EVALUATING THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN REDUCING SAFETY RISKS AND HUMAN ERRORS DURING ORGANIZATIONAL DOWNSIZING

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ABSTRACT

Organizational downsizing, especially in high-risk industries, poses significant challenges to workplace safety, often increasing the incidence of human errors and safety risks due to decreased workforce morale, heightened stress, and reduced resources. This study evaluates the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) and targeted communication strategies in mitigating these risks, aiming to uncover effective practices that maintain safety standards and minimize human errors during workforce reductions in a case study of Oil and Gas (O&G. By analyzing HRM approaches in high-risk industries such as oil and gas, this research examines the impact of communication strategies on employee engagement, safety compliance, and overall morale during downsizing. Additionally, it investigates the comparative effectiveness of downsizing alternatives-including re-engineering, rightsizing, and restructuring on employee retention and safety outcomes. The study also explores automation's potential as an alternative to layoffs, assessing its effects on both safety performance and employee retention. Findings from this research aim to provide HRM professionals and organizational leaders with actionable insights into designing and implementing downsizing strategies that prioritize health, safety, and morale. By integrating psychosocial risk management and strategic communication within HRM practices, organizations can better navigate the complexities of downsizing while safeguarding employee well-being and minimizing workplace incidents. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of sustainable downsizing strategies that balance economic demands with employee health and safety considerations.

Keywords: Downsizing; Workforce stability; Economic crisis; Risk mitigation; psychosocial well-being

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A healthy and safe workplace begins with the commitment of the organization's leadership to the health, safety, and well-being of its employees. More often than not, employees may commit themselves to the organization's health and safety (H&S) policies when there is a substantial level of job security in the organization, as job insecurity may negatively influence employees' H&S performance and efficiencies, Quinlan and Bohle [1]. "Global economic crisis has led many organizations to downsize to cut costs quickly and increase productivity",

Iverson and Zatzick, p.29 [2]. Downsizing in the organizational context is believed to be a set of strategic policies and practices aimed at the reduction of permanent employees to enhance performance and efficiency, Datta et al. [3]. Studies unveiled that this business tactic by Human Resource Managers (HRM) that is aimed at improving efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness, has recorded significant negative impacts on the health, safety, and well-being of employees and the organization's safety performance-reputation, Schulz and Johann [4]; ILO [5]. Although some strategic terms such as restructuring, re-engineering, and rightsizing have been tactically used to describe the dismissal of employees in the new economic world of enhancing an organization's efficiency and productivity; however, other evidence suggests that either an aggressive or even a reasonable downsizing strategy may equally influence employees' health, safety and well-being negatively [1,6,7].

The inherent risks in the Oil and Gas (O&G) industries, may often require the expertise of highly skilled and well-motivated professionals with sound minds, for the effective and safe running of its complex social-technical systems; this is essential to avoid large-scale O&G incidents such as the Piper Alpha, BP Texas and ESSO [8,9]. O&G facilities are made up of Health, Safety, and Environmental Critical Equipment Systems (HSECES), which must be operated effectively by skilled personnel to avoid catastrophes. These HSECES are parts of the plant installations, structures, equipment & systems, and the failure of which, could cause or contribute substantially to a major accident with severe/catastrophic consequences. Although, accidents in O&G industries are caused by a combination of factors (human-organizational factors); however, the critical incidence in the O&G industries such as BP Texas, has been linked to workers' absent-mindedness, stress, and psychological risks, which are common consequences of downsizing emanating from HRM's decisions, MacKenzie et al. [10]. Regarding H&S, psychosocial risks are the risks caused by exposure to psychosocial hazards. Exposure to psychosocial hazards could lead to work-related stress and absent-mindedness errors with negative impacts that can potentially affect both H&S in the organization, Bergh et al. [11].

As in the case of BP Texas, MacKenzie et al. [10] noted that while downsizing, on the one hand, may lead to the layoff of personnel, an accident, on the other hand, may prompt the need to introduce skilled professionals to manage the organization's facility safely and efficiently. Therefore, this research is aimed at evaluating the role of human resource management and communication strategies in reducing safety risks and human errors during organizational downsizing. Hence, this study will investigate the impact of economic crises on workforce reduction: analyze how economic downturns affect employment stability and lead to recurrent downsizing in the O&G sector; examine the psychosocial effects on employees: assess the mental health and psychosocial stability of both remaining employees and those impacted by downsizing, considering stress, job insecurity, and workplace culture; determine health and safety (H&S) risks: identify how downsizing influences organizational H&S performance, with a focus on the potential for increased safety incidents and reduced safety compliance; develop mitigation strategies: provide evidence-based recommendations for O&G companies to maintain H&S standards while navigating workforce downsizing. The study will utilize both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to collect data from O&G professionals and industry stakeholders. Conduct thematic analysis for qualitative insights and statistical analysis (using software like SPSS) for quantitative data to establish relationships between downsizing, employee well-being, and H&S performance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource Management (HRM) is an approach tailored to the development and execution of HR strategies that combine several business tactics and support their accomplishment, Armstrong and Taylor [12]. More so, employee management is a crucial aspect of many organizations, which has the proclivity to influence an employee's attitude and efficiency, which ultimately affects the organization's H&S performance, CIPD [13]. As a critical function in the organization, it is crucial for HRM to continuously align its objectives with that of the organization, towards fulfilling the legal and moral responsibilities of the employer, to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of its employees, and others who might be affected by their actions/omissions [14,15]. These obligations may be achieved when the stakeholders including H&S managers are involved in critical organizational changes such as downsizing, restructuring, and re-engineering, which may affect employees and the organization respectively, MacKenzie et al. [10]. HSE [16] reveals that organizational changes are usually based on monetary rather than safety reasons, and the changes are usually towards employee reduction, reorganizing departments and teams, or adopting 'flexible working time. Although organizational change-downsizing is a regular and unavoidable aspect of business life in most industries. However, organizations linked with major accident hazards such as the O&G companies may have a greater prospect for catastrophic consequences with higher costs in terms of loss of lives and money, due to the negative psychosocial influences on the employees, and loss of skilled personnel for the managing of critical machines. These consequences mean that organizations managing major hazards must aim for much higher reliability than is ordinarily necessary for commercial decision-making, HSE [17].

ILO [5] posits that global crises such as economic recession – downsizing may likely lead to an increased incidence of psychosocial factors at work; and work-related stress/exhaustion could lead to mishaps, illnesses, and reduced workplace performance. An economic downturn or recession is characterized by a substantial drop-in economic activity that goes on for more than a few months. This situation often results in most firms reacting in different ways to the lower prices of their commodities and the higher costs of production, Iverson and Zatzick [2]. Historically, economic meltdown acts as a precursor for downsizing whilst organizations strive to achieve economic revival, Datta et al. [3]. "The traditional assumption in economics is that concepts of fairness are irrelevant in such a dilemma", Davies and Hughes, p.308 [18]. However, concerns about employees' H&S, parity, and efficiency must be considered to balance the organization's goals. ILO [5] reports that one of the major worries about this economic change is that, even when the world's major economies are finally able to break out of the recession, workforce levels are unlikely to return to the pre-recession levels for a considerable number of years.

Whilst a drop in economic activities commonly occasions downsizing, the lay-off declarations made in the absence of an economic downturn may be seen as a positive step aimed at upholding the organization's competitiveness, Datta et al. [3]. although downsizing as an organizational strategy has been supported by several corporate reasons; its interpretation by stakeholders is perceived by the motives underpinning the lay-off event. More often, the message of downsizing is conveyed as an appropriate strategic change, as against a prospect of negative performance, Schulz and Johann [4]. However, its influence by economic factors cannot be displaced, as it has been linked to demand declines with firms seeking to reduce

labour costs whilst increasing fixed capital Cameron, Freeman and Mishra [19]. Furthermore, Datta et al. [3] revealed that downsizing is also connected to structural changes occasioned by technological advancement, with increased productivity from such advances expressing itself in the form of redundancies and employee lay-offs. Datta et al. posit that, though the causes for downsizing may be reasonable, the organizational tactics' consequences may be uncertain.

Several researchers also unveiled challenging critical H&S impacts evolving from downsizing; their findings provide substantial evidence that downsizing and its multifaceted implications have had significant adverse effects on employees' psychosocial well-being, leading to the organization's poor safety performance [1, 17, 20,21]. These impacts also extend to the weakening of incident reporting at the workplace, inadequate monitoring, and poor implementation of the organization's H&S procedures. Further, Wilkinson [22] reveals the importance of safety during the downsizing period, stating that when organizations downsize and grow leaner, safety inevitably takes a hit. Nevertheless, the differing views by researchers may suggest that the ultimate goal for downsizing has slightly been met in many organizations. Perhaps the use of other terminologies (restructuring, reengineering, and rightsizing) was adopted by organizations to reduce the negative influence of downsizing. Although Brand and Wilson [23] argues that downsizing and restructuring are customarily used interchangeably as a way of enhancing efficiency, however, it was noted that organizations could restructure without a decrease in size and vice versa.

It was revealed that although downsizing may be an unavoidable event in the organization, the critical factor influencing the organization's decision to downsize is underpinned by several uncontrollable factors. However, a tactless action in the communication and management of the event by the organization's HRM may trigger employees' psychosocial stability, creating an atmosphere that may perhaps seem to be a breach of the employee's psychological contract, thus influencing/impeding employees' H&S performance negatively-decrease morale, influence voluntary resignation and staff turnover. To show considerations for the employee's dampened morale during downsizing, Iverson and Zatzick [2] suggest that the organization's management may provide clear information on the reasons for their actions and increase communication with survivors throughout the downsizing process. Besides the significant increase in suicide rates occasioned by downsizing as revealed by the extensive European studies of 26 countries; a survey across 27 EU member states for H&S at Work, suggests that recession leading to downsizing attributed to an increase in workplace accidents- fatalities, and diseases, ILO [5]. In Figure 1, the ILO identified how the risks associated with organizational change/downsizing have led to critical H&S impacts, as well as an increase in ill health from unemployment.
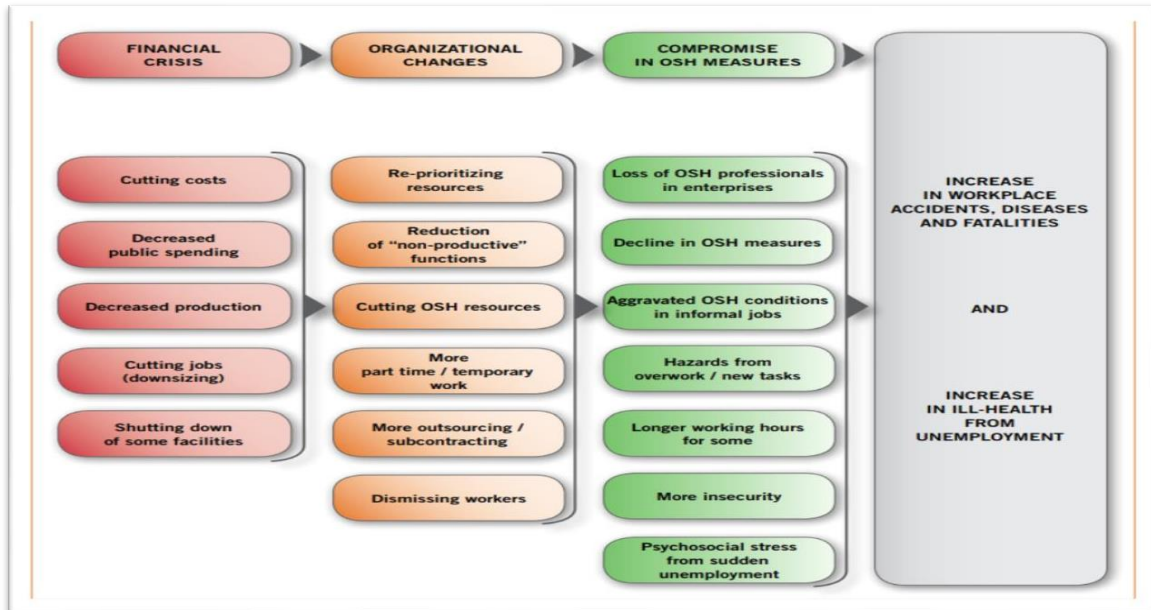
Figure 1: Health and Safety Risks of Downsizing (Adapted from ILO [5] pg.10)

Although the above evidence in Figure 1 may depict constricted causes of a workplace accident, disease, fatality, and ill health. However, other contributory factors such as weak identification of workplace hazards, inadequate training, and Permit to Work (PTW) violations, may as well cause even larger-scale accidents, Cullen [24]. As in the case of the Piper Alpha incident that claimed the lives of 167 workers, COSOP's consideration of the Cullen report revealed that inadequate or unverifiable training and the poor implementation of the PTW system were contributory factors to the accident. More recently, as part of the cost-cutting occasioned by the slump in oil prices, some 400,000 workers were downsized in the oil and gas sector Arshad and Sparrow [25]. Although, it is believed that the organizational change process may not have been an easy decision for most employers, as Hartman et al. [26] suggest that one of the major concerns for employers and HRM, is the challenge not only of a single termination but letting many employees go when a firm makes critical decisions to downsize. This hard decision by HRM further amplified the impacts of psychosocial hazards on the victims and survivors.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively evaluate the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) and communication strategies in mitigating safety risks and reducing human errors during organizational downsizing. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative data, which provides measurable insights into HRM practices and their impact on safety outcomes, and qualitative data, which offers depth in understanding employees' experiences and perceptions. The research methodology is structured as follows:

3.1 Research Design

The mixed-methods design allows for an integrative approach that leverages both quantitative and qualitative insights to examine the complex and interconnected aspects of downsizing,

HRM practices, and communication strategies. This design is appropriate as it enables a nuanced analysis of HRM and communication strategies by examining both numerical patterns (quantitative) and context-specific experiences (qualitative). Quantitative methods will capture the measurable impacts of HRM strategies on safety outcomes, while qualitative methods will provide an in-depth understanding of employee perspectives on the efficacy of communication and HR support during downsizing.

3.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses

3.2.1 Research Questions

- What is the impact of HRM practices on reducing safety risks and human errors during organizational downsizing?
- How do communication strategies influence employee safety behaviour and engagement in a downsized organization?
- What is the relationship between employee perceptions of HRM support and their engagement in safety protocols during downsizing?

3.2.2 Hypotheses

- H1: Effective HRM practices are positively associated with reduced human error and safety risks during downsizing.
- H2: Transparent and frequent communication strategies enhance employee safety behaviour and reduce safety risks.
- Positive employee perceptions of HRM support are associated with higher adherence to safety protocols.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The study targets employees in industries where downsizing has significant safety implications, such as oil and gas, manufacturing, and healthcare. The sampling frame includes employees who have experienced or are currently experiencing downsizing within their organizations. This group includes both HR personnel involved in downsizing decisions and general employees affected by these changes.

- Sampling Technique: A stratified sampling approach will be used to ensure representation across various levels of the organization, including HR professionals, middle management, and frontline employees.
- Sample Size: A sample size of approximately 200 participants is targeted for the quantitative survey, based on power analysis for detecting moderate effect sizes with a 95% confidence interval. For the qualitative component, 20–25 participants will be selected, allowing for in-depth interviews.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

3.4.1 Quantitative Data Collection

• **Survey Instrument:** A structured questionnaire will be developed to measure HRM practices, communication effectiveness, safety behaviour, and incidence of human errors. Items will be adapted from validated scales, such as the Safety Climate Questionnaire (Zohar, 2000) and the Organizational Communication Assessment (Downs & Hazen, 1977).

• **Variables Measured**

   i. Independent Variables: HRM support (training, counselling, workload management), and communication strategies (frequency, transparency, openness).

  ii. Dependent Variables: Safety outcomes (incidents, near-misses, reported errors) and employee engagement in safety practices.

 iii. Control Variables: Employee demographics (age, tenure, and role) and organizational factors (industry type, downsizing magnitude).

• **Data Collection Procedure:** The survey will be administered online to reach a wider audience and ensure the anonymity of participants. To enhance response rates, follow-up emails, and reminders will be sent to participants, and HR departments in participating organizations will be engaged to encourage participation.

3.4.2 Qualitative Data Collection

- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of participants from the survey to gather detailed insights into their perceptions of HRM practices and communication strategies. Questions will explore employees' personal experiences, the perceived impact of HR support on safety adherence, and their sense of trust and morale post-downsizing.
- Focus Groups: In addition to interviews, focus groups will be organized with HR managers and safety officers to discuss best practices and challenges in implementing effective communication and HRM strategies during downsizing.
- Data Collection Procedure: Interviews and focus groups will be conducted via video conferencing to accommodate geographical diversity and ensure participant convenience. Each interview will last approximately 45–60 minutes, while focus groups will be scheduled for 60–90 minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, median, and standard deviation will be calculated to summarize HRM practices, communication strategies, and safety outcomes.
- Inferential Statistics: Multiple regression analysis will test the hypotheses, examining the relationships between HRM practices, communication strategies, and safety outcomes.
- Mediation Analysis: Mediation analysis will explore whether employee engagement serves as an intermediary variable linking HRM and communication practices to safety outcomes.

- Statistical Software: SPSS will be used for data analysis, ensuring robust and reliable statistical results.

3.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: A thematic analysis will be conducted on interview and focus group transcripts to identify common themes related to employee perceptions of HRM and communication practices. This approach will highlight recurring patterns and unique insights, providing contextual depth to the quantitative findings.
- Coding Process: Transcripts will be coded using NVivo software, with open coding for initial theme identification, followed by axial coding to group-related themes. Two independent coders will verify coding consistency to enhance reliability.
- Triangulation: The qualitative and quantitative findings will be triangulated to identify converging or diverging insights, allowing for a holistic understanding of the role HRM and communication play in safety management during downsizing.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

To ensure methodological rigour, various reliability and validity checks will be employed:

- Survey Reliability: Cronbach's alpha will be used to assess the internal consistency of survey items, aiming for a value of 0.70 or higher for each scale.
- Content Validity: Experts in HRM and organizational communication will review the survey and interview questions to ensure they align with the research objectives.
- Construct Validity: Factor analysis will be conducted on survey items to confirm that they accurately reflect the underlying constructs of HRM support, communication, and safety outcomes.
- Triangulation of Data: By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study will enhance construct validity and reduce bias.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study will adhere to ethical guidelines to protect participants:

- Informed Consent: Participants will be informed about the study's purpose, their rights, and data confidentiality. Consent will be obtained before participation.
- Confidentiality: Survey responses and interview data will be anonymized. Personal identifiers will not be recorded, and only aggregated results will be reported.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants may withdraw at any stage without penalty, ensuring voluntary participation throughout the study.

3.8 Limitations and Delimitations

- Limitations: As a cross-sectional study, this research cannot establish causation. Self-reported data may also be susceptible to response biases, particularly social desirability bias.

- Delimitations: This study focuses on industries where safety risks are high during downsizing. The findings may not generalize to industries with lower safety risk profiles or minimal downsizing experience.

This methodology provides a structured and comprehensive approach to evaluating the role of HRM and communication in reducing safety risks during downsizing, ensuring a reliable and valid examination of the research questions. By combining quantitative measures with qualitative insights, this approach addresses the complexities involved in HRM and safety management in organizations undergoing workforce reductions.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher applied pragmatism because it made it possible to use mixed methods and the inductive approach. The survey method was used for data collection which includes open and closed-ended questions.

4.1 Results and Discussion

The survey was sent to 171 employees, as against the initial 200 targeted for employees working in O&G companies within the MENA region. 120 (81.6%) responses were received, for which 96 (80%) were male and 24 (20%) were female. Figure 2 shows the respondents/employees' age range. From the chart below, the majority (29.2%) of the
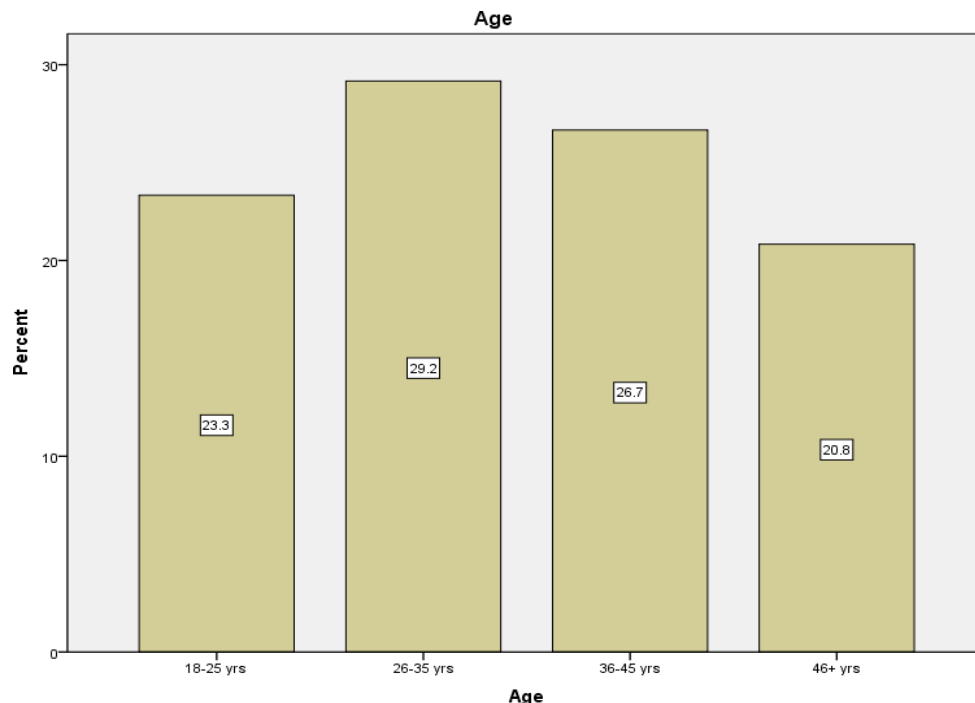
respondents fall within the age range of 26-35 years. About 27% reported they were within the age range of 36-45; 23% reported between 18-25 years, whilst respondents who are above 45 years constituted about 21%.

Figure 2: Employees' Age

Figure 3 shows the respondents' perception of downsizing. From the chart below, the majority (73.3%) of employees perceived downsizing can result in mental stress. The majority (62%) of the employees also perceived that downsizing can result in psychosocial problems. About 67% of the employees claimed that downsizing may increase workload as well as work overtime. Only about 22% of the employees reported downsizing can affect their work performance negatively. 68.4% perceived downsizing in any organization as a breach of psychological contract, whilst about 43.4% reported they would leave any downsizing organization if able to secure another employment. The majority (68.4%) of the employees disagreed with the claim that downsizing would improve their psychosocial stability at work, whilst about 32% reported downsizing in any organization tends to improve the employee's psychosocial stability. The majority (57.7%) of the employees believed downsizing improves work morale, whilst about 42% perceived otherwise. About 31% of the employee perceived downsizing improves their self-confidence and self-worth, whilst the majority (69%) reported a decrease in self-confidence/self-worth with organization downsizing. The majority (68.3%) of employees disagreed with the claim that downsizing organizations consider employees' well-being or their reactions to the events although about one-third perceived organization considers employees' well-being.
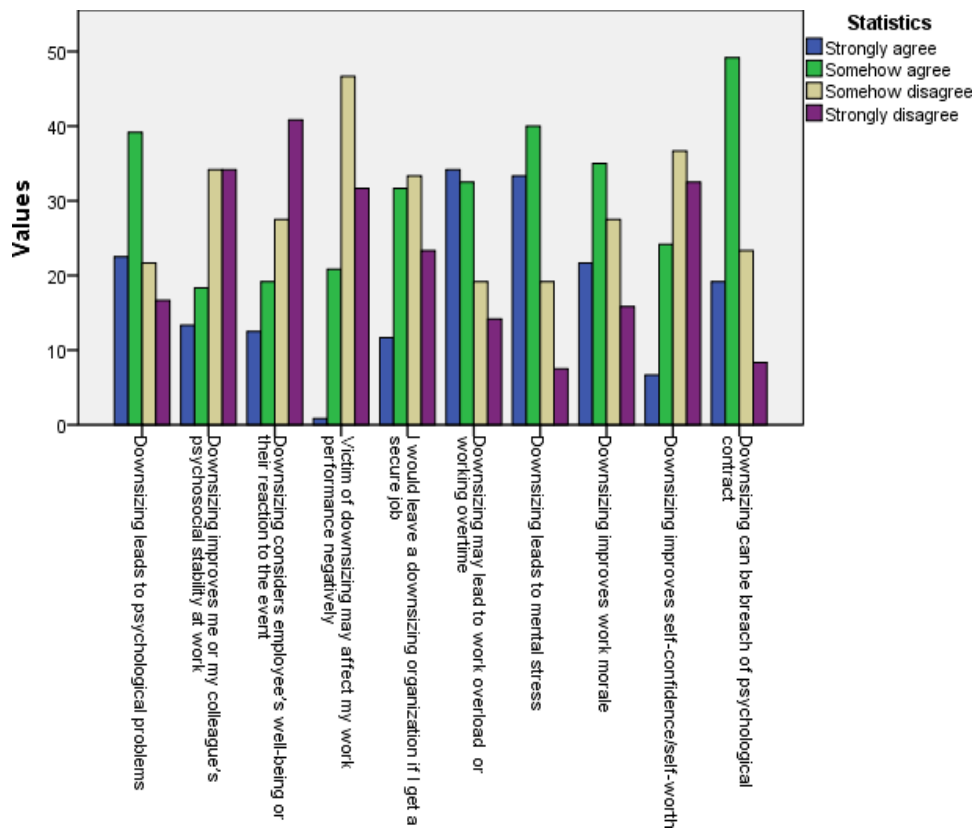

Figure 3: Employee's perception towards downsizing

Figure 4 shows the perceived influence of downsizing on workplace incidents. From the chart below, the majority (72.5%) of the employees perceived that downsizing can precipitate psychological risks which in turn affects employee performance. The majority (73.3%) of the employees perceived downsizing may negatively on the health and safety of employees. About

76% of the employees believed that downsizing can result in loss of expertise, whilst about 82.5% reported vandalism as one of the consequences of downsizing in an organization. About 78% of the respondents reported they had experienced resentment towards the organization that laid people off. With regards to the relationship between downsizing and the improvement of safe work conditions, only about one-third (30.9%) of the employees reported that downsizing of employees can improve safe work conditions, although the majority (69.1%) disagreed with the claim. About 28.3% of the employees perceived downsizing as one of the effective ways to eliminate errors, and 35.8% claimed H&S programs increase upon downsizing. Although, the majority of the respondents had a negative perception towards downsizing, about 80% of the employees, however, believed that downsizing is one of the safety mechanisms in any oil and gas industry.
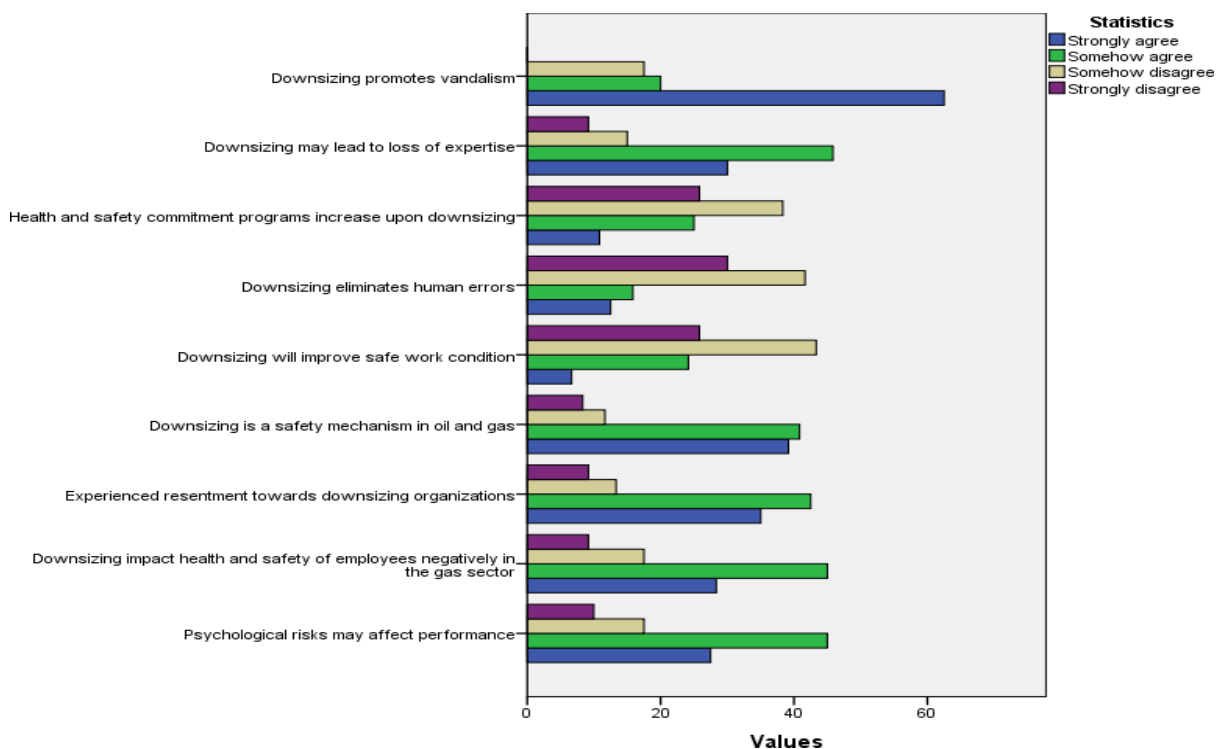

Figure 4: Employees perceived influence of downsizing on workplace incidents.

Figure 5 shows the management of the psychosocial impact of downsizing. From the chart below, about 27.5% of employees perceived engaging employees in downsizing as irrelevant. The majority (77.5%) of the employee's believed communication is one of the key factors in the management of downsizing consequences as it helps prevent psychological problems. About 72% of employees reported that psychological resilience training helps control the H&S impact of downsizing. The majority (68.3%) of the employees claimed that communication about service termination improves psychological stability, whilst 71% believed that mandatory vacation is an effective way of mitigating the negative consequences of downsizing. About 64.2% of the employees agreed with the claim that downsizing is an effective way of reducing redundancy in an organization. The majority (70.8%) of the employees claimed that reducing the workweek could go a long way in reducing the impacts of downsizing, whilst about 67.7% recommend that cutting overtime pay can be adopted instead of downsizing.

About 68.4% perceived that salary reduction can be an effective strategy to mitigate the negative impact of downsizing. About 28% of the employees supported the claim that there are no alternatives to downsizing, whilst the majority (72%) disagreed with the claim believing that there are alternatives to organization downsizing.
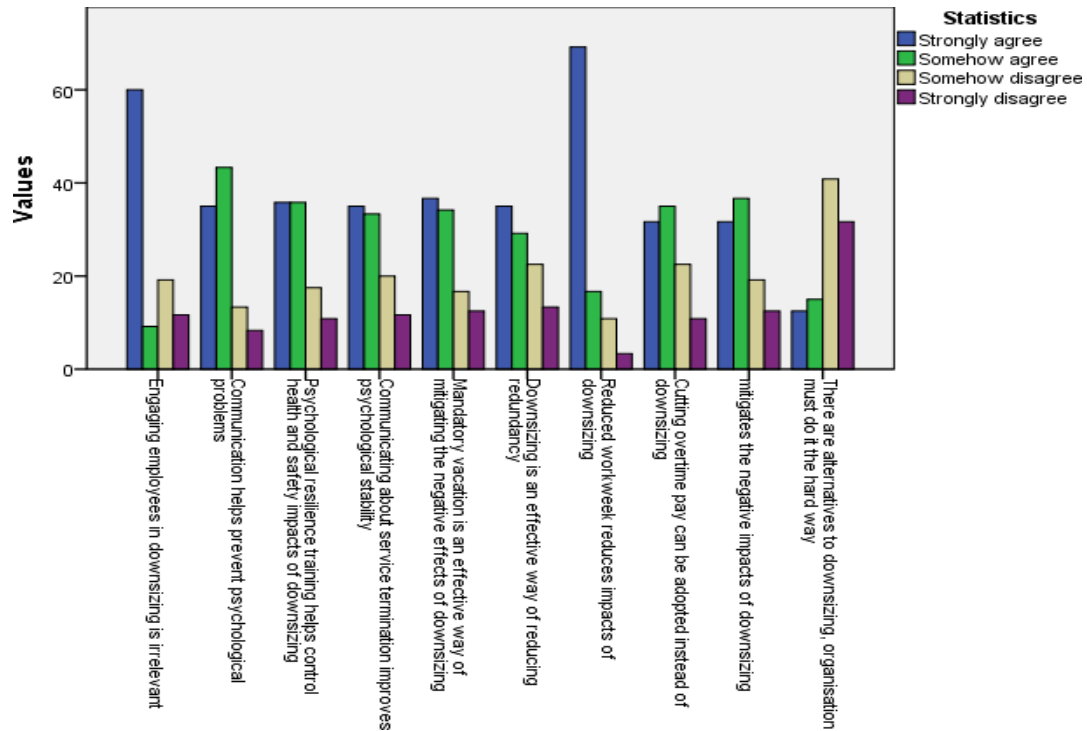

Figure 5: Management of psychosocial impact of downsizing.

A total of 51 qualitative responses were obtained from the respondents in three sections of the questionnaire as shown below in Figures 6 and 7. Figure 6 represents the respondent's recommendations to organizations for mitigating the H&S impact of downsizing. Figure 7 represents the respondents' perceived ways to deal with the negative psychosocial impacts of downsizing in the organization. The significance of their perception is explained in a subsequent section. The respondents reported their perception of how each employee in the organization can avert the negative influence of downsizing. One of the respondents stated that *"As a victim, accept the inevitable, and channel the remaining resources towards keeping afloat until the next opportunity comes by".* Another respondent stated, "*As an employee, I would continue to focus on doing my work safely and increase the production and also would ask my colleagues to do the same, so the management would reconsider the downsizing program"*. These responses suggest that employees' psychosocial resilience skills could be critical when dealing with psychosocial risks; they believe employees will be in a better position to manage H&S psychosocial challenges at work, by developing psychosocial resilient skills for personal improvement/competitiveness. Employees may further need to ensure their professional skills are up to date to ensure they are relevant in the industries. Also, respondents believed that with better savings and consistent financial discipline/frugality, they could reduce the immediate anxiety and fears that come with job loss. Furthermore, respondents thought that when the inevitable happens (downsizing), they can always seek other opportunities within or outside the organization. This represents employees' views on how the organization should act to

prevent the negative influence of downsizing on their employees. Respondents believed that the psychosocial influence of downsizing such as stress, job insecurity, work overload, and anxiety could be mitigated when employees are fully aware of the hazards and control measures of this workplace risk. In this regard, they preferred to be well trained on psychosocial resilience skills early, to ensure the causes and control measures of these hazards are known. Also, 21 % of the respondents believed that organizations should communicate downsizing plans.
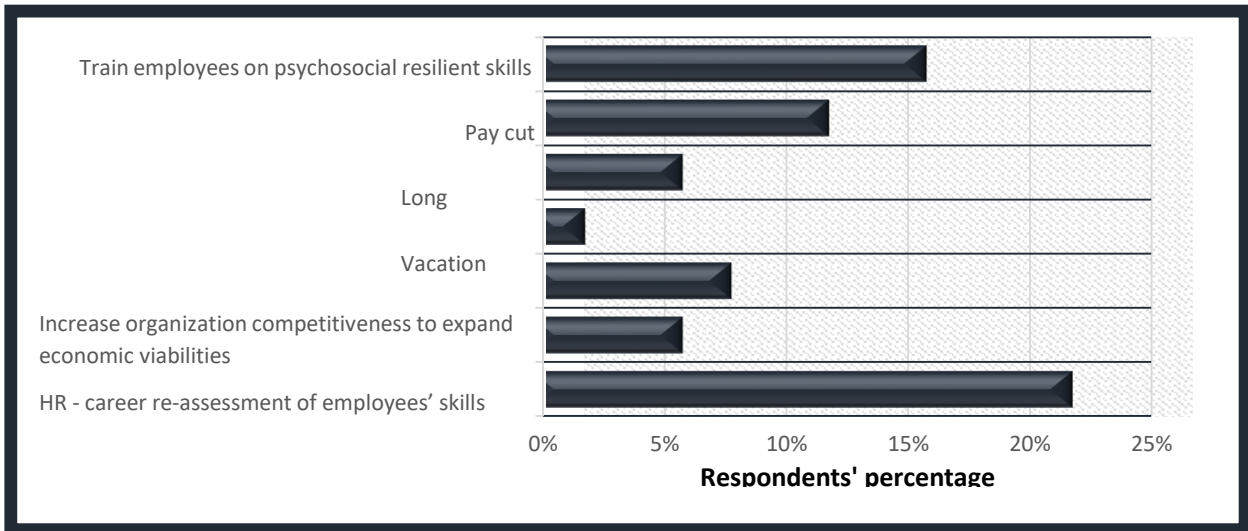

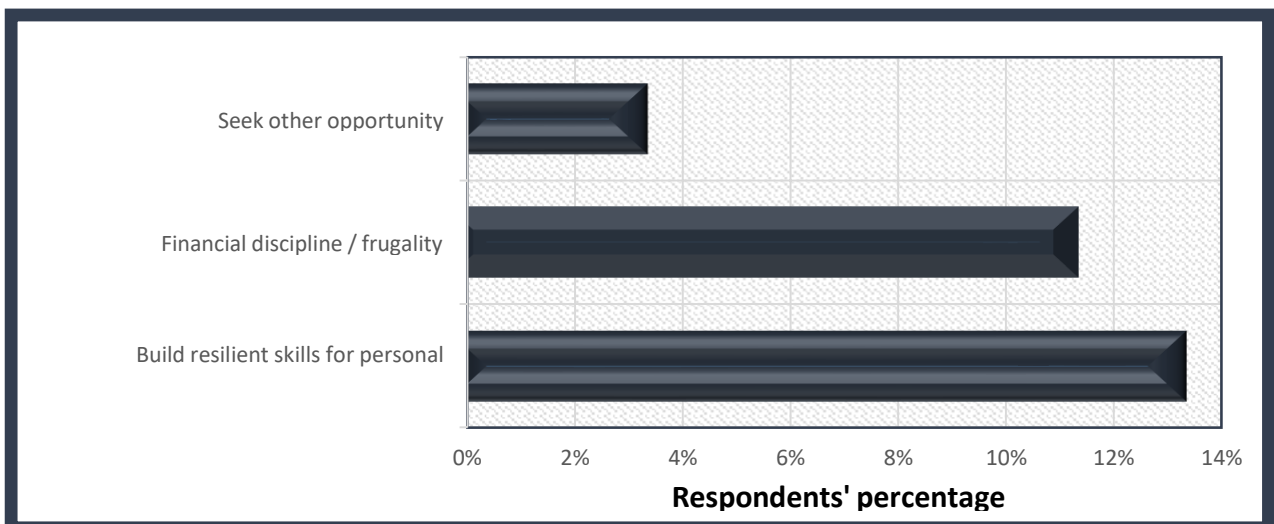**Figure 6: Respondents' recommendations to the organization for mitigating H&S's influence of downsizing**

Figure 7: Respondents' self-recommendations for mitigating H&S influence of downsizing

5.0 THE ANALYSIS OUTCOMES COMPARISON WITH OTHER REPORTS

Here, we discuss whether the analyzed data corroborates, is similar to, or varies from the reviewed literature. The aim is to ensure that the results and significance of the research are critically discussed; attention will be drawn to comparable and contrasting opinions and research results found in the literature. To achieve this aim, the different sections of the questionnaire will be critically discussed.

5.1 The Psychosocial Influence of Downsizing on Employees

As stated in the earlier section, the psychosocial well-being of employees sums up the subjective issues that affect the employees; which include but are not limited to workplace stressors such as job stress, job insecurity, poor organizational climate, work pressure, emotional exhaustion, social, physical, economic and cultural concerns. The respondents found downsizing to be associated with psychosocial problems as 62% of respondents perceived that. About 68.3 % of the respondents disagreed that downsizing organizations consider employees' well-being or their reaction to the event before they embark on it - this may be a key factor influencing psychosocial problems. ILO [5] agrees with these findings, revealing that low decision latitude and low levels of organizational support at work have been recognized as important constructs concerning work-related psychological health and well-being emanating from downsizing.

Subsequently, about 68% of the respondents disagreed with the notion that downsizing event may improve their or their colleagues' (victims/survivors) psychosocial stability. The downsizing influence on employees' psychosocial stability suggests that employees are triggered, immediately after the sudden news of downsizing is announced in the organization, this implies that proper communication of the event by the organization's stakeholders is crucial in managing its impact. Validating this finding Wilkinson [22] reported that even a slight acuity of the downsizing event by the workers in an organization might influence their psychosocial safety with the tendency of inducing human error that causes workplace incidents. In this regard, BNQ [27] recommends that for some organizations, the most vital aspect of psychological support may be an appropriate communication of the event to the affected persons, to protect against traumatic stressors at work. It is believed that the psychological trauma brought by downsizing events inadvertently influences employee's behaviour at work, perhaps, leading to risky behaviours, ILO [5]. This usually happens at the initial stage when the downsizing news is announced, the affected employee's mental aptitude is disturbed as the employee tries to discover new means of survival to meet individual and family needs, whilst struggling with the daily tasks at the workplace until the exit date from the organization is due.

The workplace becomes uninteresting; feelings of resentment may arise as the employee recognizes a breach of psychological contract. Creswell and Creswell [28] affirm that damaging personal consequences from a perceived violation of psychological contract on employees contribute to reducing psychological H&S and the experience of negative emotions. Consequently, the negative emotions which are usually accompanied by feelings of resentment may occur as a result of the perceived breach of psychological contract; this may further gravitate into anger, bitterness, depression, and hurt; perhaps leading to sabotaging of the organization's assets. Validating this reasoning, 77.5% of the respondents reported they had experienced resentment towards the downsizing organization. In the O&G industries, a deliberate act such as the sabotaging or vandalization of a company's HSECES by aggrieved employees could lead to a major accident in the organization; this may further amount to

colossal loss of lives and assets. This aligns with the respondents' perception, as 82% agree that vandalism is one of the consequences of downsizing in an organization.

Although, ILO p.14 [5] highlights that "both employers and workers have the responsibility to address psychosocial hazards at the workplace and find innovative ways to deal with the consequences of the risks associated with psychosocial factors such as stress, violence, abuse at the workplace". Nevertheless, greater accountabilities may be required from the organization's management in ensuring its decisions about employees' employment do not jeopardize the organization's H&S standards. Similarly, Guest et al. [29] (cited in Nadin and Williams p.111 [30]) argues that, since "the psychological contract is regarded as a two-way reciprocal agreement between the employee and the employer, then the capacity for employers to experience violations at the hands of their employees should also be recognized". This suggests that employees must control their level of resentment or anger during downsizing periods. Contrasting the general notion that downsizing promotes poor workplace performance; 78 % of the respondents disagreed that downsizing affects their work performance, whilst 57% responded that their work morale might not be affected by downsizing event, this contradicts some notions by Datta et al. [3] which suggest that employees morale may dampen during downsizing. However, 66.7% perceived that downsizing may lead to work overload/working extra hours, which is found to be a major psychosocial risk as suggested by ILO [5]. The perceived low influence of downsizing on employees' work performance may be connected to their psychosocial resilient skills that perhaps, have been built over time. However, 72% of the respondents recognized that psychosocial risks are a major influence on workplace performance.

5.2 Downsizing Influence on Safety Performance and Job Security

About 70% of the respondents agreed that downsizing might lead to reduced safety performance in the organization by way of promoting workplace psychosocial incidents. Further, respondents revealed that downsizing may well lead to loss of expertise in O&G industries and employees may also leave due to job insecurity. Corroborating with some literature, downsizing may prompt early resignation or job insecurity; employee's willingness to resign from the organization may be attributed to their perceived breach of the psychological contract, poor communication, and fear of job loss [1,30]. Early resignations of persons not intended to be downsized could lead to a critical shortage of skilled personnel and work overload on the survivors, the further implication is that highly qualified personnel that may be required to minimize the chances of catastrophic accidents may exit the organization due to fear of being downsized.

Work overload was seen as a critical factor influencing psychosocial stress at workplaces; it has also been seen to induce serious workplace incidents, diseases, and fatality, ILO [5]. In agreement with this, respondents perceived that downsizing might potentially lead to working extra hours for the survivors due to the shortage of human resources; further safety implications will be discussed in the subsequent section. Vaden-Kiernan et al. [31] (cited in ILO [5]) identified Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs) as a major H&S concern amongst the survivors of organizational restructuring. ILO points out that employees' exposure to both physical and psychosocial work risks may escalate the risk of WMSDs. In the same disposition, 73.3% of the respondents agreed that downsizing might lead to the development of mental stress-related work disorders, which was suggested by ILO to be a major contributor

to WMSDs. In contrast to the general perception that downsizing will lead to loss of expertise in the organization, 57% of the respondents think they may not leave a downsizing organization even if they secure a better job - the reason for respondents contrasting answers may be due to their subjective experience or emotional ties with the organization. However, in agreement with the respondent's earlier view that downsizing leads to loss of expertise, Leka et al. [32] "reflects the fact that job insecurity is now widely recognized as one of the key psychosocial risks at the workplace, next to aspects such as workload, (lack of) control, role stressors and poor interpersonal relationships at work, leading to psychological and physical harm".

5.3 Managing the Psychosocial Influence of Downsizing

Only 27.5% of the respondents agreed that management engagement with employees in downsizing dialogue is irrelevant; hence the majority of the respondents (72.5%) believe it is essential for management to dialogue with employees. This suggests that positive engagement, openness, and communication with employees about the company's decision to downsize is relevant. It also implies that proper discussion about the event may play a vital role in resolving issues that influence employees' psychosocial well-being. 77.5% agreed that organizations should communicate information about service termination before the event takes place, as it may improve their psychosocial stability. The respondents' view corroborates with the BNQ [27] report as indicated earlier. The report found that employees will enjoy and feel connected to their work, and will be well motivated to do their jobs when employers engage/communicate with them on psychosocial risks.

This is also in line with the view of ILO [5] which states that success factors of well-being at work include management commitments that create a supportive environment where employees can freely communicate their psychosocial challenges with employers. Inversion and Zatzick [2] affirmed that by providing, excellent communication and a thorough explanation of the cause of management actions on downsizing, organizations could mitigate the adverse outcomes of downsizing employees. Besides the adequate communication of downsizing events to employees by management; the respondents also disagreed with the claim that there are no alternatives to downsizing, believing that there are better options that downsizing organizations can adopt. They agreed that mandatory vacation, a pay cut, and a reduced work-week might be offered as alternatives to the affected victims; this was suggested to be an effective strategy for mitigating the negative impacts of downsizing. Likewise, the organization through its HRM may be required to review its current downsizing processes/policy, to ensure a system of fairness and inclusiveness. CIPD [33] suggests that HRM can be a crucial aspect of organizations, with the proclivity to influence employee's attitudes and efficiency, and this could ultimately affect the organization's H&S performance.

5.4 Other Qualitative Feedback

The respondents provided varying opinions on how H&S's impacts of downsizing could be averted, and how/what the organization's management and employees could do to mitigate the downsizing impact. Most respondents pointed out that one of the best solutions would be for employees to be prepared psychologically for a downsizing event before it takes place. They reasoned that employees should be aware that nothing lasts forever, and must strive to develop some personal psychosocial resilient skills. Other respondents suggested that the H&S impact of downsizing would be well addressed if the downsizing organizations communicated the event to them in advance. The remaining proportion perceived that the effects could be

prevented if employees engaged in saving strategies during their working period to avoid serious financial problems after downsizing. In the point of what the management could do, a significant portion of the respondents felt that it would be essential if the organization's management adopted all legal requirements in the downsizing process, to ensure they do not.

Violate employees' employment terms. Respondents were also of the view that organizations should introduce psychological training, to ensure employees were aware of psychosocial hazards in their workplace.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the critical roles of Human Resource Management (HRM) and communication strategies in reducing safety risks and minimizing human errors during organizational downsizing. The findings demonstrate that HRM practices, when designed and executed effectively, can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of downsizing on employee well-being, engagement, and adherence to safety protocols. Specifically, HRM initiatives that prioritize employee support, such as counselling, skill retraining, and workload management, were associated with a notable reduction in workplace incidents and errors. These practices help foster a resilient workforce capable of maintaining safety standards even in a context of uncertainty and resource constraints.

Communication strategies also emerged as a vital factor in maintaining safety and morale among employees. Transparent, frequent, and empathetic communication was shown to build trust, reduce anxiety, and promote alignment with safety objectives. By keeping employees informed about downsizing processes and providing forums for addressing their concerns, organizations can reduce the negative psychological impacts often associated with workforce reductions. Effective communication reinforces the organization's commitment to employee well-being, which, in turn, encourages safety-conscious behaviour and reduces the likelihood of human errors.

This research underscores the importance of an integrative approach to HRM and communication during organizational downsizing. HRM should work closely with management to implement comprehensive support structures, while communication channels should remain open, honest, and proactive to sustain employee engagement and safety adherence. These findings highlight that, while downsizing is often a necessary response to economic pressures, it does not have to compromise organizational safety culture. Through intentional HRM and communication efforts, organizations can navigate the complexities of downsizing while maintaining workforce stability, reducing safety risks, and upholding their commitment to employee well-being.

6.1 Recommendations

- Strengthen HRM Support Systems: Organizations undergoing downsizing should prioritize the development of robust HRM support systems, including retraining programs, workload adjustments, and access to counselling services. These measures can help employees adapt to new responsibilities, reduce stress, and maintain safety standards.
- Implement Transparent Communication Strategies: Management should adopt a communication framework that emphasizes transparency and empathy. Regular

updates on downsizing processes, coupled with accessible channels for employee feedback, can help reduce anxiety, foster trust, and maintain alignment with safety objectives.

- Promote a Resilient Safety Culture: HRM should work closely with safety teams to reinforce the organization's commitment to safety. Regular safety briefings, recognition of safe practices, and clear expectations for safety adherence can support a culture where employees feel responsible and motivated to uphold safety protocols.
- Monitor and Evaluate Downsizing Impacts: Organizations should implement monitoring mechanisms to assess the psychosocial and safety impacts of downsizing on employees. Regular assessments can identify emerging risks, enabling timely interventions to address any declines in employee well-being or safety performance.
- Invest in Leadership Training: HRM and organizational leaders should be trained in change management and empathetic communication. Leaders who are equipped to handle employee concerns sensitively and effectively can help sustain morale, safety awareness, and trust throughout the downsizing process.

By following these recommendations, organizations can ensure that downsizing strategies are conducted with minimal safety risk, reduced human error, and a continued commitment to employee well-being, ultimately supporting both operational resilience and organizational integrity.

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