

# Exploring Alternative Approaches to the Management of Psycho-Social Hazards in the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) Depot, Owerri, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Employees are the most critical and crucial resources of any organisation and their work are often threatened by certain factors in the workplace. This study explored the alternative approaches to management of psycho-social hazards in the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) depot, Owerri, Nigeria. The paper extensively reviewed related and relevant literature. Job Characteristics Model (JCM) served as the theoretical framework. The paper highlighted the problems of psychosocial hazards within the manufacturing industries, particularly with reference to the NBC plc, such as work load, unhealthy workplace relationship, aggression, intimidation etc. It equally identified some of the standard measures applicable in addressing such hazards in the global practice. This paper concluded that such standard practices were not able to address the current levels of psychosocial hazards that are peculiar within the context of the, Owerri depot. The paper recommended among others that supervisors in the NBC should try to identifying when tasks assigned to employees become strenuous on their health. To manipulate this situation, managers should re-strategize by changing the way the job is done or sharing the workload differently. It could also be done by introducing flexible job-sharing, ensuring that employees have the required knowledge and ability to perform their assigned roles, and equally follow up to supervise and direct them in flexible ways that could encourage and motivate them to do better. Again, managers should address issues of poor interpersonal relationship in the workplace by addressing issues of work-related bullying, aggression, harassment of any sort, discrimination and other unreasonable behaviours by co-workers, supervisors or managers. Organisational managers in the NBC should develop, implement and enforce a code of conduct so that everyone is aware of appropriate work behaviours and equally ensure that such standards are implemented to demonstrate that there are consequences for inappropriate behaviours.

**Keywords:** Alternative Approaches, Management, Nigerian Bottling Company, Psycho-Social Hazards, Safety.

## **Introduction**

For the past few years, work related hazards have been a major focus of many organisational researches across the globe. This is in consideration of the view that the labour force of an organisation (employees) remains one of the most critical and crucial resources within the work organisation. They constitute the power engine that could determine the overall performance of an organisation. Well managed employees would ultimately lead to greater productivity of the organisation and ill-managed employees could lead to devastating consequences for the organisation. Over the past few decades, the high competitiveness in the global market has put different production companies in serious pressures, in the bid to remain at competitive advantage in the global market. This pressure however has a trickle-down effect in such a manner that such organisations put so much pressure on the employees without actually evaluating the implications of such pressures on their psycho-social health. As such, many employees suffer different challenges and the most critical among such challenges is psycho-social hazards.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1986), psycho-social hazards refers to the interactions between and among work environment, job content, organizational conditions and workers' capacities, needs, culture, personal extra-job considerations that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction of employees. They are often determined by hazards found within the work organisation, work design, working conditions, and labour relations. It often occurs when the knowledge and abilities of an individual worker to cope with the practices within the work organisation are not matched with the job demands and expectations of the organisational culture of the enterprise. Such poses risks to the health, safety and productivity of the employee. According to the European Union (2014), psychosocial hazards are linked not only to health outcomes but also to performance-related outcomes such as absenteeism, work ability and especially job satisfaction. Other scholars have the view that exposure to psychosocial hazards can impact mental and physical health through stress, psychological strain, job burnout, anxiety, depression, muscular aches and pains, irritability, poor concentration and disturbed sleep (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, 2019).

As a result, the management of Psycho-social work-related hazards and development of employees are now being recognized as one of the main success criteria for organizational performance (Bergh, Leka & Zwetsloot, 2017). For any organisation to achieve optimal productivity, it has to ensure that issues affecting employees' workability are addressed effectively. Thus, one of the priorities that human resource managers in major organisations are concerned about is how to identify various workable strategies that could reduce the occurrence of psycho-social hazards. This is with the ultimate aim of improving the overall working conditions of employees, which would equally lead to overall organisational productivity.

Actions targeted at reducing hazards (including psycho-social hazards) experienced by employees in the work place could be captured as organisational risk or hazards management. This refers to the process of planning, organising, leading and controlling the activities of an organisation in order to minimize the effects of risks or hazards on an organisation's capital, workforce and performance (Stulz, 2004) as cited in Ugwuanyi and Imo (2012). Koontz, O'Donnell and Dietrich (2000) were of the view that the aim of hazard management is to adopt a systematic and consistent approach to managing all the risks or hazards confronting an organization. It is conceived as a key part of a company's revenue and future profitability, in the sense that hazard management is linked to conformance which further leads to performance, and performance itself leads to sustainable profitability and growth. Hence, a direct linkage between hazard management and profitability of an organisation is hypothesised.

However, research efforts in exploring strategies to address work-related hazards have more or less focused on the physical, hygiene and bio-chemical hazards (Guadix, Carrillo-Castrillo, Onieva & Lucena, 2015), while the issue of psycho-social hazards have remained relatively ignored in recent researches. Although psycho-social hazards have been recognised as a major challenge within the work organisation within the past two decades (ILO, 1986), solutions provided by researches in the past may have become somewhat difficult to practice in recent time, considering the fact that technological innovations within the workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have introduced many changes that add more heightened levels of

stress to the employees. Hence, there is need for alternative strategies to be developed in order to meet up with the new forms of hazards that may have been introduced by the changes within organisations.

This is most important within manufacturing industries because they are the most organisations with the highest forms of psychosocial hazards (Guadix et al, 2015). Hence, the importance of addressing psychosocial hazards within the manufacturing industries like the Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) plc cannot be overlooked as a means of ensuring optimal productivity. Scholars like Ugwuanyi and Imo (2012) documented that the brewing industries are exposed to various risks/hazards such as business risks, operating risks, strategic risks, political, legal and regulatory risks. They also encounter psychosocial risks like bullying, harassment etc which often jeopardize the performance of the industries. Despite these levels of risks, strategies for managing psychosocial and other work-related risks have merely focused on standard rules as laid down by the

International Labour Organisations, particularly as applicable to the European nations. Such strategies are arguably insufficient to address the peculiar organisational realities in the Nigerian context. Thus, this presents a gap in knowledge on strategies for managing psychosocial hazards within the manufacturing industry and necessitates the need to explore alternative approaches to the management of psycho-social hazards in the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) depot, Owerri, Nigeria.

### **Aims of the Paper**

The general aim of this paper is to explore alternative approaches to the management of psycho-social hazards in the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) depot, Owerri, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to;

1. To highlight the problems of psychosocial hazards within NBC.
2. To identify some standard measures applicable in addressing psychosocial hazards in manufacturing industries.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

## **The Concept of Psychosocial Hazards and its Types/Forms**

The term psychosocial hazard has been conceptualized by authors in different ways. However, considering that all ideas regarding the variable cannot be fully articulated within one research, few conceptualizations considered relevant to drive the theme of this study are reviewed. Thus, International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1986) conceptualised psychological hazards in terms of the interactions among job content, work organization and management, and other environmental and organizational conditions, on the other hand, and the employees' competencies and needs on the other hand, that prove to have a hazardous influence over employees' health through their perceptions and experiences. Building from this definition, Brun, Emmanuelle and Milczarek (2017) defined psychosocial hazards as workplace stressors that affect the well-being of workers and impair their ability to participate with people in a work environment. According to these scholars, a stressor is a predisposing condition that exerts mental pressure on a worker. It is a hazard in the workplace which poses challenges to occupational health and safety. Similarly, Cox and Griffiths (2012) defined psychosocial hazards as any occupational hazard that affects the psychological health of employees of an organization. In this direction, an occupational hazard is a risk that predisposes workers to health issues.

Psychosocial hazards are related to the way work is designed; organized and managed as well as to the economic and social contexts of work. At such, the psychosocial hazards may vary in type based on the organizational contexts. However, in general context, psychosocial hazards include workplace violence, bullying, sexual harassment and occupational stress that are associated with psychiatric, psychological and physical injury or illness. In a bid to present a holistic account of the concept of psychosocial hazard, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2017) identified the most important emerging psychosocial risks including: i) Precarious work contracts; ii) Increased work vulnerability due to globalization; iii) New forms of employment contracts; iv) Feeling of job insecurity; v) Aging workforce; vi) Long working hours; vii) Work intensification; viii) Lean production and outsourcing; ix) High emotional demands; x) Poor work-life balance. Deducing from the above conceptualizations, psychosocial hazard is conceptualise in this present study as those type of work situations that present unfavourable

psychological and social effects to employees, in a way that the employees' cannot perform optimally within the work environment.

### **Importance of Managing Psychosocial Hazards in the Work Environment**

As mentioned earlier in the introductory part of this paper, employees of an organisation is one of the most important elements in the workforce. However, the experience of work-related psychosocial hazards poses significant risks to their performance, as well as their job satisfaction. As such, the importance of managing every form of psychosocial hazards which affect their workability cannot be overemphasised. Thus, psychosocial hazards constitute an important area for managerial improvement within any organization. It has been noted that management of psychosocial hazards prevents accidents and absenteeism; and strategically, organizations that manage psychosocial hazards effectively can be more competitive (Guadix et al, 2015).

In addition, management of psychosocial hazards is influential in improving overall employee health at the organizational level (Oliver, Cheyne, Tomas & Cox, 2002); and the main organizational outcomes are greater job satisfaction, lower absenteeism, and better productivity (Leka & Cox, 2008). According to Chuang, Chen and Chuang (2013), human resource practices that foster relationships between employers positively relate to organizational social capital. Psychosocial risk management thereby contributes to human factors management. Guadix et al (2015) equally averred that as part of human resource management, an innovative strategy in psychosocial risk management may increase organizational social capital by encouraging relationships among employees.

### **Ways of Reducing Psychosocial Hazards**

Hazards control in the workplace has been identified as a panacea for healthy and safe working condition. Guadix et al (2015) opined that the elimination of a hazard should be most effective control measure before the consideration of using other means, like engineering or design controls. It stressed that engineering controls help to reduce the possibility of exposure by controlling the hazards at its source. Examples of which include: workplace design to reduce the potential for violence (e.g. cameras, location of offices, desks, etc.), access controls, workplace design

(e.g. flow of work, level of personal control of work, quantity and variation of work, etc.), alarm systems, physical and chemical restraints.

However, Work Safe (2011) noted that the other next level of control is administrative. The administrative control is directed toward individuals (workers and managers) and the culture of the organization. Examples include: policies (e.g. workplace violence prevention and management, working alone, etc.), management style, communication processes, change management processes, safe work procedures, fitness to work assessments, training, scheduling, accommodation for workers with health issues, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It further argued that where engineering and/or administrative controls are not sufficient to control the hazards, a third choice is the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This form of control measure is not commonly used for psychosocial hazards. Often several controls are applied simultaneously to effectively control a hazard.

The burden of many psychosocial hazards is said to be possibly reduced by prevention and management (Gyawali, 2015). He argued that protecting workers from psychosocial hazards is very important, but very challenging at the same time, and needs holistic approach at all levels. Various approaches have been proposed so far for preventing and managing hazards at workplace. Conventionally, interventions for workplace hazards used to be focused on individual self-efficacy of workers such as coping and management skill development. However, individual-focused approach without other interventions can only influence individual-level outcomes but not at the organizational level. In a systematic review, Van der Molen, Sluiter, Hulshof, Vink and Frings-Dresen (2005) emphasized on organization-oriented interventions such as inspections, trainings, and introduction of occupational health services for reducing non-fatal injuries at workplace.

LaMontagne, Keegel, Louie, Ostry and Landsbergis (2007) submitted that reduction on the impact of work-related stress on worker's health can be done by developing appropriate rehabilitation and return-to-work systems and enhanced occupational health provisions. To them, this can be done through interventions at the tertiary level which will typically involve the provision of counselling services for employees in the work or personal domain or therapy for people experiencing burnout or

depression. Again, it is the rehabilitation measures for people who have been absent from their work for a long time due to illness caused by work related psychosocial hazards.

Carrillo, Guadix and Onieva (2014) on their part noted that managers should consider motivation, strategy, and perceived risks when deciding which health and safety management model to adopt. In comprehensive terms, the ILO (2016) articulated measures to reduce psychosocial hazards within the work organization to include:

- Implementing of collective risk assessment and management measures for psychosocial risks as it will be done with other workplace risks.
- Adopting collective and individual preventive and control measures and engage workers and their representatives in their implementation.
- Improving the coping ability of workers by increasing their control over their tasks;
- Enhancing organizational communication.
- Allowing workers' participation in decision making.
- Building up social support systems for workers within the workplace.
- Taking into account the interrelation between working and living conditions.
- Assessing the needs of the organization by taking into consideration organizational, individual and individual/organizational interactions when evaluating workers' health requirements

### **Policy Frameworks in the Management of Psychosocial Hazards**

The ILO being a major international agency for labour suggested legal frameworks that could be applied to address the challenges of psychosocial hazards in the work environment. Such standards included two dimensions that were expressed as: 1) binding legal instruments which include international labour standards, regional standards, national standards and collective standards. International labour standards include conventions held to address psychosocial hazards such as: i) the Occupational Safety and Health Convention in 1981 – which aims at protecting workers' physical and mental health by means of adaptation of machinery,



equipment, working time, work organization and work processes to the physical and mental capacities of workers, ii) Occupational Health Services Convention in 1985 – which aims at assisting employers, workers, and their representatives in establishing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment, including the adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers so as to facilitate optimal physical and mental health at work; iii) Promotion Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention in 2006 – which prescribes the requirements and functions of national structure, relevant institutions and stakeholders responsible for implementing a national and enterprise-level occupational safety and health policy and building a preventive occupational safety health culture.

The regional standards include: i) Framework Directive on Safety and Health at Work in 1989, which stipulates employers responsibility to ensure workers' health and safety in every aspect related to work; ii) Directive on the Minimum Safety and Health Requirements for Work with Display Screen Equipment in 1990, which stipulates employers' responsibility to evaluate the safety and health conditions, particularly as regards possible risks to eyesight, physical problems and problems of mental stress; iii) Social and Labour Declaration in 1998, which stipulates workers' right to the protection of their physical and mental health; iv) Andean Instrument on Safety and Health at Work in 2004, which emphasises the organisation and management of work and psychosocial factors included in the definition of working conditions, v) Directive on Prevention from Sharp Injuries in the Hospital and Healthcare Sector in 2010, which stipulates employers' responsibility to ensure the safety and health of workers in every aspect related to their work, including psychosocial factors and work organisation.

### **Brief Overview of Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) Depot, Owerri**

The Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) is one of the world's largest bottlers of drinks. They serve approximately 180 million people through the production and distribution of unique portfolio of quality brands (Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company - CCHBC, 2018). NBC was incorporated in 1951 as a franchise bottler of products of the Coca-Cola Company in Nigeria. NBC became a Public Liability Company (Plc) in 1972 and has its shares listed in the Nigerian Stock exchange.

NBC depot Owerri is located at Km 55 Owerri-Onitsha Road Industrial Layout, Irette, Owerri, Imo State. Located in the capital city of Owerri in Imo State, the Owerri plant started its operations in 1982. Owerri plant runs Coca-Cola, Fanta, Sprite and Schweppes production lines producing both the sugar and sugar free variant. Distribution covers all product categories. Positioned in the heart of the eastern Nigeria, Owerri Plant affords central distribution in the east, supplying to Uyo, Owerri and Aba commercial territories. This spread across 5 states, that is, Abia, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Imo and Ebonyi States with an estimated population coverage of 20.2million. The company since its operation has employed more than a thousand workers and has been the selling beverage company with annual sales running into billions of bottles (NBC, 2021).

According Maduawuchi (2018), the Owerri plant was established to capture the markets in Owerri as well as some parts of Anambra State. The Owerri depot is made up of Administrative, Accounts, Customer Relations, Distribution, Plants, Marketing and Procurement departments. The Company produces and distributes brands such as, Coke, Sprite, Fanta, Schweppes, Bitter Lemon, Tonic Water, Eva Table Water and Five Alive Juice.

The Owerri depot has been recognised for its outstanding performance and has consecutively emerged the most performing plant, with the winning of the famous Andrew David /Coca Cola Excellence Awards (Osagie, 2005). He noted that the annual award is giving to the most performing plant in the year and usually based on the plant's highest cumulative score in sales, market share, profit and quality performance.

### **Challenges of Psychosocial Hazards in NBC Depot**

All cadres of workers in any organisation (formal or informal) are usually exposed to different forms of workplace psychosocial risks at certain points. They may sometimes be employers induced or organisational environmental factors. They could come in form of work load, home-work interface, lack of possibilities to advance forward, lack of career development, constant state of alertness (CSA) and so on. Most of the company's employees are appears over stressed with work load. Some usually do the work loading and at the same time driver, with or without any

market assistant. This could be overbearing and possibly weigh down the person involved.

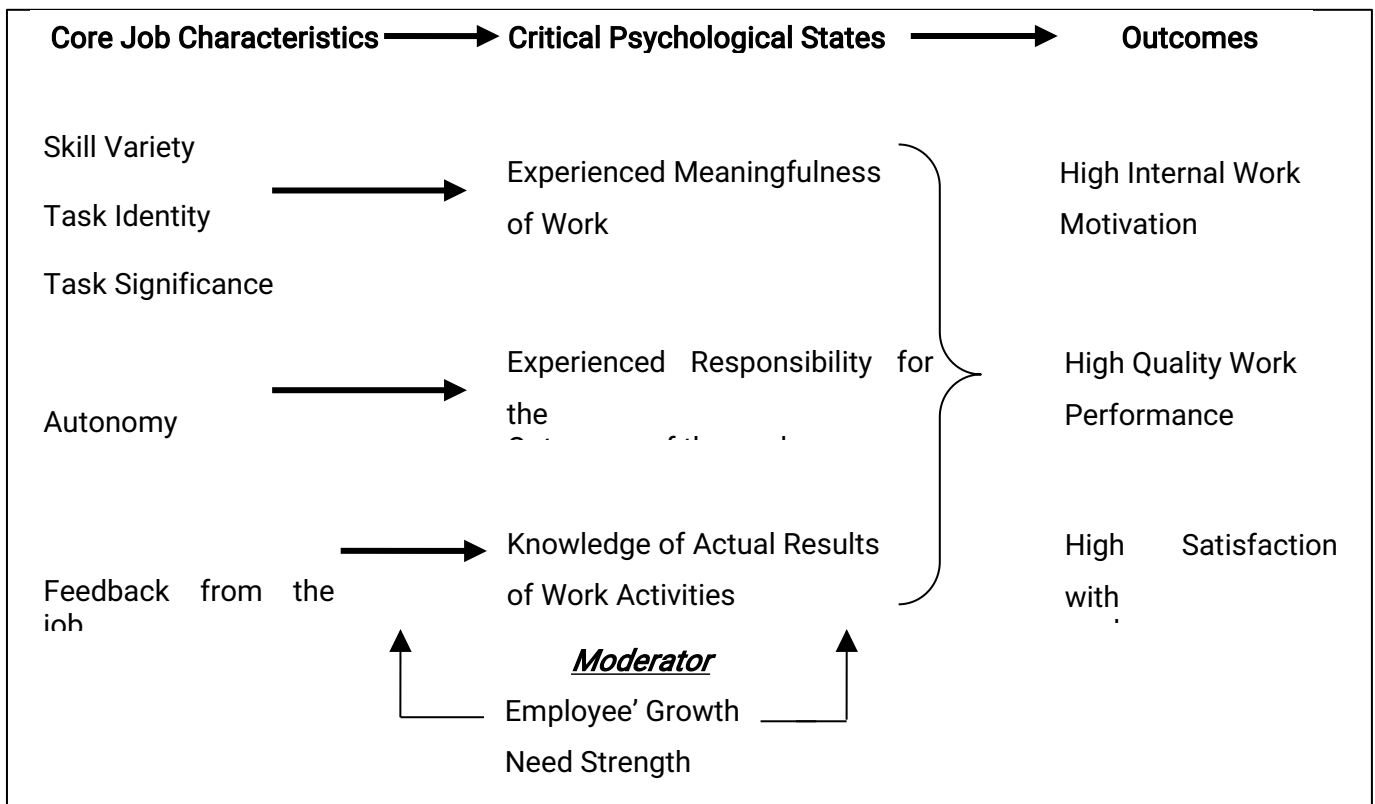
Due to the uncondiciveness of certain work environments employees' satisfaction which would ultimately enhance their optimal performance within an organization is usually hampered. The outbreak of the dreaded COVID-19 pandemic exposed many workers to health related dangers and made them vulnerable to their work environments. Most organisations were not having the capacity to guarantee the safety of their workforce. This appears to have led many employees to acts drudgery and absenteeism. In the course of being absent or working from home as directed by more organisations, certain areas appear to suffer some setbacks. Employees of NBC are not exemption of this and the fear of being infected with the virus affected most of them. This is in view of the fact that they meet and relate with the public in the course of their job.

Moreso, many employees often transfer aggression of what happened at home or elsewhere to colleagues at work unknowingly. This is usually witnessed in unnecessary nagging and unwholesome attitudes displayed toward a colleague or customer. This creates psychosocial issues and when left unchecked could affect interpersonal relationships.

There is also the challenge of insecurity and fear of the unknown. Owerri has been relatively peaceful and safe business environment until the incessant armed attacks of unknown gunmen. That has continued to send fear to many residents and workers alike. Since the hive of events in the State there have been reports of abducted persons and killings. This affects the psych of many employees as one is not sure of where or when to run into them. This is making access into NBC very strenuous and prevailing atmosphere of tension could be easily sensed. Aside this, there is also the problem of dilapidated road networks which usually result to the fallen of trucks of NBC. When such incidences happen, it was made to be understood that the affected driver will suffer the brunt of it. The company usually make the driver to pay part, it not all the cost of the damaged products through monthly deductions from his salary. This is traumatising and could affect proper articulation in the workplace giving the fact that bad roads or potholes are not the making of the driver.

## Theoretical Thrust: Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

The Job characteristics model was developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) as a work design which provides a set of implementing principles for enhancing jobs in organizational settings. JCM is based on the belief that certain job characteristics enhance psychological conditions, which result in motivation, performance and satisfaction. In other words, motivation, satisfaction and performance are conceived through enriching job characteristics. The job characteristics are variety of skill, task identity, task significance, autonomy and constructive feedback (Robbins, Odendaal & Roodt, 2003). The model thus identifies a match between the characteristics of the job itself and the individual's needs, and has been extensively applied in work design initiatives. Figure 1 shows the framework for JCM.



- Task identity refers to the extent to which a job has a predefined description of its start and finish, with a measurable outcome.

Fig. 1: Job Characteristics Model (Adapted from Garg & Rastogi, 2005).

- Skill variety which refers to the degree to which an employee is required to utilise various skills and abilities in order to accomplish a multi task. Skill

variety may also reduce monotony by creating a more challenging environment for the employee.

- Task identity refers to the extent to which a job has a predefined description of its start and finish, with a measurable outcome.
- Task significance refers to the importance of a specific task. If a task is seen to be significant by an employee, it will have a positive effect on the outcome of the task. The task also holds significance within the organisation and in a broader context, the individual's social networking environment (Garg & Rastogi, 2005).
- Autonomy is viewed as the level to which a job offers independence. It also identifies the amount of freedom and control that is afforded to an employee to accomplish objectives, make decisions and organise working schedules.
- Constructive feedback refers to the relaying of discrete information about an employee's job performance.

In totality, this model suggests that the nature of these five core job characteristics within an organization would have significant influence on critical psychological states of the employees, which could in turn enhance or retard their job performance. The emphasis here is that work organisations particular manufacturing companies like the NBC should focus on management strategies that could influence conducive working conditions for the employees.

## **Discussion**

The management strategies for work-related psychosocial hazards have often based on regulatory policies as stipulated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which serve as standards for managing psychosocial hazards in work places. However, it is noteworthy that above ILO standards do not often conform to the management requirement for psychosocial hazards in every organisational context. This is particularly because the standards were designed based on the socio-cultural environments of European nations; and such standards often focus on management of physical and hygiene hazards (Guadix, Carrillo-Castrillo, Onieva & Lucena, 2015).

Consequently, a more appropriate way of managing psychosocial hazards especially

with regard to Nigerian Companies would be by looking at the problem from Nigeria's socio-cultural and organisational-specific context. In particular, the nature of psychosocial risks applicable to the specific organisations must be fully noted and taken cognisance of. In order to do so, it is important to reiterate in general, the common factors that could generate psychosocial hazards in various organisational contexts and use such framework to articulate alternative strategies for managing psychosocial hazards in the Nigerian Bottling Company (NBC) or any other Nigerian Company.

Furthermore, to address factors that generate psycho-social hazards in organizations, like NBC disparity between employers and employees should be prioritized. Organisational hierarchy does not allow opportunities for the lower level employees to express their concerns in terms of the psychosocial hazards they are faced with. Consequently, this gap in communication prevents the top management officials from understanding the degree of psychosocial hazards affecting their employees. In most cases, applying the standard procedures for managing psychosocial hazards may become unproductive.

The issue of Job Demand/Work Load which is a major challenge for many employees in the manufacturing industries needs management attention. In most occasions, top managers are often interested in the output of the employees without considering their capacities in handling job demands. When an employee is engaged in a task that supersedes his or her abilities, it generates a feeling of work overload, which could lead to serious mental health problems.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study has been able to highlight the problems of psychosocial hazards within the manufacturing industries, particularly with reference to the NBC plc, and equally identified some of the standard measures applicable in addressing such hazards in the global practice. This study argued however that such standard practices were not able to address the current levels of psychosocial hazards that are peculiar within the context of the NBC. As such, alternative measures to address such psychosocial hazards were identified in this paper. However, the commitment of the senior management in the NBC is critical to the implementation of the identified

alternative strategies for managing psychosocial hazards; as such measures/interventions may require an investment in resources including people, money and time. Based on these findings the following recommendations are made;

1. Supervisors in NBC should try in identifying when tasks assigned to employees become strenuous on their health. To manipulate this situation, managers should re-strategize by changing the way the job is done or sharing the workload differently.
2. Again, managers should address issues of poor interpersonal relationship in the workplace by addressing issues of work-related bullying, aggression, harassment of any sort, discrimination and other unreasonable behaviours by co-workers, supervisors or managers.
3. Organisational managers should also develop, implement and enforce a code of conduct so that everyone is aware of appropriate work behaviours and equally ensure that such standards are implemented to demonstrate that there are consequences for inappropriate behaviours.

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