Employees' Counselling as a Mechanism for Healthy Post-Work Transition: A Preliminary Survey

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed employees' counselling as a mechanism for managing unexpected workplace transition. The objectives were to determine the current awareness level of employees' counselling as a mechanism for healthy workplace transition and to ascertain the readiness of both management and employees to adopt employees' counselling as part of their strategies in managing unexpected exit from the organization. In order to achieve these objectives, the study adopted quantitative approach using First Bank of Nigeria Plc. as a case study. The result shows that awareness level of employees' counselling is low and that First Bank of Nigeria is yet to adopt employees' counselling in helping victims of unprepared exits to cope with the challenges of such experience. However, the study revealed that the workers believed that employees' counselling would help them grapple with the challenges posed by unexpected exit from the organization. Thus, the study emphasized the need to incorporate employee counselling into the functions of the Human Resource (HR) Department of the organization.

1 INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, organizations globally are faced with many difficulties threatening their survival. The recent economic meltdown forced many companies to close shops, while others adopted different restructuring strategies which included cost-cutting through downsizing and layoffs. Specifically, the years 2010 and 2011 witnessed a rise in unexpected job losses in Europe and America with many people pushed to the streets without any prior preparation for such unexpected transition. The situation in Nigeria was not different as the last one year of President Muhammed Buhari has witnessed economic downturn plugging Nigeria into yet another recession. This has led many companies, especially banks and communication companies to lay-off many of their workers as part of their survival strategies. In doing this, little or no attention was paid to the possible socio-psychological implications for the exiting employees who more or less have been deprived of their source of livelihood. The policy trust of many affected organizations was 'save the company and not the worker'. This situation brought many crises into the life of the affected employees such as marriage break-ups, family disorientation, and withdrawal from school and even death. The traumatic experience arising from losing one's source of income with no hope of replacing it with another accounted for family crisis or even death of victims of downsizing.

Notwithstanding, many organizations still do not have any intervention mechanism for managing workers in crisis situation arising from layoffs/redundancies, termination, retirement, resignation etc. Such measure that can be used as stress reducing and shock absorbing mechanism is counselling. Studies have shown that counselling can be used in the workplace to reduce employee's stress and problems (Carroll, 1996: 3). In Carroll (1996:3) words: "change is never easy: it disrupts, disorientates, causes grieving and takes time. Support is needed for individuals and teams as transitions in organizations are managed. Counselling is one way of supporting employees as they cope with organizational change." Responsive organizations use different Employees' Assistance Programs (EAP) to support employees during crisis times. One of such programs is counselling especially when the organization incurs the cost by employing the services of professional counsellors. McLeod (2003) describes Employee's Assistance Programs

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(EAP) "as an external service which comprises face-to-face counselling, a telephone helpline, legal advice and critical-incident debriefing."

Thus, this paper's approach could be considered novel in this part of the world as victims of unexpected exit from the organization in Nigeria are virtually left to their fate. The paper therefore aims to examine the awareness level of employee counselling (which is defined within the context of workplace counselling as the provision of brief psychological therapy for exiting employees of an organization, which is paid for by the employer) as a mechanism for managing unexpected exit employees from the workplace. Effort is therefore directed towards understanding how counselling can be used to ameliorate different degrees of disorientation that arise from layoffs/ redundancies, termination, retirement, resignation etc. This is on the premise that both voluntary and involuntary exit from work involves a great deal of emotion and difficulty for employees (Penn Behavioural Health Corporate Services, 2008).

The rationale behind this paper is the paucity of existing research on workplace counselling, especially exit counselling. Thus, McLeod, (2001) points out the importance of recognizing the limitations of the existing research-base for workplace counselling. In his words, "this is a field in which research has been constrained by commercial considerations" (McLeod, 2001). The motivation of this paper comes from the lack-lustre attitude of many organizations towards this all-important concept of exit counselling. Being that there is little information about workplace counselling, there has not been a consensus model for delivering workplace counselling (Claringbull, 2006:1). Therefore, this paper will examine these issues and find out how counselling can be used to help exiting employees cope with likely challenges of their transition.

2   LITERATURE REVIEW

Counselling is "a process through which one person helps another by purposeful conversation in an understanding atmosphere. It seeks to establish a helping relationship in which the one counselled can express their thoughts and feelings in such a way as to clarify their own situation, come to terms with some new experience, see their difficulty more objectively, and so face their problem with less anxiety and tension. It's basic purpose is to assist the individual to make their own decision from among the choices available to them" (British Association for Counselling, Rugby 1989).

However, there are different types of counselling which can be applied to different situations and different occasions. Counselling in a school or in a sporting event is different from counselling in the family or at the workplace. In addition, general counselling also differs from psychological counselling. The former is in the form of "advising, consoling and sharing, happens in all spheres of life and does not need a specialized counsellor" (Joshi, 2002). Even in organizations, this kind of Counselling usually happens at all levels (Joshi, 2002). But Psychological Counselling "is a process that emphasizes a formal relationship between the counselee and the counsellor. The focus of the relationship is achieving specific goals, that is, solving the problems as disclosed by the clients" (Joshi, 2002). Therefore, psychological counselling is the category under which workplace or employee counselling falls.

2.1 Conceptual Framework of Employees' Counselling

Employees' counselling "is a process which is initiated by the counsellor or the manager to assist the employee or subordinate to gain knowledge, understanding and insights on a performance concern" (Tong Hing Tham, 1998). This definition failed to capture all the aspects of the employee's needs that may require counselling. Its emphasis on using counselling as a tool in helping employees improve their performance fails to address other aspects of psychological challenges that employees are likely to suffer like termination or other forms of unprepared exits. However, employee counselling goes beyond providing timely professional and confidential aid for employees whose personal problems might otherwise lead to work impairment, absenteeism, reduced productivity etc. to psychological trauma arising from redundancy, termination and even retirement. Even where employees' counselling is deployed to solving personal problems that could lead to reduction in performance or helping an exiting employee cope with the current challenges of transition, employee counselling generally is meant to provide effective means of dealing with problems in the workplace.

Employees' counselling is more relevant to those employees leaving the organization. There are different ways employees exit from the organization such as layoffs, termination, retirement, and resignation. Exit counselling therefore is a service which organizations that care for their employees provide for exiting employees to help them cope with certain psychological effect of changes and transition process. In this context, exit counselling refers to psychological counselling that involved the services of an independent professional counsellor contracted by the organization to help the affected employees cope with the trauma of leaving the organization.

Retirement counselling appears to be similar to exit counselling as many potential retirees (though aware of their retirement) may not know how to manage the transition. Retirement could be voluntary, compulsory and

forced (Alutu, 1999). Whatever form it takes, retirement has been variously described as "occupational death" when contrasted with biological death, which is terminal (Carew, 2004); as physiological atrophy which unavoidably accompanies an active life (Olayinka & Omoegun, 2002). This suggests that retirements like layoffs and terminations comes with certain stressful and depressing conditions which employees' counselling in the form of retirement counselling addresses. Retirement counselling "is the process of providing prospective retirees with factual information needed to make a pleasant transition from world of work into the world of less rigorous occupational schedules – retirement" (Asonibare & Oniye, 2008).

Existing models try to explain employee counselling in different ways. There are as many workplace counselling models as there are different theorists in this field of study. Theorists are yet to arrive at an integrated workplace counselling model. Instead, authors over the years have suggested ways to model the workplace counselling (Coles, 2003). However, the challenge is that employee counselling involves different stakeholders and integration of these stakeholders only creates a complex model of counselling. With this understanding Claringbull (2006) suggested "that in order to try and control or overcome this problem, it might now be necessary to find some different, possibly systematic approaches to modelling workplace counselling."

According to Beer (2003) "much of workplace counselling is delivered via Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)." Obviously, this has been the traditional practice for most organization that recognized the importance of managing psychological problems in the workplace. Employee Assistance Programmes play a vital role in helping exiting employees to cope with the trauma of transition and also serve as a palliative measure. Research by Claringbull (2006) has shown "that many EAP clinical managers see individual case managers as vital and central in any workplace counselling provision." "The clinical managers argue that case managers should always occupy a pivotal position in any workplace counselling model (Claringbull, 2006)".

Admittedly, EAP holds certain merits in addressing some of the problems of exiting employees, but it has been found inadequate in addressing the varied stakeholder's interest in the workplace. Lammers (1999) identified four major interests that any workplace counselling programme should cover. According to Lammers (1999), "there are four key stake-holders that are involved in a typical therapy-focused workplace counselling." These stake-holders include the organization, the counsellor, the client and the clinical supervisor. The State could also be included as part of the stakeholders as it owes it a duty to give support to the other stakeholders in a bid to ensure hitch-free implementation of EAP. However, the interests of these stake-holders are not mutually exclusive, rather they are interconnected.

2.2 The Effect of Unplanned Exit from Work

Unplanned exit from work comes in form of termination, redundancy, layoffs, forced retirement and forced resignation. The news of these unexpected exits come with strong emotions like shock, anger, rejection, relief, guilt and apprehension. These feelings might be latent or deliberately suppressed by the victim who may want to pretend that all is well. Most discussions in the literature on the effect of unplanned exit from work revolve around three key areas – psychological, social and financial. These effects are not mutually exclusive, rather they are inter-connected. Luther (2011) points out that "whether the person you lay off is someone just starting with your company or a seasoned worker with seniority, a layoff will affect your employee's self-esteem. The employee might feel slighted and less valuable than workers that you retained. In addition to the blow to his ego, the laid-off employee faces the prospect of being separated from meaningful work, co-workers and the worst possible financial scenario – lack of steady income." These effects go beyond the laid-off workers to those who are retained. This view is consistent with the view of International Finance Corporation (2005) "that it is evident that retrenchment will have a substantial impact on the workers involved.

However, the effect can be much more widespread. Those employees who are left behind and managers who deal with retrenchment can be affected by the process, especially if it is badly handled or creates unnecessary conflict" (International Finance Corporation, 2005). The loss of income impacts on the victim's family life and social status, especially if the affected worker is the breadwinner of the family. In a family where the source of livelihood or economic sustenance comes from the father (as in most patrilineal society such as Nigeria), the loss of income through unplanned exit from work will diminish the employees' ego, prestige and respect as the family head. His inability to continue to sustain his family is likely to result to family crisis. For example, most marriages in Nigeria have failed as a result of loss of job of the breadwinner, brilliant students withdrawn from schools, threat of eviction by landlords amongst others.

2.3 The Importance of Employees' Counselling

Exit from a job comes with many challenges including unanticipated ones. Especially, unplanned exits (whether through layoff, termination or forced retirement) come with psychological, social and financial challenges that are capable of causing a total disorientation. The thought of loss of income and status due to loss of one's job is capable

of triggering chains of negative events in the life of the victim. Thus, the importance of employees' counselling lies in its provision of cushioning effect to a perceived ugly situation. For the prospective retirees, retirement counselling helps in providing the necessary information in relation to review of insurance policies, management of personal income during retirement, social security, medical care coverage and acquisition of life skills needed for optional adjustment to retirement roles (Asonibare & Oniye, 2008).

Accordingly, Parker (2008) explained that: "Counsellors recognise that being made redundant can cause psychological reactions that are similar to grief. The process starts with shock and disbelief at losing something important, then it moves on to anger followed by fantasy and a sense that it's not really happening, and finally, feelings of guilt and depression. Counselling will help understand these emotions and the mental process the affected persons are going through, allowing you to move on to the important positive stages of acceptance and action. If you don't look for help early in this process, reaching these later stages will take a lot longer" (Parker, 2008). Migwe, Gachunga and Iravo (2017) reported that employees believe that workplace counselling reduces rate of absenteeism, grievances hearing and dismissal.

For victims of redundancy, redundancy counselling will help them adjust to the new realities by helping them to remain positive and plan ahead instead of fighting back through litigation process against their employers, which may be of little or no help to their current situation (Parker, 2008). Even where the victims of redundancy or manpower contraction embark on litigation process against their employers, it will take a long time to yield result due to the dilatory nature of the judiciary system in Nigeria. In equal vein, the chances of success by the litigants may also be slim. In addition, Labour Act in Nigeria allows the employer to embark on redundancy exercise especially during period of recession provided the following conditions are met; (a) the employer shall inform the trade union or workers' representatives about the reason(s) for the exercise and the extent of the anticipated redundancy; (b) the principle of "last in, first out" shall be adopted in the discharge of the workers to be affected; and (c) the employer shall negotiate redundancy benefits to be paid to the discharged workers.

2.4 Intervention Strategies to Unplanned Exit from Work

Retrenchment, redundancy or layoffs are inevitable given changing circumstances that organizations sometimes face, for example, during recession. Luther (2011) also concurs that "employee layoffs might be inevitable due to recession, overseas competition or any number of business factors that affect a company's bottom line." However, the focus is then on what can be done to manage the affected workers and help them cope with their predicament or the psychological dilemma they may find themselves. Intervention strategies therefore, are deliberate effort by a concerned and caring employer aimed at helping victims of retrenchment, layoffs, redundancy, forced retirement etc. to overcome imminent consequences of their pre-matured exit from work. Prominent among these strategies is the Employees Assistance Programmes (EAPs), which has proven helpful to exiting employees.

However, various forms of employees' counselling can be of great help in mitigating the painful effects of unprepared exit from work. Pre-retirement counselling is useful in helping potential retirees prepare themselves for the new status of living a retired life. One of the counselling strategies for managing pre-retirement anxiety is Rational-Emotive Behaviour Therapy (R.E.B.T). Rational Emotive Counselling is appropriate counselling therapy for instilling rationality in adult workers regarding their perception of retirement (Asonibare & Oniye, 2008). "Taking for granted that humans are fallible, Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy attempts to help people accept themselves as creatures who will continue to make mistakes; yet at the same time learn to live more at peace with themselves" (Asonibare & Oniye, 2008).

Another form of intervention strategy to exit from job, especially exit through termination, redundancy, retrenchment or layoffs is outplacement. According to Encyclopaedia of Applied Psychology, "outplacement is an extension of the termination process. It typically includes two elements: counselling the employee who has lost his/her job for emotional stress resulting from trauma of termination, and assisting in job search." "Outplacement can help to address these emotional issues. It provides firing managers the training and procedures to minimize trauma to the affected workers and disruption within the affected departments. It helps survivors to see the organization as a fair and considerate employer. Among the employees downsized, outplacement can mitigate the damaging effect of unemployment on family life by incorporating the terminated employee's spouse in counselling sessions" (Asonibare & Oniye, 2008).

3   METHODOLOGY

The research design for this paper is exploratory in nature. As van Wyk (2010) had explained, research design shows the purpose of the inquiry which could be exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, predictive, evaluative, historical or a combination of any of the designs. In particular, exploratory design is considered most appropriate

and useful for addressing issues of high level uncertainty and ignorance (Wyk, 2010).This paper's approach is considered novel in this part of the world as victims of unexpected exit from Nigerian organisations are virtually left to their fate.

The study involved sample drawn from the head office branch of one of the foremost financial institutions in Nigeria, First Bank Nigeria Plc, Lagos. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. In addition to access to the respondents, the choice of the study population was based on the issues under consideration. For instance, Williams, Etuk and Inyang (2014), identified our population of interest as one of the organizations that experienced "crises and retrenchment which swept across the Nigerian banking sector". Moreover, such bank workers are noted for feelings of inequity, anger, insecurity and uncertainty (Kurebwa, 2011).

The stratified and systematic sampling methods were employed in the study to select the sample. Stratified sampling involved the selection of the study population from a list of commercial banks in Nigeria with experiences of retirement, termination, redundancy and retrenchment in the last 10 years while systematic sampling involved dividing the entire study population by 10 and respondents selected at particular intervals (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000 as cited in van Wyk, Boschof, Nieman, van Vuuren & Pretorius, 2009). This process gave rise to a sample size of 120 participants. The Questionnaires were personally administered to the selected respondents during their break time over a period of 30 days.

Although it is an exploratory study, it used questionnaire as the main instrument. The study instrument comprised of two sections. Section A was made up of 4 items designed to assess the Demographic profile of the respondents. The items in this category included *Gender, Age, Years in Service and the respondents' position* in the organisation. Section B was made up of 9 items with 3-point rating scale. The items were constructed for the purpose of this study and were informed by extant literature in the study area. However, the researchers ensured that the issues relevant to the focus of the study were properly captured taking into consideration the Nigerian work environment.

In order to validate the instrument, 25 items drawn in the first version of the questionnaire were given to experts with background in psychology and human resource management for content validation (Nunnally, 1967). The experts were requested to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, the extent to which they considered the items as valid measures of the issues under focus. Out of the original 25 items, 14 items with scores of 3 and above were accepted as valid. As a measure of testing the reliability of the study instrument, the 14 items were further subjected to item-total correlation wherein 9 items were retained based on coefficient range of 0.37-0.94 (Rust & Golombok, 1995). The reliability coefficient value of the study instrument was 0.93. Descriptive statistics was used as the method of data analysis. Interpretation and discussions were based on the result that emerged from the analysis. In general, the study was based on quantitative approach.

4   FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the participants' background information. The demographic characteristics of the sample showed that out of the 108 participants, 44 (40.7%) were female, and 64 (59.3%) were males. The finding showed that there are more male than female in the organization. This situation reflects the inflexibility of working hours in the Banking industry in Nigeria, thereby, making it a less preferred job by females, who find it difficult to combine their job demands with childbearing and rearing and also other domestic responsibilities. The age distribution of the participants ranged between 21 to 50 years with majority of the participants below 40 years. The average age of respondents was 34.5 years. The mean age distribution shows that the organization has a relatively young workforce.

The years of service of participants in First Bank of Nigeria Plc showed that 10 (9.3%) have put in less than 1 year; 48 (44.4%) have worked between 1 to 5 years; 22 (20.4%) have worked between 11 to 15 years; 12 (11.1%) have served between 11 to 15 years, and the remaining 11 (10.2) have worked between 16 to 20 years. However, there were 5 (4.6%) missing values representing participants that did not provide their service years with First Bank Nigeria Plc. Majority of the respondents therefore have spent not less than 5 years in the service of the organisation.

The distribution of the participants according to their job positions showed that 10 (9.3%) out of the 108 participants were Banking Assistants; 48 (44.4%) were Banking Officers, and the remaining 29 (26.9) were Managers. However, there was a missing value of 21 (19.4%) representing the participants that failed to include their current job positions. Therefore, majority of the sample that participated in the study were Banking Officers.

Table 1: Participants background (n = 108)

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
21 – 30yrs	25	23.1
31 – 40yrs	60	55.6
41 – 50yrs	23	21.3
	Mean = 34.5 years	
Gender		
Female	44	40.7
Male	64	59.3
Service Years (With First Bank)		
Below 1yr	10	9.7
1-5yrs	48	46.6
6-10yrs	22	20.4
11-15yrs	12	11.1
16-20yrs	11	10.2
Missing value	5	4.6
Job Position		
Banking Assistant	10	9.3
Banking Officer	48	44.4
Manager	29	26.6
Missing value	21	19.4

Source: Fieldwork, November, 2016

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the responses of the participants

Item	N	Yes	No	Not Sure	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am not aware of Exit Counselling	108	23 (21.3%)	75 (69.4%)	10 (9.3%)	2.12	.542
Some of my former colleagues were victims of redundancy, termination, forced resignation and untimely retirement	108	70 (64.8)	32 (29.6%)	6 (5.6%)	2.59	.597
My bank did not provide exit counselling for my colleagues who were victims of redundancy, termination, forced resignation, layoff, and untimely retirement	103	17 (15.7%)	40 (37.0)	46 (42.6)	1.72	.733
I am aware that exit counselling can be used to cushion the effect of unprepared exit from work	108	96 (88.6%)	-	12 (11.1%)	2.78	.631
There are many organizations that do not practice exit counselling	103	50 (46.3%)	-	53 (49.1%)	1.97	1.004
There is a perceived need for exit counselling in every organization	108	102 (94.4%)	-	6 (5.6%)	2.89	.460
Exit counselling should be an integral function of the HR Unit	108	96 (88.6%)	-	12 (11.1%)	2.78	.631
I am unaware of any organization practicing exit counselling in Nigeria	108	11 (10.2%)	53 (49.1%)	44 (40.7%)	1.69	.648
I believe Exit counselling will be beneficial to the organization	108	91 (84.3%)	5 (4.6%)	12 (11.1%)	2.73	.650

Source: Fieldwork, November, 2016

The result of the analysis in table 2 shows that 21.3% were not aware of any form of exit counselling, 69.4% were aware, while 9.3% are not even sure of any exit counselling. The mean score and standard deviation for this item (mean = 2.12, SD = .542) indicate that many workers seem to be unaware of exit counselling in the workplace. The frequency distribution for the second item shows that 64.8% of the participants agreed that some of their former

colleagues were victims of untimely and unplanned exit from work as a result of redundancy, termination, forced resignation, layoffs and untimely retirement. 29.6% stated that their colleagues have not been affected, while 5.6% were not sure whether any of their colleagues have been affected. However, the mean score and standard deviation of 2.59 and .597 respectively show that some of the workers were actually victims of unplanned and untimely exit from work. More striking is the finding that 15.7% of the participants reported that the Bank did not provide exit counselling for their former colleagues that loss their jobs through redundancy, termination, layoffs, forced resignation and forced retirement. On same issue, 42.6% reported that they were not sure whether such counselling took place. But on the contrary, 37% reported that counselling was provided by the Bank. However, the statistics showed that the Bank did not provide counselling for its employees (mean = 1.72, SD = .733).

The findings showed that 88.6% of the respondents supported the view that exit counselling can be used to cushion the effect of unplanned exit from work. 11.1% were not sure on whether exit counselling could cushion the effect of unplanned exit from work. The result of the statistics (Mean = 2.78, SD = .631) shows a reasonable agreement by the workers that exit counselling could cushion the effect of unplanned exit from work. In consideration of the number of organizations that practice exit counselling, 46.3% of the participants agreed that there are many organizations that do not practice exit counselling; while 49.1% were not sure of such organizations. The result of the statistics (Mean = 1.97, SD = 1.004) shows that many workers are not sure whether other organizations practice exit counselling. However, there is a greater consensus among the participants of a perceived need for exit counselling. Specifically, 94.4% of the participants perceived the need for exit counselling. The result of the statistics (Mean = 2.89, SD .460) is an indication that the workers perceived the need for exit counselling in the workplace. The workers gave various reasons and prominent among them were that it would enable the victims of unplanned exit from work to cope with the psychological effect, help in reducing litigations on unlawful exit, help in reducing unnecessary appeals for reinstatement, help in winning the loyalty of the remaining workers, help in cushioning the effect of unplanned exit from work and provide a good framework for handling grievances and complaints among others.

Furthermore, 88.6% of the participants agreed that exit counselling should be an integral function of the human resource department or unit in the organisation; while 11.1% were not sure. The result of the statistics (Mean = 2.78, SD = .631) revealed greater agreement among the respondents that exit counselling should be made an integral function of HR Department or Unit. In addition, 84.3% believed that exit counselling would be beneficial to the organization. However, 4.6% disagreed while 11.1% were unsure of the organization benefitting from exit counselling.

5   DISCUSSION

The finding from this study shows that the level of awareness of employee counselling especially for employees exiting the organization unprepared is low. The failure of management in providing counselling service to victims of unexpected exit could be attributed to avoidance of cost implications in engaging an external counsellor or the absence of professional counsellors within the organizations. These reasons not withstanding, McLeod (2008) found that employees should be made to be aware of all workplace counselling policies and practices for easy evaluation. However, the low level of awareness of employee counselling in the study could be explained by near absence of the practice of employee counselling. The situation is not only common in Nigeria. For instance, in a similar study carried out in Mumbai by Raheja (2014), the results showed that 61% of the sample population were unaware of the concept of employee counselling. In furtherance of the low level of awareness concerning employees' counselling, earlier studies such as McLeod (2001) harped on the importance of recognizing the limitations of the existing research-base for workplace counselling. Unfortunately, it has been shown that there has not been a consensus model for delivering workplace counselling (Claringbull, 2006). Interestingly, this particular finding goes to show that workers seem not to be aware of any intervention mechanism for managing crisis situation arising from layoffs/redundancies, termination, retirement, resignation etc. Perhaps, the foregoing finding may have informed the conclusions reached by Asonibare and Oniye (2008) which advocated for factual information concerning pleasant transition from world of work into the world of less rigorous occupational schedules.

Although from our findings, employee counselling was not provided for employees exiting the organization, but the employees believe that it would help in cushioning the effect of post-work transition. Empirical evidence in literature also supports this view. For instance, while Beer (2003) construed workplace counselling as *Employee Assistance Programmes* (EAPs), Raheja (2014) in the same vein, found that 69% of the sample perceived the need for employees counselling in the organisation. In a related development, Parker (2008) reported that employee counselling is needful for victims of redundancy to help them adjust to the new realities by helping them to remain positive and plan ahead instead of maintaining adversarial postures with management which may offer little or no help to their current situation.

Evidence abound in literature on the widespread effects of layoffs, termination, retirement, and resignation on employees who are left behind and managers who deal with such issues, especially when such issues are badly

handled or left to fester (International Finance Corporation, 2005). This particular finding which indicated that the provision of counselling services would help in cushioning the effect of post-work transition is in consonance with studies such as Migwe, Gachunga and Iravo (2017) which linked workplace counselling with reduction in rates of absenteeism, grievances hearing and dismissal. Similarly, Mayor (2006) found that workplace counselling can achieve reduction in work-related stress in more than 50% of employees who have received counselling. In fact, a related study by McLeod (2008) found that 80% of the organisations that adopt employee counselling policies and practices were able to recommend or use counselling repeatedly or continuously.

Further exploration of the findings show that employees hold the opinion that employee counselling should be made an integral function of the Human Resource Department. They (the respondents) also posited that counselling should incorporate Employees Assistance Program (EAP). Basically, Employees Assistance Program (EAP) has been found to be effective in helping the victims of unprepared exit to cope with the trauma associated with such condition. Consequently, from the foregoing, 78% of the respondents in Raheja (2014) rated employee counselling as an important function of Human Resource Development while Beer (2003) as earlier stated construed workplace counselling as *Employee Assistance Programmes* (EAPs). Perhaps in what may appear as support for domiciling employee counselling functions or EAPs with the Human Resource Department (Beer, 2003), studies have shown that 50% of cases had improved absence and/or productivity at work after EAP adoption (Harlow, 2006) while 57% of cases had improvement in ability to work productively after use of EAP (Attridge, 2003). Thus, the foregoing evidence in literature underscores the importance of making counselling functions or EAP integral function of the Human Resource Department (Beer, 2003; Raheja, 2014) as Employee Assistance Programmes have been found to be effective in helping the victims of unprepared exit from the origination to cope with the trauma associated with such condition.

6   CONCLUSION

The findings from this survey revealed that many workers leave the organization when they least expected it and therefore, are always unprepared for such exit. As shown in this survey, cases of fellow workers who were victims of redundancy, termination, forced retirement or resignation will in one time or the other abound. However, it is unfortunate that many organizations in Nigeria are yet to imbibe the culture or practice of helping their employees who are victims of changes or organizational restructuring cope with the effect of traumatic experiences. As expressed by greater percentage of the participants, there is a perceived need for exit counselling to help workers overcome the possible challenges of unplanned exits. This calls for action on the part of management. Therefore, management should understand that for the organization to maintain a good brand name and also for it to win the loyalty of its employees, there is need for it to evolve different help programmes aimed at assisting its employees who might suffer from any of the unplanned exit forms or types – redundancy, termination, forced retirement and resignation and layoffs to cope with the unexpected transition. These programmes must be incorporated into exit counselling.

In addition, given the fact that this study is an exploratory study, its findings may not be generalized to the public sector and other industries in Nigeria. Therefore, there is the need for further studies on how employees counselling could be used to help employees experiencing similar work conditions in a bid to have a balanced view on this important subject that focused on the need for healthy post-work transition, especially at this period of recession.

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