks, and lowered team performances (Zwingmann et al., 2014).

### **A Supportive Organization**

Research findings proved elevated levels of organizational support could result in a decrease in stress antecedents such as workload, work pressure, role ambiguity, role conflict, and job burnout. Business leaders can apply a strategy of organizational support by learning about issues impacting employee well-being, and supporting initiatives aligned to employee development, employee satisfaction, performance feedback, and employee recognition. Santhi and Reddy (2015) stated, recognizing, rewarding, promoting, and incentivizing employees in achieving performance goals, is an effective stress reduction strategy. Business leaders who desire to accomplish organizational goals might benefit from providing essential organizational job resources and tools such as employee assistance programs, counseling, process improvements, and systems optimization and modernization. Providing job resources could lead to enhanced employee stress coping mechanisms, improved psychological and psychosocial well-being, reduced stress, and improved productivity. Employees' exposure to work stressors erodes coping ability, reduces focus and motivation levels, and increases health impairment (Lamb & Kwok, 2016). Hill et al. (2015) argued a supportive environment contributes to a reduction in stress levels and increased employee productivity. The findings also encouraged business leaders to invest in a functional human resource department and a proper compensation and benefits system to; increase responsiveness to the needs of employees, increase work performances, and reduce work stressors and

dissatisfiers. A work environment where employees perceive a high-commitment to human resource management influences a reduction in job stress (Seung-Wan & Su-Dol, 2016).

### **Occupational Health & Well-being**

The study participants indicated, providing the necessary job resources to support employee health and well-being is a crucial element in reducing or eliminating occupational stress. Gauche, De Beer, & Brink (2017) stated, the provision of job resources elevates employees' ability to cope with the demands of the job environment and contribute to improvements in employees' health and well-being. Business leaders may adopt the contribution of participants by integrating workplace health promotion into workplace policies to protect employees' well-being, safeguard against psychosocial hazards, and reduce work stressors. Pannu and Tikku (2014) identified leadership, organizational culture and policies, support, and work design as critical organizational stress intervention strategies. Business leaders who desire to limit occupational stress and achieve established organizational goals might benefit from committing job resources to physical, cognitive, and organizational ergonomic aspects (ILO, 2016). An improvement between workers and their environment reduces productivity losses, mitigates employee health impairment, reduces stressors, and supports improvements in quality management standards in the workplace. Research linked poor working conditions to musculoskeletal disorders and psychosocial stress symptoms (Nag, Vyas, & Nag, 2015). Business leaders may design, implement, and execute health and wellness programs and provide employees access to wellness facilities to develop a healthier and more productive

workforce. Burke, Dailey, and Zhu (2017) mentioned, organizations recognized their responsibility in a health crisis and are focused increasingly on a strategy of workplace wellness programs implementations to improve health.

### **Prevention**

An effective strategy to manage occupational stress is prevention (Arnetz et al., 2013). During research interviews, participants explicated on occupational stress prevention strategies and provided valuable data aligned to *organizational culture, labor relations, work-life balance, and job-fit*. The findings proved when leaders support an engaging culture that is collaborative, nurturing, and contributes to employee development, occupational stressors may be prevented. Business leaders who recognize the importance of prevention strategies might reap the benefits from reduced employees' health risk and potential health cost to the organization. Havermans et al. (2018) declared, work stress prevention reduces employees' health risks and organizational costs; however, the success of any intervention is dependent on proper implementation. Business leaders may use findings in developing successful workplace interventions, to confront the core or origin of potential stressors by identifying and addressing psychosocial hazards linked to work conditions and reduce organizational health costs. Business owners might improve ambient working conditions and a positive organizational climate and culture by developing and executing workplace programs that focus on values surrounding people, respect, dynamic leadership, and exceptional service. Leaders can apply the labor relations strategies shared by participants by improving interactions and engagement with trade unions and embracing relevant labor laws to

enhance social protection, reduce job environment tensions and stress, and support occupational health and safety. Business owners can apply findings supporting work-life balance strategies by leveraging interventions to manage employees' work processes and flexible work schedules while introducing family-friendly workplace policies to reduce stress. A work-life balance strategy could enhance worker psychological well-being and harmonious living. Thus, employees can effectively manage the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and the external environment (Walia, 2014). Business leaders should consider job-fit as a part of their overarching recruitment strategy to enhance employee job appreciation and reduce stress.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The theoretical principles of social change, culture, and human development supports deepened understanding of a changing ecology and predicts a reversal in socio-demographic trends such as wealth reduction, correlates to a reversal in psychological and cultural trends (Greenfield, 2018). The framework facilitates an exploration of shifts in developmental trajectories associated with socio-demographic factors such as (a) type of economy, (b) degree of urbanization, (c) level of formal education, and (c) type and spread of technology, and how these factors interplays with cultural values in influencing societal development (Greenfield, 2018). The theory encourages an expansive view on social change within the context of a rapidly globalizing world in which socio-demographic shifts impact human development. The underpinnings of the interdisciplinary theory of social change, culture, and human development was



appropriate for this research and helped to understand the potential implications of findings for tangible improvements for individuals, organizations, cultures, and societies.

The significance of stress for reducing productivity and increasing health cost is well recorded in research and is an issue which has yielded the global society incalculable amounts in indirect and direct costs annually (ILO, 2016; O’Keefe, Brown, & Christian, 2014). These negative stress implications have caused depletion in health care systems resources, reduced family income, and increased the burden of cost to organizations. Participants in this research emphasized prevention as a critical stress reduction strategy which is simultaneously applicable to enhancing social change. A prevention strategy helps organizations to identify and address psychosocial hazards affecting working conditions and employees’ well-being (D’Ettorre & Greco, 2016). By investing in stress prevention, socio-demographic factors improve, and the burden of health care cost to organizations reduces; thus, enabling increased investments in social provisioning. Organizations investments in social provision ensure communities have access to employment opportunities that pay living wages and sustains the environment (Underwood, Hackney, & Friesner, 2015). Improvements in socio-demographic trends such as increased wealth influences enhancement in psychological and cultural trends (Greenfield, 2018).

An exploration of other findings in this research revealed, strategies surrounding organizational protection and leadership, supportive organization, and employee occupational health and well-being, helps organizations to embrace a comprehensive approach in improving well-being and to catalyze beneficial social behaviors among

workers. Executing these complimentary strategies could improve employee health and reduce health costs to employees, their families, and communities. Employee work-life balance could also be enhanced from supportive organization initiatives, and lead to increases in their participation in civic duties to improve social conditions. A study on work-life balance (WLB) across cultures, revealed WLB had a positive relationship with employee job and life satisfaction (Haar et al., 2014). Consequently, improving work-life balance could enhance worker psychological well-being and harmonious living, and enrich society. Employees can effectively manage the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and external environment and can contribute more to society (Walia, 2014). Leaders can embrace strategies from this research to support positive shifts in societal development trajectories by advancing socio-demographic factors linked with the economy, urbanization, education, and technology.

### **Recommendations for Action**

To meet 21<sup>st</sup>-century job demands, and reduce the effects of stress on job functioning, paradigmatic shifts in leader behaviors are required. Organizations strategy of responding to global demands by implementing drastic changes to improve efficiency and enhance business competitiveness has increased work pressure on employees (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). The banking industry is no exception; banks come under severe pressure to design innovative products and services to meet the divergent needs of customers and increase business growth. Consequently, increased workload, role ambiguity, reduced autonomy, and work-life imbalances have challenged employees and often leads to elevated levels of stress (George & K. A., 2015; Samartha et al., 2013).

Hence, transformational and supportive leadership strategies are essential in effecting employee recovery from work-related stress, while positively influencing working conditions (Dunkl et al., 2015). The following recommendations may help to enhance the quality of work-life for employees by improving workers' well-being and health; thereby, mitigating the effects of workplace stress (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015). Employees' exposure to health impairments such as musculoskeletal disorders and cardiovascular diseases may reduce, and stress disorders associated with burnout, depression, exhaustion, and anxiety, controlled (ILO, 2016).

A strategy of organizational protection and leadership emerged from findings and is an area that helps organizations to address workplace risk factors affecting employees, through a process of transformational and supportive leadership and employee work engagement. Engaged employees have access to critical job resources such as social support, employee growth and development, decision latitude, and ongoing communication, which attenuates job demands and reduces stress and fatigue (ILO, 2016; Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Stress that occurs because of the imbalances between job resources and job demands can directly impact the productive capacity of organizations, leading to declining revenue margins (Sharma, 2015). The recommendation is for business leaders to engage and inspire employees by providing the relevant job resources to enhance worker well-being, improve productive capacity, and support an upward trajectory in revenue margins. To bolster employee functioning, and organizational performance, it is recommended leaders aim to improve worker psychological well-being by developing a culture of transformational leadership that focuses on essential values

such as people respect, dynamic leadership, innovation, and employee empowerment. Managers should aim at establishing a positive working environment by supporting an organizational climate that's engaging, inspiring, supportive, family-friendly, and nurture. The organizational climate should be one that supports employee counseling, job enrichment, career planning, and employee involvement in decision-making processes. Bronkhorst et al. (2015) revealed a significant correlation between employees' perception of a favorable organizational climate and reduced burnout, anxiety, and depression. As a performance enhancement strategy, business leaders are encouraged to invest in managers and supervisors' transformational leadership development programs to reduce emotional exhaustion, which could lead to occupational stress if not carefully managed (Clark et al., 2014; Green et al., 2013). A transformational and supportive leadership style is essential in influencing employee recovery from work-related stress, while positively influencing working conditions (Dunkl et al., 2015). Organizational protection and leadership is a critical dimension and strategy in reducing employees' occupational stress by protecting workers psychological and physiological well-being.

Research findings from this study revealed a supportive organizational strategy reduced employees' occupational stress, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced performance. A supportive organization exists in which the required tools and job resources are made available to support (a) employee well-being, (b) employee growth and development, (c) employee satisfaction, and (d) performance feedback and recognition. Research scholars Malik and Noreen (2015) discovered organizational support is a significant moderator of occupational stress and workers' affective well-

being. Newman et al. (2015) excogitated, employees have the proclivity to be satisfied in their work environment when they perceive their work context as supportive. In support of the findings of this study, I propose that business leaders provide the tools and resources to reduce the deleterious effects of stress and create an environment conducive to high-employee performance. Managers should design and implement a functional recognition and reward system to create a high-performance work environment. Recognizing, rewarding, and incentivizing employees could serve as a stress buffer and augment affective commitment to the goals of the organization (Santhi & Reddy, 2015). Managers who desire to enhance stress coping mechanisms in the job environment and improve employees' psychosocial well-being should provide support through employee assistance and counseling programs, wellness facilities, process improvements, and work systems modernization and optimization. Pannu and Tikku (2014) found, employee assistance programs supported by stress control workshops, helps to reduce the burden of stress on workers. I recommend that business leaders develop employee financial empowerment programs and workplace banking initiatives to improve employee quality of life by reducing financial stress and encouraging financial independence. To enhance the quality of work processes and reduce stressors in the work environment, it is recommended business managers invest in international organization for standardization (ISO) programs to establish and maintain standards in quality management systems.

Managers must support strategies promoting employees' occupational health and well-being. Strengthening employees' awareness and competence in addressing stressors in the work environment enhances leaders' ability to create a safe and healthy working

environment to protect the health and well-being of employees (ILO, 2016). Leaders in organizations must design and implement employee awareness programs focused on the negative effects of workplace stress and the coping behaviors required to improve health. Improving workers' ability to cope with stress is viewed as a useful complementary strategy, supporting the wider organizational processes aimed at mitigating workplace stress (ILO, 2016; Montero-Marin et al., 2014). To support a strategy of enhancing employees' health and well-being, and reduce psychosocial hazards, business leaders could integrate workplace health promotion into workplace policies addressing areas such as sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination. Additionally, business leaders could develop and implement an overarching occupational health and safety policy to reduce potential occupational risks and the burden of stress in the work environment. In closing, business managers can reduce work environmental stressors and improve employees' performance and well-being by committing job resources to the physical, cognitive, and organizational ergonomics.

The findings of this study support prevention as an effective strategy in managing occupational stress. Organizations should confront the core or origin of potential stress causes by identifying and addressing psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions (D'Ettorre & Greco, 2016). Managers can prevent stress by supporting an organizational culture that promotes positive labor relations, work-life balance, and a recruitment strategy that incorporates employee job-fit. In support of the prevention strategy disclosed in this research that reduces stress, it is recommended business leaders leverage strategies to manage employees work process, work schedule, and work flexibility by

introducing family-friendly workplace policies that aids the improvement of employees' work-life balance (Khann & Maini, 2013; Walia, 2014). An increase in workload and work-life imbalances lead to increased levels of stress (George & K. A., 2015).

Additionally, business leaders are encouraged to give focused attention to job-fit as a part of organizations' recruitment strategy, and policy to (a) reduce underperformance, (b) eradicate low employee self-esteem, and (c) lower job stress. Managers should match jobs to the physiological and psychological skills and capabilities of employees and assign role functions based on employees' competence and experience. In concluding, it is recommended business leaders seek to develop meaningful partnerships with trade unions through an improved process of positive interaction and engagement. Improving labor relations reduces tension and stress in the work environment and creates an atmosphere for increased productivity.

Following the final review and approval of my study, a 3-5-page summary of my findings, conclusions, and recommendations, will be delivered to all participants including the chief executive officer at the study location, in the Caribbean. To facilitate access to valuable research data, I will publish the study in the ProQuest/UMI Dissertation database, for scholars, academicians, and other stakeholders, who have an interest in my field of study.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Because of the demands of globalization and increased complexities in the workplace, researchers view the job environment as an antecedent for psychosocial risks and poor work-life balance (ILO, 2016). Conversely, these psychosocial risk factors and

quality of life impediments positions the workplace as an ideal venue for identifying and addressing those psychosocial risks at the core of job-related stress (ILO, 2016).

Workplace stress, costs organizations billions of dollars in expense annually (O'Keefe et al., 2014). Specific job-related aspects of the work environment such as poor leadership, inadequate management support, high work pressure, and role ambiguity, causes occupational stress (Lokke & Madsen, 2014; Mohammad, 2014). These problems have a considerable impact on productivity; hence, optimizing employees' health is imperative towards achieving social advancement and economic development (O'Keefe et al., 2014; WHO, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress.

The limitations of this study included a lack of generalizability. Future researchers could address the weakness of a lack of generalizability in findings by expanding the scope and sample population of this study to include other organizations and managers within the specific industry observed in this research, and who have successfully engaged strategies that reduced employees' occupational stress. Additionally, future researchers may opt to use a quantitative research method to examine the extent to which different leadership styles impact a reduction in employees' occupational stress or to predict the outcome by comparing and testing variables associated with different industries or geographic areas. Expanding future studies beyond the geographic region and industry observed in this research will increase the depth of understanding on occupational stress causes and help researchers to compare the effectiveness of strategies engaged to reduce the phenomena. Another limitation of this study is the use of a case study design



approach. Future researchers may consider a narrative approach as another plausible research design. By using a narrative design, researchers may inculcate reason in multiple situations in which participants are intimately involved. Furthermore, the narrative approach might allow researchers to investigate the stories and experiences of those affected by occupational stress, rather than relying on the views of business leaders in developing an understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Reflections**

As I reflect on my DBA doctoral journey, I recall there were moments when I felt overwhelmed and lacking the capacity to continue this pathway. However, my dream and aspiration to be a catalyst for change in a challenging society by improving the lives of individuals and communities kept me motivated. During my challenging journey, I felt this level of self-sacrifice was too much to bear; nevertheless, access to close family members, a diverse community of learners, a faculty committed to care and professional excellence, great friends, and most importantly the sufficiency and grace of God, gave me an awe-inspiring view of what lies ahead.

Reflecting on the data collection and analysis processes, I earned participants' trust by establishing a position of mutual respect and ethical standards. This approach helped me to unearth rich and reliable data from interviewees and to gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon. From the data provided, I uncovered viable strategies leaders use to solve business problems and the potential effect those solutions may have in impacting positive social change in communities.

At the completion of the study, I found a deeper appreciation of the nature and purpose of struggles encountered when I started the journey. Every phase of the journey was critical towards having a deeper understating of the research process; how it guides researchers to ensure adherence to research standards and protocols and the study findings and recommendations meet validity and reliability requirements. Because of this experience, I now possess a wealth of knowledge on the study phenomena and can use this new knowledge to share valuable strategies for improving business practice, as well as influence positive social change in communities.

### **Conclusion**

The impact of occupational stress on employee well-being, workplace productivity, and the broader economy has been considerable (ILO, 2016). New trends in the economy complemented by new production technology and new information, have accelerated and increased the intensity of business processes, which has influenced a rise in the precariousness associated with working conditions and employees' health (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). More than \$300 billion is expended by organizations each year for employee lost productivity and healthcare costs because of occupational stress (EU-OSHA, 2014). Within the last two decades, the causes and effects of stress have been a focus for scholars. Academicians investigating the impact of occupational stress on organizational performances revealed significant outcomes associated with poor job performance, low productivity, depression, and turnover intention (Kozusznik et al., 2015; Safaria, 2014; Yiwen et al., 2014). Consequently, designing and implementing strategies to reduce occupational stress should be a top priority for organizations.

Business leaders should confront the core or origin of potential stress causes by identifying and addressing psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions, the working environment, the culture of the organization, and labor relations (ILO, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the strategies some bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. Banks come under severe pressure to design innovative products and services to meet the divergent needs of customers and increase business growth. Accordingly, increased work pressure and work-life imbalances have influenced an increase in banking employees' stress levels (George & K. A., 2015; Samartha et al., 2013). Data collected and analyzed from interviews and company documents in this research, exposed viable strategies bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress. Findings revealed bank managers should take a comprehensive approach to promote psychological and physiological well-being to reduce work environment stressors. Four themes emerged that supported strategies identified in the research findings (a) organizational protection and leadership, (b) supportive organization, (c) occupational health and well-being, and (d) prevention.

A strategy of organizational protection and leadership helps leaders to address psychosocial risks and reduce stress through leader behavior that supports people empowerment, and by providing the relevant job resources that enhance employees work engagement. From study findings it was revealed, bank managers should adopt a transformational and supportive leader behavior style to enhance worker psychological well-being and inspire and empower employees to achieve personal, professional, and organizational goals. The primary attributes of transformational leadership style such as

employee empowerment and employee support could potentially mitigate the development of stress in the work environment (Dust et al., 2014). Engaged employees are more physically, cognitively, and emotionally linked to their work, are enthused about achieving performance goals, and are less susceptible to stress symptoms (Anitha, 2014; Bakker, 2011; Gupta et al., 2016).

While this research disclosed several strategies to reduce employees' occupational stress, a supportive organization seemed to have been the most effective and frequently discussed approach. Organizational support is a significant moderator of occupational stress and workers' affective well-being (Newman et al., 2015). In a supportive organizational climate, leaders give attention to factors affecting employee well-being, employee development, employee satisfaction, and employee reward and recognition. Hence, developing a supportive organizational climate is paramount for leaders who desire to increase productive capacity, improve psychological well-being, and reduce workplace stress. A supportive organizational strategy endorsed by leaders contributes to a reduction in stress levels and increased employee productivity (Hill et al., 2015).

From the research findings, leaders may discover that a strategy supporting occupational health and well-being, could be viable in buffering stress effects and creating a work climate conducive to improved employee health and well-being. Employees' health and well-being are threatened because of the unprecedented economic, cultural, and psychosocial challenges (Sheppard et al., 2013). Therefore, leaders should aim to improve working conditions and work organizations, by integrating workplace health promotion into workplace policies to reduce psychosocial hazards and

control stressors. Accordingly, occupational and other job-related diseases such as musculoskeletal and cardiovascular disorders could be mitigated. Furthermore, the development and implementation of an overarching occupational health and safety policy could reduce potential occupational risks and the burden of stress in the work environment. Leaders who design and implement appropriate workplace policies and wellness programs influences an integrated response to stress and encourage action in the workplace that improves health and well-being (ILO, 2016).

An effective strategy to manage occupational stress is prevention (Arnetz et al., 2013). Leaders may discover that fostering a prevention strategy helps to identify and address psychosocial hazards linked to working conditions, the culture of the organization, and labor relations, and promote psychological health at work (ILO, 2016). Work stress prevention reduces employees' health risks and organizational costs (Havermans et al., 2018). Findings from this study revealed leaders reduced stress by focusing on stress prevention areas linked to organizational culture, labor relations, work-life balance, and job-fit. Leaders who manage employees' work processes and flexible work schedules while introducing family-friendly workplace policies, could reduce poor work-life balance and employees' stress. Work-life balance is a collaborative effort between employee and employer, to attain worker psychological well-being and improvement in harmonious living by effectively managing the competing demands and imbalances that exist in the work domain and external environment (Walia, 2014). Furthermore, when business leaders incorporate job-fit as a part of their overarching recruitment strategy, it enhances employee job appreciation and reduces stress.

In conclusion, it is clear the impact of occupational stress on workers, organizations, and the economy is of significance. Business leaders could consider the findings, recommendations, and conclusions outlined in this research, to facilitate enhancing workers' well-being and improving organizational health. Business leaders should focus on stress prevention by designing and implementing workplace policies that support occupational health. Business leaders are encouraged to make occupational stress a focal point by including psychosocial hazards and risks into strategic plans and management measures and linking those efforts with interventions. Leaders must engage effective strategies to enhance the quality of work-life for employees and mitigate the effects of workplace stress (Verissimo & Lacerda, 2015).

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Zwingmann

## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Location\_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer\_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee\_\_\_\_\_

### **Orientation**

Opening introduction and exchange of pleasantries

### **General Reminders to Participants**

- Purpose of the study
- Reaffirm information shared will be held strictly confidential and used solely for the purpose of the study
- Interview will be audio recorded and handwritten notes taken during interactions
- On completion of the transcription and analyses process, member checking will be executed to engage participants on the accuracy of the data gathered and to validate the interpretation of their responses.

### **Participants**

The participants included in this study will consist of a population sample of five managers from one banking organization in the Caribbean, who successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. Participants who have worked in the banking and financial services sector for five years or more and have a minimum of

one-year supervising and leading banking employees will be targeted as a part of the eligibility criteria.

### **Length of Interviews**

Each interview session will last approximately 60 minutes. However, I will seek pre-authorization to request a 15-20 minutes follow-up interview where necessary - (a) for further clarification of unfamiliar terms and/or phrases (b) to clarify participant's responses and (c) to validate new information shared in subsequent interviews.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress?

### **Interview Questions**

1. In your role as a leader in the organization, how do you define occupational stress?
2. How does reducing occupational stress fit into your organization's overall strategy?
3. What effect has reducing occupational stress had on your organization's performance?
4. What strategies are you using to reduce occupational stress?
5. What challenges did you encounter when implementing occupational stress reduction strategies, and how did you address the implementation challenges?
6. What method(s) did you find worked best to reduce occupational stress?
7. How did your employees respond to your different techniques to reduce occupational stress?

8. What effect has reducing occupational stress had on your organization's staff well-being, and how do you know?
9. What additional information would you like to share regarding reducing occupational stress?

**Closing**

- Interviewer reviews manuscripts with interviewee and allows time for reflection, feedback and confirmation of accuracy of interpretation of key terms.
- Thanks the interviewee for their time and request permission to request a follow up visit if necessary.



## Appendix B: Letter of Introduction and Request for Participation

Subject: Research Request

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am a DBA student at Walden University with specialization in leadership. This email serves as an invitation to your bank to participate in my study: Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress.

The inclusion criteria are bank managers who have worked in the banking industry for five years or more, have a minimum of one-year supervising and leading banking employees and have successfully implemented strategies that reduced occupational stress. In this study, I will qualitatively explore strategies bank managers use to reduce employees' occupational stress.

I would appreciate your assistance in obtaining access to the employees at your organization who meet the inclusion criteria. The study has met preliminary IRB criteria at Walden University. I will be using face-to-face interviews as my data collection approach and will ensure confidentiality of all participants throughout the research process.

Attached is a Walden University Letter of Cooperation Agreement for permission to gain access and recruit participants. Please sign and return the Letter of Cooperation for remittance to Walden University. Upon receipt of the signed Letter of Cooperation and final IRB approval, employees' who meet the study criteria will be invited to be a part of the study. Participants and organization confidentiality will be strictly maintained. I remain available to answer questions pertaining to my research proposal.

Thank you for your consideration, time, and attention to this request.

Sincerely,  
Ransford Davidson

## Appendix C: Bank's Values

# Our Values

#PROUD

## People

Members proudly serving members. We support passionate team members inspired to be the best that they can be. Provide opportunities for meaningful, challenging and rewarding work.

## Respect

We take the time to understand deeply the history, culture, needs, dreams and aspirations of our members, customers, suppliers, regulators, staff and communities.

## Innovation

Deliver outstanding service harnessing cutting edge technology to enhance the lives of those we serve.

## Dynamic Leadership

The courage to shape a better future committed to the highest ethical standards and adhering to the spirit and letter of relevant laws, regulations and standards.

## Exceptional Service

We provide exceptional financial hospitality facilitating extraordinary life experiences. We honour our agreements and treat all stakeholders fairly while we foster mutually rewarding relationships.

Appendix D: Group's Mission

# Mission

🏠 > About Us > Mission



## Mission

A globally respected brand – boldly finding ways to enrich lives and  
build communities



## Appendix E: Bank's International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Certification



## Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that the Management System of:

**Bank Limited**

Kingston 10, Kingston, 0, Jamaica

has been approved by LRQA to the following standards:

ISO 9001:2015

Chris Koci - President, LRQA Americas

Issued By: Lloyd's Register Central and South America Ltd

for and on behalf of: Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Limited

This certificate is valid only in association with the certificate schedule bearing the same number on which the locations applicable to this approval are listed.

Current Issue Date: 5 April 2018

Expiry Date: 22 August 2018

Certificate Identity Number: 10071091

Original Approvals:

ISO 9001 – 23 August 2012

Approval Number(s): ISO 9001 – 0013821

The scope of this approval is applicable to:  
Provision of Banking and Mortgage Services.



001

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Note: Reprinted with permission (see Appendix G) from the banking organization.

## Appendix F: Organization's Book of Culture

LEADER2LEADER Page 04




## THE LITTLE BLUE BOOK OF CULTURE

We can only achieve our ambitions for the organisation, our members and ourselves if we are equipped and skilled to be our best. As an employer of choice, the [redacted] Group recruits the brightest and the best people, who feel nurtured, valued, challenged and fairly rewarded, as we execute the mission of the organisation.

The Little Blue Book brings together all the aspects of our culture that make us [redacted]. It outlines our values, practices, traditions, competency framework and development opportunities that help us to demonstrate how we LIVE, LEAD and LEARN the [redacted] Way!

The GHRD Learning, Development & Culture team will be sharing The Little Blue Book with all team members, but we would first like feedback from you, the leadership team. Please look out for a draft of the book. Once the final copy is completed, we anticipate that team leads will make sure that it is a living, breathing, true representation of the [redacted] Culture within their teams.

**CULTURE IS NOT A PART OF THE GAME...IT IS THE GAME!**



THE LITTLE BLUE BOOK OF CULTURE  
LEARN. LEAD. LIVE... THE [redacted] WAY

Note: Reprinted with permission (see Appendix H) from the banking organization.

## Appendix G: Permission from the Bank to Use Copy of Certification

RE: Doctoral Research - Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress



[Redacted]

Fri 7/20, 10:16 AM

Ransford Davidson [Redacted]

👤 \$ Reply all | ↘

Inbox

Dear Ransford,

Thank you for your email. Confirmation given.

Regards

[Redacted]

---

**From:** Ransford Davidson [mailto:ransford.davidson@waldenu.edu]

**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 4:18 PM

**To:** [Redacted]

**Cc:** Ransford Davidson [Redacted]

**Subject:** Doctoral Research - Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress

Dear Ms. [Redacted]

I refer to our discussion on 2018 July 19 regarding the subject study.

Please confirm I may use a copy of your bank's International Organization Standardization (ISO) certification I reviewed through your office to help reinforce information on your organization's effort, as it pertains to strategies leaders use to reduce employees' occupational stress.

Thanks in advance as I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,

Ransford Davidson

## Appendix H: Permission from the Bank to Use Copy of Printed Material

RE: Doctoral Research - Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress



Thu 7/19, 6:39 PM  
Ransford Davidson

Reply all

Inbox

Dear Ransford,

I am happy for you to use the book, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I have circulated it to all leaders for their review and most are aligned with its contents.

---

**From:** Ransford Davidson [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2018 6:16 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Doctoral Research - Leadership Strategies to Reduce Employees' Occupational Stress

Hello Dr. [REDACTED]

Reference is made to the captioned study that's being conducted at your organization. Please confirm I may use a copy of the attached document I reviewed through your office relating to the "Little Blue Book of Culture" and to reinforce information on your organization's efforts to reduce employees' occupational stress.

Thanks in advance as I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards,  
Ransford Davidson