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Oruh, Emeka Smart, Egwuonwu, Arthur, Egwuonwu, Ambrose and Nwosu, Chinwe Ebere

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The Future of Digital Transformation of HR Functions and Employee Wellbeing: The Case for Responsible Digital Work Engagement in Nigeria

The operations of contemporary organisations, including Human Resource (HR) functions, are predicted to become fully digital. However, the degree to which this transition implicates employees' health and wellbeing requires more in-depth scrutiny, especially in the context of developing economies such as Nigeria, where the availability of related resources is limited and the drive for financial sustainability is higher than ever. This chapter explores the future of digitalising HR roles in Nigeria's employment terrain, with a specific focus on a responsible approach to managing risks to employees' health and wellbeing that stem from digital transformation. By adopting an interpretive qualitative methodology and thematically analysing data from 33 semi-structured interviews with respondents across five organisations from the Nigerian banking sector, operating within three cosmopolitan cities, the study corroborated the long-standing findings in the extant literature – showcasing the extent to which the digitalisation of HRM functions is perceived to be desirable due to its associated convenience, efficiency, high-productivity and profitability. Likewise, the risks to employees' health and wellbeing (including excessive digital work engagement and compromise of work-life balance, increased stress level, and others) as a consequence of digital transformation and the culture of bringing the workplace into the home or to other remote locations was also laid bare. To address this problem, the study proposed and developed a 'responsible digital work transformation framework', which organisations need to embrace as they move forward in order to harness the associated benefits of digital transformation while averting the associated risks to workforce's health and wellbeing risks. The contributions, implications, limitations, and direction for future study on this topic are discussed.

Keywords: HR Functions, Digital Transformation, Responsible Digital Engagement, Nigeria

Introduction

According to Amor (2023), contemporary organisations and businesses in the developed economies have largely digitalised their human resource (HR) operations and related activities – also known as 'digital working' – by leveraging emergent technologies. This trend is also becoming widespread in the developing economies for similar reasons (Singh et al., 2023). As intimated by Bellmann and Hübler (2021), digital working entails a work arrangement or design in which organisations' employees operate from remote locations other than their work

premises using technological tools to account to their stakeholders, including managers, co-workers, clients, and customers. This mechanism of working, also known as teleworking, telecommuting (Beno and Hvorecky, 2021), e-working, and remote working (Susilo, 2020), among others, means that employees are not required to commute to the workplace (Bellman and Hübler, 2021; Maguire, 2019). Moving forward, these various terms will be adopted interchangeably as necessary.

While numerous factors, including globalization and the changing work culture (MacRae and Sawatzky, 2020), and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic (Kilpatrick and Barter, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021), have been linked with the rise in digital working, the incremental breakthroughs in emergent technologies such as internet connectivity, the Internet of Things (IoT), smart mobile phones, artificial intelligence and affordable digital communication tools have remained the key basis upon which the digital work dynamic is being amplified (Dagnino, 2016; Messenger, 2019). As a consequence, the global community of organisations and businesses is increasingly encouraging digital working (also known as ‘virtual office’) in finance, HRM, marketing and IT departments, among other sections, across nearly all disciplines and sectors (Strohmeier, 2020). As Tustin (2014) implied, the surge in the global drive for digital working has been largely driven by its envisaged potentialities to increase the speed, efficiency, and quality of work. Other commentators have also acknowledged that digitalisation of work can drive high productivity, work autonomy, and convenience in the work environment while also reducing operational costs as a result of reduced office rents (Amor, 2023; Gigi and Sangeetha, 2020; Purwanto et al., 2020; Susilo, 2020).

It is for the above reasons that many organisations – particularly those operating in the banking sector – have realised that their survival in the current competitive business environment is dependent upon digital transformation, where related activities and services have become more automated and less paper-based than ever (Umans et al., 2018). Developing economies’ business sectors are not immune to this change dynamic: Nigerian banking firms have joined the race for digital transformation (Keramati, 2007), as their corporate existence relies on keeping pace with how information technology has redefined operational efficiency and value creation for key stakeholders – particular the customer base (Olanipekun et al., 2021). This is crucial, as customers now appreciate not just fast and efficient but also convenient services. They want personalised banking that suits their particular business objectives in the same way that they demand cashless online services (checking cash balance and clearance of funds, and

downloading transaction records), amongst other instantaneous services (Ayo, 2006; Umans et al., 2018).

While the competitive potential of digital work systems cannot be overemphasized, it is also important to bring into perspective the associated drawbacks, which can be detrimental to organisations and their workforces (Strohmeier, 2020). From an organisational security perspective, digital working is known to have exposed many companies to cyber threats of various forms, including viruses, malware, pharming, phishing, and theft of firms' and customers' confidential details (Renkema, 2021). All of these often manifest in fraud and other malicious activities targeted at the firms and their customers, which can lead to data breaches, loss of reputation, and damaging legal and financial consequences for the organisations and their stakeholders (Singh et al., 2023). While cyber threats and related issues are currently being managed, thanks to the increased awareness and implementations of effective cyber-security measures (Amor, 2023), the same cannot be said for the challenges to employee wellbeing created by the surge in organisational digital transformation (Altun, 2022; Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021).

The all-encompassing nature and use of emergent technologies in contemporary work settings simply mean that employees (regardless of whether they are on work premises or at other remote locations) are constantly glued to their technological devices (Tustin, 2014), which may present health and wellbeing issues (Gigauri, 2020). Put simply, digital transformation panders to a hyper-connected internet age, where organisations leverage instant reward using technology, which makes self-regulation difficult and often results in what some experts refer to as 'technostress' (Ayyagari et al., 2011). Numerous studies have shown that the use of emergent technologies, along with related work and social networking sites, is strongly linked to stress, among other health and wellbeing risks (Maier et al., 2015a). Ideally, the right thing to do when the individual feels stressed while using emergent technologies is to stop using them immediately; however, the worrying aspect of digital or work technologies is that even when individuals know that they are experiencing stress because of using such technologies, they find ways to cope and continue to use them, because they are integrated into the work system (Henley Business School, 2017; Maier et al., 2015b). This situation resonates with what Weinschenk (2012) described as the blurring nature of stress caused by using these work technologies and their compulsive (addictive) use, wherein workers are practically unable to stop using them. Thus, the implication of stress and addiction to technological utilities (or

inability to move away from them) is that of risks to health and wellbeing, also known as technostress (Brod, 1984; Henley Business School, 2017), which many experts have warned are inherently linked to digital work transformation (Tarafdar et al., 2015).

While the health and wellbeing risks associated with digital work transformation cannot be overlooked (Altun, 2022), the benefits of leveraging such transformation cannot be underemphasized – especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. Hence, it is necessary to find a way to balance the associated benefits and risks in the context of responsible utility (Bamel et al., 2022), which is the mainstay of this chapter. Thus, this purpose of this study is:

To explore the future of digital work transformation and the case for responsible digital engagement for enhanced employee wellbeing in Nigeria's employment terrain

The study will analyse data gathered from respondents from five firms operating in the Nigerian banking sector using a thematic analytical procedure (TAP). The following section will provide an overview of work digitalisation and its benefits and challenges, which will be followed by the future of digital work transformation, with a specific focus on the framework for leveraging responsible digital work engagement. The findings, discussion and implications of the study will be presented in subsequent sections.

Digitalisation of HR functions, benefits, challenges, and future: Responsible engagement

As Strohmeier (2020) noted, the process of relying on emergent technologies in changing the operational procedures in any given organisational work dynamic is known as digital transformation, which can apply to HR functions and related activities, including planning, selection and recruitment, training, learning and development, performance management and appraisal, industrial relations, compensations and benefits, and disciplinary procedures, among other administrative functions (Amor, 2023). In the HR context, therefore, digitalisation of work or HR functions simply entails the process in which the HR teams take up the responsibilities of transforming the HR roles, while also transforming the employees and the ways they go about conducting their work, using the instrumentality of emergent digital technologies (Renkema, 2021). This means that the HR function becomes largely automated, data-driven and operationalised in the cloud, as a remote-first workspace, digital or virtual environment, which often goes beyond the confines of HR to involve the whole organisation (Bresciani et al., 2021).

While digitalisation in this context may simply entail, for instance, migrating paper-based work forms to online forms, which make them accessible for designated stakeholders to access from remote locations using the instrumentality of digital connectivity, digital transformation can be much bigger in scale, involving wider organisational implementation of integrated HR systems (Isokallio, 2020). This may include, but is not limited to, digital payrolls, digital onboarding, employee self-service portals, people analytics, AI-powered applications and other work-related tracking systems, HR and recruitment chatbots, and adoption platforms (Lumi, 2020). Broadly, the core purpose of digital transformation is to radically change the organisation's operational dynamics, bringing multifaceted benefits. Parry and Battista (2019) enjoined that by implementing digital transformation, organisations are better positioned to enjoy a standardised, automated and simplified business process that emanates from a well-harmonised HR tech stack, leading to improved effectiveness, efficiency and informed data-driven decision-making (Shirase et al., 2023). More importantly, digital transformation is largely considered as a medium for both enhanced employee and customer experiences. It is seen as a mechanism for reskilling employees, which is responsible for their favourable work experience (Lumi, 2020). Likewise, digital transformation also enhances customers' experience and satisfaction, as better analysis of customers' demands and end users' experience leads to necessary adjustments in the overall process of delivering to customers' needs (Isokallio, 2020). This process of working therefore helps organisations not only to harness time and cost efficiency and facilitate autonomous, flexible, and remote working, but also to drive productivity and profitability (Singh et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, the above benefits which drive digital transformation are also responsible for the rising issues of health and wellbeing incidents and risks, which are believed to be particularly common among organisations implementing digital transformation (Fedorova et al., 2019). With many organisations going digital, a lot of employees are forced to over-engage with their work tasks, as they find themselves glued to their smart work devices regardless of whether they are at work, at home, or in other remote locations, which often undermines their work-life balance (Olanipekun et al., 2021) and exposes them to health risks (Maier et al., 2015b; Umans et al., 2018). A major health issue associated with digital working is technostress, which was originally coined in as the 'human cost of the computer revolution', to explain how excessive human interaction with technology is believed to culminate in addiction to such technologies and a subsequent rise in stress levels (Brod, 1984). By technostress, Brod (1984) refers to abnormal physical, emotional, and mental responses, which stem from the inability to dis-

engage, leading to excessive contact with digital technologies and concomitant information overload. Thus, it means that an individual becomes addicted to technology due to numerous reasons, particularly work tasks, and becomes stressed as a result (Bamel et al., 2022; Maier et al., 2015b). As the world of work moves into a remote mode, it becomes difficult for humans to disconnect from what goes on around them (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021). This contention has been validated up until recent years, with increasing evidence to show that technologies have adverse health effects for humans, especially when they are used to excess for work engagement, ranging from data management to the internet, which in effect blurs the longstanding work–life boundaries (Gigauri, 2020).

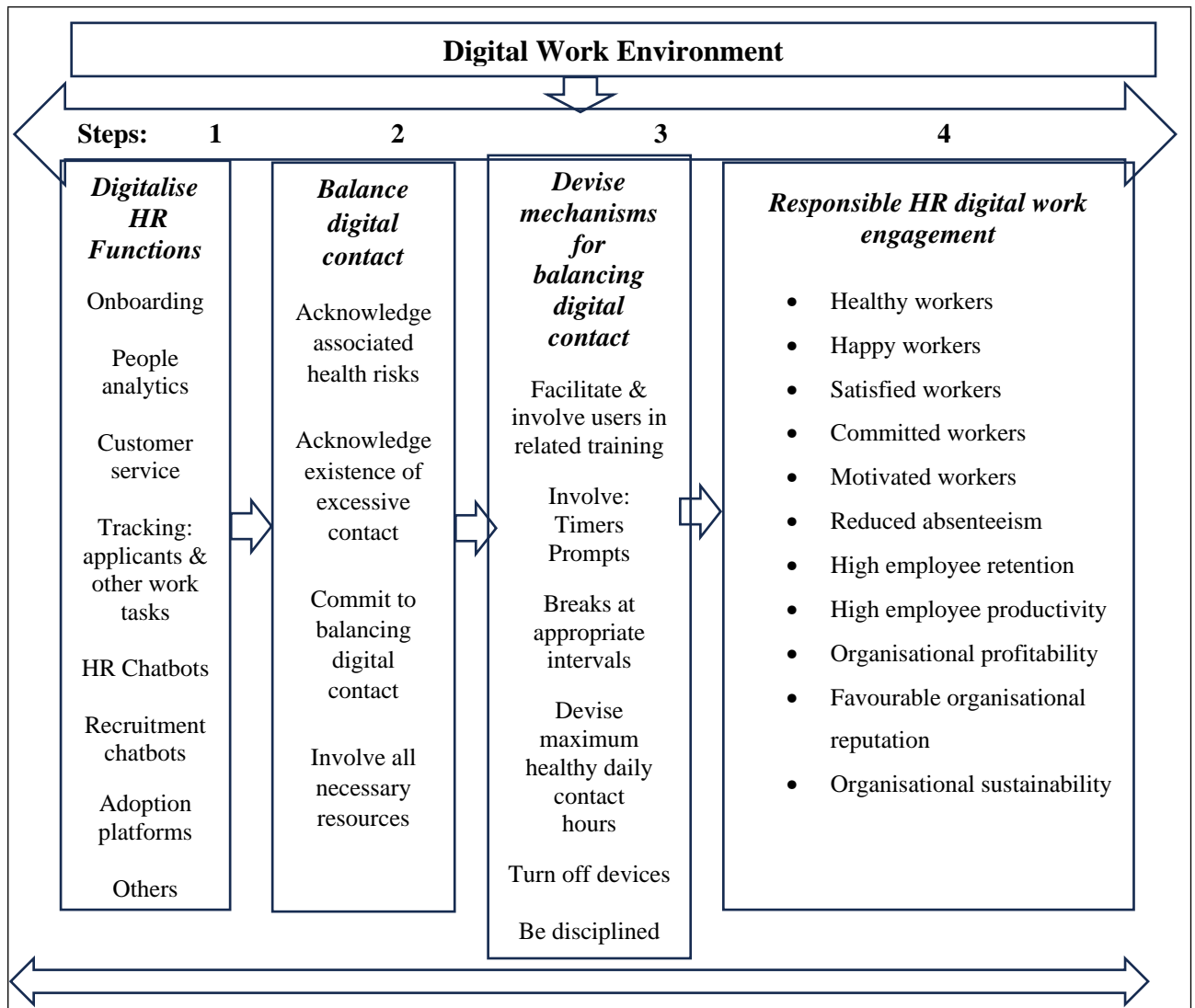
The issue is further problematised by the reality of the current digital era, in which the use of technology cannot be avoided if an organisation is to stay competitive. Hence, it has become imperative to devise a strategy to manage the risk of integrating technology into work processes (Lumi, 2020) – in this context, digital HR. As Amor (2023) noted, while it is impossible to overemphasize the benefits of work digitalisation, it is also crucial to not ignore the health implications of over-engaging with the associated technologies, which compels a need to find an appropriate balance in the process of digital transformation and engagement (Fedorova et al., 2022; Maier et al., 2015b). This calls for a balance in the processes that materialise in the context of what some experts may describe as responsible use of or engagement with technology, which manifests in responsible digital HR working (Gigauri, 2020).

The responsible approach to balancing digital work engagement refers to a range of requirements to which the users of the said technologies (including management and employees) must be committed (Bamel et al., 2022; Suchacka, 2020). Essentially, the notion of responsible utility begins with the acknowledgment that digital work transformations can be a medium of irresponsible engagement, and that it is necessary to engage such technologies in a more responsible and balanced manner in order to avert the associated health risks (Altun, 2022; Gigauri, 2020). The heuristic of responsible utility and engagement in work digitalisation evolves around finding ways of understanding when to start and ends users' contact with digital work devices and systems (Orbik and Zozulakova, 2019; Suchacka, 2020). The responsible approach to digital HR work engagement is operationalised in the conceptual framework presented in the following section.

Conceptualising responsible digital engagement: Responsible digital HR working

As emphasised in the previous section, the logic of responsible digital engagement (or digital HR work engagement, in this case) is the call to duty to all stakeholders to acknowledge the imminent health threats and risks that are associated with spending longer hours than necessary carrying out HR functions in the digital environment (Bamel et al., 2022; Fedorova et al., 2019). For this process to be effective, the discipline and commitment of all stakeholders – particularly management (and their agents, such as line managers) and employees – is of the essence (Orbik and Zozulakova, 2019; Suchacka, 2020): otherwise the process would be meaningless. Following on from this commitment, the responsible approach to digitalisation of (HR) work processes would revolve around devising practical mechanisms to achieve the required balance in engagement (Altun, 2022; Gigauri, 2020). This may involve the implementation and use of digital timers (or timing) and prompts to let users know when to take a break between work tasks and help them to manage (or focus only on) areas of engagement and communication that are necessary at the time, rather than allowing the system to draw them into every area of the process (Suchacka, 2020). Essentially, at the centre of responsible digital engagement is the need for users to know when they have reached the maximum healthy daily engagement hours, and to be automatically prompted to disengage at this point, regardless of how urgent the work is (Bamel et al., 2022; Fedorova et al., 2019). Figure 1, below, is a graphic illustration of responsible digital HR working.

Figure 1: **Towards** a responsible digital work transformation framework for enhanced employee wellbeing



Researchers' idea, adapted from Bamel et al. (2022), Maier et al. (2015b), Orbik and Zozulakova (2019), and Suchacka (2020).

As Figure 1 demonstrates, responsible digital engagement in the context of HR working would normally start with the first step – involving all stakeholders, including management and employees (Fedorova et al., 2019) – which is the acknowledgement that the implementation of digital transformation presents tendencies for irresponsible utility or users' over-engagement with the technologies used to conduct related HR functions, with associated risks to health and wellbeing (Bamel et al., 2022). In the second step, by acknowledging the tendencies and actual occurrences of excessive digital contact, users are compelled to take the necessary steps,

including using all required resources, towards committing to balancing the process of such engagement (Gigauri, 2020). At step three, management facilitates and provides essential training on how to be responsible in digital HR work transformation, which employees must equally take on board. If management fails to ensure this, employees must take personal initiative and insist on such demand, citing health implications (Umans et al., 2018). In a practical sense, some of the steps here may include, but are not limited to, the process of devising mechanisms for the provision of requisite training, involving the use of timers and prompts to let users know when to take breaks in between work sessions and helping them to focus on the immediate concerns of the task, rather than drifting into others areas of concern (i.e., needless digital-induced multi-tasking) (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021). Most importantly, at the centre of step three is the need to be disciplined and know when to discontinue digital work contact when one's maximum healthy daily hours have been reached (Suchacka, 2020). Step three leads to step four, which is assumed by proponents of responsible digital HR function transformation to reduce absenteeism and bring about healthy, happy, satisfied, committed, and motivated workers, leading to high employee retention, productivity, and favourable reputation, profitability, and overall sustainability (Lumi, 2020; Olanipekun et al., 2021). Thus, as this study proposes, a responsible digital HR transformation for enhanced employee wellbeing is crucial for the Nigerian banking sector, which is the context of this study.

Context: Nigeria's banking sector

The context of the study is Nigeria, which is considered the most populous black nation on the Western coast of the African continent, with a population of over 200 million (Pontianus and Oruonye, 2021), thereby providing operators in the banking sector with the potential for huge customer segmentation and market share (Umans et al., 2018). According Akingunola et al. (2013), the Nigerian banking sector is known to play a significant role in driving the economy and the developmental outlook of the country (Obeten et al., 2014). In an attempt to tackle the numerous challenges it faces (including breaches of established banking principles, practices and policy directives, and misappropriation of funds, among others), the sector has endured many years of reforms (Solomon, 2007, 2020; Soludo, 2006), leading to the famous structural adjustment programme (Ajayi, 2018). In 2004, further reform was implemented by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in the context of the recapitalisation policy, which, as Akingunola et al. (2013) validated, mandated all banks operating in the country to raise their capital reserve

to the minimum base of 25 billion Naira. Although the reform led to numerous redundancies and forced many banks to collapse, and others to merge, bringing down their total number from 89 to the current number of 23, it was a necessary step towards stabilising the sector (CBN, 2019). Furthermore, the fierce competitive business environment and the urge for sustainability have forced operators to embrace digital transformation, which has also created its own unique challenges, including the susceptibility of users (i.e., employees) to stay glued to their work systems for longer hours than is required, thus presenting risks to health and wellbeing (Umans et al., 2018). This is the current norm in Nigeria, where employers are known for labour exploitation: hence, the digitalisation of HR functions only exacerbates the phenomenon of irresponsible digital working which is forced by management (Olanipekun et al., 2021). Among the 23 banks operating in the sector are: First bank, First City Monument Bank, Access Bank, Ecobank, Union Bank, Citibank, Guaranty Trust Bank, Heritage Bank, Fidelity Bank, Standard Chartered bank, Stanbic IBTC Bank, United Bank, Wema Bank, and Zenith Bank (CBN, 2019), from which the four case study organisations were selected for this study. The methodology is presented in the next section.

Methodology, data collection and analysis

Method & data collection

For this chapter, a case study approach was adopted to explore how respondents perceived the future of digital work transformation and the implications that this may have on the wellbeing of employees. This approach is appropriate, according to Holliday (2002), given that a qualitative, exploratory study allows researchers to both understand and analyse organisational reality in the practical sense of business and management. This is particularly predicated on the researcher's ability to access raw (and new rich) data that may be instrumental in uncovering new findings or validating existing debate of socio-corporate phenomena (Wöcke et al., 2007). Thus, relying on purposive sampling of target respondents, the process leverages subjective judgement, which necessitates that the researchers have good knowledge of their sample size and target (Saunders et al., 2009). Using gatekeepers' referrals and personal contacts, the researchers were able to solicit 33 respondents (holding managerial and non-managerial positions) from the selected five banks. The sample was drawn from different branches across three major commercial and cosmopolitan cities of Nigeria, namely Abuja, Lagos, and Port-Harcourt. The inclusive nature of the sample is demonstrated in Table 1 below.

Based on strict research ethics guidance, the researchers ensured confidentiality throughout the process, including obtaining prior (interview) consent from respondents and using codes and pseudonyms to enhance anonymity (Patton, 2015). The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were conducted on-line using telephone and WhatsApp techniques (Saunders et al., 2012). Open-ended questioning was adopted to stimulate healthy interviewer-interviewee discussion, which can help to inform how the interview responses are explored, captured, analysed, and contextualised (Creswell, 2013). Some of the key areas of the research questions addressed how respondents perceived the implications of digital working on employees' wellbeing and how these issues can be managed moving forward to avert the associated health risk. Each interview lasted between 36 and 52 minutes. The telephone technique is known to limit interviewers' ability to observe respondents' body language and related behaviours; the process is also susceptible to network and technical glitches (Farooq and De Villiers, 2017). Nonetheless, the researchers chose this technique because it is time and cost efficient, and can be quickly conducted remotely, to generate rich data of similar quality to face-to-face methods (Novick, 2008). Although there were some instances of network disruptions during the interviews, the overall process was successful. After 32 interview sessions, the researchers deemed the process to have reached the saturation point, which entails that further interviews would be less likely to access new information that could alter the current trajectory of the study's findings (Glaser and Strauss, 2017).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Methodology

SN	Codes	Role	Male/ Female	Office Branch	Years at work
Banking Sector Firms					
<i>Banking Firm 1 (BF1)</i>					
1	BF1-1	HR Manager	F	Abuja	7
2	BF1-2	Senior Sales Executive	M	Lagos	6
3	BF1-3	Administrative Officer	M	PH	6
4	BF1-4	NME	F	PH	5
5	BF1-5	NME	M	Lagos	5
6	BF1-6	NME	M	Lagos	6
7	BF1-7	NME	F	Abuja	4
<i>Banking Firm 2 (BF2)</i>					
8	BF2-8	Senior Manager	M	Abuja	6
9	BF2-9	Director of commerce	M	Lagos	6
10	BF2-10	Public Relation Officer	F	PH	7

11	BF2-11	NME	F	Lagos	6
12	BF2-12	NME	F	Abuja	5
13	BF2-13	NME	M	PH	5
<i>Banking Firm 3 (BF3)</i>					
14	BF3-14	Branch Manager	M	PH	8
15	BF3-15	Brand Manager	F	Abuja	7
16	BF3-16	IT Manager	M	PH	7
17	BF3-17	NME	F	Lagos	5
18	BF3-18	NME	F	Lagos	5
19	BF3-19	NME	M	Abuja	6
<i>Banking Firm 4 (BF4)</i>					
20	BF4-20	Asset Manager	M	Lagos	6
21	BF4-21	Operation Manager	M	Lagos	7
22	BF4-22	Investment Manager	M	Abuja	6
23	BF4-23	NME	F	Abuja	6
24	BF4-24	NME	F	Abuja	5
25	BF4-25	NME	M	PH	4
<i>Banking Firm 5 (BF5)</i>					
26	BF5-26	Senior Operation Manager	M	Abuja	7
27	BF5-27	Relationship Manager	F	PH	7
28	BF5-28	Project Management Officer	M	Lagos	8
29	BF5-29	HR Officer	F	PH	6
30	BF5-30	NME	F	PH	6
31	BF5-31	NME	F	Lagos	7
32	BF5-32	NME	M	Lagos	5
33	BF5-33	NME	M	Abuja	5
		Managerial employees =16 Non-managerial employees = 17	M = 18 F = 15	L = 12 A = 11 PH = 10	Min = 4 Max = 8
<p>Key guide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SN: Serial Number • BF1 – BF5: Banking Firm 1 – Banking Firm 5 • NME: Non-Managerial Employee 					

Data collection

At the end of each session, the researchers transcribed the interview manually. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis procedures (TAP), which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is an appropriate qualitative tool for identifying, analysing, and presenting patterns of events in themes. To operationalise the process, the researchers relied on Pratt et al.'s (2006) three-step sequence. In the first step, the researchers began the process of first-order coding, followed by creating tentative categories. This paved the way for the researchers

to begin the data reduction process as well as open coding, analysis of textual content and creation of terms, which captured the essence of the data and addressed the subject of inquiry. At every stage of the process, using the contact summary sheet that applies to a qualitative procedure, the researchers took note of tentative categories that emerged in the dataset (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This was followed by code naming and development of further categories, which was informed by a thorough review of the data, to ensure that all data extracts aligned well with their various categories. In the second step of the sequence, the researchers drew from the first-order codes, which were informed by respondents' data, to develop theoretical categories (Pratt et al., 2006). This led to the third step, whereby the researchers consolidated the conceptual categories, which helped to formalise a theoretical statement or account of the reasoning underpinning the research enquiry. Following the thematic order (Braun and Clark, 2006), the process of cross-comparison and validation of conceptual categories continued until the researchers reached a consensus to adopt the final themes of findings based on the data.

Findings

The TAP of the data from the respondents across the five selected banks produced three key themes, namely: digital leverage of HR functions; irresponsible digital engagement – technostress and risk to wellbeing; and the need for responsible digital engagement. These are explained in the following sections.

- **Digital leverage of HR functions**

In line with the evidence gathered from the extant literature (Amor, 2023; Strohmeier, 2020), respondents from the selected banks overwhelmingly acknowledged that the importance of digital transformation can never be overemphasized across all business levels. They particularly highlighted how digital transformation can be leveraged in the HR functions to 'support mobile working' (BF3-16), 'enhance remote work engagement' (BF1-1), 'improve work efficiency and effectiveness' (BF4-20), 'reduce response time' (BF5-27), 'promote information sharing' BF2-8), and 'increase both productivity and profitability' (BF5-30), all of which are consistent with what Renkema (2021) describes as 'digital leverage'. As one respondent noted, digitalising the way bankers conduct their daily activities, including HR functions, can 'really make all the difference between a pass mark and distinction – if you ask

me’ (BF1-4). From the realm of mobile and remote working, respondents’ notion of digital leverage is expatiated in the following excerpts:

The logic behind bankers going more digital is simply because it is a way of encouraging and supporting mobile working, which can be very efficient and effective in a competitive and challenging business environment, where time is of the essence. (BF3-14)

When you incorporate relevant technology in the work system, it means you are supporting remote working. Remote working means you do not necessarily need to be physically present in the office to engage with your business task. (BF2-10)

Digitalising our operational activities is the key to success in today’s business environment. There’s no limit to the tasks we can carry out digitally, be it selection, interviews, recruitment, training, payroll, grievance, or disciplinary procedures. (BF5-26)

Based on the logic of mobile and remote working potentials, respondent deduced that ‘by embracing digital working, we (they) have become more efficient’ (BF1-2). According to one respondent, ‘this is no rocket science – emergent technologies, for instance, allow you to just jump off from your bed and straight into your daily task without needing to dress up, or travel to the work place’ (BF4-21). Others alluded to the idea that technology can ‘reduce response time’ (BF4-24), ‘helps to promote information sharing’ (BF1-3) and ‘increase both productivity and profitability’ (BF5-28). These benefits have been captured in the extant literature regarding the imperatives of digital work transformation (Bresciani et al., 2021; Lumi, 2020). However, there are also a range of drawbacks that have been attributed to excessive contact with work technologies (Olanipekun et al., 2021), as discussed in the following section.

- **Irresponsible digital (over)engagement: Techno-stress and risk to wellbeing**

While digital (or technological) transformation has been hailed as the future of work culture, the idea of bringing the workplace into the home or other remote locations is increasingly being debated as a phenomenon that comes with its own negative implications (Bamel et al., 2022). As one respondent opined, ‘digital transformation is a double-edged sword – you win some, you lose some’ (BF2-11), which was in line with other respondents’ views that ‘although this

work dynamic can be beneficial, it comes with significant challenges’ (BF2-13) – particularly to ‘employees’ health and wellbeing – if not appropriately managed’ (BF5-31) – in terms of irresponsible and excessive engagement or over-engagement (Fedorova et al., 2019). Broadly, respondents highlighted the ‘tendency for employees to stay glued to their work device beyond the maximum number of hours that human beings should have contact with technologies’ (BF5-33), which can present concomitant health implications (Umans et al., 2018). Accordingly:

What we have also learned from digital transformation is that you are automatically stuck to the system and thereby over-engage yourself with your HR work task by force or willingly, because your work systems are with you regardless of whether it is a weekend or you are on holiday. The truth is that any work that does not encourage you to have a good break is suicidal. (BF3-18)

When you have your office at home, or preferably, should I say, remotely, it becomes difficult to separate work life and life outside of work. As you may know, nearly all HR functions are seamlessly conducted online. You end up not having time for anything else: yourself, your family, or your social engagements, which is a problem for our wellbeing. (BF1-4)

With your work apparatuses digitally wired around you, you are constantly reminded or deliberately aware of your to-do-list, which never ends. If you are lucky to have time to reflect, you will realise that you hardly pay attention to things around you, except your work task, which means that you have been suffering from a fragmented attention span – due to excessive work-engagement – largely induced by digital work integration. This situation is very risky to anybody’s health. (BF3-19)

In line with the foregoing contentions, the respondent below cautioned that:

Digital transformation is indeed a trap for unsuspecting employees, because you feel and to some extent realise that everything you are doing on-line, including your performance, is being tracked and monitored by your superiors whom you want to please and impress for positive performance appraisal. So, at some point, you automatically become addicted and unable to switch off, which is one of the reasons why people suffer high stress levels at work. (BF4-25)

From the foregoing responses, it is clear that the ‘digitalisation of HR roles and responsibilities is more likely to have negative health implications to employees’ (BF1-7) for a multitude of reason. This is especially the case when they ‘cannot switch off’ (BF2-12) because they ‘are pressured by the need to meet their work target’ (BF3-17), ‘are compelled to follow through with the to-do-list, which is endless’, ‘feel the need to impress and be in the good books of their line managers’ (BF4-23), or simply cannot summon the courage to switch off because they are addicted and hooked to the systems. These characteristics describes what Brod (1984) refers to as technostress, which is when excessive contact with work technology culminates in addiction to such technologies and subsequently drives up one’s stress level – leading to risks to both physical and mental health and wellbeing (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021). Hence, it is crucial to consider healthy means of dealing and engaging with digital transformation (Gigauri, 2020). This is the focus of the following section.

- **Need for a responsible approach to digital HR functions**

Technology has come to stay: hence, digital transformation has become the future of the world of work, which means that contemporary organisations that are unable to embrace this digital change will be overtaken by those that are able to do so. While the benefits of digitalising HR functions cannot be overemphasised, the associated health and wellbeing risks to employees cannot be overlooked. Hence, many respondents agreed that ‘the way forward is to continue to embrace digital transformation in manner that are responsible’ (BF3-15) and ‘realistically manageable, to avert health issues’ (BF2-9). However, some of the respondents also noted that ‘for digital transformation to be effectively managed and utilised in [a] responsible and healthy manner, the management team need to take the lead’ (BF5-29), and ‘employees need to take personal responsibility for their health and resist any attempt by management to force them into excessive engagement with work technologies’ (BF5-32). This is called dual management–workforce consensus on healthy work relationships to enhance organisational sustainability (Bamel et al., 2022; Orbik and Zozulakova, 2019). The premise of responsible digital engagement with HR functions was overwhelmingly emphasised by the majority of respondents. From the perspectives of employees holding managerial positions:

I believe – as a manager – that we cannot roll back what we have achieved so far with digital integration. However, what we can do is to encourage more caution in the way we work with technology, especially outside of the working hours. It is easy to stay far

too many hours working on the computer without even knowing it, and this can constitute a health hazard. (BF4-22)

I have a few employees under my supervision who are keen to continue their work from home, and there are some who prefer to actually work more days at home than at the office, because they want to save (transportation) cost. But the problem is not really about whether they would be disciplined enough with working at home, but the issue of not knowing when to stop working for the day, which is why sometimes we have them calling in sick when there is a need for them to really appear in the office. This is why I think there is a need to find a solution to this. (BF5-26)

It is not possible to eat your cake and still have it at the same time. I mean, you cannot have an effective, healthy workforce when they are burned out and sick from working day and night – simply because the digital transformation allows such. Therefore, I welcome any means of balancing the work engagement and life administration. (BF1-1)

Similarly, non-managerial employees expressed that ‘it is the responsibility of management to initiate the culture of adherence to work-life balance – particularly on the hills of digital work transformation, because employees are often intimidated to raise such demands’ (BF2-11), due to the fear of losing their jobs or facing other reprisals (Olanipekun et al., 2021). Another respondent enjoined that ‘we have come to realise that some organisations see employees as mere numbers which can be easily replaced’ (BF3-17). Hence, ‘it would be foolish to allow yourself to fall sick as a consequence of excessive work-engagement – because they would abandon and easily forget about you’ (BF4-23). This contention was further emphasized by another respondent who insisted that ‘employees have a duty too, to reject [the] unjustified push for excessive working from management, because if their health and wellbeing is ensured, they can always secure another job moving forward’ (BF5-30).

In order to operationalise a responsible approach to engaging in digital transformation, respondents pointed towards the need to first acknowledge that ‘the issue of excessive engagement is omnipresence within the organisations’ work systems’ (BF4-25), and that ‘the prevailing nature of excessive digital work engagement in the sector is a trigger of health and wellbeing risk’ (BF5-33). They further emphasised a need for a ‘commitment by all and sundry to embrace the balancing act of work and life outside of work – particularly when using the digital platform’ (BF1-4) and ‘ensuring that the necessary resources are in place to manage the

phenomenon of digital transformation’ (BF2-12), reflecting Suchacka’s (2020) practical steps towards healthy digital management. At the centre of this approach, respondents suggested that ‘management need to facilitate, encourage and involve all stakeholders in the relevant training’ (BF3-19), and where possible, ‘take [the] lead in championing mechanisms for managing digital work transformation, which can include using electronic prompter and timer or related devices’ (BF2-8). On the other hand, ‘employees are duty-bound to take personal initiative in abiding by such mechanisms in addition with taking breaks at appropriate intervals’ (BF4-24), ‘knowing when they have reached the maximum healthy daily hours of digital contact’ (BF5-31), and ‘demonstrating discipline in turning of their devices once the maximum daily contact hours have been exhausted’ (BF1-5).

While the above aligns with the view covered in the extant literature (Bamel et al., 2022; Gigauri, 2020), there was also a general consensus among respondents that the health and wellbeing of the workforce is paramount to organisational success. According to some of them, ‘healthy workers are indeed happy workers’ (BF3-14), and ‘once employees feel happy and satisfied, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to their work task’ (BF2-13). Furthermore, they added that ‘organisations that oversee healthy and happy workforce stand to harness the gains of a reduced absenteeism and high retention rate’ (BF4-20), and ‘increased productivity, profitability and favourable organisational reputation’ (BF3-18), all of which can translate to long-term organisational sustainability (Orbik and Zozulakova, 2019).

Discussion and implications

With many organisations in the developed economies digitalising their HR functions to harness the benefits associated with integrating the related emergent technologies (Amor, 2023), businesses in the developing economies are also increasingly joining the bandwagon in order to stay sustainable – particularly at a time when the market environment is not only challenging (MacRae and Sawatzky, 2020) but also more fiercely competitive than ever (Singh et al., 2023). However, the implication of this transition in operational dynamics for employees’ health and wellbeing requires further critical review in the developing countries. This need is crucial in Nigeria – the context of this study – where the integration of technology to drive remote and mobile working for profit maximization can only exacerbate the risk to wellbeing (Umans et al., 2018) in a country where employees are known to already face labour exploitation and unfavourable work conditions (Keramati, 2007). The Nigerian banking firms operate in a sector

where operators are compelled by virtue of the digital era, the recent pandemic, and the broader challenging business environment to embrace digital transformation in order to survive (Olanipekun et al., 2021). Thus, while digital transformation cannot be avoided, it can be embraced and operationalised or implemented in a manner that poses fewer health and wellbeing risks to users (employees). It is to this end that this chapter has explored the future of digital work transformation and the case for responsible digital engagement for enhanced employee wellbeing in Nigeria's employment terrain.

In addressing the above objective, the study relied on an interpretive qualitative methodology and TAP of empirical data collected from respondents across five Nigerian banks. The data-gathering process involved semi-structured interviews with 33 managerial and non-managerial staff in various branches of the selected banks across Nigeria's three major cosmopolitan cities: Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. The rigours of the TAP helped to develop themes through which to present the study's findings, which propose – through the development of a responsible digital utility framework – a new future in terms of how digital transformation can be implemented to harness the associated benefits while also averting the health and wellbeing risks it can pose to employees. With this in mind, it is hoped that this chapter has contributed to the digital transformation literature both empirically and theoretically.

Empirically, a synopsis from the data analysis expatiated that digital transformation can be leveraged in the organisations' HR roles to 'support mobile working' (BF3-16), 'enhance remote work engagement (BF1-1), 'improve work efficiency and effectiveness' (BF4-20), 'reduce response time' (BF5-27), 'promote information sharing' BF2-8), and 'increase both productivity and profitability' (BF5-30), which tallies with the invaluable nature of digital transformation to organisational survival in the digital era (Amor, 2023; Strohmeier, 2020). Participants emphasised that 'although this work dynamic can be beneficial, it comes with significant challenges' (BF2-13), such as workers' tendency 'to stay glued to work devices' (BF5-33), and that they 'cannot switch off' (BF2-12), due to endless 'to-do-lists' (BF4-23), 'work targets' (BF3-17), and pressure to impress 'their line managers' (BF4-23), thus presenting risks to 'employees' health and wellbeing' (BF5-31; BF1-7). This highlights that 'digital transformation is a double-edged sword' (BF2-11) if not appropriately and reasonably managed (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021).

In line with the popular view that the benefits of digitalising HR functions cannot be overemphasised, and likewise the broader consensus that the associated risks to employees'

health and wellbeing cannot be overlooked (Gigauri, 2020; Bamel et al., 2022), data excerpts suggest that ‘the way forward is to continue to embrace digital transformation in manners that are responsible’ (BF3-15) and ‘realistically manageable, to avert health issues’ (BF2-9). Respondents also commented on the need to ‘encourage more caution with technology, especially outside working hours’ (BF4-22), and to be ‘disciplined enough with working at home and knowing when to stop working for the day’ (BF5-26) while ‘balancing the work engagement and life administration’ (BF1-1). These comments further corroborate the call for responsible utility in the approach toward implementing digital transformation (Suchacka, 2020). Essentially, in order to manifest responsible digital transformation, management agents ‘need to take the lead’ (BF5-29), while non-managerial staff must ‘take personal responsibility and resist any attempt to be forced’ (BF5-32) into excessive and irresponsible engagement with work technologies, which parallels Bamel et al.’s (2022) dual management-workforce consensus on healthy work relationships. According to respondents, when a responsible approach to digital integration is manifest, health and wellbeing risks are more likely to be averted, while employees’ wellness, satisfaction, motivation, and commitment will increase, leading to lower absenteeism, greater efficiency and effectiveness, higher productivity and profitability, and a more favourable organisational reputation (BF3-18; BF4-20; BF3-14), leading to increased organisational sustainability (Orbik and Zozulakova, 2019).

Theoretically, the study proposes that a responsible approach is the future to engaging digital HR function transformation if the associated benefits are to be harnessed while avoiding employees’ exposure to imminent health and wellbeing risks. To operationalise the proposed responsible approach, the study draws from the work of Maier et al. (2015b), Orbik and Zozulakova (2019), Suchacka (2020), and Bamel et al. (2022) to develop a ‘responsible digital work transformation framework for enhanced employee wellbeing’ (see Figure 1), which embodies four key steps. The first step compels both management and employees to acknowledge that where digital transformation is implemented, tendencies for irresponsible utility or users’ over-engagement with the related technologies and the concomitant health risks will be high (Bamel et al., 2022). The second step goes beyond acknowledging the imminent tendency to observing the actual occurrences of excessive digital contact, thereby necessitating that urgent actions are taken and the necessary resources are put in place to commit towards balancing the process of such engagement (Gigauri, 2020). This leads to the third step, where the actions required, including training for responsible digital HR engagement, are encouraged by management or otherwise demanded by employees, citing health implications (Umans et

al., 2018). Central to step three is the practical approach to devising mechanisms for facilitating employees' training, using timers and prompts on related devices to compel users to be more disciplined, take breaks between work sessions (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021), and discontinue digital work contact as soon as their maximum healthy daily hours have been reached (Suchacka, 2020). Thus, effective implementation of step three is envisaged to help reduce risks to employees' wellbeing risks and absenteeism, while increasing their wellness, satisfaction, commitment, and productivity, and this improving organisational profitability and long-term sustainability (Lumi, 2020; Olanipekun et al., 2021), as characterised in step four of the framework.

The study has both scholarly and practical implications. In the context of scholarly implications, our findings have corroborated the long-standing findings in the extant literature regarding the astronomical rise in digital transformation (Amor, 2023; Susilo, 2020), given that organisations in the developing economies have joined suit with those in the developed economies, citing the associated benefits (Singh et al., 2023). Similarly, the study has also corroborated prior research that has highlighted the health and wellbeing implications for employees when organisations embrace digital work integration (Strohmeier, 2020), especially in the developing economies where such transformation tends to exacerbate employees' stress levels, leading to illness, high absenteeism and low productivity (Olanipekun et al., 2021). While a consensus seemed to have been reached among many scholars that the benefits of digital transformation cannot be overemphasised, and likewise that the health implications must not be overlooked, the practical solution has been for organisations to strike a good balance between moderate and excessive digital work engagement (Juchnowicz and Kinowska, 2021). This is the mainstay of this current study, which proposes responsible digital engagement and a framework to support this logic. Future scholarly focus needs to explore further ways in which this responsible digital engagement framework can be strengthened and re-defined.

The study's practical implications are primarily managerial, highlighting the role of management, line managers, and employees in addressing the health and wellbeing implications of allowing digital transformation to be mismanaged. The benefits and long-term drawbacks of digital transformation are clear (Fedorova et al., 2019), and it has thus become imperative for managers to encourage and lead the process of responsible engagement in such

transformation by setting out strategies and guiding frameworks that can help them to achieve this (Bamel et al., 2022). Furthermore, based on the premise of their own health and wellbeing, employees also have a duty to call for responsible digital engagement (Gigauri, 2020). Hence, where managers fail to demonstrate commitment to responsible digital engagement, employees need to demand such and take active steps in exercising discipline, taking breaks at appropriate intervals, and knowing when to discontinue such engagement (Fedorova et al., 2022; Maier et al., 2015b), because they can easily be replaced if they become incapacitated as a consequence of irresponsible digital engagement.

Limitations and directions for future study

While the study has demonstrated important strengths and contributions, it is also limited in a number of ways. One of the concerns here is the relatively small sample of 33 respondents from five banking organisations, representing a single sector. Future studies need to involve samples from firms operating in more sectors. Furthermore, future studies may benefit from a multi-qualitative method, combining survey data and analysis with interviews to allow generalisation of findings (Patton, 2015)

Conclusion

This chapter has critically explored the future of digital work transformation and made the case for responsible digital engagement by developing a framework for responsible digital transformation in order to harness the associated benefits in the digital era while avoiding the potential health and wellbeing risks to the workforce. The study gathered and thematically analysed data from 33 managerial and non-managerial staff working in five Nigerian banks.

References

Reference list is being dealt with