

The 5-M Downsizing Communication Model for Survivor-Employee Engagement

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The global economic crisis has led to downsizing, creating survivor-employees and affecting employee-engagement. This study aimed to assess the relationship between banks' internal communication strategies and their survivor-employee engagement. The research involved in-depth interviews and descriptive design, focusing on 15 commercial banks in Nigeria. The findings revealed that downsizing is prevalent in the industry, with no protection from Nigerian labour laws. The downsizing-communication from top management to survivor-employees is minimal, leading to survivor syndrome and declining employee-engagement. The study created and proposed the 5M-model for downsizing communication and employee engagement. The 5M-model framework connotes Mobilisation, Management, Motivate, Monitor and Measure. However, the 5M-model for downsizing-communication and employee-engagement amplifies the media richness theory, integrates employee-engagement theory and caters for downsizing communication phenomena, a new solution-dimension for optimal employee-organisation relationship. The 5M model communication gradient transits from green to yellow indicating efficacy of communication, the capacity to convey meaning between sender and receiver, record reactions and get immediate feedback. This novel model is a template to improve survivor-employee engagement and employee-organization relationships.

Keywords: internal communication strategy, corporate downsizing, survivor-employee organisation relations, commercial banking, UWES-3

INTRODUCTION

Organisations face challenges (Beerli & Martín, 2004), (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017) in their everyday living cycle, and one of the responses of the management is employee downsizing (Ray & Maheshwari, 2017). Downsizing is carried out to improve the business (Kawai, 2015). During an organisational change like downsizing, the internal impact is felt negatively by the victims (i.e. those with terminated employment), the survivors (i.e. employees remaining after the downsizing activity) (Kiran et al., 2014), the human executioners (e.g. human resource personnel), the organisation and its financial base (de Jong et al., 2016). During downsizing, while more or fewer employees are told to leave, the organisation's progress then rests mainly on the survivors (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Thus, there is an emotive, intellectual and commitment obligation and expectation from the survivor-employee to guarantee the success of the organisation's objectives (Morrison, 2014), (Wolfe, 2004). Organisational communication has a significant influence on workplace performance, effectiveness (Qerimi, 2019) and employee engagement, but the unanswered question is whether employee engagement is considered during downsizing communication.

Meanwhile, empirical data from countries in Europe, Asia and America indicate that in the long run, organisations that downsize experience decline, largely socially, in profit and other financial standings, implying the objective for downsizing fails in a matter of time (Datta et al., 2010), (Nwoye, 2017), (Worrell et al., 1991). If employee engagement guarantees the success of the organisations' objectives, then why do organisations who downsize experience a form of business decline in time post-downsizing? What are the loopholes in this phenomenon of failure in the downsizing objective of organisations and support job development? Does it have anything to do with survivor-employee engagement? While some scholars have listed many factors that may lead to business decline post-downsizing, communication concerning the survivors is mentioned. It is of significant interest, considering employees are the lifeblood of the organisation. Effective internal communication is a prerequisite for organisational success. Consequently, organisations are expected to evaluate and improve communication, especially in increasingly trying economic pressures (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

Also, according to Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, & Bordia (2004), the downsizing communication expected by survivors is primarily informational including updates on the ongoing organisational changes, how it impacts their job roles and any further changes to make in the organisation. Frahm & Brown (2005) also reiterated the difficulty in communicating during an organisational change like downsizing. This positions downsizing communication as a factor for changes in survivor-employee engagement (Pignata et al., 2015). Thus, the inquiry into these phenomena, particularly in the Nigerian context, where employee silence is loud in many sectors on workplace issues. Is the presence or absence of informational updates during downsizing communication heightening uncertainty, impacting employee engagement and by extension leading to the failure of the downsizing objective? What are the standards for informative communication in the Banking industry to downsizing survivors during downsizing communication? What can be considered a model or pragmatic approach to downsizing communication with positive impact potential on survivor-employee engagement, and organisational policies? What is the state of survivor-employee engagement due to downsizing communication?

Considering the issues raised and absence of a 'known' downsizing communication model, this study's research questions were streamlined to the following: What is the impact of downsizing communication strategy on bank employees? (RQ1); What communication model can be integrated into corporate downsizing communication strategy in banks to foster survivor-employee engagement? (RQ2). This paper then presents a concise literature review and discourse analysis on the downsizing, downsizing communication, media-richness in organisational communication, the impact of downsizing communication on employee communication and a way forward (the 5M model of downsizing communication which potentially improves Employee Organisation Relationship (EOR)).

Downsizing Communication in Employee Communications

Downsizing communication is dynamic and should occur within the workplace framework of employee communications. It is also worthy of note that workplace productivity is enhanced by employee communication and is fundamental in shaping employee-organisation relationships (EOR) (Grunig, 1992; Men, 2014). Also recognised as internal communication (Jablin & Putnam, 2011), employee communication refers to the exchange of information [amongst employees] critical to the success of the organisation (Burley, 2015). This puts communication as a core process via which employees form relations, share information, and imbibe corporate values, meaning and culture ((Jablin & Putnam, 2011) (Husain, 2013)). Effective employee communication produces organisational success, especially during organisational change (Husain, 2013).

As suggested earlier, organisational changes and restructuring occur in a business life cycle, one of which is downsizing. And equally, a significant characteristic of the management of organisations (Jong et al., 2016) the flow of communication during downsizing is determined by the [existing] employee communication of the system. At present, it is worthy of note that Employee communication or internal communication is responsible for shaping employee-organisation relationships (EOR) and enhancing workplace productivity (Grunig, 1992; Men, 2014).

Scholars have empirically proven the significance of communication in the process of organisational change as intimately related processes (Lewis, 1999). Most research indicates that communication has a positive correlation with many organisational outputs like organisational commitment (Lan, 2007), performance (Espahbodi et al., 2000), staff conduct (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017), and job satisfaction (Ruck, 2012). Also, failures in employee communication can hurt the organisation (Goyer et al., 2016), and this can affect an organisation's efficiency negatively (Zhang & Agarwal, 2009).

Communication during an organisational change to employees reduces resistance to change (Husain, 2013). Furthermore, two crucial outcomes emerge in response to organisations' relationship cultivation efforts via employee communication, and the result is evident in the employee response to work engagement (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Saks, 2006) and commitment (Mishra et al., 2014; Ni, 2007). Implicitly employee engagement is in the balance during an organisational change.

Change for organisations involves the continuous adjustment to the external conditions of the company in the operating milieu, in parallel with the growth of domestic stability (Hodgkinson, 2018).

In the wake of the global recession and economic downturn (Wyman, 2011) companies, being the wheel of the economy have continued to experience and react to the economic upheavals (Deans, 2009). The organisation's ability to adapt quickly to these changes depends to a large extent on its competitiveness and management of resources (Hodgkinson, 2018). Many kinds of changes take place in the external environment of the organisation (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017), the most prominent include globalisation (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011), business automation or other innovations by the business (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Thus, organisations are faced with two sources of pressure in favour of change: external and internal (Tileag & Rizescu, 2016).

Researcher institutes like Prosci (Creasey & Taylor, 2014) and scholars like Elving (2005) have done extensive studies in change management proposing models for communicating organisational change (Creasey & Taylor, 2014) on a commercial scale. However, there is little proof of what model organisations have adapted in different industries. This makes this study imperative as downsizing continues to be an enigma (Datta et al., 2010), a multidimensional occurrence in existing organisations.

Haven identified declining employee engagement as a threat to long and medium-organisational success (Datta et al., 2010), this begs the question of whether this knowledge is available to decision-makers (Kristin & Wie, 2015) and communicators (Walden et al., 2017) of the downsizing process in organisations. In a competitive capitalist business clime like Nigeria (Researchgate, 2014), is there evidence of survivor syndrome (Kiran et al., 2014) aggravated by communication (Elving, 2005) during the downsizing process (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011) and awareness of the resultant threat to business (Luan et al., 2013) sustainability?

The researchers thus assessed informational communication of organisational change (downsizing in this instance) and implication for survivors to survivors during the downsizing process, plus the impact of the informational communication or otherwise on survivor-employee engagement. An assessment of employee communication during downsizing and the impact on the survivors would indicate the significance of internal/employee communication in change management and how it impacts employees and the business. This is essentially a communications audit to place downsizing communication within context. Findings were drawn for survivor employees in the banking sector.

This is an excerpt from a doctoral thesis and the findings provide useful insight to business leaders on the cause of likely variations in personnel performance, in the medium and long term, following an organisational change; will inspire further research by discerning organisations on profit and loss over a period post downsizing, taking stock of communication flow efficiency and impact of internal communication. Furthermore, this feedback is essential for employers, team leads, human resource professionals, communicators, business administration consultants, life coaches, researchers, governments and all human capital investors.

What Is the Need for a Sector-Based Downsizing Communication Model?

Scholars have empirically proven the significance of communication in the process of organisational change as intimately related processes (Lewis, 1999). Organisational changes occur in a business life cycle,

one of which is downsizing (Jong et al., 2016) and communication is a fundamental part of attaining efficiency in an organisational change (Tourish, Paulsen, Hobman, & Bordia, 2004), hence the need to research communication during such changes like downsizing.

While downsizing is aimed at helping the organisation, it can have negative consequences on the well-being of retained employees (Jong et al., 2016), called survivors (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Several industries have suffered an economic downturn globally (Elstein, 2008; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011) leading to downsizing. Countries like the United States (Read, 2008), Taiwan (Luan et al., 2013), United Kingdom (Goyer et al., 2016), Nigeria (Researchgate, 2014), Canada and Calgary (Nwoye, 2017) and more suffered, thus leaving a trail of downsizing survivors in the global and local workplaces. Despite the changes in survivor employees, there is relatively little research on surviving employees even when the long-term growth of the organisation is heavily dependent on the downsizing survivors (Guo & Giacobbe-Miller, 2012), not to mention investigating downsizing communication.

Researchers (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006) insist that an assessment of employee's outlook on downsizing is necessary for understanding individual reactions to the same. Whereas some employees consider changes (due to downsizing) as a vista of career growth opportunities for advancement, others think of it as being a stressful, adverse event (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Guo & Giacobbe-Miller, 2012). For many, however, the phenomenon is typically linked with significant changes in the group composition, work content, organisational resources and reporting channels (Kernan & Hanges, 2002).

Several studies have looked at the negative impact of downsizing on employees and the organisation with plenty of emphasis leaning on the financial implications because of its relevance to the development and stability of global economies. Luan et al. (2013) accessed the data of organisations in Taiwan to show the negative impacts of downsizing. At the same time, Goyer et al. (2016) considered employee downsizing in a capitalist economy while accessing financial institutions. A good number focus on employee engagement impact as will be reviewed in this study. It is worthy of note that employee reaction is dynamic, individualistic and starts at an emotional level. Noer's (1993) emotional cluster of downsizing survivors (Wolfe, 2004; Tran & Quach, 2017) further enunciates survivor syndrome.

In some workplaces, downsizing survivors (Bujang & Sani, 2014) consequentially exhibit behavioural traits due to the impact of the downsizing identified as downsizing survivor syndrome. Some of these traits are mistrust of management, demotivation, declining job satisfaction, uncertainty and commitment, which are paradigms of employee engagement (Wolfe, 2004), (Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). This, therefore, implies that the downsizing experience has some impact on survivor-employee engagement.

Meanwhile, scholars like Tourish et al. (2004) argue it is not downsizing that generates mistrust for management, demotivation, declining job satisfaction and commitment but how the terminations are handled (Schweiger et al., 1987) and the level of information received by survivors about the organisational change and their jobs. Wyman (2011) also reiterates that the way the downsizing is communicated impacts the employees' engagement and commitment to work, the downsizing aftermath affects the business bottomline (Kawai, 2015b) in the long and short term (Morris et al., 1999). However, this study focuses on informational communication, downsizing communication to survivors in the process of organisational change. Organisational leaders who suppress communicating during uncertainty situations like downsizing do so at their organisations' risk since their employees tend to be less satisfied and more cynical than those who work in uncertainty-embracing and communicative organisations. The challenge for communication scholars and practitioners lies in developing theories, strategies, and practices that focus on embracing uncertainty (Tourish & Hargie, 2003) and communication.

While organisations may operate various modes of downsizing communication, mainly an informational update on changes and how they affect the survivors, the sociocultural milieu or other factors are critical to driving success and business sustainability. Where a model works successfully, it is validated and suitable for exporting to other institutions, industries and climes.

This study thus assessed informational communication during downsizing and its implication on survivor-employee engagement during the downsizing process, plus the impact of the informational communication or otherwise on survivor-employee engagement and leaning on a theoretical basis, proposes

the 5M model of downsizing communication for optimal survivor-employee engagement, with focus on the banking sector.

This intervention is imperative as financial organisations can leverage findings toward building a stronger relationship with employees and growing their profit. The impact of this research in the real world is an analytical basis for progression policy and decision-making concerning change management and employee communication. This is key because the downsizing and communication phenomena have a direct impact on business profitability and productivity. Furthermore, downsizing communication models can facilitate a national economic boost and best practice standards for discerning organisations. This study furthermore provides a level of sensitisation concerning the relationship between internal communication, employee engagement, overall organisational growth and communication satisfaction for researchers and businesses. The adaptation of recommendations herein will potentially improve workplace communications, sustain employee engagement and boost business growth. For human resource managers and corporate leaders who spearhead internal communication and change management, this is a trigger for continuous learning on effective communication approaches for change management, downsizing and review of employee engagement sustenance strategy. Other impact points are talent management, retention, and emotional aspects of work-life in contemporary workplaces. Communication satisfaction during downsizing significantly impacts emotional connection to work, commitment, performance and intention to exit the workplace. However, this is a huge factor that has received only a little attention in African research and the Banking industry.

METHODOLOGY

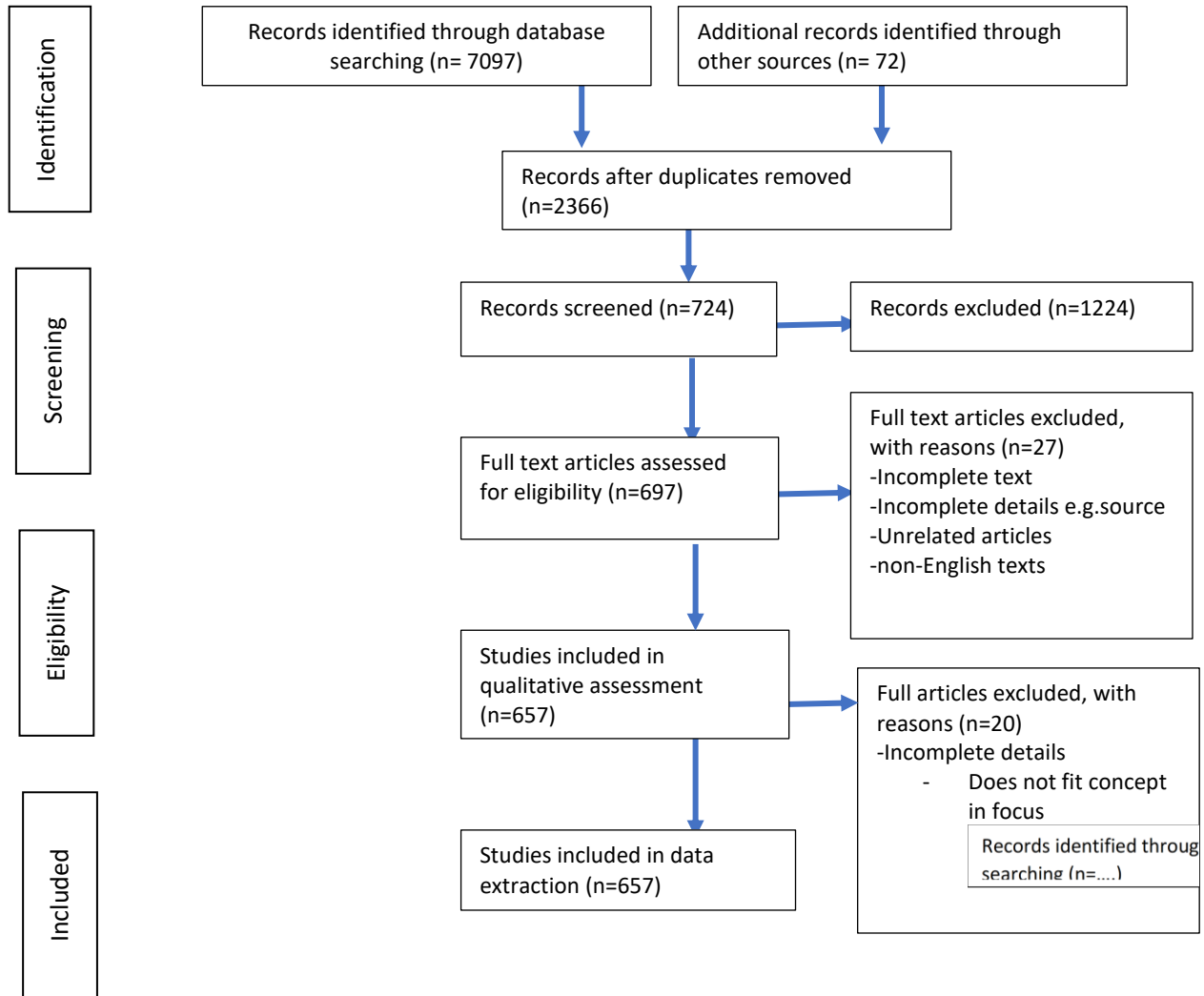
The researchers used mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative, specifically in-depth interviews, discourse analysis and the PRISMA methodology.

The qualitative approach used in-depth interviews. This methodology allows a minimum of 5 interviews (Dworkin, 2012), until a saturation level. The researchers however interviewed 31 survivor employees from 14 commercial banks in Nigeria. Only employee-survivors whose roles are administrative, executive, technical and professional were assessed, because they unprotected by the Nigeria Labour Law. The study focused on (top-down) medium and mode of informational communication during downsizing vis-à-vis the bank's regular channels of internal communication. Interviews stopped upon saturation and repetition of information. Field data collected were analysed using Excel and Nvivo.

The quantitative approach was a systematic search strategy to identify relevant literature, PRISMA and conduct discourse analysis. The PRISMA search strategy and criteria was tailored to four databases: EBSCO, Google Scholar, Scopus and ProQuest. The search items were downsizing, Nigerian banks, employee engagement, and employee/internal communication. All searches spanned from 1980-2020 and included journal articles, research reports, review papers, and conference proceedings, published in English. All unrelated items or non-English literature were excluded and extracted. The selection criteria are based on the PRISMA Statement (Moher et al., 2009). The search mainly focused on mapping existing literature on organisational communication issues, and employee engagement. The investigation had a limitation on Nigeria-specific data at some stage. A total of 657 sources were used and 6440 were Excluded due to non-eligibility. See the framework below;

PRISMA FRAMEWORK

**FIGURE 1
PRISMA FRAMEWORK FOR THIS STUDY**



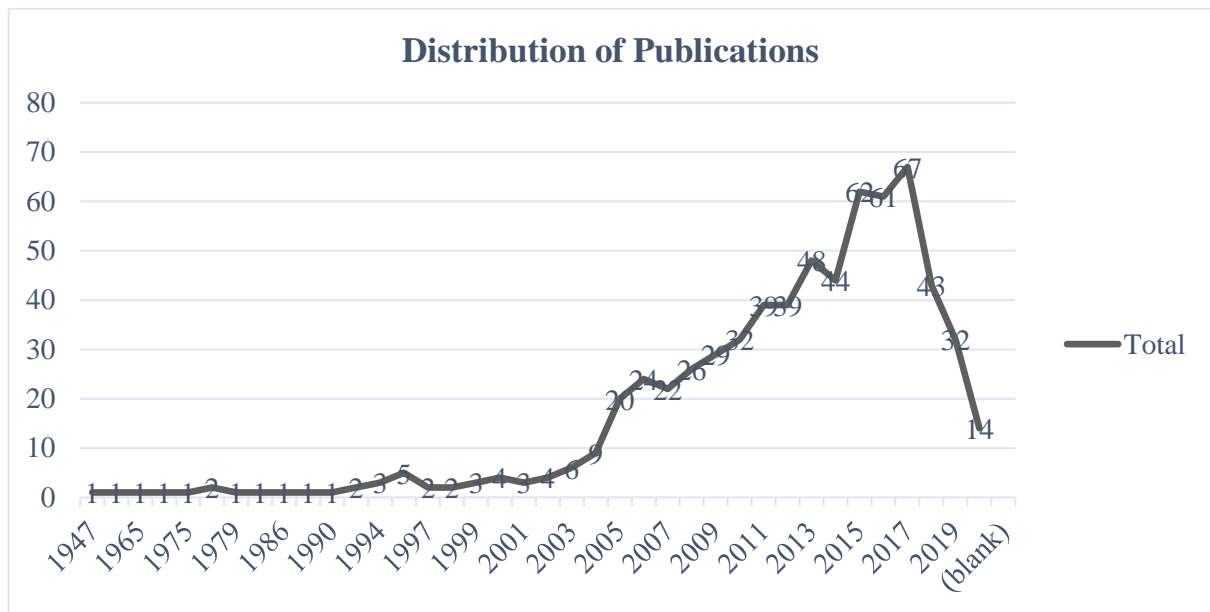
Source: Researcher, 2020

**FIGURE 2
LIST OF PUBLICATION SOURCES FROM PRIMA FRAMEWORK**

Publication Sources	Count
Book	36
Book Section	7
Conference Proceedings	4
Generic	8
Journal Article	454
Newspaper Article	4

Newspaper Article	4
Report	133
Thesis	2
Unpublished Work	2
Web Page	7
Grand Total	657

**FIGURE 3
DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATION FROM PRISMA FRAMEWORK & ANALYSIS**



For the in-depth interview, the researchers used a semi-structured interview guide which adapted the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale UWES-3 and Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire CSQ. Interviewing and participant observation are the most common techniques for obtaining an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Jamshed, 2014; Percy et al., 2015). An interview is a technique for accumulating data in which the researcher asks qualitative questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The researcher can choose an interview format that runs from a structured, unstructured and semi-structured interview. Using a face-to-face interview enables the researcher to see, learn, and feel the participants' experiences through participant observation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Participant observation is likewise an additional and separate method for authenticating research findings (Jamshed, 2014). The interview protocol contains a set of interview questions and step-by-step guidance, directing the interviewer through the interview process (Chen & Mykletun, 2015; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012).

Regarding the business schedule of respondents, the sensibility of the subject topic and other limiting constraints, all respondents opted for interviews via telephone calls. During the telephone call interviews, the researchers gained useful insight and deeper context while also leveraging rapport and trust (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The tone of respondents was closely monitored. There were evident differences in response between respondents still at work and those responding while outside the workplace. Meanwhile, all respondents took an interview time most convenient for them. Being mindful of personal bias is room to mitigate influencing the audience results. The researcher minimised personal preference through the role of member checking. Member checking is a process to share interview data with the participants to assure the

accuracy of interview data and the credibility of research findings (Birt et al., 2016; David, Hitchcock, Ragan, Brooks, & Starkey, 2016).

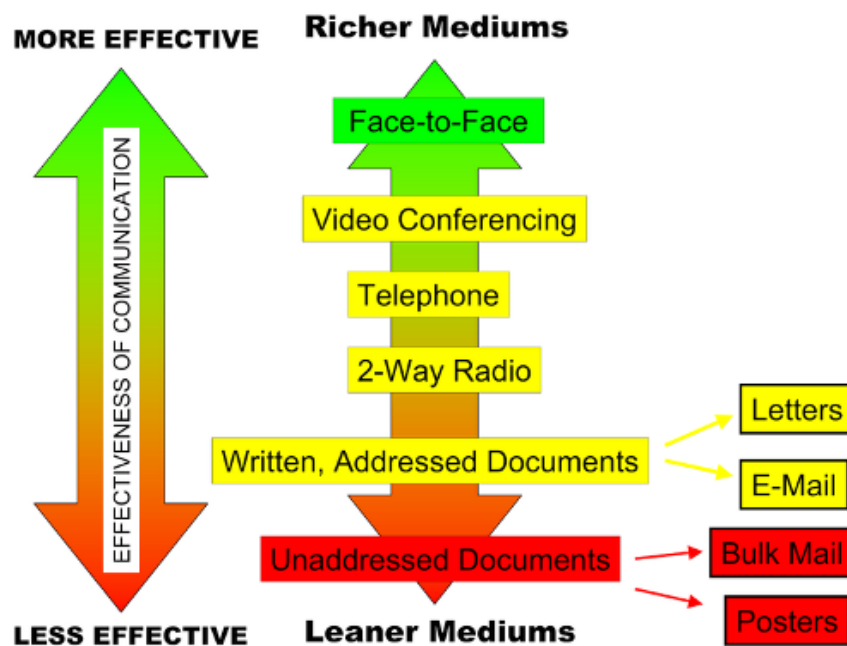
THEORETICAL BASIS

Media Richness Theory (MRT)

MRT also described as ‘Information Richness Theory’, posits that certain media can transmit the needed information more effectively than others. This capability to transmit is dependent on whether the information will be used in times of uncertainty or equivocality. The proponents of the Media/Information Richness theory are Daft and Lengel.

According to MRT, different media or forms of communication have different levels of richness in the information being shared. Media channels and platforms are classified based on their capacity to facilitate equivocality or uncertainty (Communication Theories, 2016). The theorists propose that a medium’s ability to allow message senders and receivers to achieve shared meaning is what constitutes or guarantees effective communication. Where the medium is inadequate or not rich enough, it implies the message recipients will encounter or suffer uncertainty. This is the outcome of multiple or conflicting interpretations of a message.

FIGURE 4
MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY



Daft & Lengel, 1986

The criteria for determining the richness of media are as follows:

- a) **Personal focus inclusiveness** -Every single medium has diverse levels of personal focus. This is even more critical when media integrates more personal feelings and emotions. It presents an opportunity for the message to get conveyed fully and in an improved way. For instance, face-to-face communication may be compared to email communication
- b) **Potential for immediate feedback**- The act of communication is considered complete when the required feedback is provided. Receiving feedback is also considered an acceptable means of noting that the message is received appropriately. Immediacy in feedback guarantees that

any mistake in the message transmission can be adjusted instantly. This feature in a communication medium further refers to its ability to allow users to respond to the communication being received swiftly. The medium ought to support and accommodate 2-way communication.

- c) **Transference of multiple cues-** There are numerous means by which the medium of communication information is reached, and these cues can either be visual or auditory. For instance, an advertisement on adherence to Covid-19 preventive actions can be communicated by using a combination of cues. The background score can be solemn and gloomy, the visuals could illustrate a person on life support in a hospital bed, and the voice-over can be in a severe tone discussing preventive measures.
- d) **Diverse language support-** This describes the multicity of meanings that may be transmitted by the use of language symbols or natural language. Numbers specify precision while natural language facilitates transmission of several concepts and philosophies. A specific medium is said to possess more richness if it has a more extensive plethora of criteria. Thus the theory ranks different medium in descending order and richness as follows: face-to-face, video systems, audio systems and text systems. Media is, therefore, viewed to be very rich, somewhat rich, lean or very lean.

The amount of information received by a sender in a text message is less than what it would be in an email or phone conversation. Each level adds more details and therefore increases the amount of understanding that the receiver has at the end. The chances that the information will be misunderstood are much less also. Another factor to consider is how personal the information is. You would not tell anyone he is fired by text message; it would be more appropriate to say to him in person. For instance, if a news channel is investigating possible electoral malpractice and scandal, they would reach out to potential informants for detailed insider information. If the communication is entirely done via email, then the informant may hesitate to put down any facts on paper. This could incriminate the informant unless the text is coded to hide details and evidence.

However, if a phone call is used, there is an opportunity to elucidate on points, queries and doubts. The rise and fall of tones say a lot too.

- e) **Ambiguity and Equivocality-** In communicativity, there is a need sometimes to minimise ambiguity or to reduce equivocality (finding the right question to answer). According to MRT, lean media (emails) was best used to reduce ambiguity and rich media (face-to-face) was best suited for lowering equivocality. Thus, depending on circumstances, diverse media should be used to transmit messages in consideration of their richness level and messaging objective.

The media richness theory had some criticism, and it included that a medium's richness potential stayed constant despite being used by various persons. Also, it could be challenging to decide upon the media to be used because tasks had a diverse degree of equivocality and uncertainty.

In organisational contexts, features that allow message recipients to rapidly interact with the message sender (seeking and giving feedback) and assess consistency in message interpretations are thought to have a greater capacity for dealing with difficult messages. Media are also classified as having heightened richness when they incorporate channels that allow message recipients to utilize a more significant number of sensory modalities (i.e., visual, auditory, tactile).

Similarly, rich media provides communicators with the ability to use natural, conversational delivery (i.e., A face-to-face conversation) rather than more formal and technical language (i.e., A statistical report). Last, personal focus consists of the degree to which a communication method allows a communicator to tailor a message to a specific recipient or audience rather than more generalized receivers.

Richer media, according to the media richness theory, ease perceptions in interpersonal communication in organisations. They directly impact total socio-emotional communication and positive socio-emotional climate in the organisation and the perceived ability to evaluate others' deception and expertise. Leaner media encompasses emails, documents and other non-personal media to facilitate communication clarity when participants have less task-relevant knowledge. The impacts of these mediating constructs on decision

[and communication] quality depend significantly on the levels of communicators' expertise (Kahai & Cooper, 2003).

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Downsizing is a global phenomenon and recurrent in financial institutions across the world because of the industry's sensitivity and stake in socioeconomics. It is also prevalent in the Nigerian banking industry and survivor employees are seldom notified about it except in general mails announcing that staff should focus on their goals.

In most cases, Survivors typically observed the absence of colleagues and realize downsizing has occurred when their colleague's duties are passed to them or staff is introduced to the team. This situation fuels rumour, uncertainties, anger, mistrust for management and other emotional responses that impact employee engagement. This situation, particularly the minimalist communication from management as per the restructuring or downsizing and how it directly impacts them triggers survivor syndrome and the expectation of better employee communication.

Employee preference for more interpersonal communication during downsizing aligns with the principles of the media richness theory. The phenomena affirm the weight of the richness of media and other criteria like personal focus inclusiveness which integrates more personal feelings and emotions, i.e., face-to-face. This medium also has the potential for immediate feedback, and observation, and limits errors in message transmission and incidence of miscommunication. Furthermore, richer media provides the benefits of multiple cues- staff can see and hear simultaneously, plus the diverse language support. Downsizing communication presents a difficult conversation, and some tension; thus, face-to-face serves excellently to minimize uncertainty and equivocality. Staff can be told what is happening during downsizing, why, plus the implications for them and the organisation.

Video conferencing also features in Media Richness Theory as rich, also embodies features of face-to-face; however, it has limitations because it is mediated. A significant advantage, however, is the potential to communicate with a large number of employees directly. Potential for immediate feedback may be minimal, depending on timing, technology and the number of people being addressed per time. According to findings on channels currently and predominantly used for downsizing communication to survivors, emails are the standard media channel used. Emails have the potential to document, but it is limiting for effective communication at this period because it is impersonal.

One criticism of the media richness theory that was also apparent and will be catered for in the recommendation section of this study is the difficulty in deciding upon media. This difficulty in media choice is because tasks have a diverse degree of equivocality and uncertainty. Downsizing communication may be a difficult message to transmit to a large number of persons with different roles and personalities. Thus, the 5M model for downsizing communication proposed by this study becomes turnkey.

The study affirmed the prevalence of downsizing in the Nigerian banking industry presents uncertainty in the employee organisation relationship. However, when survivors get information from trusted sources like management, there is the possibility of uncertainty reduction. The premise of employee organisation relationships makes uncertainty reduction imperative. This is informed by the fact that uncertainty reduction in employee communication positively impacts employee engagement. Employee communication drives employee engagement. By extension, optimal employee engagement provides a higher potential for organisational growth and achievement of goals. This presupposes that the medium for employee communication is also apt for the circumstance.

During the downsizing period in the banks, the tension heightened due to minimalist communication by management. The minimalist communication from strategic sources like top management also contributed to the spread of rumours among staff and bad press. The information received or not from the bank's senior management is used to make assumptions, predictions of management behaviour and possible outcomes. This comms-situation again impacts employee organisation relationships as survivors are continually watching the quantum of verbal communication, and non-verbal gestures while having an information-quest attitude. They are also checking for mutual respect in employee-organisation-

relationship, the intimacy level of interactions, similarities between individual and organisational goals and their liking of management. Senior management must begin to take cognizance of employee communication and engagement during downsizing. This is a timely reminder as the economy is starting to cringe from the socio-economic impact of Covid-19.

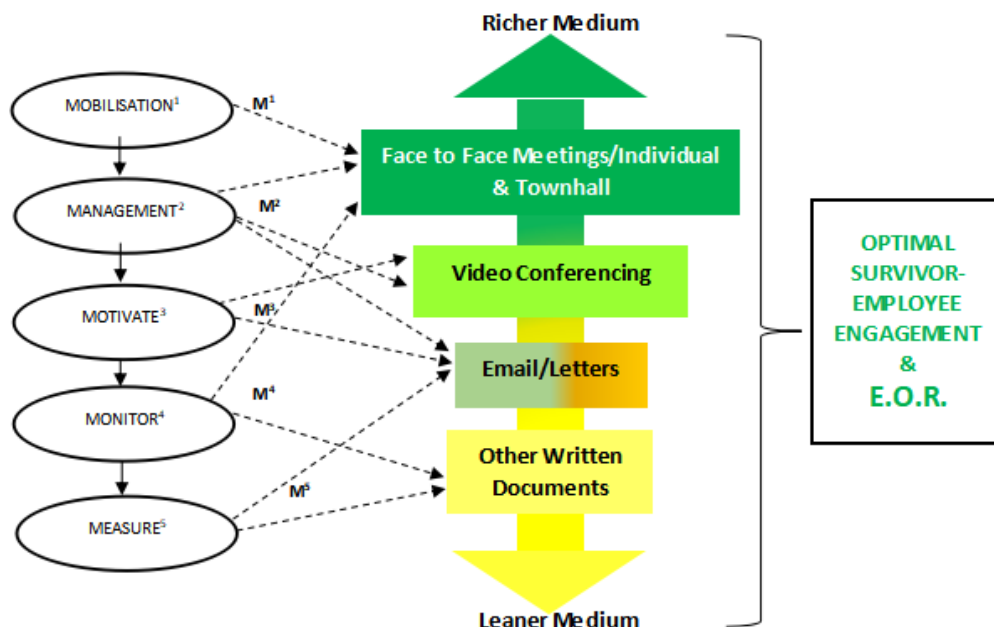
Having considered the preceding, this study thus proposes a pragmatic approach to curb present challenges, the 5M model for downsizing communication, and a communications expert must coordinate the process.

RECOMMENDATION

The 5M Model for Downsizing Communication in the Bank Sector

This study presents a visual, conceptual model for downsizing communication and employee engagement for implementation by organisations and coordinated by an organisational communications expert or media and communications consultant. The model is presented below, followed by a breakdown of all phases of the model and anticipated outcomes, summarily towards optimal employee engagement.

FIGURE 5
5M MODEL FOR DOWNSIZING COMMUNICATION & EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



The 5M model for Downsizing Communication and Employee Engagement is a visual, conceptual model for downsizing communication in banks and financial institutions during an economic downturn facing the industry. It is concise and informed by the literature review, theories, and analysis of field data. The communicativity channels gradient could be likened to Daft & Lengel’s (1986) visual representation of the media richness theory. However, this 5M model for downsizing communication and employee engagement amplifies that theory, while integrating and introducing a new dimension. The communication gradient transits from green to yellow indicating the efficacy of communication, the capacity to convey meaning between sender and receiver, record reactions and get immediate feedback. The specified channels are most suitable for Downsizing Communication in organisations.

See further details on the intricacies of the model below:

TABLE 1
BREAKDOWN OF THE 5M DOWNSIZING COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

COMMUNICATION PHASES	DETAILS	COMMUNICATIVITY CHANNEL/GRADIENT	EOR ANTICIPATED OUTCOME
Mobilisation M¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This phase involves gathering stakeholders in the organisation's downsizing process, e.g., communicators, human resource leads, regional heads, management representatives, a psychologist and other decision-making parties, as Adhoc downsizing committee. • The team reviews documents and internal policies on downsizing. • Other clarifications required cover downsizing justification and the means to assess the impact on the victims, survivors, organisation, finances and reputation in the long and short term. • Deliberate on risks, exit package and strategic downsizing communication plan towards sustainable Employee Engagement 	Face to Face Meetings/Individual & Townhall	Transparency
ManagementM²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management drives the ad-hoc downsizing committee. • Ensure pre-downsizing training of committee and communicators on soft skills and emotional intelligence. • Organise certification training for potential victims and some key personnel, as a form of empowerment 	Face to Face Meetings/Individual & Townhall Video Conferencing Email/Letters	Trust

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host some town hall meetings; notify staff of challenges in the industry with an assurance that management is deliberating in the best interest of employees. • Invite participation and (anonymous) suggestions on the way forward for structural adjustments. Present alternatives to downsizing, i.e., pay cuts, vertical role changes, voluntary resignation, leave/training without pay etc. • Allow for 2-6months interval • Appraise staff based on clear downsizing criteria and shortlist defaulters • Invite downsizing victims for tenure review/exit meeting with Human Resources, Communications team lead and Psychologist. • Downsize effectively 		
<p>MotivateM³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management to host/hold simultaneous branch meetings addressing survivors over brunch to announce the restructuring exercise and its purpose. • This leverages technology but unifies communication. It is a direct communication to employees from a management representative or CEO. It is virtual due to staff size and spread across locations 	<p>Video Conferencing Email/Letters</p>	<p>Participation</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share criteria for downsizing to quell uncertainty, and that victims were adequately compensated as per policy and employee suggestions • Reiterate that role changes may occur, and employees should be open to growth and development • Receive questions, comments and suggestions, to be responded to by the corporate communications team lead and the CEO. • Emphasise the organisation's commitment to employees and clients • Monitor the atmosphere for calm, unrest, misgivings and other body language of survivors • Announce promotions, pay increases etc. • Provide light refreshments, and employees toast to a more robust organisation 		
<p>Monitor M⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor survivor adjustments in new roles and increased workload • Look for emotional clusters of redundancy traits or survivor syndrome • Monitor employee turnover within a period • Sponsor brand communication by leveraging employees as ambassadors, then monitor reactions and outputs 	<p>Face to Face Meetings/Individual & Townhall Other Written Documents</p>	<p>Satisfaction</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up internal brand ambassador campaigns with reward schemes to evoke a connection to organisational vision and appreciate personnel commitment • Hold town hall meetings after 3-months to discuss challenges and adjustments post-downsizing • Note corporate successes' post-downsizing/restructure 		
Measure M⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things to measure using validated and adapted test instruments include; • Employee engagement via the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale • Employee turnover rate post-downsizing communication • Communications audit via communication satisfaction questionnaire CSQ • Employee bonding • Individual/team productivity appraisal & • These tests can be creatively packaged to ease pressure while being tested, e.g., via game mode 	Email/Letters Other Written Documents	Optimal Employee Engagement

It is worthy of note that this model will be significantly impacted by organisational leadership, socio-cultural milieu, politics, Personality, Administration, Organisational Culture, Family, Work environment Organisational Performance, Authentic Leadership, socio-economic constraints and other factors future research may bring up.

The 5M Downsizing Communication Model builds upon the media richness theory, uncertainty reduction theory and employee engagement; all towards optimising employee engagement in the organisation. The duration of each phase is dependent on circumstantial contexts and the discretion of management and ad-hoc committee. However, it is recommended that intervals do not exceed 2-3 months. This is a visual heuristic model recommended based on the findings of my research and is open for further studies.

This model is borne out of a study of internal and downsizing communication within Nigerian banks. However, the concept is adaptable by other financial institutions and organisations in other sectors. Researchers can further test and make recommendations for adaptability by other industries. Further reviews may eventually birth a theory in downsizing communication.

The study is also relevant to banks, university students and lecturers who are interested in looking at employee engagement. Also, the corporate communications team, members of management, human resource managers, bank executives in Nigeria, and the legislators who are to effect a change or review the labour law.

This paper is also recommending that a duration(notice) be given to the victims or survivors before the person is laid off. That there should also be a compensation plan for its employees. This is to ensure that downsizing victims can foot their bills before they get a new job. The research has already mentioned the training of the survivors and victims by the bank. The paper also recommends that the bank should develop a strategy for optimizing employee engagement.

This study further proposes a new definition of *employee engagement as the condition of self-actualization and sustained healthy relationship with management and colleagues in the workplace; It is an adapted set of the mind, body and spirit in harmony with the organization's essence and resulting in optimal result beneficial to the employ and organisation. Many organisations strive to attain this with their internal public as overlooking it is detrimental to achieving its key performance index.*

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