FACTORS INFLUENCING THE QUALITY OF DIRECT EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISMS IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES: A CASE STUDY   OF NIGERIA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBN: Central Bank of Nigeria

DA: Discourse Analysis

EU: European Union

FMOI: Federal Ministry of Industry

HRM: Human Resource Management

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

NAMSE: The National Association for Small and Medium Enterprises

RBV: Resource Based View

T&D: Training and Development

SME: Small and Medium Sized Enterprise

SMIEIS: Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme

SMEDAN: Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria

HOD: Head of Department

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

ILO: International Labour Organistaion

KADCCIMA: Kaduna Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture

NBS: National Bureau of Statistics

ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been procreation of non-union organisations, and present business organisations are replacing representative forms of voice with individual communication within the workplace. Several investigations on the factors influencing employee voice have been carried out, but they are primarily established within the context of large organisations and predominantly in unionised firms, without a particular emphasis on the connection of the factors that influence such employee voice channels and with little or no evidence of analysis in Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Despite the rich and growing body of literature on this area and the importance of SMEs as a major driver of economic growth, there is a significant lacuna in the understanding of how composites of organisational factors influence the quality (i.e., depth, scope, level, and form) of employee voice mechanisms in non-unionised firms, which are usually direct. Direct voice mechanisms can be informal or formal, such that employee involvement and participation in the organisation can be done through formal and informal mechanisms. Also, employee participation in SMEs is usually more direct because of their size.

More fundamentally, the SMEs symbolises the shortage of academic research on the role of organisational factors in explaining the quality of direct voice channels in the firm, particularly those operating in less-developed economic environments. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the factors influencing the quality of employee voice mechanisms in SMEs, in which direct voice mechanisms are the most common means of communication, using Nigeria as a case study with the view of providing situation perceptions.

This study employed a qualitative research strategy using a case study design to generate insights from intensive and in-depth research into the topic of this study. From a sample of SMEs drawn from the national database maintained by Kaduna Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (KADCCIMA) Nigeria, the case study design used incorporated data gathered through in-depth interviews conducted with the CEO, HODs and employees of sample organisations, direct observations and document analysis using six case study firms. A total of 131 interviews, direct observations of meetings and the business environment was carried out within the case study firms. Also, company documents from the case study firms were collected to support the primary data. The case study data were analysed through thematic analysis.

The findings of the thesis suggest that the type of culture, structure, leadership style and HR practices in the organisation are factors affecting the employee voice channels in SMEs. Specifically, the group and power cultures, decentralised and standardised structures, and transformational and transactional leadership styles impacted on the quality of the direct voice mechanism in the SMEs. The results also portrayed how the interconnection of these factors affected the quality of voice in SMEs. Specifically, supervisory support, formalisation, innovation, training and development (T&D), performance feedback (i.e. rewards) and efficiency were some of the key factors that impacted the quality of the voice mechanisms in SMEs. Finally, the results concluded that supervisory support and structure of HR practices play a key role in influencing employee voice in SMEs. In SMEs, two-way communication is highly used to communicate and thus, encourage participation at all levels. Obviously, by involving employees in the company decisions through direct methods, regardless of the depth, scope, and level of voice, employees will better understand some business decisions. They may show more commitment to the company's actions through working efficiently to meet the goals of the firm, which is increased productivity (employee satisfaction, skilled, experienced workforce, and increased productivity).

This thesis contributes to theoretical knowledge by providing insights into the factors that influence employee voice in the SME context by developing a framework. This research is a significant step further in understanding the factors that influence HRM and employee relationships in SMEs. It underscores the knowledge of the links between the micro-organisational factors influencing voice, namely: organisational culture, organisational structure and leadership style and the quality of direct voice mechanisms. The study also confirms the importance of management in enhancing employee relationships.

In practical terms, this study examines the role of organisational factors in influencing the quality of direct employee voice in the context of SMEs using Nigeria. The study also explores how precisely the types of organisational culture, structure, and leadership style in SMEs impact on the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs. Thus, this research will assist SMEs particularly in improving their performance by applying the appropriate HRM practices that support employee involvement and participation in decision-making, thereby ameliorating the quality of employee voice in the organisation. Additionally, it will help improve the management of employee relations by providing a positive organisational environment, which entails supportive

leadership through supervisory support, catering for the welfare of employees and encouraging autonomous and involved employees through training practices and performance feedback. Thus, improving HR and enhancing the quality of direct employee voice in the process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The performance and growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is a major driver of industrialisation, modernisation, urbanisation, gainful and meaningful employment. For all those who are able and willing to work, equitable distribution of income, the welfare, income per capital and quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of any country (Ayanda & Laraba, 2011; Katua, 2014; Lawal et al., 2020). SMEs contribute to employment growth at a higher rate than larger firms (SMEDAN, 2016; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020). The SMEs sector is viewed as an important driving force of economic growth and employment creation in both developing and developed countries (Olowe et al., 2013; Harney & Alkhalaf, 2020). SMEs make up the most prominent business sector in every world economy, and governments around the globe are increasingly promoting and supporting SME growth as part of their overall national development strategy. Sameer & Ozbilgin (2014) and Msangi (2020) point to SMEs' flexibility, their simple organisational structure, their low risk and receptivity as the essential features facilitating them to be innovative.

In Nigeria, the employment relations system has been immersed in disputes and corporate-stakeholder conflicts since its inception (Ugwoji, 2014). Employees are constantly in conflict with their employers and the government due to the dynamics of the centralisation of power and voice in Nigeria's employee relations system (Olanrewaju & Ismaila, 2020). Literature on employment relations in Nigeria has established that employee voice and rights are marginalised as a result of the country's organisational culture and political leadership (Nwoko, 2009; Nwagbara et al., 2013; Olanrewaju & Ismaila, 2020). According to Nwoko (2009), industrialisation and commercialisation started in 1940 and gave rise to the introduction of wage payment which marked the beginning of industrial relations and personnel management in Nigeria. During this period, expatriates filled most of the personnel positions, and the unions thought them to be oppressors of employees. However, the situation changed after Nigeria gained its independence (Lawal et al., 2020). Today Nigeria, is known as the giant of Africa with an estimated population of 41.5million SMEs representing over 96% of the total number of firms in the country, with nearly 90% of them operating in the manufacturing sector and employing over 84% of the population. Yet, the contribution of SMEs to the GDP is relatively low (NBS, 2018).

Furthermore, the rising scourge of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, particularly among graduates has increased the focus on the survival of SMEs as a means of tackling this

problem. An important driver of success in any business organisation is human resources management (HRM) practices (Werner et al., 2012; Lai et al., 2017; Opute, 2020). Although there are different factors that influence the success of a business, it is challenging for a business to survive without managing its human resources (HR) effectively. In small firms, the case is even more precarious because unlike lager firms, they depend greatly on the individual contribution of the employee (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Msangi, 2020). Employees contribute to decision-making in SMEs in more direct ways than in larger firms. Despite the importance of HRM as an important driver of success in both small and larger firms, the majority of the existing kinds of literature has focused mainly on large firms, creating a wide gap to be filled with respect to HRM practices in SMEs (Tocher & Rutherford, 2009; Okpu & Seth, 2014; Psychogios et al., 2016; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

In light of the preceding, exploring all avenues to ensure sustainable development of SMEs is indispensable, especially in Nigeria, where according to Uchehara (2017), the scourge of unemployment is very rife. Results of previous studies have indicated that the Nigerian government's effort to boost SMEs (i.e. as a means of creating jobs and reducing unemployment) have been on providing financial resources and establishing financial agencies for SMEs (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013; Eniola, 2014; Uchehara, 2017; Olanrewaju and Ismaila, 2020). This no doubt emanates from the conviction that the failure of small businesses is mainly because of inadequate financial resources (Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe, 2014). The role of corporate governance is also an essential factor for SMEs performance (Eniola, 2014). Other determinants of SME survival are poor start process, technological factors, socio-cultural factors, global economic issues, multiple taxation, marketing, and human resource factors (Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe, 2014; Lawal et., 2020).

Nevertheless, there is the need to explore other possible determinants of SMEs failure and evaluate what can be done to lull the situation. Hence the importance of practising HRM (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018; Msangi, 2020). Furthermore, Opute (2020) notes that HRM practices play a key role in the development and sustenance of any organisation, particularly SMEs. A key HRM practice is employee relations, which means a management style or method utilised in managing HR in an organisation (Noe et al., 2018). Employee relations is an extensive term that combines various aspects from negotiations, employment legislation, collective bargaining to more current concerns like equal opportunity, work-life balance and managing diversity. One essential aspect

of employee relations involves the voice of employees. Voice refers to allowing employees to have a say regarding work-related activities and decision-making issues in the workplace (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018).

Wilkinson et al. (2014: 5) defined employee voice as the "opportunities for employees to have a say and potentially influence organisational affairs relating to issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners". Similarly, Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) defined employee voice as the process of providing employees with the opportunity to get involved or participate in the firm's decision making through any form of mechanisms, structure or practice made available by the organisation. Therefore, voice is any method or process which enables employees to contribute to the activities of a firm either directly or indirectly (Barry and Wilkinson, 2016, Della et al., 2021). Furthermore, employee voice can be referred to in different terms such as involvement, participation, or empowerment as used by practitioners and academics (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018; Wilkinson et al. 2020). Employees can use any form of voice mechanism within the firm (Wilkinson et al., 2020). This mechanism can be in two forms. First, the direct voice; refers to the direct involvement of employees with management via any mechanisms with respect to their jobs and work environment (Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Second, the indirect voice involves the indirect expression of employee's views and input through some form of collective representation such as unions or non-unions structures (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Usually, direct voice is classified as being either consultative or substantive that informal and formal (Kim et al., 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2013; Mowbray et al.,2015). Consultative such that it may entail management seeking for the opinions or suggestions of employees on matters affecting them in their work which management may neither be aware of nor have a solution to (Kim et al., 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2014). Substantive employee voice mechanisms mean implementing the matters raised through setting up permanent structures. Direct voice is done by authorising structures like workgroups to organise the role of employees in the firm's decision-making process (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2018). This makes direct employee voice an all-around mechanism for handling communication issues in a manner that benefits all the individuals that make up the organisation (i.e. employer and employees) (Kim et al.,2010; Klaas et al., 2012, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). This research will focus on the 'influence'

aspect of direct employee voice, which allows the examination of both categories (i.e. informal and formal) of direct employee voice (Klaas et al., 2012; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018).

Additionally, the strength of the voice possessed by the employee is influenced by some internal and external factors such as managerial and employee attitudes, employees' expectations, government legislations, union demands and business pressure (Dundon & Gallon, 2007; Morrison, 2014; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Gilaman et al., 2015; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). In agreement, Kaufman (2015) and Prouska et al. (2021) explained that there are external and internal factors that influence employee voice in an organisation. Against this backdrop, this research seeks to evaluate the internal/micro-organisational factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanism in SMEs in developing countries using Nigeria as an example. The rationale for focusing on this particular area follows in the next sections. This thesis will evaluate the various types of direct voice mechanisms with reference to how effective they are in providing employees in SMEs with a robust input in the decision-making process and ascertain the factors impacting those voice mechanisms.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Differences of opinion about working conditions, methods, and rates of pay usually arise in business organisations. If the relationship between the employees and their employer is not effective, these differences will evolve into confrontations, resulting in open disputes. Involving either strike action or the failure of both parties to cooperate fully (Rees et al., 2013; Msangi, 2020; Townsend and Mowbray, 2020.). SMEs in developing countries such as Nigeria face many operational issues, which stem from the fact that most SMEs are family businesses structured as sole proprietorships (Uchehara, 2017). Managerial decisions here are usually at the mercy of the key owner, who in most cases lacks basic managerial skills, qualities, and culture to manage a business carefully (Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016). This also has effects on the management structure and employee-employer relationship (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Lai et al., 2017).

As a result of the fall in the price of crude oil in Nigeria during the year 2007/2008, the economy has been through and through a recession. (Lawal et al., 2020). Hence, more considerable attention needs to be directed towards SMEs and particularly in the manufacturing sector, because of their potential in supporting the economy. Nonetheless, Uchehara (2017) says that within the

first five years of existence, younger SMEs die, while between the sixth and tenth years, another smaller percentage goes into extinction. Thus, the percentage that survives and reaches maturity is only about five to ten (OECD, 2017). This implies that in the first five years of existence, the survival rate of SMEs is below 5%, particularly in Nigeria (Lawal et al., 2020). This also shows that SMEs in Nigeria is not performing as expected despite the nation's massive population compared to China. In general, observing the efforts targeted at boosting the growth of SMEs has shown that these efforts have mainly been directed at the aspect of finance and infrastructural provision. Therefore, considering other aspects such as HRM practices is necessary for SMEs because the increased use of HRM practices, particularly in developed countries, has revealed the vital role they can play in promoting the growth and survival of SMEs (Omolo et al., 2013; Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe 2014; Long et al., 2016; Opute, 2020; Msangi, 2020). It is on this note that this research will evaluate the effectiveness of employee voice in SMEs in developing countries by focusing on the Nigerian context under investigation.

Research on SMEs has established the SMEs contributions and benefits to an economy, especially in improving GDP, job creation and poverty reduction (Ayanda & Laraba, 2011; Eniola 2014; Mohammed & Obeleagu-Nzelibe, 2014; Lawal et al., 2020). It has been suggested by a school of thought that SMEs are indeed a panacea to the economic drawbacks of less developed and developing nations (Olowe et al., 2013; Ofoegbu et al., 2013; Msangi, 2020).

The failure of many businesses often happens due to several factors, such as poor customer service, poor management of HR and poor management of natural resources. According to Oladele and Akeke (2016), the low performance of SMEs in Nigeria is allotted to several factors. However, one of the significant factors determining such poor performance is the management of Human resources. Human resources are a major provenience of economic development. Like other resources, utilising them effectively and efficiently is required to ensure maximum potential is achieved from them (Msangi, 2020; Olanrewaju and Ismaila, 2020). Hence the importance of practising HRM in all organisations, including in SMEs.

Organisations of any size cannot operate in a communication system that is unfavourably lopsided. Rather, there has to be a means of integrating a number of people into the life and objectives of an organisation and eliciting contributions to create a balance (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016; Kwon and Farndale, 2020; Nechanska, 2020). However, in SMEs, the form of voice or communication used within is generally top-down and informal (Wilkinson., 2007; Sameer &

Ozbilgin, 2014; Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016; Psychogios et al., 2016, Della et al.,2021). This is due to the size of the firms, which makes indirect voice mechanisms largely unnecessary and due to the paternalistic nature of their employment relationship. Therefore, direct voice mechanisms are commonly used within SMEs, making employees be mostly consulted informally and formally by management on work-related matters (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Mallett & Wapshott, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). The concept of employee voice is relatively broad; hence, the aspect of employee voice that will be focused on for this research will be the ability of employees to contribute to decisions made in the firm and express dissatisfaction through using direct methods.

The management of employee voice in SMEs is an important topic and cannot be overlooked (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Gautam and Markey (2017). where employees may be given little or no room by the management to contribute to decision-making, daily business operations of the organisation, and express dissatisfactions can be detrimental to the growth and survival of the business (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Philip and Arrowsmith, 2020). These attitudes run contrary to modern demands and etiquette of business principles. Unarguably, employees are the drivers of organisational objectives, and without recognition of their voice, conflict and exit may be the resultant effect (Kim et al., 2010; Klaas et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2014; Psychogios et al., 2016). Thus, it becomes pertinent to examine the management of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs.

Also, in an environment where a unitarist framework underpins contemporary HRM, that is the assumption that organisations are an integrated group of people with a single authority and a set of common values and objectives shared by all in the organisation (Purcell & Hall, 2012; Bratton & Gold, 2017). The state and managers are hostile towards a third party in the employee relationship. This has led to a vast body of quantitative data based on engagement from a managerial perspective. Many critics argue the need for more qualitative data, which can provide details on how non-union mechanisms function (Gennard et al., 2016; Bratton & Gold, 2017). As previously noted, employee voice is a product of culture, norms of communication and an atmosphere of trust (Holland et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020). The simple existence of employee voice systems will not deliver the long-term psychological aspects of voice behaviour in terms of employees believing and having confidence in those mechanisms (Klaas et al., 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Philip and Arrowsmith, 2020). Therefore, this study

will attempt to fill this gap by examining individual and management perceptions (employees, supervisors, and executives) on the factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs. It will also assess the factors that influence how management and employees feel in employing this direct voice mechanism to communicate in the workplace (Morrison, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016).

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The objective of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to critically assess the management of direct employee voice mechanisms within SMEs with regards to the quality (i.e. the depth, scope, form, and level) of voice from the perceptive of management and employees. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the factors within the control of the organisation influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs, analyse the identified factors, and examine how they affect employee voice in SMEs.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?
2. How do these identified factors influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?

1.4 Rationale/Significance of the Study

This research explores the factors that influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs. This is a highly relevant issue in organisations, specifically SMEs, because they are less likely to have employee unions in place and instead opt to adopt non-union structures through more direct involvement of the workforce. In order to control their employees since indirect communication and control structures do not exist (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2013; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Psychogios et al., 2016; Mallet & Wapshott, 2017). Traditionally SMEs are non-unionised; therefore, finding ways to enable direct employee voice is essential. Moreover, the small size of SMEs means that official recognition of a trade union is not warrened (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014). It is for this reason that these organisations are heavily reliant on direct means of communication. Furthermore, research on direct forms of voice in SMEs appears limited. The focus has so far been on justifying employee involvement/voice effectiveness

in unionised and non-unionised large organisations using mainly quantitative research methods (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015). This research contributes to the literature on direct employee voice in SMEs by identifying and validating the factors that influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria**.**

The importance of employee voice cannot be overemphasised. Dundon and Gallon (2007) point out that contradicting the significance of voice for enhancing competitiveness and encouraging democracy in the workplace environment is unnecessary. Being involved in decision-making generates a better environment in which to work, as employees are more committed to the organization and communication flows more freely (Rees et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Reis et al., 2016; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018; Nechanska et al., 2020). As affirmed above, the participation of employees in the decision-making process within the organisation is in the interest of not only the employee but also of the company (Nechanska et al., 2020). If employee voice initiatives are successful, both employees and the organisation can benefit. Affirmatively, Kwon and Farndale (2020) assert that if employees are to participate effectively in the firm's affairs, then a change in the culture of the organisation must be initiated by management. Additionally, Marchington (2015), Reis et al. (2016) and Funminiyi (2018) argue that management is indispensable for employee voice structures to function effectively.

The result of this study is of importance to researchers and management practitioners. It will educate management on the usefulness of managing direct employee voice channels in building worker involvement in small organisations and to their own advantage. Furthermore, it will demonstrate to management the importance of creating an enabling structure and culture that would facilitate employee participation and involvement in decision making in such small workplaces. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on employee voice and the role the factors of direct employee voice mechanisms play in shaping communication throughout smaller organisations.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is composed of eight chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter presents the general introduction and an outline of the thesis. It highlights the background to the research; the justification for the study; aims and objectives; research questions, the breadth, depth, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Theory of employee voice

Employee voice-schools of thought are presented in this chapter through the review of relevant literature with particular attention to defining the key concepts of employee voice, defining the history, and meaning of employee voice, the importance of employee voice, identifying the different forms of direct employee voice mechanisms, the quality of these employee voice mechanisms and discussing the nature of employee voice in SMEs

Chapter 3: Literature review – Factors influencing direct employee voice mechanisms

This chapter presents a literature review on the factors influencing employee voice, with particular attention to the micro-organisational factors (culture, structure, and leadership style) that influence employee voice and how they shape the quality of direct employee voice in the SMEs. Consequently, a discussion demonstrating the relationship between these micro-organisational factors and how they influence direct employee voice mechanisms is presented. The chapter concludes by integrating all these factors together in a conceptual framework and elaborating on the importance of understanding these factors.

Chapter 4: The Contextual background of SMEs

This chapter provides the macro-contextual background of SMEs. This examines the definition and importance of SMEs. The development of the SME sub-sector towards contributing to economic growth and national development, presents the characteristics of Nigerian SMEs and the factors that stimulate their growth. The chapter concludes by discussing on employee voice and HRM in Nigerian SMEs.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

The chapter discusses the philosophical stance that dictated the investigation method and theories used for the study. It then covers a wide range of subjects such as the selection of the research methods, sampling, case organisations, interview questions, interview and validation process, and research ethics. The different analysis methods for qualitative data and their suitability for this

research are explored. Finally, to provide the readers with an understanding of how the analysis was conducted, abstracts of data analysis are presented.

Chapter 6: Presentation of Findings.

The first section of this chapter discusses the main characteristics of the respondents and the profile of the case organisations. The second section presents the results of qualitative analysis addressing the research objectives. The third section presents a comparative presentation of the findings. The fourth section presents the reoccurring themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Chapter 7: Discussion and interpretation of findings

This chapter discusses the key findings of the research and attempts to integrate these findings with the literature. The chapter synthesises the qualitative findings. It highlights the factors that impact the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms identified qualitatively, interconnects these with the qualitative themes and answers each research question through the discussion, based on the results from the case study findings.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion and Recommendations

A summary of research conclusions, key contributions of research to knowledge, and managerial implications of the research are explained in subsequent sections of this chapter. In addition, the limitations of the research and recommendations for further research are discussed.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY OF EMPLOYEE VOICE

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature on employee voice, more specifically, direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs and the factors influencing direct employee voice. Hence, the literature review chapter was structured to serve three purposes. Firstly, to introduce the concept of employee voice by exploring the historical background, meaning and importance of employee voice. Secondly, discuss the forms and mechanisms of direct employee voice, and thirdly to present an overview of direct employee voice in SMEs. Through exploring in detail, the literature relating to the evidence of direct employee voice in SMEs.

2.1 Definition and Importance of Employee voice

The theory of employee voice dates back to the work of Hirschman in 1971, who explored responses of declining business firms with regards to exit and voice (Farndale et al., 2011; Klaas et al., 2012; Nechanska et al., 2020). His exit-voice-loyalty framework indicated that employee voice and organisational loyalty are related. That is, if workers are faced with conditions that dissatisfy them, they will either voice their concerns or decide to exit the organisation. Hence, this voice or exist strategy is determined by the employees' loyalty to the organisation and a belief in the possibility of improvement (Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Barry &Wilkinson, 2016, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018).

However, Klaas et al. (2012) and Wilkinson et al. (2020) contends that in the study by Freeman and Medoff in 1984, the use of employee voice was broadened to include consensual forms of voice through which employees might contribute ideas to help improve the performance of the firm, and conflictual forms of voice that could relay the discontent of employees. They described the voice as two-way communication between employees and managers and highlighted the benefits of exercising voice mechanisms for both management and staff (Rees et al., 2013; Knoll and Redman; 2016; Park and Nawakitphaitoon, 2018). This means that in their dealings with management, workers, by having a collective voice, will more likely remain with the firm than exit through quitting. Since they are able to express their dissatisfactions as opposed to remaining silent, which can lead to demotivation and low commitment in the workplace. (Dundon et al., 2004; Kwon et al., 2016; Prouska &Psychogios, 2018). Furthermore, Kwon and Farndale (2020)

assert that employee voice is being redefined in ways that go beyond the exit-voice framework and are now focused on expressing dissatisfaction. As a result of the global decline in union membership, doors for alternative voice mechanisms have been opened as well as prompting renewed debates over the need for non-union voice and supportive public policies. The scope of research on employee voice and participation in organisations has been broadened significantly by these developments (Rees et al., 2013; Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Knoll and Redman 2016; Kwon and Ferndale; 2020; Nechanska et al., 2020).

In contemporary literature, employee voice is used to handle the dilemma over the use of employee participation and employee involvement. Several scholars (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2014; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Marchington, 2015; Dundon and Wilkinson; 2018; Kwon and Farndale; 2020) have used employee participation, employee involvement and employee voice interchangeably to discuss employee inclusion in the firm's decision making. However, employee voice is a term now widely used in the practitioner and academic literature on human resource management and industrial relations (Farndale et al., 2011; Wilkinson and Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Barry &Wilkinson, 2016).

Wilkinson et al. (2013) defined employee involvement as those undertakings primarily established by management, intended to provide employees with more information within the organisation. And also give employees the chance to contribute to workplace level decisions and ultimately (in theory at least) increase their commitment to their employer. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) contends that employee voice embraces both involvement and participation. They defined employee voice as provisions put in place by the management of an organisation to ensure that their employees are provided the opportunity to influence decisions regarding the organisation's affairs and to contribute to the improvement of the business. There are different definitions of participation. For instance, Marchington and Cox (2007) see participation as sharing decision making with others to achieve the objectives of the firm. In contrast, Marchington and Suter (2013) define participation as a group process comprising of a number of workers and their managers.

Furthermore, Mowbray et al. (2015) argue that the ability of employees to have an impact on decisions made within the organisation is a concise definition of employee voice that seeks to incorporate much of its employee involvement and participation role. Simultaneously, Marchington and Suter (2013), in exploring the changing nature of employee involvement and

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employee participation in non-union firms, revealed that the changes are due to the increasing attention towards employee participation and involvement as a specific aspect of the employee voice.

Purcell and Hall (2012) suggest that employee voice is a term that covers all the processes and structures which enable and empowers employees, directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision making in the organisation. Employee voice refers to the participation of employees in influencing corporate decision making. Through the direct and indirect means, workers are given a voice to improve communication, minimize conflicts and encourage staff retention by motivation and fair treatment (Purcell, 2014; Morrison, 2014, Mowbray et al., 2015). Also, Wilkinson and Fay (2011) and Wilkinson et al. (2018) affirms that employee voice refers to the ability of employees to contribute to the decision-making issues and work affairs of the organisation they work.

Concisely, Wilkinson et al. (2014) define voice as the opportunities for employees to have a say and potentially influence organisational affairs relating to issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners. Similarly, Wilkinson et al. (2020) inferred that employee voice refers to all mechanisms, structures or practices through which employees attempt to have a say about and influence their work and the functioning of their organisation. Furthermore, Van Buren and Greenwood (2008:209) define employee voice as "the ability of employees to raise concerns and to negotiate about the terms of exchange with their employers (including wages, working conditions and so on) and to negotiate changes thereof". Nevertheless, Farndale et al. (2011:114) argue that irrespective of what constitutes employee voice, it can be examined by "the existence of mechanisms to facilitate employee voice, a climate that encourages employees to put forward their ideas and opinions, and the extent to which influence is associated with voice, that is, whether employee ideas and opinions really affect the outcome of decisions". This means that employee voice cannot function on its own. Hence, they are some underlying factors (i.e. macro and micro) that influence employee voice within the organisation (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Kaulfman, 2015; Marchington 2015; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016; Prouska & Psychogios,2018; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Nechanska et al., 2020; Prouska et al., 2021).

The unifying theme in the aforementioned definitions of employee voice, employee involvement and employee participation; is the position of employees in the decision-making

process of a firm, management ability to give employees some sort of control over decisions made in the organisation that would affect them and employees projecting their dissatisfaction or discontent within the organisation. Regardless of the varying terminologies, most researchers use the same measures to operationalise the concept (Farndale et al., 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2013; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018, Wilkinson et al., 2020). Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, employee voice would be used interchangeably with employee participation and employee involvement to describe the influence employees have over decisions in the organisation and their involvement in the process and structure that contributes to effective decision making and implementation. Employees offer ideas and bring in their wealth of human capital to management when decisions are to be taken. Management, in return, offers to employees' timely information and considers employee's suggestions/ideas before making final decisions in the organisation (Wilkinson and Fay., 2011; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Nechanska et al., 2020). Table 2.1 below provides a summary of the meaning and articulation of employee voice, which was elaborated on in the upcoming sections.

Table 2.1: The Meaning and Articulation of Employee Voice

Voice as:	Purpose and articulation of voice	Mechanisms and practices for voice	Range of outcomes
Articulation of individual dissatisfaction	To rectify a problem with management or prevent deterioration in relations	Complaint to line manager Grievance procedure Speak-up programme	Exit - loyalty
Expression of collective organisation	To provide a countervailing source of power to management	Union recognition Collective bargaining Industrial action	Partnership – Derecognition
Contribution to management decision-making	To seek improvements in work organisation, quality and productivity	Upward problem-solving groups Quality circles, Suggestion schemes, Attitude surveys, Self-managed teams	Identity and commitment – Disillusionment and apathy Improved performance
Demonstration of mutuality and cooperative relations	To achieve long-term viability for the organisation and its employees	Partnership agreements Joint consultative committees Work councils	Significant influence over management decisions - Marginalisation and Sweetheart deals.

Source: (Dundon et al. 2004; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018)

2.2 Forms of Employee Voice

Employee voice can be in different mechanisms (Mowbray et al., 2015). However, there are two forms of employee voice; indirect voice traditionally is where a third party (historically a trade union) creates the mechanism through which workers suggestions and issues are presented to management (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021). While direct voice, as suggested by the name, is two-way communication between management and individual or collective employees that happen directly without the intervention of a third party (Pyman et al., 2010; Marchington & Suter; 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Marchington and Suter (2013:286) defined indirect voice as voice using 'codified, pre-arranged, and regular/concrete structures' that promote consistent implementation and minimise discretionary powers of voice managers. This means that indirect voice involves the representation of employees. These include representation like trade unions, non-union structures of collective representations like work councils, and consultative committees (Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Differently, direct voice has no explicit voice mechanisms and refers to 'ideas or concerns, expressed directly and outside a structured process' (Klaas et al., 2012:324). Through the improvised or unscheduled interactions between employers and their employees (Marchington and Suter 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Furthermore, direct employee voice means the direct interaction between management and employees through structures, face-to-face or any mechanism. This includes individual or collective engagement through surveys, social media, representative committees, and hybrid (Purcell & Hall, 2012, Wilkinson et al., 2013, Mowbray et al., 2015, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018).

Indirect employees voice mechanism is often associated with pluralism which emphasises on theory promoting labour union. On the other hand, direct employee voice is often associated with modern HRM practices or unitarianism, which emphasise a common goal for management and employees (Purcell & Hall, 2012; Klaas et al., 2012; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016, Wilkinson et al., 2020). Additionally, according to Barry and Wilkinson (2016), employee voice is a mechanism that creates an avenue for employees to have an attempt and possibly influence organisational matters regarding issues that affect not only their job roles but also the interests of managers and employers. It is clear from their definition that voice is not only concerned with employee's welfare but that of management as well (Marchington and Suter, 2013; Kwon and

Farndale, 2020). However, Knoll and Redman (2016) and Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) suggests that in organisational behaviour (OB), the aim of voice is for employees to communicate information and opinions to the management such that the firm and, by extension, work group may benefit too. Hence, this makes direct employee voice mechanisms a very important aspect of any organisation because, without communication, no organisation can succeed (Morrison et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Nechanska, 2020; Della et al., 2021).

Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) assert that direct employee voice is a means of upward problem solving that can be consultative(informal); that is it, may involve management soliciting the ideas or solutions of their employees on matters that affect their duties which they(management) may not know about, or substantive(formal); that is it, may involve setting up permanent structures for the enforcement of the issues mentioned (Kim et al., 2010; Rees et al., 2013; Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020). This is done by formalising the structures, like work teams, to foresee and frame out employee roles in decision making in the organisation (Kim et al. 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020). This makes the direct voice mechanism a significant means of tackling communication in a manner that benefits both management and employees in the organisation (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Moreover, according to Barry and Wilkinson (2016), obtaining information from consumers is the aim of most organisations, but the lower employees have more contact with these consumers than the senior employees or strategic managers. Consequently, influencing the communication between managers and employees to help pass the concerns of customers to higher-level management (Morrison, 2014; Knoll & Redman, 2016; Lai et al., 2017; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). This can mainly be accomplished through direct employee voice, through participative and consultative committees, employee surveys, during regular briefings and on social media platforms (Mowbray et al., 2015; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018; Della et al., 2021).

Overall, the indirect voice mechanism is rarely seen in SMEs because, according to Mallett and Wapshott (2017), they do not encourage informal communication between management and employees within the organisation. That is involving the employees in the daily changes and affairs of the organisation through direct interactions with management (Della et al., 2021). Also, the focus of this research is on direct employee voice mechanisms. Hence the next sections explain

the key direct voice mechanisms in more detail. Table 2.2 below displays a list of mechanisms that may be considered as a means of facilitating employee involvement through informal and formal direct voice mechanisms.

Table 2.2 Direct Employee Voice Mechanisms

formal voice mechanism	informal voice mechanism
quality circles	word-of mouth
suggestion schemes	
attitude surveys	informal discussion
speak up programs	grievance processes
email	email
open door policy	open door policy
Joint consultative committee	
empowerment by supervisor	empowerment by supervisor
informal discussions	
self-managed teams	
upward problem-solving groups	
one-to-one meetings	
Intranet	
team briefings	
staff meetings	
'noticeboard'	
continuous improvement teams	

Adapted from:; Klaas et al. (2012); Marchington and Suter, (2013); Mowbray et a., (2015) Wilkinson and Barry, (2016); Kwon and Farndale, (2020).

The next section below explores direct forms of employee voice in more detail before it goes on to explain these mechanisms, which is the focus of this research and, subsequently the factors influencing the quality of these direct employee voice mechanisms.

2.3 Direct Employee Voice

According to Wilkinson et al. (2014) direct voice can be defined as any system adopted by management to tap into the individual ideas and opinions of the employee. Direct voice can be referred to as upward problem-solving voice mechanisms (Klaas et al., 2012; Mowbray et al., 2015; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). Upward problem-solving encourages two-way communication and allows employees to participate through the setup of a communication system (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). With this form of employee voice,

communication is more between management and individual employees, instead of via any type of representatives (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Wilkinson et al. (2014) contend that direct employee voice encompasses any mechanism that provides for direct employee involvement with management in decisions affecting their jobs and immediate work environment. Such mechanisms include formally designated teams, electronics media, internal attitude surveys, quality circles and meetings between managers and workers (two-way communication) and suggestion schemes (Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Furthermore, Mowbray et al., 2015) asserts that to allow direct employee voice there are numerous numbers of structures and methods that can be adopted within the organisation. The main direct employee voice mechanisms are explained in more detail in the following section. The following sections explain each of these mechanisms.

2.3.1 Internal Attitude Surveys

An internal attitude survey is a form of direct employee voice mechanism conducted by management to collect views of employees regarding issues that affect the organisation with a view to bettering the situation. By giving their views, employees, in a way, contribute their voice to the management of the organization directly (Kim et al., 2010). Unarguably Armstrong (2012) asserts that an important way of involving employees in decision making is using internal attitude surveys. They can provide information on employee preferences, alert management on potential problem areas, diagnose the cause of particular problems, and compare levels of job satisfaction, commitment and more in different parts of the organisation. Attitude surveys are usually conducted using a structured questionnaire, interviews, focus groups or a combination of questionnaires and interviews (Armstrong, 2012; Purcell & Hall, 2012). This information (questions /proposals) can be disseminated to employees through an online medium such as emails, online groups, e.t.c., hence there are fewer face-to-face interactions (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Internal attitude surveys can be designed to focus on employees' perceptions about several issues such as their careers, jobs, work climate, training and development, organisation design, organisation culture, management style, sources of stress, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction (Gerstmann. 2011, Bartel et al., 2011).

In exploring the use of attitude survey in a Danish subsidiary of a UK parent company, with the use of questionnaires and personal interviews, Gerstmann (2011) revealed that the

employees were very enthusiastic about the survey and the opportunity given to them to air their views and be heard. Thus, they believed they had a voice in the organization which made the employees became more committed and motivated, which resulted in greater organisation performance. Another research by Gerstmann (2011) showed how a firm was able to build a useful tool in identifying customer's needs, focus their priorities and develop new business opportunities with the aid of an employee attitude survey. Irrespective of these positive benefits in the use of surveys, there are also negative results reported. According to Tourangeau et al. (2003), if a survey is inappropriately applied or the results misinterpreted or not disclosed, there is a danger that the survey may rebound on the organisation. If employees, for whatever reason, do not trust the survey and its results or believe the survey is not confidential, it can lead to low or misleading responses. Also, if employees do not see direct benefits arising from having taken part in the survey (i.e. there are few or no management actions arising from the organisational problems raised by the survey, or actions do not seem to the staff to be linked to the survey), then organisational cynicism and distrust may increase, possibly jeopardizing the use and benefit of future surveys or indeed a change initiative which claims to be concerned with the interests of employees.

Gerstmann (2011) suggests that the following benefits can be accrued to organisations for using attitude surveys: (i) Organisations can assess what has happened in the past and what is happening presently: the outcomes of decisions and the effectiveness of policies and practices can be appraised and evaluated; lessons can be learned for the future. (ii) Organisations can pre-empt the negative impact of potential pitfalls: areas of low morale or frustration, latent discontent, and dissatisfaction, and wasted areas of investment and effort can be identified and addressed. (iii) Organisations would be able to have an awareness of sources of morale, commitment, and dialogue, and will be able to predict how roles will merge coherently to achieve these and (iv) Organisations can facilitate change: they can respond to altering circumstances in the environment and maintain control by predicting areas of change together with direction and pace, rather than merely reacting to situations.

The use of attitude surveys by Bartel et al. (2011) in their research of banks revealed that bank branches where employees have a positive attitude to the organisation had superior sales performance. This, to a large extent, will reveal to the management the reasons for employee's positive or negative attitudes to the organisation and will enable them to look for solutions to solve this problem for better commitment and organisational performance. However, implementing the

views in the survey rest squarely with the management of the organisation, and aside from airing their views by taking part in the survey, employees cannot do much. This they noted was the only weakness of using surveys as a direct voice mechanism (Bryson et al., 2007).

2.3.2. Suggestion Schemes

A suggestion scheme is a form of direct voice mechanism that allows the employees to discuss and make suggestions and contribute to the growth of the team in an organisation. Usually, where the suggestions of employees are accepted and implemented, there are incentives for the contributors (Purcell & Hall, 2012). Milner et al. (1995:4) defined a suggestion scheme as a 'formalised mechanism which encourages employees to contribute constructive ideas for improving the organisation in which they work'. Implemented ideas can be rewarded by a monetary award or some other form of recognition – usually proportionate to the benefits generated. "Employee suggestion schemes are a way to capture employee's ideas on areas that are often not within their control" (International Labour Organisation, 2010:1).

Suggestion schemes are the oldest form of employee voice and are very useful for any organisation that wishes to introduce change in its culture, structure, or technology (Lloyd 1996). Suggestion scheme as a form of employee voice produces good ideas for improvement, increases employee commitment to the implementation of such ideas, elevates cooperation, enhances workers sense of power and dignity, improves loyalty and identification with the organisation, educates employees in goal setting and helps to identify leaders (Purcell & Hall, 2012). Suggestion schemes are a valuable means for employees to participate in improving the efficiency of an organisation. This is because they help to reduce the feelings of frustration workers have when they believe there are no recognised channels of communication for them to air their ideas/views. Suggestion boxes are usually provided with forms given for entering a suggestion (Armstrong, 2012).

A suggestion scheme involves employees writing their suggestion on a piece of paper and placing it in a box that is easily accessible. The manager in charge publicly empties the suggestion box on a regularly scheduled basis and reads the suggestion. A committee then decides which suggestions to implement and responds to suggestions (ILO, 2010). According to Milner et al. (1995), when organisations are establishing a scheme, a likely starting- point for them is to ensure that the suggestion scheme aligns with the organisation's mission, objectives, and values. It must

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also be viewed as being a key human resource initiative and as such should seek to integrate with the goals of recruitment, training and appraisal of staff at all levels. Senior management should demonstrate their faith in the scheme, promote and support it and encourage all managers to view it as a positive force for continuous improvement. Suggestion schemes help organisations to become more innovative and help them reduce costs (Buech et al., 2010) when implemented effectively.

The following factors were identified by Milner et al. (1995) as being necessary to successfully implementing a suggestion scheme in an organisation: (i) it is important for senior and middle management to be totally committed to the scheme. A member of the senior team of staff should be clearly identified as the champion of the overall idea of the service; (ii) All employees should be encouraged to participate in the scheme. Everyone in the organisation will be eligible, and this should be made clear in recruitment materials, job descriptions, and publicity material for the scheme; (iii) Careful consideration should be given to the evaluation strategy. Those who are given responsibility for evaluating suggestions must be fully committed to the success of the scheme; (iv)The suggestion scheme must be supported by effective administrative backup with sound procedural systems to ensure that suggestions are processed within published timescales; (v) An adequate budget must be provided to fund awards, other forms of recognition, the purchase of equipment and promotion and publicity of the scheme; (vi) Every opportunity must be taken to promote the scheme throughout the organisation. There is little point in launching a scheme if nobody knows that it exists. It must be publicized at regular intervals throughout the year in order to ensure that everyone is aware of its existence; (vii)The success of a suggestion scheme can be measured by the number of suggestions that are actually implemented. Implementation is important because implemented ideas demonstrate the continuing success of the scheme and implemented ideas provide the individual who made the suggestion, with a personal satisfaction at seeing their idea in operation – having the knowledge that they have made a difference; and (viii)It is important that everyone in the organisation is aware of the benefits gained from implemented suggestions, so that they too may be encouraged to think about ways in which they can contribute.

Lloyd (1996) was able to demonstrate through his research of British Gas how the use of suggestion schemes can encourage employees not only to think more creatively but also to share their ideas for the benefit of the organisation. This will make them more committed and motivated,

especially if they receive the appropriate reward and recognition for their ideas and see them implemented and actually improving the organisation. An ill-conceived and undefined suggestion scheme can turn employees off and generate ill-will, cynicism and misunderstanding in the organisation (ILO, 2010). Buech et al. (2010) also reports that suggestion schemes can backfire on the organisation if they become overtly bureaucratic. This can be as a result of unclear ground rules, complex and excessive paperwork, lengthy processing time, inexperienced or overburdened evaluators, rejections without clear and sufficient reasons, long delays in implementing approved ideas or in delivering rewards, insufficient communication with employees, and processing proposals through layer after layer of the hierarchy, can lead to disillusioned and demoralized participants.

2.3.3 Quality Circles

Quality circles are a form of a project team that was conceptualized by an American, Edward W. Deming and introduced to Japanese industry. In 1962 Professor Kaoru Ishikawa of the University of Tokyo developed the quality circle concept (Elvins, 1985; Dhillon, 1988). According to Dhillon (1988), a quality control circle may be simply described as a small group of workers from the same working area with similar tasks who meet regularly with their supervisor in order to identify, analyse and solve work-related problems. Quality circles or project teams are another effective means of direct communication.

Members of the quality circle are usually four to twelve in number and usually meet for an hour a week during or outside regular working hours. The primary function of the quality control circle is to identify and solve quality and production problems (Dhillon, 1988). Okpu & Seth (2014) see quality circles as permanent discussion groups, in which a limited number of collaborators from one certain working sector originating from the lower hierarchy meet on a voluntary basis at regular intervals during or outside normal working hours (then against remuneration). The purpose of the meeting is to discuss problems within their own working sectors. Under the direction of a trained moderator, and with the help of special techniques to solve problems, the team works out recommendations for solutions and initiates methods of application for these recommendations (independently or through official channels). The recommendations for improvement will be remunerated within the scope of the legal rules or those existing within the enterprise, and the working team process includes learning effects for the participants.

The recurring theme in the above definitions is the formation of a small group of employees in the same work area brainstorming and arriving at solutions to problems that are particular to their work. Quality circles are different from other forms of direct participation in that the members are usually drawn from the same work area, with the group led by the immediate supervisor. They identify problems from their own area and, using data collection methods and statistical techniques acquired through circle training, analyse these problems and propose possible solutions. These are then presented formally to the manager of the section, who may decide to implement the circle's proposal. Follow-up of the implemented proposal may be the responsibility of the quality circle members (Brennan, 1992). This makes quality circles members become more skilful in problem solving methods, statistical analysis techniques, leadership skills and interpersonal communication skills (Elvins 1985).

Generally, there are two reasons for the use of quality circles: firstly, it is believed to increase productivity and quality improvement of the organisation (Elvins, 1985). Increased productivity has a positive effect on worker morale and behaviour. It leads to a decrease in absenteeism, attrition rates, grievances filed, and suggestions offered through company suggestion systems (Okpu & Seth, 2014). Secondly, it is a means for employees to have a voice in the organisation. This is because it is assumed employees know more about their problems than anyone else; therefore, they are best qualified to find the solutions (Subbulakshmi, 2019). Also, when workers are directly involved in decisions that affect them, it leads to an increase in their feelings of accomplishment, pride, self-esteem, and self-fulfilment. This results in a higher level of commitment to the job and the organisation (Elvins, 1985). Additionally, King (1990) found the use of quality circles have advantages, such as members of the circle were able to identify work related problems and found innovative solutions to solve these problems at a reasonable cost. This boosted the confidence of employees and served as a great motivator because they were recognized by their organisation for their problem-solving abilities, and hence made management proud of them. In their study, Okpu & Seth (2014) listed the following as benefits of using quality circles: the task of management is made easier, giving them time to concentrate on priority areas, junior management is placed in leadership role providing opportunities for future managers to emerge, increases employees feeling of belonging in an organisation, greater team working and provides an avenue for employees' voice to be heard leading to improved job satisfaction and commitment.

Brennan (1992) found that middle managers oppose quality circle programmes in the organisation because they perceive them as a threat to their managerial rights and a waste of scarce resources. This view is also shared by several researchers who found that middle level managers feel they were bypassed by the quality circle process and that their authority was undermined, and hence sabotaged circle efforts (Cook, 1982; Ingle, 1982; Okpu & Seth, 2014). Middle managers also had a distrust of their workforce and believed them to be incapable of making worthwhile contributions to organisational problems. This may be as a result that most of the managers were not given adequate training for them to be competent in guiding and advising employees. Therefore, quality circles did not provide a voice mechanism for workers because managers were reluctant to share information with the circle and had no faith in their ability to succeed (Brennan,1992).

For quality circle techniques to work well, an organisation's basic philosophy must be compatible with the goals of participative management theory, which implies that employees will be fully involved in the organisation's problem solving and decision making. This will be a problem for organisations that are hierarchically structured because quality circles work best with a flatter organisational structure (Elvins 1985).

2.3.4 Team Briefings

Team briefings are a regular and systematic process that ensures communication takes place between management and employees. It was introduced by the Industrial Society in the United Kingdom. Since its inception, there have been fewer incidences of industrial disputes owing to increased understanding and acceptance of the change (Dudai and Cacioppe, 1992). The objective of team briefing is to make sure that every employee knows and understands what they and others are doing in the organisation and why. Team briefings involve managers and their team getting together for about half an hour, in a formal setting, on a weekly basis to discuss issues relevant to their work and to provide them with information about the wider organisation (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). Everyone has the opportunity to discuss specific job-related matters with members of their team (Okpu &Obiora, 2015; Okpu & Seth,2014).

In order for an organisation to achieve its goals, there must be effective communication between managers and employees (Gilman et al., 2015). Team briefing is simply defined as a process of direct communication where meetings are held between managers and the workers to

inform the employees or for interaction to obtain the ideas/views of employees on various organisational matters (Armstrong, 2012; Okpu & Obiora, 2015). These meetings may be in the form of brief meetings, regular meetings, dept/staff meetings, and they not only allow for improved issue management but also work on the improvement of performance of the team as such. Here employees can suggest problem-solving for issues that are faced or even discuss ideas to improve the processes (Wilkinson et al., 2013).

Team briefings are a systematic yet flexible system that ensures that information is passed regularly to all staff through interlinked team meetings (Dudai &Cacioppe, 1992). They allow information, ideas, and questions to be fed back to other managers within the structure. Team briefings entail face- to- face discussions, which encourages people to feel like part of a team and reinforces the message that it is the team leader and not the grapevine that provides accurate, credible information. Effective communication has a strong impact on employees' sense of wellbeing, job satisfaction and commitment (Oliver and Tonks, 1998; Johlke and Duham, 2000; White et al., 2010; Okpu & Obiora, 2015). Communication acts as the primary means for organisational members to process information, reduce ambiguity, and coordinate their actions. Managers can personally influence employees; therefore, they need to ensure that employees are given adequate information on their job roles (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). According to Wilkinson et al. (2020), the face of the firm are employees, and hence they have a strong impact on the firm success.

The importance of team briefing has been highlighted in several studies: Jo and Shim (2005) found a strong relationship between management's interpersonal communication and employees forming trusting attitudes. Personal relationships can help draw people into an organisation and motivate them to stay in the organisation. Team briefings as a form of communication allow subordinates to ask questions and seek clarification, therefore promoting shared understanding in the organisation. They also improve employee's performance, team building, commitment, and employee relations (Oliver and Tonks 1998; Gamble and Kelliher 1999). Okpu and Obiora (2015) notes that team briefings mechanisms are a useful channel for passing urgent information throughout the organisation at short notice during periods of major changes or crisis in the workplace. For team briefings to be successful, they should be based on a regular briefing or bulletin from the top of the organisation so that all employees have access to a message which everyone can hear/read before team briefings take place. This may be through

email, the intranet or a printed copy. The message from the top remains consistent to all audiences and has not been watered down or become garbled.

In their research of an electronic retail chain in the United Kingdom, Gamble and Kelliher (1999) reported that managers were not trained, appraised, or given feedback on the way to conducting team briefings. The organisation did not create a formal mechanism to monitor team briefings nor to make them successful. Therefore, team briefing had little impact on employee's motivation and behaviour. They attributed this failure to the organisation's culture of promoting from within the ranks and to the national culture of conservatism. In light of the above, Dudai and Cacioppe (1992) argued that team briefings fail in some organisations because managers do not feel responsible for communicating the corporate vision, goals, changes or policies initiated by senior management. Some managers lack confidence in communication since they do not have a presentation, listening, asserting, and meeting skills. Managers withhold sensitive information from employees, believing the information will be misused or distorted. However, Oliver and Tonks (1998) believe that feedback, hard work, commitment, and perseverance are essential to successfully implement team briefings. Senior management commitment is very important. In a compatible culture, team briefings promote consultation and a more open climate, thereby serving as an effective employee voice mechanism (Okpu & Obiora, 2015).

2.3.5. Open Door Policy

Management, as part of the effort to improve the communication climate in the organisation, many lower and middle-level managers practice an open-door policy on their own initiative, and many general managements establish such policies for the entire organisation. However, the term "open door" is subject to interpretation and many organisations see the same thing in different ways. Shenher (1993) defines an organisation open-door policy as the procedure or practice where employees are able to approach their supervisors at various levels, and a meeting between them takes place as a result of a managerial action or a manager's decision to see the employee. For managers to have an open door does not necessarily indicate that employees always call on them, it simply suggests that when employees wish to see their supervisor, they would be allowed to without much difficulty (Beck and Beck 1986). Hence, there may be different ways employees can meet their managers. Such as their office, shop floor, outside organisation, etc. Although as mentioned, managers may practice the local open-door policy based on their own

initiative. However, here the open-door policy is referred to basically as an overall company policy that is established by the general manager and that is imposed on all managers at all levels.

Employees desire to see their supervisor may be related, among other things, to a personal problem, a complaint or a work-related issue. However, the important point is that they sincerely want to listen to the employees, but no one enters. This means that in the eyes of the employees, the door is actually closed, and this may be due to different reasons. But common to all is probably the employee's perception of the outcome after making the first step towards the door. Some employees simply do not believe it will do them any good, and they often perceive a defensive rather than supportive attitude on the side of management. Also, on the part of managers, despite their declarations of being ready to listen, they usually believe their actions are right or that they would not have taken them in the first place. Thus, any complaints by employees are therefore presumably inappropriate (Beck and Beck,1986).

Another difficulty that may arise is establishing an effective open-door policy. The fact that many complaints are connected to the actions or decisions made by immediate supervisors, to resolve them, the employees must talk to the managers at a higher level, and often they do not believe that higher-echelon managers will be prepared to act against their subordinates. This belief is indeed confirmed by the attitude of lower and middle-level managers towards the subject of direct discussion of employees with top management. Even if management wishes to encourage such direct appeals, lower-level managers may feel threatened because they often seek and even insist on having their superiors protection and support. Consequently, higher managers tend to support their subordinates, justifying the employee's perception that the door is actually closed (Shenhar, 1993). The manager's immediate reception of the employee entering their office can also be a source of difficulty for an effective open-door policy. When the employee enters, and the manager looks busy, preoccupied with other problems, or is frequently interrupted by incoming phone calls or other people knocking on the door, it is possible that the employee will simply never make this trip again. On the other hand, managers may be reluctant to be available at all times because of the real burden such a practice may impose on their time management and the disruption caused to their schedules.

Finally, the procedure which may be involved in exploiting the open-door policy or the formal written request, which is often required before employees are allowed to enter the manager's

door, is another difficulty that hinders employees calls upon 'open doors. The employees may hesitate to file a request in writing because this action may be interpreted as a direct complaint against somebody (i.e. HOD or employee). If this somebody is the employee superior or another employee with whom the employee must go on living, they may have second thoughts about filing a request. However, if the employee is certain of being able to talk directly to a senior executive and get a response on the spot, they may be encouraged to proceed further with the complaint. Hence, the need for formal, written requests for open interviews is therefore, a major barrier to the use of an open door which leaves many employees with their problems are solved (Shenhar, 1993).

2.3.6. Other Mechanisms

Wilkinson et al. (2014) assert that there are other means of direct employee participation, which are in the form of structures used to facilitate the use of other direct voice channels (such as the noticeboard, newsletters, and more sophisticated means like electronic media). Also, although these mechanisms foster downward communication to employees and hence, may represent one-way methods of information sharing, they are the most dilute form of voice mechanism because they cannot challenge the status quo existing within the organisation (Marchington, 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). Likewise, Marchington and Cox (2007: 238) state that some direct communications "can be viewed as nothing more than a neutral device to inform workers about specific issues or as an instrument to reinforce management prerogatives.... management inevitably controls what (and when) information will be passed to employees, and its objectivity is likely to be in some doubt since the information communicated is invariably selected by management". This means that one-way voice methods particularly from management to employees are employed in the organisation in order to win the hearts and minds of the workforce by communicating the goals and business position of the firm to them (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

The plan here is that the workforce will see reasons with management as to why some business decisions are made and hence will be more devoted to the action of the organisation (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Noticeboard, emails, WhatsApp groups fall under this voice mechanism because they are all structures put in place to inform employees directly (Okpu & Obiora, 2015). For instance, newsletters, emails or printed copies of information can be placed on the noticeboard by management for the employees to view (Wilkinson et al., 2014).

Also, noticeboards are important to foster team briefings or meetings because they can serve as a means of informing employees about such meetings before they take off. For the internal newsletters, or social media intranets, employees can use them as a means to exchange knowledge, information and ideas to improve their current job practices (Wilkinson et al., 2014, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). The focus of this thesis is direct employee voice mechanisms; hence, the following section will concentrate on the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms and how it operates in SMEs and then the factors that influence the quality of these direct employee voice mechanisms.

2.4 Quality of Employee Voice Mechanisms

According to Wilkinson et al. (2014), simply describing the number of voice mechanisms found is indifferent. What is more important is the quality and effectiveness of voice channels. That is, understanding the extent to which different employee voice schemes actually provides employees with the chance to contribute and participate in matters that affect them in the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2020; Kwon and Farndale, 2020). Similarly, Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) assert that being able to offload the purpose, meaning as well as the ensuing impact of employee participation is vital. In a bid to do this, they implemented a fourfold framework which is also referred to as the escalator of participation. The diagram in Figure 2.1 shows the escalator of participation. The framework covers the depth/degree, level, scope, and form of different direct/ informal voice mechanisms in actual practice.

Figure 2.1 Escalator of Participation Diagram

				Control
			Codetermination	
		Consultation		
	Communication			
Information				
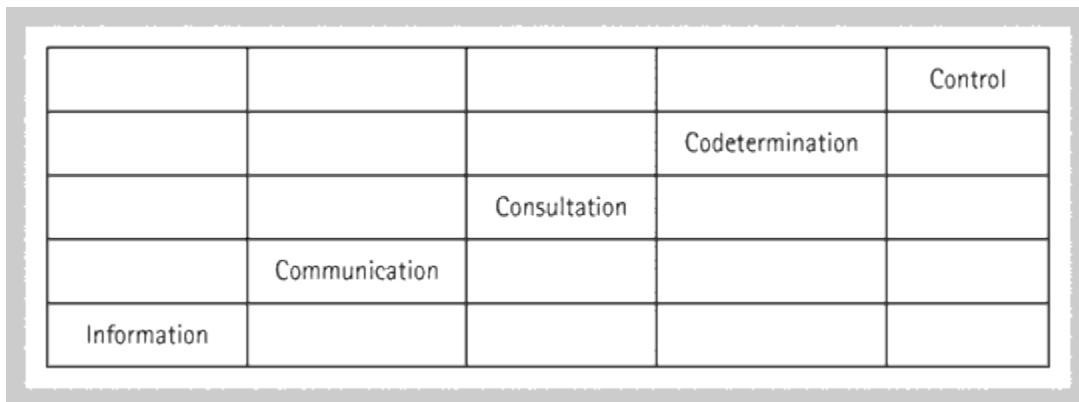
Source: Wilkinson et al., 2013

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The *depth* of voice refers to the intensity of participation an employee is allowed in the workplace, which differs from shallow to deep. It differs because it depends on the mechanism implemented and the employee's ability to be involved in the firm's decision-making process (Dundon et al., 2004). Notwithstanding if they are just informed of changes, consulted, or actually make the decisions. As demonstrated by the escalator of participation diagram in Figure 2.1, it indicates a progression upwards rather than simply a move from zero contribution or participation to employees' control (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Thus, a greater depth of participation may be obvious if employees influence those decisions that are designed for management (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). Contrarily, where employees are only informed of decisions taken by management, participation may be described as minimal.

The *level,* as noted by Wilkinson et al. (2013), covers whether as a workgroup, department, corporate or plant level the workplace decisions are made. Wilkinson et al. (2020) assert that management allows employees to have more input on small matters within the workplace in an effort to minimize the influence they have on major organisational decisions, which will greatly affect the conditions of the firm. Therefore, the amount of input an employee is enabled to have with regards to the decision making within the firm depends on the level of the employer in the workplace (i.e. senior and lower level). For instance, it would be inappropriate to involve lower-level employees in a team meeting over future policy because most lower-level employees may not have the authority to re-design organisational policy (Wilkinson et al., 2013, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018).

The *scope,* which can also be referred to as the range, describes "the type of subject matter dealt with, ranging from the trivial to the strategic" (Marchington and Cox 2007:179). That is the topics or issues on which employees are enabled to participate. Trivial issues (e.g. workplace canteen or car-parking space) are characterized as low-level decisions, while higher-level strategic issues (e.g. plans on future investment) concern "broader questions about organizational goals" (Marchington and Cox 2007:179). Basically, management has authority over what matters the involve or give employees voice on. Finally, the *form* may be characterised according to whether a mechanism is formal or informal and direct or indirect (Dundon and Gollan 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2014). Formal mechanisms are used by management at regular intervals, whereas informal mechanisms are more ad-hoc in their implementation. Bryson et al. (2007) suggest that there are

three avenues for employee voice, union and non - union representatives and, through direct voice mechanisms. Indirect voice mechanisms involve an intermediary, which is either a trade union member or employee representative (Dundon & Rollinson, 2011). Direct voice mechanisms focus on employees and management sharing their views directly with the other party. Various researchers have noted that the channel of voice used within organisations is shifting dramatically, with direct mechanisms replacing more indirect mechanisms (Mowbray et al., 2015; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021).

2.5 An Overview of Direct Employee Voice in SMEs

Most earlier studies on employee relations and HRM in SMEs have moved to unite the characteristics of smaller firms on the opposite extreme of a continuum (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). On one end reclines, the 'small is beautiful' perspective, which suggests that amongst employees and owner-mangers flows an informal communication, which aids in creating commitment and loyalty. And hence, lower level of conflicts (Msangi, 2020). In contrast, the other end is a Dickensian picture of some SMEs employment conditions. Which argues that employees endure poor working conditions, health and safety deficiencies and minimal access to union representation than their counterparts in larger firms (Uchehara, 2017; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). Furthermore, conflicts exist here but are rather expressed by increased levels of absenteeism and turnover (Wu et al., 2015; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Presumably, such contradictory views are the subjects of many criticisms and debates. Although, in each end, there is a probability of some truth (Marchington & Suter, 2013), SMEs in reality, are best described by a complex web of social and familial norms, economic conditions and sector variability (Lai et al., 2017; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). For instance, according to Marchington (2015), informality cannot be related automatically to harmonious work relations. Nor can the formalisation of management methods signify a measure of the substance of HRM in SMEs (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Therefore, developing a theory on the employment relationship in SMEs in either term can abridge practices that are very much, in reality, complicated (Lai et al., 2017; Dundon and Wilkonson, 2018).

According to Mallet and Wapshott (2017), SMEs can be deceptively complex organisations to manage. Hence a wide range of challenges relating to the business owners,

employees and the employment relationship can arise as a result of this complexity. In order to comprehend the enterprising nature of employment relationships in SMEs, it is significant to recognise that not only are SMEs different from larger enterprises in numerous ways, but they also differ from one another. Thus, trade union/collective bargaining are less likely to be found in SMEs (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Della et al., 2021). Also, SMEs tend to have more centralised decision-making structures because they lack internal labour markets (Wilkinson et al., 2014; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). The organisational cultures in SMEs are primarily formed by owners whose aims and desires are directly communicated to the employees by means of structures and close interactions (i.e. informal and formal voice mechanisms). These close interactions encourage informal relationships and working practices in the SMEs that can be easily (i.e. flexible) adjusted and adapted (Gilman et al., 2015; Marllet and Wapshott, 2017).

According to Mallett and Wapshott (2014), close spatial and social proximity (i.e. direct interactions) are often manifested in SMEs, particularly small organisations. This can promote and overlap connecting personal and working relationships and a significant level of familiarity in the workplace. However, Marlow et al. (2010) contend that, although direct communication provides a greater level of employee satisfaction, intensified relationships with the possibilities of conflicts are also created. In SMEs, such conflicts can be very disruptive to the business (Gilman et al., 2015). Thus, a uniquely fertile environment is provided by SMEs for direct employee relations to persist and dominate the business environment. (Mallet & Wapshott, 2014). Furthermore, Sameer and Ozbilgin (2014) contend that in SMEs, employee relations are normally complex and diversified. Such that the level of obscurity about the responsibility for job roles or specific duties are often influenced by completing workplace roles unplanned, following the perceived firm needs and internal and external negotiations and informal bases (Diefenbach, & Sillince, 2011; Miao et al., 2020). Mallet & Wapshott (2014) and Gilman et al. (2015) asserts that over time these unplanned informal voice practices in the workplace becomes the routine working practices in the organisation for tackling different challenges that arise in the firm. Employment relationship in large firms may not be suitable in SMEs, hence, the need for exploring the literature on SMEs to understand and evaluate how their concepts of employee relationships are developed on their own terms (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011; Lai et al., 2017; Della et al., 2021). Table 2.3 below provides a summary of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs.

Table 2.3 Direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs

Face-to-face meetings
Large-scale meetings (i.e., between senior manager& the whole workforce).
Team briefings
Any face-to-face meetings.
Written two-way communication.
Employee surveys
Suggestion schemes
Any written two-way communication
Downward Communication
Noticeboards
Regular newsletters
Intranet
Systematic use of management data
Any downward communication

Adopted from: Dundon &Wilkinson (2018)

Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) note that direct employee voice simplifies two-way dialogue among management and employees, hence presenting such employees the opportunity to (potentially) influence managerial thinking and organisational decisions through communicating their opinions and concerns. Additionally, the opportunity for management to discuss issues, provide feedback, and gain insight into employee's concerns is presented by voice (Wilkinson et al., 2014; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016). Therefore, Rohlfer (2018) asserts that employee voice arrangements play a significant part in employee involvement, participation, and managerial communication. Particularly because the conditions and structures that foster voice are created by senior management (Holland et al., 2017; Miao et al., 2020; Nechanska, 2020).

Irrespective, of whatever role such direct employee voice mechanism play, they can be either informal or formal as explained in the previous sections. As a result of the enterprising nature of the work environment in SMEs, it is proposed that direct employee voice is likely to be the most effective form of voice on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, it has been revealed by current research like (Mallet & Wapshott, 2017; Ruck et al., 2017; Park and Nawakitphaitoon, 2018;

Nechanska, 2020) that the most effective form of employee voice for extracting managerial responsiveness is through informal and formal methods. Bryson et al. (2007) state that research evidence indicates that organisations report experiencing higher levels of conflict where there is a lack of opportunity for direct voice. Also, as indicated by research into the job demand–resources model, direct voice can also mediate the negative consequence of high-demand work environments (Bakker et al., 2005; Bakker et al., 2014; Gautam & Markey 2017).

According to Wilkinson et al. (2007), in SMEs, the nature of communication processes is less formal when compared to larger firms because of their kind of business environment and more flexible social settings. Also, the daily interactions between management and employees may encourage a more informal dimension of participation (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). Therefore, the form of voice mechanisms used within SMEs is generally top-down and direct (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). Additionally, Sameer and Ozbilgin (2014) note that this is due to the size of the firms, which makes indirect voice mechanisms largely unnecessary. Therefore, making direct voice mechanism more favourably within the SMEs and employees to be mostly consulted on minor work-related matters (Verreynne et al., 2013; Philip and Arrowsmith, 2020).

Verreynne et al. (2013) contend that in smaller organisations, their complexity and diversified employee relations practices is due to scarcity of resources, particularly at the development stage of the business. This was revealed by their study on Australian SMEs using mixed-methods research design and engaging both employees and CEOs with regards to the practices and employment relation systems in high and low performing SMEs. The employees in the high performing SMEs (i.e. good communication, flexible working practices, high involvement and feasible career path) had more positive views of their firm's ER practices, emphasising more on employee participation. While low-performing SMEs, the reverse was the case. Meaning that the employees reported poor communication, rigid working condition, limited career path and lack of involvement (Verreynne et al., 2013). The findings with the CEOs varied because they displayed minimal sensitivity to the corresponding effective benefits of the HRM practices in their firms. This means that the employees are aware and understand how employment relations can serve as a tool to improve organisational outcomes, compared to CEOs who often detach themselves from the daily practices of their organisations (Mallett & Wapshott 2014; Mallett & Wapshott; 2017).

Additionally, since owner-managers in SMEs may not be aware or comprehend all the happenings in their business, then they should support direct employee involvement and be open to employee voice practices (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017).

According to Dundon et al. (2005), who examined the management of employee voice in non-union firms, their study aimed at addressing the gap in employee voice in non-union settings revealed that dismissing voice in non-union firms as ineffective and in consequential is too simple. So, within their immediate work situation, employees do express their views and contribute to a range of issues that matter to them. However, at the same time, it is management that allows such voice to occur. What is vital is that over time such processes also take on a life of their own and evolve. Thus, management might control the voice agenda but not necessarily the dynamics of how such processes are mediated and translated into actual practice. They further suggest that the question of non-union voice is an area that warrants even more investigation. The findings of Dundon and Gallons (2007); Morrison (2011); Klaas et al. (2012); Della et al. (2021) also lend support to the significance of direct voice by affirming that more direct methods of voice are abruptly replacing more indirect voice mechanisms that may be in place within the organisation.

Okpu and Jaja (2014) who examined the relationship between the quality circle and workers commitment with respondents drawn from a sample size of 357 workers from the Banks in the South-South zone of Nigeria, revealed that quality Circle had a significant positive association with workers affective, continuance and normative commitment. Hence quality circle increased workers affective, continuance and normative commitment. The quality circle is a technique for solving small group problems which are widely used in organisations throughout the world. As a form of small-group communication within organisational settings, the quality circle concept is of 'potential interest to communication scholars (Elvins, 1985). Also, the data from his analysis revealed that quality circle participation had positive effects on perceived individual power/influence, communication with superiors, subordinates,' and to some degree, with peers. In line with this, another researcher such as Gilman et al. (2015), in exploring the nature of employee voice in SMEs in order to understand how and why employee voice operates in them, found that in the firms studied, performance was not only related to an output of a particular HRM style but also provided a rationale for the use and operation of employee voice. Also, managers were made to reevaluate the limitations caused by the firms' performance challenges and created more

opportunities for employee voice. Therefore, voice and wider HR practices are not stable and would change over time in reaction to specific performance challenges encountered by the firm.

Dundon and Wilkinson (2018), on exploring employee voice communication in SMEs, confirmed the direct nature of communication flow as a feature of employee relationships in the workplace. Also, they revealed that although a direct range of communication and consultation methods were found in SMEs, face-to-face meetings were the dominant mode of communication in the majority of the firms. In comparison, written communication was the least common. Similarly, Gilman et al. (2015) concur that SMEs do have more preference for direct approaches to their employment relationships. This direct approach has often been associated with their lack of HRM expertise, which includes limited resources, minimal trade union representation and shortage of managerial skills (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Gilman et al. 2015; Marlow et al., 2010; Gautam and Markey, 2017). For instance, Wilkinson et al. (2007), using a qualitative study of four SMEs, revealed that informal aspects greatly influenced the use of the adoption of employee involvement practices than the formal aspects. Also, such formal practices can reduce employee satisfaction within the workplace (Gautam & Markey, 2017).

Likewise, Gilman et al. (2015), employing five SMEs, examined the contours (i.e., the how and why) of employee voice and found that high levels of satisfaction and motivation were revealed by employees, although the direct voice mechanisms utilised was mostly residually informal and functional to operational matters. It was due to the perceptions of cooperative climate within the workplace, high level of task autonomy and a preeminent degree of trust between management and employees. But they also revealed some heterogeneity in the SMEs analysed. Such as firm-specific resources (i.e., the experience of owner/managers and employees) and constraints (mainly related to the industry context). This means that compared to what is the general belief, SMEs are much more complex in reality (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018). Harney and Alkhalaf (2020:9), confirming this view, argues that 'there is as much diversity within the SME category as between SMEs and larger firms' and thus, it is important to implement more nuanced approaches for a deeper understanding of HRM in SMEs.

According to Wu et al. (2015), the number of employees in SMEs influences the direct voice mechanisms used. For instance, the higher number of employees in medium sized firms makes it impossible for managers to encourage employee involvement through informal or formal

voice mechanisms only. Compared to smaller firms (with their family-style structure) that features mostly informal direct verbal communication between employees and management, which hinders less or no need for formal voice channels (Gautam & Markey, 2017; Della et al., 2021).

Della et al. (2021) argued that the level of formalisation in SMEs, specifically medium sized firms might make them strategically capitalise on voice mechanisms more like those of larger organisations, including representative employee voice channels. However, Gilman et al., (2015) and Della et al. (2021) suggests that a high level of informality persists in medium size firms. For example, it is more likely that medium sized firms will have an HR professional than smaller firms. But when compared to larger organisations are unlikely to have (Wu et al., 2015). Marlow et al. (2010) explored the informality and formality of direct voice using six SMEs. They revealed that in all organisations, there was a strong pattern towards greater formalisation of employment relationships. But they also found a 'continued adherence to informality which draws upon patronage, ignorance, and prerogative [due to the] inability of either managers or employees to mobilize formal policy or procedure to shape the interaction of formality and informality' (p. 962). Therefore, informality and formality can be examined as part of a single span, while finding and attaining an appropriate and functional balance between the two appears to be the challenge for SMEs, particularly medium sized firms (Marlow et al., 2010; Lai et al., 2017, Della et al., 2021). Exploring direct voice mechanisms in their different forms (i.e. informal and formal) and their combinations in relation to internal factors influencing the quality of such voice mechanisms in SMEs presents a unique opportunity for advancing the literature on employee voice.

However, the strength of the direct voice mechanism possessed by the employee is influenced by some internal and external factors such as managerial and employee attitudes, employees' expectations, government legislations, union demands and business pressure (Dundon & Rollinson, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Kaufman, 2015). Also, Sameer and Ozbilgin (2014) note that the specific nature of an SME is not the only factor that impacts on their employment relationships but also the external factors and the turbulent environments in which they often end up (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Edward et al., 2010; Psychogios et al., 2016; Prouska et al., 2021). For instance, SMEs that may rely on larger consumers that may make requests on how the organisation is run, suggesting that precise practices or strategies be adopted in the workplace. Similarly, Prouska et al. (2021), in their study on employee voice determinants in SMEs, revealed that employee voice

agency, the perceived levels of voice and, ultimately, employee voice behaviour are influenced by the interaction between the external institutional context and internal SME context that is organisational configuration, governance structure and internal contingencies in the employment relationship. Therefore, the following chapter provides more details on these factors that influence employee voice mechanisms.

2.6 Summary

The above section has explored employee voice mechanisms, more specifically direct employee voice mechanisms, because the focus of the study is on SMEs, which are usually non-unionised and instead utilised more direct forms of employee voice. The direct voice mechanism has been examined to be formal and informal. The following chapter will explore the literature review on the factors that influence these direct voice mechanisms in SMEs.

CHAPTER 3: FACTORS INFLUENCING DIRECT EMPLOYEE VOICE

3.0 Introduction

This section examined the factors that influence direct employee voice in SMEs. Existing literature was used to explore the external and internal factors that influence direct employee voice mechanisms. The internal factors were explored in-depth, being that they are the focus of the thesis and identified factors were contextualised in the SMEs. According to Kaufman (2015), Gilman et al. (2015) and Prouska, et al. (2021) there are some factors that influence the quality of employee voice in an organisation. These factors can be internal (i.e. within the organisation) or external (i.e. outside the organisation). This chapter will explore each of these factors and will be focused on the internal factors, which are the aim and objective of the research.

Macro Environmental/External Factors

These are factors that exist outside the firm and are beyond their control (Dundon & Gallon 2007; Kaufman, 2015). These include the business environment in terms of economic factors, social-cultural factors, technological factors, and political and legal factors. Furthermore, Dundon and Gallon (2007) studied the macro- environment influencing voice under three headings: market pressures, structural influences and government or legal regulations. While Kaufman (2015), using an employment relation model of voice determinants, expressed the external factors affecting voice in various categories such as economic factors (e.g. industry growth, macro cycles), legal factors (e.g. union organising and bargaining regulation, rights of employees) and socio-cultural factors (e.g. authority-conformity norms and individualist vs collective attitudes).

However, Morrison (2011) argues that these external factors are not necessary when analysing the determinants of employee voice. Supportively Klaas et al. (2012) virtually left out the influence of the external environment in their argument, and their focus mainly was on the internal organisational factors. However, this wasn't accepted by Kaufman (2015), who explained that these external factors are significant. Therefore, whatever form or magnitude of workplace issues that arise in the firm, the way they are presented to management by employees, and the organisations' financial capacity to tackle these issues constructively are influenced significantly by the state of the economy (i.e. in recession or at full employment). Also, by the laws governing the employment rights (i.e. the organisation being able to terminate employees or switch them from permanent to temporary workers). Concurrently, Barry and Wilkinson (2016) say that the

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business environment must be speculated as an open system. Hence, any description of individual-level employee behaviour that disregards the macro/external environment may produce a narrow viewpoint of organisational behaviour. However, below is a summary of the components of these macro-environmental factors.

Economic factors: consist of all those economic forces which affect the HR function. The most relevant economic factors are suppliers, customers, competitors, and globalisation. For instance, market pressure (i.e. competition in the environment of an industry) can significantly influence how employee voice is managed in an organisation. One of the unique resources of any organisation is its human resources and, as such, can serve as a source of competitive advantage in the industry (Msangi, 2020). Therefore, ensuring that there is a channel of communication between the employees and the organisation is very fundamental, especially in a business that is service-oriented and highly dependent on the skills of its workforce. Correspondingly, Dundon and Gallon (2007) assert that new innovations for employee voice can be stimulated by market pressure and flexibility for high-quality customer service, specifically where the employees have direct contact with the customer. This means that management in organisations where workers have first-hand interaction with customers and customer service is given high importance will seek and make a significant effort to use employee voice for improvements in the business (Kim et al., 2010). Furthermore, market pressures of the requirement of flexibility in terms of business operations, limited supply of talented workforce and customer service spur the necessity for innovations in employee voice. Hence, offering employees an opportunity to express their opinions and ideas will make them feel like a part of the organisation (Kaufman, 2015).

Socio-cultural factors: are factors that can influence the behaviour of the consumer. Social factors include cultural change within the business environment and society (i.e. the organisation's employees, relatives, friends and neighbours). A business organisation cannot operate without society, which currently has become more demanding. Hence, the organisation first will have to consider the social impact of any action program. The structure of an organisation can influence their employee voice (Dundon and Gallon, 2007; Kaufman, 2014). Organisational structure as regards the number of employees, type of management, size of operations etc., can impact the organisation manages employee voice. The organisation's ownership also has an effect on employee voice, particularly in SMEs, their preferences and styles of owner-managers (Harney

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and Dundon, 2006; Oladele and Akeke, 2016). Supportively, Dundon and Gallon (2007); Long et al. (2016) asserts that in terms of the style of management, this also differs with the size of the organisation and the extent of involvement of the owner and top management with management of employee relations.

For instance, there may not be specific departments in SMEs to manage human resources and employee relations, hence, promoting employee voice/ involvement to be managed extensively by the HOD or immediate supervisors of the employees (Karami et al., 2008; Dundon Wilkinson, 2018). On the one hand, this can limit the voice of employees in the SMEs due to the monopoly of power and, on the other hand, make the available voice channels (i.e., the HOD) very effective. If the employee voice channels in the organisation lead to some form of conflict, it can affect the productivity of the employees and customer demands (Liebowitz, 2008). On the other hand, large scale enterprises with specific structures in place for employee relations, learning and training of workforce etc., have specialised human resource managers that may undertake regular reviews and have formal channels of communication with the employees for expression of opinions and complaints (Wu et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2017 and Wilkinson et al., 2020).

3.1 Micro-Organisational or Internal Factors

These are elements within the organisation that affect employee voice. Therefore, being within the organisation, most of them can be controlled, managed, and changed by the organisation, unlike the macro-organisational factors (Dundon & Gallon, 2007; Morrison, 2011; Kaufman 2015; Prouska et al. 2021). They are organisational culture, organisational structure, leadership style and HR practices.

3.1.1 Organisational Environment/Climate

Organisational environment or climate can be defined as a number of measurable properties of the supposed business environment directly or indirectly formed by the people who live and work in this environment and also that influence their behaviour and motivation (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). According to Madhukar and Sharma (2017), organisation climate depicts a quick impression of the relationship between the managers of the organisation and their

employees. Also, organisation climate reflects the magnitude of employee motivation in the organisation, and it has positive and negative effects on the behaviour of the people in the workplace (Mohelska and Sokolova, 2015; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020).

In 1968 Litwin and Stinger popularised the concept of OC in industrial and organisational literature through their book (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). Other researchers such as Schyns et al. (2009), Anitha (2014) and Kwon and Ferndale (2016) have also studied OC. However, Anitha (2014) notes that the majority of these researchers, in a bid to define and operationalise the concept of OC, quoted Forehand and Von Haller (1964:364), who stated that "OC is a unique set of characteristics that defines an organisation and sets it apart from other organisations". These characteristics remain intact for a long period of time thus, influencing the behaviour of people working in such an environment. Guion (1973) asserts that both the attributes of a firm and those of the perceiving individual are associated with the perceived climate, and also the conceived climate was most frequently just an auxiliary label for affective responses to the business organisation, such as job satisfaction (Holland et al., 2017; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020).

However, James et al. (1974) contend that the psychological climate should be incorporated to emphasise the fact that it is the aggregated cognitive interpretations of an organisational workforce that emerge from involvement in the firm and gives meaning to the features, processes, and events of the firm. This means that organizational climate helps to set the tone of the business environment and can work to facilitate employee voice or involvement or impair it. Studies by; Rich et al. (2010); Ferndale et al. (2011); Gilman et al. (2015); Kaufman (2015) and Townsend and Mowbray (2020) revealed that employee voice is the result of various aspects of the workplace. Patterson et al. (2004) investigated the relationship between climate and performance, analysing a sample of 42 manufacturing companies in the United Kingdom. They measured not only organisational climate and organisational performance but also job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Their findings showed that five aspects of organisational climate were significantly correlated with subsequent productivity: concern for employee welfare, skill development, reflexivity, innovation and flexibility and performance feedback. Companies that were perceived by employees to place more emphasis in those domains were more productive than others in the following year. Company productivity was in addition predicted by supervisor support, effort, quality, and formalization. All of which were aspects of organisational climate.

Supportively, Dundon et al. (2005) and Holland et al. (2017) stipulate that by encouraging a supportive working environment, management typically displays concern for employees' needs and feelings, provides positive feedback and encourages them to voice their concerns, to develop new skills and to solve work-related problems. Therefore, a meaningful work environment that aids employees in focused work and interpersonal harmony are considered a key determinant of employee participation (Farndale et al., 2011; Holland et al. 2017; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020).

According to Madhukar and Sharma (2017), an organisation's climate can be categorised into six distinct profiles of configurations in line with Halpin and Croft (1963). The six organisational climate profiles that are found in the organisations are; open, autonomous, controlled, familiar, paternal and closed. *Open climate*; an open environment is used to describe the openness and authenticity of interaction that exists between the super-ordinates and their subordinates. An open climate shows the cooperative, supportive and receptive attitudes between managers and their employees to each other's ideas and their commitment to work. The manager shows genuine concern for employees; they motivate and encourages staff members (high supportiveness). Employees work hard so that customers succeed (high commitment). They care, respect and help one another as colleagues and even at a personal level (high collegial relations). As a team, they work for the success of customers. Both the management and low-level employees are accessible and approachable, and they maintain close relationships with customers (Halpin & Croft 1963).

Autonomous climate; this type of climate portrays an atmosphere where employees are given a good measure of freedom to operate within the organisation. The manager arouses enthusiasm and diligence. There is no external threat or influence. Employees have great desire and motivation to work. The close relationship between the management and staff members creates an autonomous climate in the institution (Halpin & Croft 1963). *Controlled Climate;* The major characteristic of a controlled climate is diligence and hard work. Even though the manager may not model commitment, hard work is overemphasized to the extent that little or no time is given to social life. Nonetheless, employees are committed to their work and spend considerable time on paperwork. Thus, in most cases, there is little time to interact with one another. The manager often employs a direct approach, keeps his/her distance from staff in order to avoid familiarity. (Silver, 1983; Halpin & Croft, 1963). *Familiar climate;* familiar climate depicts a laissez-faire atmosphere.

The manager is concerned about maintaining a friendly atmosphere at the expense of task accomplishment. Thus, a considerable percentage of employees are not committed to their primary assignment. Some who are committed resent the way the manager runs the organisation: they do not share the same views with the manager/supervisor. As a result, those who have not committed form a clique because they are of the same attitude, and they become friends.

Paternal Climate; this type of climate depicts an atmosphere where the manager is very hardworking but has no effect on the staff. To the employees, hard work is not a popular term. There is a degree of closeness between the manager and members of staff, but the manager's expectation from staff is rather impractical. All the same, he/she is considerate and energetic, but his/her leadership approach is benevolently autocratic. As a result, most employees prefer to maintain distance from the manager. *Closed climate;* the closed climate represents the 'antithesis of the open climate'. The main characteristic of this type of climate identified by Halpin & Croft (1963) is lack of commitment or unproductive disengagement. There is no commitment, especially on the part of the manager and staff. There is no emphasis on task accomplishment; rather, the manager stresses routine, trivial and unnecessary paperwork to which staff minimally respond. The manager is strict and rigid in behaviour. Consequently, most of the employees feel frustrated and dissatisfied. This makes the atmosphere tense.

Generally, in all business organisations, the individual evaluation of the environment leads to multidimensional factors. The construct of such factors is known as organisational climate. These evaluations may refer to general dimensions or determinants of the organisational behaviour such as rules and regulations, physical facilities available, structure, autonomy, reward structure, tolerance and conflict, the need for innovation, support, consideration, job stress, job satisfaction, leadership styles e.tc (Madhukar & Sharma, 2017; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the organisational environment will be discussed broadly or in-depth under the following headings: organisational structure, organisational culture and leadership style.

3.1.1. 1 Organisational Culture

The concept of organisational culture has been applied as an organisational phenomenon. However, since the start of the 20th century, this concept has received a lot of attention from researchers. Thus, according to Werner et al. (2012), compared to other factors, organisational

culture has more impact on the success or failure of any organisation. Hence, it is an important issue for academic and managerial practice. The concept of organisational culture is typically used by academic researchers in a wide sense to mean the culture of a whole organisation or any group of individuals working together within the organization (Warrick, 2017). Additionally, the culture of an organisation involves their values and standards shared by the workplace employees and describes the way a social group achieves things (Jogaratnam, 2017). It gives the standard of conduct in the organization to individual employees, and management uses it as an instrument to form their business direction.

According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), the culture an organisation has, differentiates them from other organisations through the structure of their shared meaning held by its members. Arnold (2005) defines the culture of an organisation as a combination of unique standards, beliefs, principles and habits of behaving that provides each organisation with a distinctive nature. Both explanations imply that organisations are differentiated from one another through their organisational culture. Similarly, Werner et al. (2012) assert it is necessary for management to ascertain what culture would reflect their organisation's future plans and standards, determine practices that are appropriate to form that culture. Then initiate strategies to introduce such practices within the workplace. Mohelska and Sokoloya (2015) agree that a well-established organisational culture can create a significant competitive advantage for an organisation. However, Mullins (2008) contends organisational culture is a general concept that is difficult to define or explain precisely. This may have led to the several definitions given by different researchers. Armstrong & Taylor (2014) are of the view that organisational culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been articulated but shape the ways in which people behave and things get done. Values refer to what is believed to be important about how people and organisations behave. Norms are the unwritten rules of behaviour'. Organisational culture shapes the way employees perceive and react to jobs and influences employees' attitudes and behaviours at work (Mullins, 2008).

Additionally, Mullins (2008) offered a more embracing definition of organisational culture as the sum total of an organisation's past and current assumptions, experiences, philosophy, and values that hold it together and is expressed in its self-image, inner workings, interactions with the outside world, and future expectations. It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs and customs, express

or implied contracts, and written and unwritten rules that the organisation develops over time and that have worked well enough to be considered valid (Pinho et al., 2014). The recurring themes from the above definitions of organisational culture are that organisational culture is integrated, historically determined, related to anthropological concepts, socially constructed and difficult to change (Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017).

According to Handy (1983), Organisational culture can manifest in; (i) the ways the organisation conducts its business, treats its employees, customers, and the wider community, (ii) The extent to which autonomy and freedom are allowed in decision making, developing new ideas, and personal expression, (iii) How power and information flow through its hierarchy, and (iv) The strength of employee commitment towards collective objectives. Cameron and Quinn (2011) note that organisational culture can be measured by examining the different types of cultures types and their qualities. Researchers such as Quinn (1998); Mohelska and Sokolova (2015); Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko (2017), and Warrick (2017) have identified the four organisational cultures as; (a) power/hierarchy culture (b)Clan/group culture, (d) market/development and, (d) Adhocracy/ rational culture. As explained by Cameron and Quinn (2011), the diagram in Figure 3.1 shows the comparison between the organizational culture types by identifying the two main dimensions upon which the competing values framework of organisational climate/environment is based.

Figure 3.1 A Competing Values Framework of Organisational Environment
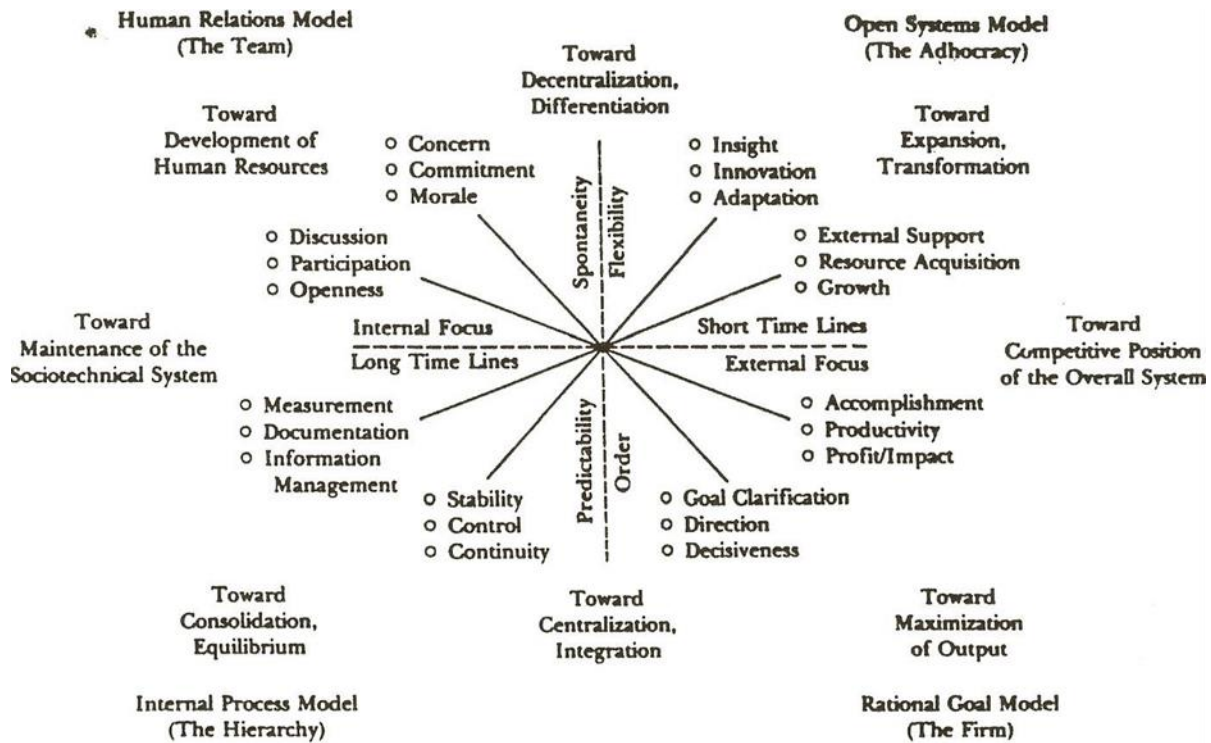
Source: Cameron and Quinn (2011)

The first axis reflects the competing demands of change and stability. One end of the axis represents an emphasis on flexibility and spontaneity, whereas the other represents a complementary focus on stability, control, and order. The second axis reflects the conflicting demands created by the internal organization and the external environment. One end of the axis represents a focus on integration and buffering to sustain the existing organization, while the other represents a focus on competition, adaptation, and interaction with the environment. From the juxtaposition of these two dimensions, four types of cultural orientations emerge: the team (i.e. group) culture, the firm (i.e. market) culture, adhocracy (i.e. rational) culture, and the hierarchy (i.e. power) culture. Each of the four types of cultural orientation represents one of the four major models, as shown in figure 3.1. Additionally, the types of organisational culture are explained in more detail below.

Hierarchy/power culture: the hierarchy culture which is also referred to as the power culture relies on internal orientation and is extensively focused on structure and standards, such that power is concentrated among a few (Nam and Kim, 2016). In power culture, the style of management needs to be bureaucratic and minimize the employee's creativity. Hence, control in the organization radiates from the centre like a web. Power and influence spread out from a central figure or group. Power desires from the top person and personal relationships with that individual matter more than any formal title of the position (Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko, 2017). It extremely values predictable and consistent procedures; thus, job description and specialisation are inherent (Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017). In this culture, the business environment tends to be well-coordinated as the management run the organisation by implementing rules and policies. Such that the defined the task of the employees clearly in order for them to meet the expectations of the firm. Hence, routine, specific formation, communication and consistency are valued by the power culture in order to influence the performance resulting from these values. According to Naidoo and Martins (2014), the organisational workplace characterised by power cultures is mostly concerned with stability and effective production. Thus, with power culture enhancing efficiency and effectiveness is the ultimate goal (Naidoo and Martins, 2014; Mohelska and Sokolova, 2015).

Team/Group culture: The group culture is also internally oriented and centred on collaboration among team members in the organisation and is also known as clan culture. The group culture can promote teamwork, enhance employee involvement, provide, and facilitate open communication between managers and employees (Pinho et al., 2014; Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko, 2017), empowerment, and loyalty (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). The team culture is mainly concerned with human relations and, it emphasises flexibility and maintains a primary focus on the internal organisation. The purpose of organisations with emphases on the group culture tends to be group maintenance (Cameroon and Quinn, 2011). Belonging, trust, and participation are core values, and primary motivational factors include attachment, cohesiveness, and membership. Camerron and Quinn (2011) note that with this culture, leaders tend to be participative, considerate, and supportive, and they facilitate interaction through teamwork. Effectiveness criteria include the development of human potential and member commitment (Mohelska and Sokolova, 2015). They also noted that group culture, as the name entails, involves the maintenance of the team/group. Furthermore, the development and participation of human resources within

organisations and market competitions are the focus of this culture than with hierarchy laws and regulations.

Firm /Market culture: is a task culture that allows organisation members to focus on realizing the set purpose and goals of the organisation. Teams are formed to solve particular problems, which helps the organisation create a high performance and high commitment workgroup. Power derives from expertise as long as a team requires expertise. These cultures often feature the multiple reporting lines of a matrix structure. Skills, competencies, and expert power form the core of this culture. Authority is based on knowledge and competence (Handy, 1983). *Adhocracy/ rational culture* promotes individuals as the central point in the organisation. It is a person-oriented culture low in formalisation and centralisation. There is a flat hierarchy. Authority is based on task competence. Individuals influence each other through example and helpfulness. In this culture, all individuals believe themselves superior to the organisation (Pinho et al., 2014). Survival can become difficult for such organisations since the concept of an organisation suggests that a group of like-minded individuals pursue the organisational goals. Some professional partnerships can operate as personal cultures because each partner brings particular expertise and clientele to the firm (Handy. 1983; and Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko, 2017).

Figure 3.2 A Summary of the Types of Organisational Culture

The Group Culture	The Rational Culture
A very friendly workplace where individuals share a lot. It's like a larger family. The organisation leaders or managers are regarded as mentors and, perhaps, parents. The organization is linked by loyalty or tradition. The commitment is strong. The organisation underlines the long-term advantage of the growth of human resources and attaches excellent significance to cohesion and morality. In terms of client sensitivity and concern for individuals, success is described. The organisation's teamwork, participation and consensus are of prime importance	A vibrant, entrepreneurial and innovative workplace. People are hanging out their necks and taking risks. Leaders are regarded as innovative and brave. A dedication to experimentation and innovation is the glue that holds the organisation together. The focus is on being at the forefront. The long-term focus of the organization is on development and raw resources acquisition. Success implies the acquisition of distinctive services or goods and new ones. It is essential to be a product or service manager. The organisation promotes initiative and liberty for the person
The Hierarchy Culture	The Market Culture

A highly official and organized workplace. What individuals do is regulated by procedures. The dictators are proud to be excellent, efficient coordinators and organizers. It is most important to maintain a smooth organisation. The organisation maintains formal laws and policies. Stability and efficiency with effective, smooth activities are the long-term issue. A reliable delivery, smooth scheduling and low price are described for success. Employee leadership is concerned with safe and predictable jobs.	An organisation that focuses on results. The biggest problem is to get the work done. Individuals are competitive and oriented towards their goals. The dictators are difficult drivers and manufacturers. It's hard and tough. The glue that holds the organisation together is a winning emphasis. Remembrance and achievement are shared issues. The long-term emphasis is on competitive measures, and measurable aims and objectives are achieved. Market share and penetration is described as success. It is essential for competitive pricing and market management. The style of the organization is competitive.

Source: Cameron and Quinn, 2011

Several researchers have confirmed the relationship between organisational culture and employee involvement or engagement. For instance, Krog (2014) asserts that in order to encourage employee voice, employers need to know which type of organisational culture is more helpful in building an atmosphere that encourages employee voice through engagement. Also, an organisational culture that fosters employee involvement and participation will request, welcome and exploit the verbal contribution of employees. Likewise, an environment that inspires employees to participate in decision making should be created by management. In order to benefit from the contribution of employees, a supportive, empowering culture must be created by the organisation (Pinho et al., 2014).

According to Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko (2017), the relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement can be explained from the social exchange theory (SET) perspective. According to the theory, social behaviour is the result of an exchange process. Thus, when employees perceive the culture of the organisation allows them to have a good relationship with other members within the organisation, where they have the needed support and power among others, they tend to give their all, be dedicated and work with vigour.

Using a cross-sectional study of employees in public accounting firms, Barkman et al. (1992) found the firms got their workers committed and engaged in their jobs, not because of the nature of attractive incentives given them but because their organisational culture was compatible with the employees' values. Allen (2010), in employing, Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Model,

established that organisations that develop cultures that are compatible with the values of their members are able to retain and engage a higher percentage of their key employees. Furthermore, in a study to measure the effect of power and authority on employee behaviour at work, he discovered that when the level of power and authority within these firms was high, lower-level employees usually felt intimidated by their superiors, and this resulted in too many tensions within the organisation., hence, the intention to stay was limited. Hagan (2004) did a qualitative study on training and employee commitment and found that after training, if the trained workers are not given the kind of support needed to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in relevant areas of the organisation, they may feel demotivated and consequently have a strong intention to quit the organisation. He established that, even if such employees decide to stay, it might probably be as a result of the lack of job opportunities in that market. As such, their commitment and engagement to the organisation would be a challenge (Krog, 2014).

Despite the fact that employee engagement is seen as a relatively new field, there are some studies that have been conducted to study the effect of organisational culture on employee engagement. In one such study on investigating the relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement using South Africa, Naidoo and Martins (2014) established that it is logical for an organisation to nurture a culture that is positive and one which ensures that employees feel and continue being engaged in their in work in order to sustain the workers in the organisation longer than those organisations that do not emphasise and promote employee engagement. Consistently, Krog (2014) carried out a multilevel study in 35 Norwegian organizations and found that culture affects individuals, and that clan culture and engagement are moderately related. Similarly, the market culture and the hierarchy culture did not show any major negative relationship with work engagement. However, in both studies quoted, their researchers did not completely establish the organizational culture that influences employee voice and what determines and manifest as voice or engagement.

Reis et al. (2016) carried out a study using attendees of graduate and postgraduate programs of a business school in Brazil and revealed that those environments that are seen to be more comprehensive and participative and that encourage autonomy (i.e. clan/group and adhocracy cultures) neither nurture nor inhibit realism. Cultures seen as having control, are orderly and emphasize stability (i.e. hierarchy and market cultures) are negatively related to authenticity, and

therefore, employees who behave more authentically at work are more engaged with their jobs. Also, in a study by Parent and Lovelace (2015), investigating the impact of employee engagement and a positive organisational culture, they found that individual adaptability to change can be enhanced through positive organisational culture. Furthermore, Krog (2014) established that organisations with a positive organisational culture also foster both job and organisational engagement in their employees and that employees with high levels of job engagement are less adaptable to change. Other researchers (e.g. Pinho et al., 2014; Mohelska and Sokolova, 2015; Warrick, 2017; Subbulakshmi, 2019; Maio et al., 2020) have highlighted the important role organisation culture plays in mediating employee voice and organisational commitment.

3.1.1.2 Organisational Structure

According to Mullins (2008), an organisational structure is the pattern of relationships among positions in the organization and among members of the organisation. Structure makes possible the application of the process of management and creates a framework of order and command through which the activities of the organisation can be planned, organised, directed, and controlled. According to May et al. (2004), supportive and trusting interpersonal relationships, as well as a supportive team, promote employee engagement. An open and supportive environment is essential for employees to feel safe in the workplace and engage totally with their responsibility. The structure defines tasks and responsibilities, work roles and relationships, and channels of communication. Birkinshaw (2001:75) asserts that 'structure is the basic lines of reporting and accountability that are typically drawn on an organisational chart. It is a way of dividing responsibilities among executives and must be supported by an appropriate system and consistent culture'. Likewise, Wu et al. (2015); Oladele and Akeke (2016) notes that clarifying job responsibilities to allow employees to work well together and equally manage overlaying duties and hand-offs among themselves is what effective implementation of organisational structure entails.

The origin of an effective organisational culture is not just from aligning with the business strategy but also from impacting the business and employees positively. Hence, it should flow with the organisational culture of the company (Funiminiyi, 2018). Also, highly skilled persons are attracted and accommodated by creating positions that will influence their best capabilities and

deliver growth and development in the organisation. In general, every organisation endeavours to be the leading competitor in whichever industry they operate (Wu et al., 2015). However, Funiminyi (2018) contends that the type of structure adopted by the organisation can impact on the engagement of the employees. Hence, for an organisation to attain competitive advantage, this fact should be examined, and productivity must be high, and if it is low may draw the business down the drain. Perrin (2003) suggests that the method of operations in any organisation, how they implement each change, provide job descriptions, and communicate throughout the workplace as well as their strategic visions are revealed by their structure. In studying the relationship of employees with the structure of the organisation, Maslow's theory of needs revealed that the main objectives are security and safety. Thus, it is certain that employees that perceive security and safety in their place of work may have a positive attitude towards management and the workplace structure if appropriately organized (Funminiyi, 2018).

Furthermore, each employees' reaction and participation are influenced through evaluating their views and difficulties and sorting them out from their working conditions. Therefore, the organisation can adopt a structure that aids in the workforce, displaying positive attitudes to work and being more efficient in their task. This leads to the achievement of all the organisation's goals and specific objectives (Funminiyi, 2018). Also, they claimed that although the best structure can be implemented by an organisation, managing such a structure is necessary because poor management has led to the failure of some of the best structures. This meaning that depending on the nature of the business of each organisation, all structures have benefits and disadvantages. Liebowitz (2008) described some of the problems relative to organisational structure as; all the links in the structure of an organisation can never be showed by their organisational culture, communicating with other various levels employees, disagreement in the departments and the demand of consumers becoming too excessive for some levels. Nevertheless, normally the structure of an organisation lays out the various reporting relationships, eliminates the "middleman" in the communication structure, and identifies the worker's actions and how they come together. The structure is among the few means organisations can organise and manage employees (Funminiyi, 2018).

Mullins (2008) described the dimensions of organisational structure as; *Centralisation* refers to the hierarchical level that has authority to make a decision. When decision making is kept

at the top level, the organization is centralized. When decision-making is delegated to lower organizational levels, it is decentralized. *Formalisation;* is the amount of written documentation in the organisation. These written documents describe behaviour and activities. *Standardisation;* is the extent to which similar work activities are performed in a uniform manner. The hierarchy of authority describes who reports to whom and the span of control for each manager. When spans of control are narrow, the hierarchy tends to be tall. When spans of control are wide, the hierarchy of authority will be shorter *Specialisation,* also known as division of labour, is the degree to which organizational tasks are subdivided into separate jobs. In high specialisation, employees perform only a narrow range of tasks. In low specialisation, employees perform a wide range of tasks (Mullins, 2008). Funminiyi (2018) noted that the structure of an organisation is the practical framework, aligning the planned goals of the firm with the human resources in the business approach and representing the culture of the organisation. The ability of the firm to attract, engage and retain workers are influenced by the structure of the workplace. Therefore, the priorities of the firm are defined and laid out by their structure, through designing positions with unskilled and skilled roles, signifying reporting relationships and establishing decision making as centralised or decentralised.

3.1.1.3. Leadership Style

Leadership style (behaviour) was another main basis identified as a fundamental factor influencing employee voice (Schneider et al., 2009; Miao et al.,2020). Effective leadership is a higher-order, multi-dimensional construct comprising self-awareness, balanced processing of information, relational transparency, and internalised moral standards (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Research studies by Wallace and Trinka (2009) show that engagement or participation occurs naturally when leaders are inspiring. Leaders are responsible for communicating that, the employees' efforts play a major role in overall business success. When employees work is considered important and meaningful, it leads obviously to their interest and engagement. Authentic and supportive leadership is theorised to impact employee participation of followers in the sense of increasing their involvement, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for work (Schneider et al., 2009). Leadership is a two-sided interaction between leaders and employees to achieve a common goal (Walumbwa et al., 2008). This engagement actuates leaders to influence their employees'

behaviour while simultaneously influencing their employees' perceptions. According to Borkowski et al. (2011), effective leadership defines the success of any organisation. Consequently, the view of Gary K. Hines states that "It is through dynamism and effective leadership that plays a vital role in the success of company's management (Gadot, 2007; Mittal, 2016; Northouse, 2018).

Leadership and management, although often intertwined, is a different concept. Leadership refers to people who have a visionary mindset and can be able to lead and influence others to become leaders in attaining the goals and objectives of the business**.** The supervisor's position with the firm is to impose their authority which is driven by respect and trust from their followers. This, in turn, aids the leader to achieve the goals, plans and purpose of the entire organisation with joint efforts between the supervisor and the subordinates (Gadot, 2007). Management, on the other hand, is focused on the functions of running the business and takes into major considerations such as authority, control and instruction. It includes the main functions such as planning, organizing, directing, controlling, budgeting, and decision making (Long et al., 2016). However, they are interconnected in the sense that managers get things done through other people by using appropriate leadership. To be ideal, leaders are using different leadership styles to determine which style best fits with the different situations to gain the best advantage (Mittal, 2016; Northouse, 2018).

According to Mittal (2016), leadership is generally considered as part and parcel of an organisation's existence regardless of the type of business organisation. Whether the business structure is sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation and other types, leadership plays an important role in managing and leading the human resources, facilities, budgets and other resources in an efficient and effective manner. More so, for employees who are considered the organisation's best assets and talents, effective leadership enable them to become highly productive and more satisfied with their jobs (Long et al., 2016). According to Gadot (2007), there are different styles of leadership, and it depends on the situations and circumstances of the organisation and what type it sees fit. It consists of autocratic, laissez-faire, and transformational leadership. Moreover, in small businesses, these leadership styles are often considered and are mainly contingent on the organisation's climate and culture (Dalluay & Jalagat, 2016).

According to Northhouse (2018), the leadership style that appears to promote the development of employee participation in the firm is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders provide an inspiring vision of goals that can help overcome self-interest and narrow factionalism in organizations. They summon new and broader energies among their subordinates. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008) found the level of employee's involvement increases in an organisation where employees had positive interactions with their managers. Additionally, Walumbwa et al. (2008) found organisational commitment and job satisfaction was increased as a result of the use of transformational leadership in the organisation. Also, Cartwright and Holmes (2006) found that employee involvement and engagement was high in firms where managers focused on relationship building and trust development. Transformational leaders are considered as mutual support and not as power figures for a common purpose that is the collective good of the company. Therefore, transformational leaders are not only able to handle the human and work needs of their employees but can potentially directly influence the levels of involvement/voice of their employees, a dividend of a very unique and empowering leadership style (Northhouse, 2018).

Furthermore, the consensus from several studies and researches suggest the common leadership styles that are currently practised by most organisations include but are not limited to the following: : (1) autocratic, (2) bureaucratic, (3) laissez-faire, (4) charismatic, (5) democratic, participative, (6) situational, (7) transactional, and (8) transformational (Franco & Matos, 2015; Dalluay & Jalagat, 2016). But Dalluay and Jalagat (2016) posit that the particular leadership style used depends on the conditions and situation of the business environment. Thus, more focus was given below to the leadership styles that are more relevant to SMEs, which was the context of this study. The different leadership styles are given more attention below.

Transactional leadership: This is a leadership style that focuses on the social interactions or transactions between leaders and followers. Transactional leaders conduct their business by identifying the needs of their followers and bestowing rewards satisfying these needs for certain appropriate performances (Arnold, 2005). The leader's freedom to act is constrained by the followers` perception of him or her. Followers will only show the demanded behaviours when they experience a certain authority and ability in the leader as well as contingencies in rewards (Bass. 1985). Transactional leaders motivate their subordinates by observing their performances, and reacting to errors and failures. They help their employees accomplish the goals of the firm by

defining roles, establishing goals, methods of evaluations, giving directions and setting timelines. As a rule, task-oriented leaders use a one-way communication method to clarify what needs to be done, who is responsible for doing it, and how it needs to be done. Task-oriented leaders coordinate, plan, and schedule work-related activities. They provide their employees with the necessary motivation, equipment, supplies, and technical assistance for completing the task (Northouse, 2018). Task-oriented behaviours include clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring individual performance and operations, and short-term planning (Yukl, 2009). Clarifying behaviours include assigning tasks, explaining job responsibilities, and setting performance expectations. Monitoring behaviours include inspecting the progress and quality of work. Planning behaviours include determining staffing requirements and how to fittingly use them to reach the goals and objectives of the organisation.

Transformational leadership: Leaders that fall under this category work to change or transform their followers` needs and redirect their thinking. They create a vision of what the corporate culture can be and communicate it to their subordinates, stimulating them to develop their abilities while accepting feedback and suggestions. Leader's challenge and inspire followers with a sense of purpose and excitement with what can be accomplished. Relations-oriented leaders are more concerned with developing close, interpersonal relationships (Yukl, 2006). They involve a two-way communication method to show social and emotional support while helping their employees feel comfortable about themselves, their co-workers, and their situations (Northouse 2018). They demonstrate an understanding of their employees' problems and help to develop their employees' careers. They provide their employees with enough information to do the job, allow individual autonomy in work and show appreciation. Transformational leaders are particularly effective as they engage in behaviours such as articulating a captivating vision for the future, acting as charismatic role models, fostering the acceptance of common goals, setting high-performance expectations and providing individualised support providing individualized support and intellectual stimulation for followers (Bass, 1885; Podsakoff et al.,1990).

Many studies show that these transformational leadership behaviours inspire high levels of performance in followers and hence, are relationship oriented (Podsakoff et al., 1990; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2005). Relations-oriented leadership behaviours include supporting behaviours, developing behaviours, and recognizing behaviours. Supporting behaviours include

showing acceptance, concern, and confidence for the needs and feelings of others (Yukl, 2008). Developing behaviours provide potential benefits to new, inexperienced supervisors, colleagues, peers, or subordinates. Recognizing behaviours show praise and appreciation to others for effective performances, significant achievements, and important contributions to the organisation (Dalluay and Jalagat, 2016). Overall transformational leadership can be referred to as relational and reciprocal because the leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower (Yukl, 2008).

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3.1.1.4 HRM Practices

Noe et al. (2018) described HRM as the policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behaviour, attitudes, and performance. HRM includes the practices of analysing and designing work, determining human resource needs, attracting potential employees, choosing employees, teaching employees how to perform their jobs, and preparing them for the future (training and development), rewarding employees (compensation), evaluating their performance (performance management), and creating a positive work environment (employee relations) (Noe et al., 2018). Organisational policies, procedures, structures and systems decide the extent to which employees are engaged in an organisation. It is evident from previous research those amiable organisational policies and procedures are extremely important for employee engagement and the eventual achievement of the business goals (Purcell, 2014; Parent & Lovelace, 2015). Important policies and procedures may include fair recruitment and selection, flexible-timing, aid in balancing work and life, and fair promotional policies. Studies (e.g. Schneider et al., 2009, Neo et al., 2018) show that the recruitment policy of an organisation has a direct impact on future employees' engagement and commitment. Richman et al. (2008) argue that an organisation's flexible work-life policies have a notable positive impact on employee engagement. Various other studies (Rama Devi, 2009; Wu et al., 2015; Lai et al., 2017) have emphasised the importance of organisational policies and procedures that best support flexible work arrangements that help in balancing employee work and home environments; organisations that have such arrangements are more likely to have employees that are participative in the decision-making.

Tocher and Rutherford (2009) describes human resource management practices (HRM) as a set of distinct but interrelated activities, functions and processes that are directed at attracting,

developing, and maintaining (or disposing of) a firm's human resources. Kaufman (2015) elucidate that HRM practices are primarily aimed at effectively managing people. They established a general process through which HRM practices impact the performance of a firm as follows: effective employee management practices lead to positive employee outcomes or behaviour, which then results in positive firm performance (both operational and/or financial). Msangi (2020) notes that because of the intricacy of their creation of values, HR could allow a possible means of sustainable competitive advantage. Also, copying an HR system by employing a few top managers from a competitor is difficult because comprehending their approach is an organizational capability that is not just spread across just a few people but many. Human Capital and the Resource-Based View of the firm formed the theoretical ground for researchers in the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) area over the past decades (Owoyemi et al., 2011).

Additionally, Noe et al. (2018) asserts that effective HRM has been shown to enhance company performance by contributing to employee and customer satisfaction, innovation, productivity, and development of a favourable reputation in the firm's community. A study by Fabling and Grimes (2007) showed that HRM practices positively affect a firm's performance. Many other studies by Khan (2010), (Owoyemi et al. (2011) and (Noe et al. (2018) have also established a positive relationship between HRM practices and firm performance. The human resource policy of the organisation can be broadly discussed under the following headings,

(i)Training and career development policy: Training and career development is another important dimension that is to be considered in the process of engaging employees since it helps the employees to concentrate on a focused work dimension. Training improves service accuracy and thereby impacts service performance and employee engagement (Paradise, 2008). Hence, human capital development refers to processes that relate to training, education and other professional initiatives directed to increase the levels of knowledge, skills, abilities, values, and social assets of an employee, which will lead to the employee's satisfaction and performance, and eventually to firm performance (Ogunyomi and Bruning 2016). It provides a framework for self-development, training programs and career progression to meet an organization's future skill requirements. When the employee undergoes training and learning development programmes, his/her confidence builds up in the area of training that motivates them to be more engaged in their job. Anitha (2014) even suggested that when an organisation offers employees a chance to grow, it is equivalent to

rewarding people. He emphasised that "satisfaction of growth needs depends on a person finding the opportunity to be what he or she is most fully and become what he or she can". The career path ladder through training and development needs to be given importance by management which will lead to timely opportunities for growth and development. This improves the level of engagement automatically.

Okpu and Jaja (2014) suggest that workers in Nigeria feel morally obliged to continue with the organization. This is as a result of the training given to them by management prior to joining the circle. Likewise, Ahiauzu & Asawo (2010) noted the members of the firm are persuaded to want to give back when they adopt the standards of the workplace through huge investments in T&D and other activities that enhance individual development and interpersonal bonding. Oladipo and Abdulkadir (2011) add that the reason for the need to reciprocate may be due to family, cultural or organizational orientation. Recognition of the investments made by the organization on employee's behalf causes them to feel an obligation to reciprocate by remaining committed to the organization or participating effectively. This is in line with (Anitha 2014) suggestion that normative commitment is based on social exchange theory which holds that when an individual receives a benefit, he feels morally obliged to repay it in some way. Previous studies like (Georgiadis and Pitelis 2012); (Oladipo &Abdulkadir 2011); (Omolo et al. 2013) and (Okpu & Jaja 2014) have revealed that training has an impact on productivity and joint employee/employer training.

(ii)Compensation policy: compensation is the financial and non-financial rewards in totality that the firm gives its employees in return for labour services provided to the firm (Nwoko, 2009), while the design and implementation of a payment system that ensures that an organization attracts, retains and maintains capable and willing employees needed to accomplish organizational goals and objectives is referred to as compensation management. Compensation or remuneration is an indispensable attribute to employee engagement that motivates an employee to achieve more and hence focus more on work and personal development (Anitha 2014). It involves both financial and non-financial rewards. Attractive compensation comprises a combination of pay, bonuses, other financial rewards as well as non-financial rewards like extra holiday and voucher schemes.

The objective of compensation management applies to all enterprises, both in SMEs and large enterprises, goals consistent with Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) predictions of

HRM practices are expected to be related to employee motivation. Reward systems should relate individual objectives with the organisational strategic goals (Fisher et al., 2008). In motivating workers through compensation management, the importance of job evaluation, analysis, description, specification, enlargement, enrichment and rotation should be emphasized (Ogunyomi and Bruning 2016). A study by Saks and Rotman (2006) revealed that recognition and rewards are significant antecedents of employee engagement. They noticed that when employees receive rewards and recognition from their organisation, they will feel obliged to respond with higher levels of engagement. Kahn (2010) observes that employee's level of engagement is a function of their perceptions of the benefits they receive. Therefore, irrespective of the quantity or type of reward, it is the employee perception of the same that determines their content and, thereby, one's engagement in the job. It becomes essential for management to present acceptable standards of remuneration and recognition for their employees if they wish to achieve a high level of involvement and participation.

(iii)Workplace wellbeing policy: Workplace wellbeing is a holistic measure that enhances employee voice and engagement. Gallup's data suggest that there is no metric that captures more variance in human behaviour than wellbeing. Wellbeing is defined as "all the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives" (Rath and Harter 2010), and therefore, wellbeing becomes the most important measure for gauging the influence organisation has on employees. The importance of wellbeing is further reinforced by Perrin (2003), who found that the most important driver of engagement was senior management's interest in employee wellbeing. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) emphasised the importance of organizational health and safety (OHS) and how it is an important HRM issue since sometimes employees depending on the nature of their jobs, are exposed to the risk of health impairments or injuries in the work environment. The presence or absence of these hazards largely determines 'the use of being well or ill' within the workplace. Assessing the contributions of OHS in the literature is rare. This may be due to the rare recognition that OHS is a contributory factor to the economic viability of an organisation; alternatively, the focus is usually on compliance with government guidelines, regulations and laws.

According to Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016), there is a need to continuously highlight the economic benefits of good OHS to organisations especially SMEs. Otherwise, effective interventions aimed at preventing disease and injury may not be achieved. Also, although safety

is costly, the cost of unsafety cannot be bypassed. Akpan (2011) noted that 'management policy, especially in the developing economies, is yet to properly address the issue of employee health and safety. For instance, a reduction of accidents, damage and improvements to poor health can lead to a reduction in costs and greater availability of employees, which, in turn, can improve efficiency and the effectiveness of the firm (Ogunyomi & Bruning 2016).

3.2 Contextualizing the Factors Influencing Direct Employee Voice in SMEs

In this section, the micro-organisational factors influencing direct employee voice are put into the SMEs context. As noted above, employee voice channels in smaller firms are usually direct based on their size and number of employees (Sameer and Ozbilgin, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Figure 3.3 depicts the proposed framework of the micro-organisational factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs.

Figure 3.3 A framework of the micro- organisational factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms.

Micro-organisational factors influencing direct employee voice mechanisms

- **Organisational culture**
- **Organisational structure**
- **Leadership style**
- **HRM practices**

Quality of voice mechanisms

(Scope, depth, level)

- Information sharing
- Communication and consultation
- Codetermination and
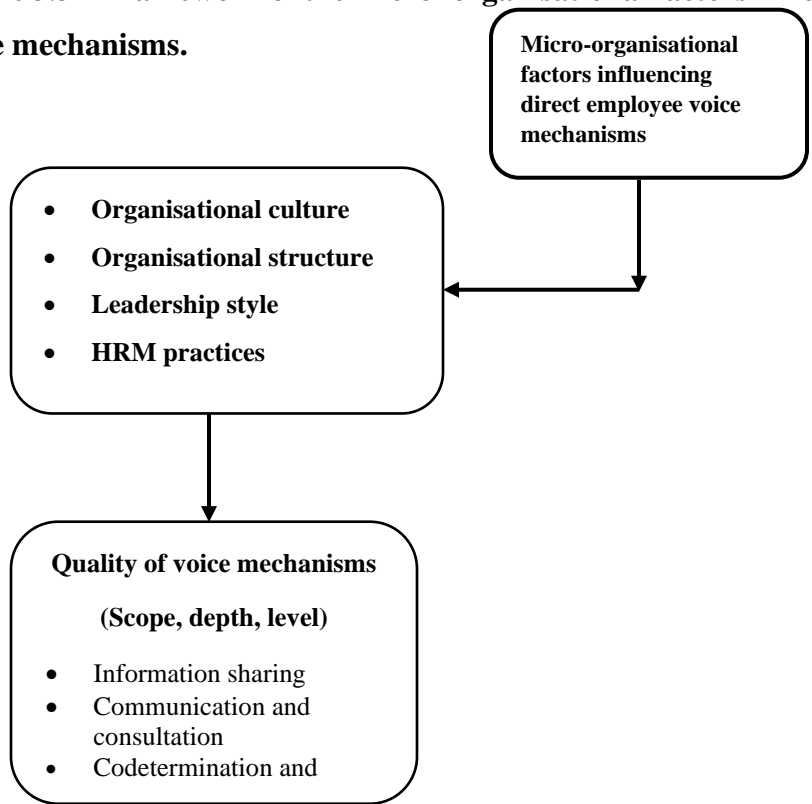
The contribution of the work environment and organisational climate builds on one of the most promising explanations about change and improvement in organisational performance. According to Schneider (2009), the organisational climate is a social structure that can either promote the performance or impede it and thus may be considered a buffer between individual skills and motivation and various work outcomes. Current research has suggested that climate perceptions are associated with a variety of important outcomes at the individual, group, and organisational levels. These include leader behaviour, job satisfaction and organisational performance (Parker et al. 2003; Patterson et al., 2004; Pyman et al., 2010). Several authors such as Patterson et al. (2005), Marchington (2015), Madhukar & Sharma (2017) noted that organisational climate mediates the relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance. In conclusion, Gelade and Ivery (2003) assert that a positive business environment is fostered by progressive HRM practices, which intensifies the wellbeing and motivation of employees. Parker et al. (2003) identified relationships between employees' perceptions of their work environment and outcomes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational citizenship behaviour and job performance. HRM systems can influence employee attitudes and behaviour, as well as organisational outcomes, through employee interpretation of the work climate (Ericksen and Dyer, 2005; Msangi, 2020).

Schneider et al. (2009) conducted a study on the antecedents of service climate and concentrated on leadership focused on leadership that connects a commitment to high levels of service quality. They hypothesised that service leadership is "a proximal antecedent of service climate, that in turn influence customer-focused organisational citizenship behaviour which impacts on customer satisfaction. Gelade and Ivery research (2003) revealed a significant relationship between organisational climate and firm performance, and their findings revealed that general climate correlates positively with measures such as sales against a target, staff retention, clerical accuracy, customer satisfaction, and overall performance. This means that positive perceptions organisational workplace can be related to increasing the involvement of the workforce in decision making. Applebaum and Kamal (2000) considered SMEs to be more likely to survive and sustain a competitive advantage over larger firms by increasing employee satisfaction, which in turn minimizes personnel turnover, absenteeism and lost productivity costs. According to Amankwah-Amoah and Debrah (2011) human capital has become the bedrock on which firms can build to gain competitive advantage. Research by Hornsby and Kuratko (2003)

has also revealed that a well-motivated, highly skilled workforce can be a determinant of an organisations' ability to remain competitive in the present business environment. Karami et al. (2008) also opine in their research that the HR capability of a firm is a considerable resource that determines the competitive advantage of the firm. Khan (2010) concluded that the adoption of HRM programs or departments in SMEs could be considered as a key element in increasing competitive advantage. The way in which human capital is managed is an important source of sustained competitive advantage for businesses operating in dynamics and complex, competitive environments (Karami, 2008). According to Khan (2010), for a business to be successful, it needs to imbibe seven HRM practices which are; selective hiring, extensive employee training, decentralized work arrangements, employment security, performance-based pay, reduced status differentials, and information sharing.

King- Kauanui et al. (2006), in their study on HRM in SMEs in Vietnam, concluded that support was found for the importance of training, performance appraisal systems and incentive compensation on the overall performance of SMEs. These results complement the results of many studies in Western countries and also indicate that firms' performance in these areas can best be explained by HRM best practices. Behrends (2007) concludes that the availability of human resources constitutes an important factor for sustainable organizational success, which constitute growth and competitive ability. Behrends (2007) further noted that because of comparatively lesser endowment with material or financial resources, SMEs are often inevitably dependent on highly committed, well-motivated and qualified employees. Or in other words, investments in human resources are expected to lead to significant differences between SMEs' performance and their competitive advantages as per the Resource-Based View (RBV). RBV predictions need to be extended to both SMEs and firms operating in developing nations such as Nigeria. SMEs cannot do not have the capacity and slack to retain employees and practices that do not contribute to performance, cannot afford to underutilize their workforce, and must rely on staff for learning, innovation, and creativity (Rohlfer, 2018).

According to Georgiadis and Pitelis (2012), who investigated the relationship between human resources and business performance in service using SMEs, their results suggest that high-performing SMEs in the Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure (THL) sector are managed by more experienced entrepreneurs. Additionally, they also found that more profitable SMEs combine a

highly skilled workforce with technological and know-how-based firm differentiation strategies and/or product differentiation strategies, based on the quality of service and personal attention to customers, alongside generous compensation and attention to employee development. In addition, Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) studied the relationship between HRM practices and organisational non-financial and financial in SMEs operating in Nigeria and their findings which was similar to that of Georgiadis and Pitelis (2012), revealed that there is a positive relationship. This means that paying more attention to employee development, among other factors, is correlated with their performance in SMEs. Hence, indicating that employers should be committed to the health and welfare of their employees, that is their health and safety as well as their future opportunities.

Utilising organisation culture and employee participation directly (Kpakol et al., 2016) findings demonstrates that employee participation enhances a sense of unity, affinity, and togetherness. When employees are involved in a process, they will come to view such a process as theirs, therefore ensuring the success or achievement of that goal. When values are shared, and membership mechanisms are put in place, the worker will feel responsible for outcomes, and this will encourage productivity and initiative. As discerned by Marchington (2015), employees function due to the firms internalised values and from forced or external control. This will enable management to focus on more important matters such as planning, as most of the workers can be trusted with less supervision. Consistently, Danjuma and Teru (2017), in exploring employee participation in Accounting Services Outsourcing (ASO) in SMEs, revealed that ASO decision is affected by cost-driven, strategy-driven, environment-driven and function-driven factors, which all are linked with employee attitude and behaviour to work. Therefore, the study concludes that employee participation has a positive influence over sourcing decisions by Nigeria's SMEs. It also confirmed that communication, vendor expertise and trustworthiness are drivers of sourcing decisions by these enterprises.

Gilman et al. (2015), in exploration on the nature of employee voice in SMEs, revealed that voice and wider HR practices are not stable and would change over time in reaction to specific performance challenges encountered by the firm. Similarly, Psychogios et al. (2016) conducted a study on the structural and organisational factors affecting the formality of (HRM) practices in (SMEs) and revealed that through a threefold framework which includes: degree of internationalisation of SMEs, sector of SMEs, and organisational size of SMEs, HRM in SMEs in

the SEE region can be understood. Also, those factors influenced the level of HRM formalisation positively in SEE SMEs. However, their finding was a result of the particular political and economic context of the post-communist Southeastern European region, which they employed in their study. Furthermore, Philip and Arrowsmith (2020) explored the process and outcomes of employee participation in smaller non-profit firms, and their findings revealed that staff recruitment and performance management, which are basic HR practices, were lacking. This led to poor management, inconsistent training, staff burnout, high labour turnover and sub-optimal performance. Therefore, the absence of a dedicated HR function and the weakness of the organisational structure (i.e. managerial coordination) undermined effective people management. Robust forms of employee participation fail to deliver anticipated equity and efficiency outcomes under such circumstances (Philip and Arrowsmith, 2020). Other related conceptual studies (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2011; Barry &Wilkinson, 2016; Holland et al., 2017; Prouska et al., 2021) have explored the organisational behaviour concept of voice.

3.3 Importance of understanding the factors influencing direct voice in SMEs.

Although SMEs are assumed to be operating in a local environment traditionally, SMEs have been exposed to similar international forces of competition that large firms face due to the modern-day advancement in information and communication technologies (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013). According to Uchehara (2017), SMEs are not protected from such competitive pressures. Hence, adapting to both local and global pressures is a necessary strategy for their survival and growth. Such that SMEs will contribute significantly to economic development (Msangi, 2020).

Rohlfer (2018) argues that there is a relationship between participation in the workplace (i.e. SMEs) and their potential to develop and add to the development of an economy. According to Lee and Xin (2015), economic development can be stimulated more by the proliferation in the size of SMEs compared to the sheer increase in their numbers. Oladele and Akeke (2016) contend that the priorities of the managers affect the disposal of these SMEs to refine programs that may boost their workplace performance and business growth. Hence, understanding how organisational factors such as culture, structure and leadership style influences the activities of SMEs is important for their performance and growth (Gilman et al. 2015; Jogaratnam, 2017; Della et al. 2021). Despite their size, which makes their culture different from large, for instance, their low level of

leadership. Most SMEs have powerful market orientation, thus rationalising the close link between them and their consumers (Sameer & Özbilgin, 2014; Rohlfer, 2018; Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020).

Evidence from the literature suggests that the organisational culture and leadership style impacts the involvement of employees in the workplace (Ogunyemi and Bruning, 2016; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018; Kwon &Ferndale, 2020). Specifically in SMEs where there is a close social relationship between management and employees (Mallett and Wapshott, 2017). Therefore, SMEs managers need to understand how their organisational practices (i.e. culture, leadership behaviours) influence the contribution of the employee in the workplace and the impact of these factors/practices on employee voice in SMEs, which is usually more direct because of their size that is structure (Mowbray et al. 2015; Barry and Willkinson 2016; Mallet & Whapshott, 2017). According to Reis et al. (2016); Subbulakshmi (2019), the culture in the workplace significantly influences communication in the workplace such that it may either prevent or enable the involvement of employees in the organisation. In developing countries like Nigeria, small business encounters many operation issues because the majority of them are family own firms structured as sole proprietorships. Hence, the owners and management are usually at the helm of affairs as regards operation decisions (Ogunyemi & Bruning, 2016; Danjuma & Teru, 2017). Also, Okpu & Kpakol (2018) notes that where management lacks basic managerial skills, qualities, and culture to run the affairs of the business, communication may be hampered. This also may affect the employee-employer relationship in the organisation (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017).

However, Kwon and Farndale (2020) argue that sharing of information, ideas, experiences, and grievances can be productively encouraged or impeded by organisational culture. For instance, an open/group culture promotes the involvement of all group members in the organisation process, is beneficial to the activity and initiative of employees (Jogaratnam, 2017). Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko, (2017) argue that a power culture that is characterised by strong control may not encourage employee participation. Organisational cultures impact on the involvement of employees because culture aims at initiating and creating suitable conditions for the effective flow of information and communication in the workplace through flexibility, rapidly adapting to changing conditions with distinctive solutions and dynamisms (Jogaratnam, 2017; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018; Nechanska, 2020).

An organisational environment that supports and encourages every employee to seek and find standard and uncommon methods of achieving tasks and the firm's objectives is key to the development of employee participation in an organisation (Marchington, 2015). Similarly, Rolfer (2018) implied that participation does not only provide an employee with greater responsibilities but also increased motivation at the workplace. That is, such employees are allowed freedom and are not rigid in executing orders from management. However, Okpu and Kpakol (2018) note that moulding an environment that provides a feeling of security or without fear of disproval or idea theft by colleagues is necessary. As well as incorporating a fair system of incentives acknowledging the efforts of employees and rewarding them for active and resourceful participation to the organisation process and tolerating solutions or ideas and mistakes that are impractical (Leitão et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Kwon and Farndale (2020) assert that effective participation in the organisation involves information flowing efficiently such that the rationale for and advantages of changes are understood by all parties involved. Also, it is necessary for effectively implementing the changes. Miao et al. (2020) and Townsend & Mowbray (2020) argue that the organisation's managers behaviours are also important because they handle the ideas and initiatives presented by their subordinates, either by giving consent, rejecting and exploring them. Also, Funimiyi (2018) noted that extensive control structures, which are normally characterised by extreme formalisation and bureaucracy of procedures, are not encouraging to employee voice in the workplace because it hinders the participation of employees and slows down the process of decision making (Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018; Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020).

Researchers have identified several factors that influence employee participation and hence the functioning of SMEs. Some of these factors include technological factors (Eniola, 2014), economic factors (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018), access to financial resources (OECD, 2017), political factors and human resource management factors. However, according to Msangi (2020), the HRM factor plays a significant role in the growth and development of any business and hence, an economy (Lawal et al., 2020; Opute, 2020), managerial skills and experience (Funimiyi, 2018), and leadership style (Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Miao et al., 2020). Also, there is the argument for researchers to look beyond the HRM factors that are internal organisational factors that influence participation in SMEs. Kpakol et al. (2016) argued that such organisational factors like the culture

of the organisation and HRM practices are significant factors that can impact employee involvement and performance in SMEs. As a result of their size, such factors are within the direct control of the organisation. Equally, the behaviour of the firm's managers is an influencing factor on employee involvement and performance in their firm (Kpakol et al. 2016; Long et al. 2016; Leitão et al., 2019; Msangi, 2020).

The majority of the current literature on factors influencing employee voice has focused on large firms leaving the area of SMEs relatively under-researched (Gilman et al. 2015; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018; Prouska et al. 2021). This is because, as revealed by some researchers, SMEs are viewed as scaled-down versions of large firms (Long et al., 2016; Danjuma & Teru, 2017; Lawal et al., 2020). This argument has been challenged in the literature as there are underlying characteristics of SMEs that justify the need for them to be examined as distinct organizations when compared to large firms (Yusuf & Dansu, 2013). SMEs typically have different organisational orientations compared to large firms (Long et al. 2016 and Lawal et al., 2020). This makes it imperative for more research on the various organizational factors that influence the quality of voice mechanism and sustainability of SMEs, including the critical issue of HRM (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020; Miao et al., 2020).

3.4 Summary

Chapter 3 examined the literature on the key concepts of the thesis, which are the forms of direct voice mechanisms and the factors that influence these voice mechanisms in SMEs, which is usually direct and can be done through formal and informal mechanisms. Direct voice mechanisms are more popular in SMEs because they do not have unions. Also, SMEs lack a formal HR department because of their size. Furthermore, these direct voice mechanisms can be influenced by external and internal factors. The internal factors were the focus of this thesis. Hence, the type of culture, structure, leadership, and even the HR practices are the internal factors that impact on the direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs and the sustainability/survival of the organisation. Evidence from the studies suggests that specific culture, structure, leadership, and HR strategy have a different magnitude of impact on the employee voice in SMEs. And this impact has both cultural and organisational contexts. That is employee participation in the organisation and the

survival of SMEs. The next chapter will explore the importance of SMEs to an economy the characteristics of SMEs in the Nigeria economy, which is the situational context of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF SMES

4. 0 Introduction

This chapter underscores the relevance and importance of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sub-sector to any nation. It also explores the characteristics and challenges of Nigerian SMEs, specifically looking at how the prospects and problems of SMEs have defined their contribution to the Nigerian economy. In this study, the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs is investigated, using Nigeria as a case study. Hence, it was important to provide a general description and examination of the SMEs in the Nigerian economy.

4.1 Importance of SMEs in an Economy

SMEs are very well known as drivers of growth and development in any economy, irrespective of whether the economy is grown or growing (Eniola, 2014; Opute, 2020; Lawal at al., 2020). The significance of SMEs in economies globally is very significant in creating a community that may be unaffected by poverty because not only do they assure the flow of money across different levels of the nation, but they also provide sufficient opportunities for jobs to the various levels of the society. In the EU, SMEs account for 99% of their businesses such that they supply two-thirds of the jobs in the private sector; also, over half of the entire value created by such businesses are from the SMEs. Thus, they play a vital part in economic and European growth, making over 60% of the EU GDP (Edward et al., 2010; Katua, 2014; Bell, 2015). Also, the process of innovation is influenced by the primary role SMEs play, hence, constituting a curial component for a knowledge-based economy (Lawal et al., 2020).

Several action programs are being implemented at the European and state level to bankroll SMEs in increasing their competitiveness through research and innovations as well as enhancing them to finance. Likewise, in Africa, SMEs engenders growth and development. For instance, in Nigeria, SMEs make up about 70% of the manufacturing sector; in Ghana, it is approximated that SMEs make up 70% of their GDP and 92% of their businesses, and in South Africa, 91% of formalised businesses are SMEs (OECD, 2019). Though in Nigeria, which is the known giant of Africa with an estimated population of 41.5million SMEs, representing over 96% of the total number of firms in Nigeria, with nearly 90% of them operating in the manufacturing sector and employing over 84% of the population. But the contribution of her SMEs to the GDP is relatively

low (NBS, 2018). Lawal et al. (2020) assert that the support SMEs provide could greatly improve the standard of living of the community and the economy of Nigeria and the entire African continent.

Additionally, in economies like Asia (i.e. Korea, Taiwan and Japan), the growth of their economy is directly proportional to their increase in SME operations. Similarly, the rapid industrialisation and development of China are as a result of the important role SMEs represent, which is around 99% of the total business ventures are SMEs, and as a whole, these SMEs produce about 60% of the total industrial output; and around 40% of the total profits and taxes realised by the different businesses in China (Bell, 2015). Furthermore, in the United States, over half of their GDP is generated through different SMEs. Through adapting and innovating in relation to changing situations, SMEs serve as a shield in case of recession and the different levels of poverty, hunger, the population's standard of living is linked to the different SMEs in the country. Basically, virtually in all countries, SMEs make up a large proportion of every industry, and in most economies that are developing or developed, the rate of employment is improved by around 90% of SME businesses (OECD, 2019). For instance, SMEs actually keeps developing and creating more jobs when large businesses downsize and reduce jobs.

4.2 Definition of SMEs

In general, SMEs are classified by the number of staff employed, sales turnover, and working capital. Hence, the total number of employees and worth of assets classifies and SME. According to Omolo et al. (2013), there is no definition of SMEs that is generally acceptable. This is because in terms of capital outlay, number of employees, sales turnover and level of development, there is no uniform criteria to measure them (Yusuf and Dansu 2013). Therefore, the definition of SMEs varies from country to country, industry to Industry and institution to institution. Various countries have varying criteria for classification. For instance, firms with less than 500 employees are categorised as SMEs in Canada. In Germany, the highest limit is 250 employees, in New Zealand, it is 19 employees, while in the EU the upper limit is 50 employees for small and 250 employees for medium sized firms, in the United Kingdom, the number of employees in an SME should not be greater than 50 also, their turnover should not be higher than £5.6 million (Rohfler, 2018).

However, according to Lawal (2020), in Nigeria, SMEs have been defined by different institutions such as the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Federal Ministry of Industry (FMOI), the National Association for Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME) and the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS). However, for this study Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) definition will be used. Hence, a business was defined as small in any sector if it employs fewer than 100 employees with an annual turnover of about 130 thousand pounds and as medium sized if it employs fewer than two hundred employees with an annual turnover of about one million pounds (SMEDAN, 2016). As aforementioned, the role played by SMEs in economic development and job creation is very important. Hence, they are often debated by different scholars and government agencies. Globally, SMEs are faced with common problems. But what varies in each economy is the comprehension of the different ways in which SMEs help in promoting economic development in the country.

4.3 The Contribution of SMEs to Employment Growth and Job Creation

The role SMEs play in job creation is very important to all the world economy, through contributing to their employment conditions as well as input and outputs. According to (OECD, 2019) over the next fifteen years, around six hundred million jobs will be needed worldwide. Generally, in growing markets majority of the formal jobs that are obtainable are generated by the SMEs; that is, out of five jobs available in the market, four are created by SMEs. Even with playing an important part in economic development, approximately 50% of SMEs have been noted to lack access to finance or capital investment. Irrespective of the situation, in developing countries, about 33% of the national income and 45% of the overall employment is generated by the formal SMEs, asides from the informal SMEs, which when included in the list, the numbers rise even greater (Bell, 2015).

Barriers/drawbacks of SMEs: Although SMEs generate massive employment, sometimes, they usually do not last because before they cross the five-year threshold, a relative of them die out, resulting in further unemployment (Mohammed and Obelegu-Nzelible, 2014; Bell, 2015; Roman et al., 2016). The astounding rate of liquidation in SMEs have been criticised in the past, and this is because when the goods or services provided by SMEs do not sell, they quickly go out

of business. Additionally, Katua (2014) notes that sometimes SMEs storm the market with low-quality goods and services just so that they can be in business and survive, although such goods cannot survive the competition even though they displace the real product temporarily. This not only ruins the value of the SME's potential but also totally destroys the image of the brand (Muritala et al., 2012). To thrive, SMEs depend on innovation. But uncertainty and confusion may arise due to the consistent pressure to innovate and create new alternatives. However, the leading alternative for SMEs to thrive remains innovation. Also, a supportive and encouraging environment is required for survival (Eniola, 2014; Lawal et al., 2020). For instance, the creation and development of SMEs are restricted by political instability and rigorous rules/regulations laid down by the government, as well as issues of taxation and government not applying pressure into devising friendly entrepreneur policies. Another big problem for SMEs is finding employees that are appropriate for a specific job. For instance, experienced individuals are either do not want to take the risk of working for a small business or are very expensive for SMEs to afford (Muritala et al., 2012). Apart from the above mentioned, there are several more drawbacks. Therefore, SMEs have both strengths and weaknesses. Katua (2014) asserts that government can foster entrepreneurship by addressing some of the aforementioned drawbacks or weaknesses. For instance, prospective entrepreneurs are encouraged to dive and generate value for themselves and eventually the community where liberal policies are in place. In the long run, an increase in income and overall GDP is provided by SMEs (Lawal et al., 2020). SMEs will not only generate more employment, where the business environment is favourable and supportive to new businesses but also provide different options of goods and services for the consumer to decide (Mohammed and Obelegu-Nzelible, 2014; Lawal et al., 2020).

4.4 Characteristics of SMEs in Nigeria

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are considered to contribute enormously to economic growth and development (Olowe et al., 2013; Lawal et al., 2020). This contribution is significant for both the growth and development of an economy in terms of its overall economic development and the creation of employment. Therefore, SMEs are not just getting the attention of the private sector but also that of the policymakers who are in charge of the overall economic development, such as the government and other corresponding organisations (Katua, 2014). In attaining equitable and sustainable industrial diversification and dispersal, SMEs are recognised

as a primary means (Olowe et al., 2013). Affirmatively, Ofoegbu et al. (2013) state that the issue of slow economic development in developing countries such as Nigeria can be solved by SMEs. Therefore, more jobs can be created, and the standard of living increased by directing increased attention to the SMEs. Also, SMEs provide a fertile ground for growth and acquiring skills through the production of goods and services (Mohammed and Obelegu-Nzelible, 2014; Lawal et al., 2020). Additionally, in terms of technological innovation and development, SMEs serve as a medium for backward integration, specifically in modifying and perfecting emerging technological discoveries. OECD (2017) asserts that despite the significance attached to SMEs, not to mention their influence on economic growth, their performance in Nigeria has not been very impressive in comparison to SMEs in other developing economies. Affirmatively, Olowe et al. (2013) noted that the impact of SMEs had not been felt by the Nigerian economy. The majority of the SMEs in Nigeria do not reach the growth stage of their life cycle. According to Lai et al. (2017) and Olanrewaju and Ismaila (2020), beginning from her independence, the Nigerian government has put in a lot of money into this sector in order to stimulate the development of these entrepreneurial and small business projects, but the results from the performance of these projects have been below expectations. In the sense that, majority of the returns on these projects has not been as expected though the country is endowed with human labour, raw materials and natural resources. Development in the manufacturing sector which could have boosted the production of value creation products, thus reducing imports, increasing exports and employment, has shown low progress. The Manufacturing sector in Nigeria is relevant and has potential for economic growth. It has been a focal sub-sector being that it represents about 90% of the SMEs in Nigeria. Although the manufacturing sector in Nigeria has shown strong growth in recent years with steady increases of 6.55% in 2010, 7.79% in 2011 and 2012, 9.03% in 2013, 9.09% in 2014, 10.17% in 2015, the potential of this sector has not been extensively utilised (NBS, 2018).

In Nigeria, Abdullahi and Sulaiman (2015), Roman et al. (2016), Uchehara (2017) characterised SMEs as follows: (a) "The same manager or proprietor finds it difficult to raise short or long-term capital from the organized capital market, instead relies on personal savings or loans from friends, relatives or money lenders. (b) The same manager/proprietor handles/supervises the production, financing, marketing and personnel functions of the enterprise. (c) The manager/proprietor's vision is confined to the local community in which he carries on his line of business. There is little or no knowledge of the wider or distant markets. (d) The rate of business

mortality is high probably because of strong mutual distrust and dominance of the sole proprietor, which militates against the formation of partnerships or limited liability companies. (e) The enterprise is generally poorly equipped as the small-scale industrialist feels reluctant to accept outside help owing to prejudice or fear that information about the enterprise might reach the tax authorities or a nearby competitor. (f) Little or no account of business costs or revenue is kept, and the banking system is hardly utilized. The result is that banking facilities for business financing and expansion are extended to only a very few industrialists. (g) The level of education of the proprietor is usually very low with a consequent low level of business management technique, skill or market information." The above features of the small-scale enterprises in Nigeria succinctly point to the necessity for a more entrepreneurial approach to the management of these enterprises (Roman et al.,2016). Irrespective of these characteristics of Nigeria SMEs, they still remain very much significant such that anticipated to do the following: provide the avenue for the birth and growth of indigenous entrepreneurs, serve as a conduit for the mobilization of savings into the real sector of the economy, being labour-intensive, provide jobs for the unemployed, accentuate the even and balanced development of the nation, among others (Eniola, 2014; Rohlfer, 2018; Lawal et al., 2020).

4.5 Factors of Nigerian culture that stimulate the productivity of SMEs.

Several SMEs encounter a lot of barriers, as mentioned above, particularly in underdeveloped or developing economies. Despite the lofty objectives of policies and practitioners, the results from SME programs and policies are often disappointing, and the potential contributions that vigorous small-scale industries could make to development programs are not realized (Yusuf and Dansu, 2013). In Nigeria, Ifekwem and Ademola (2016) identified these challenges to include (a) Poor utility services, (b) Poor managerial and technical skills development, (c) manufacturing poor quality products and services, (d)lack of financial assistance as well as access from the government. Among all the other factors, finance is perceived as the most problematic for the majority of SMEs (Olanrewaju and Ismaila, 2020).

In Nigeria, as well as in other developing economies, several measures are being put in place to ameliorate these challenges of the SMEs. For instance, specialised/managerial training provision of substantial facilities, availability of credit facilities (establishment of various financial

institutions), creation of industrial estates, and business incubators and many other developmental plans (Yusuf and Dansu, 2013). Lawal et al. (2020) assert that constant growth and development in SMEs is attainable if the government ensures legitimately that a support plan is implemented which carefully unites access to resources with entrepreneurial, technological and managerial capabilities as well as market opportunities that are legitimate. The Entrepreneur is a significant phenomenon at ensuring improved productivity and hence increased performance of the SMEs in Nigeria, particularly because they operate in a highly turbulent environment with various handicaps, especially in finance. The achievement of increased efficiency in production is important to any business organisation. It is attainable through innovative entrepreneurship, which breeds distinctive competencies difficulty-to-imitate.

Lawal et al. (2020) note that one of the biggest challenges to SMEs is the role of management, which entails creating efficiency from labour and resources, and hence, increase growth and performance. In businesses in Nigeria, precisely SMEs, industrial ability employment is very most especially in the manufacturing sector (Eniola, 2014). In Nigeria's manufacturing sector, SMEs makes up 70% to 90% of the firms (Ofoegbu et al., 2013; Eniola, 2014). SMEs provide over 90% of employment opportunities available in the manufacturing sector and account for about 70 % of aggregate employment created per annum. Moreover, with the potentials of SMEs to serve as a bedrock for entrepreneurial skills development, even distribution of income, wealth creation, employment generation, and sustainable economic development. SMEs in Nigeria have seen that the creativity and ingenuity of entrepreneurs in the utilization of the abundant non-oil, natural resources of this nation will provide a sustainable platform and springboard for industrial development and economic growth as is the case in the industrialised and economically developed societies (Olowe et al., 2013; Obokoh, & Goldman, 2016; Olanrewaju & Ismaila, 2020).

4.6 Employee voice and HRM in Nigerian SMEs

According to Yusuf and Dansu (2013) and Uchehara (2017), several attempts has been made by the Nigerian government to set up a practical and thriving small-scale industrial climate. Consequently, it was revealed by Lawal et al. (2020) that so far, the efforts made has produced little impact because their main focus was on the provision of capital to SMEs. Rather than on the organisational culture of SMEs and also completely neglecting plans (i.e. programs) to identify

the influence of individuality of the SME on her growth and survival and also motivating employees and entrepreneurs towards promoting their involvement in the workplace and boosting the progress of such organisations (Oladele & Akeke, 2016). However, Ifekwem and Ademola (2016); Olanrewaju and Ismaila (2020) maintained that industrial actions in developing countries have, over the years, greatly hampered performance and productivity, and this has not helped in accelerating expected socio-economic development. This issue has become a nuisance to the public sector in many African countries. Therefore, this has made it difficult for governments to implement sterling policies and programmes to encourage entrepreneurs to start-up SMEs, which fosters development and consequently raise the standard of living of the citizens. This, in turn, has affected the private sector (Nwoko, 2009; Rabie et al., 2016; Lawal et al., 2020).

Since Nigerian SMEs operate within a difficult economic environment, exploring survival approaches is imperative for SME owner-managers that will promote sustainability of the workplace (Ifekwem & Ademola, 2016).   Several reasons have been presented by researchers to explain the experience/challenges of Nigerian SMEs. Although some of such challenges arise from the inefficiency of public institutions, government policies and essential infrastructure (Obokoh &Goldman, 2016), others are due to organisational drawbacks of SME firms in Nigeria like risk management (Yusuf and Dansu, 2013), poor human resource management, inadequate managerial skills (Roman et al., 2016, Ogunyomi &Bruning, 2016), and the reality of information lacuna on the impact of organisational factors(i.e. structure and leadership styles) for workplace sustainability in SMEs.

Furthermore, exploring the characteristics of SMEs in Nigeria has shown that they face many operational issues/risks, which stems from the fact that most SMEs are family businesses structured as sole proprietorships (Ogunyomi &Bruning, 2016; OECD, 2017). Managerial decisions in the workplace are mostly carried out by the owners of SMEs. However, employees are involved in such decisions with the support of other employees with the appropriate management skills, qualities, and culture to handle the business carefully (Lawal et al., 2020). Hence, the culture, structure, management behaviour and HRM strategy in the workplace play an important role in influencing the voice of employees in SMEs, which is commonly direct and can be formal or informal. This also has effects on the management structure and employee-employer relationship (Kaulfman, 2015; Mallet & Wapshott, 2017).

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In a bid to transform into the group of developed economies, the country has, over time, formulated and followed the objective of spurring the rate of development. On the one hand, this occurrence is distinguished by formal and large businesses (i.e. multinational firms and foreign-owned enterprises), and likewise, SMEs controlled by native entrepreneurs (Okpu & Kpakol, 2018). According to Funminiyi (2018), the idea that SMEs face information barriers which are demonstrated in the inadequate access and exploitation of local information, insufficient data generation and most specifically, information communication and management in the workplace, has been established. Also, Msangi (2020) found that increase in productivity is attained by SMEs in developing economies mainly by just borrowing from the vast technologies accessible in the world. The factors of employee participation in SMEs include the resources directly impacting the workplace (Rohlfer, 2018). Thus, the human resources (that is, the leadership skills of managers as well as the knowledge and skills of employees and management ensuring the continuous processes of innovation in the organisation) and organisational resources (that is the size of the company which is connected to the structure and culture of the workplace (Funminiyi, 2018; Rohlfer, 2018).

Additionally, many Nigerian SMEs lack knowledge on modern information communication methods that can support creativity and innovativeness as well as aid in tackling some of the risks of local businesses (Rufai, 2014, Roman et al., 2016; OECD, 2017). Differently, in developed countries, such development is available, where innovation and creativity have been established as a major driver in SME sustenance is supported with current information and communication approaches (Lee and Xin, 2015; Kwon and Ferndale, 2020). Various researchers (Kaulfman, 2015, Gilman et al. 2015, Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016, Philip & Arrowsmith, 2020) have attributed communication in SMEs to the culture, structure and especially leadership styles. Particularly because of their size, which encourages proximity social relationships between management and their subordinates (Mallet & Wapshott, 2017). Hence, it is imperative to explore the role such organisational factors play in influencing the survival of SMEs in Nigeria through employee participation and involvement in organisations.

4.7 Summary

The importance of SMEs to the growth and development of an economy cannot be overemphasised. Most specifically, a developing economy like Nigeria, which is the situation context of this study. Also, examining direct voice in SMEs has shown the factors influencing employee voice are the culture, structure, leadership styles and HRM practices in the workplace. For instance, exploring the characteristics of SMEs in Nigeria has shown that they encounter more operational risk due to their size. The key factors influencing the voice mechanism in SMEs are the culture of the organisation and leadership style. From a Nigerian context, there appears to be a paucity of research on the culture in SMEs and its influence on the direct voice mechanism in the organisation. Amongst the factors identified with the low performance of small businesses in Nigerian, the role of management (i.e., leadership style) in SMEs was revealed as the most significant factor because of their close social relations with their subordinates. Hence, they influence the contribution and involvement of employees in the organisation, also the sustainability of the business in the long run. Despite the increased rate of mortality of Nigerian SMEs, it is questionable if the management of SMEs in Nigeria know the importance of employee voice for the growth and survival of their organisations. The following chapter presented the research method for this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the choice and justification of the research designs and methods used. According to Creswell (2003), exploring the most suitable research methods in order to achieve the objective of the research is the most important bit of the research. Therefore, this chapter will firstly discuss the philosophies that underpin the research to show how they will influence the data collection methods and the desired outcomes. Secondly, it will discuss the research strategy and instruments (i.e. presenting how reliability and validity of instruments will be ensued). Thirdly, the ethical considerations and prevention measures to protect participants will be discussed.

Collis and Hussey (2009) identified methodology as the overall approach to the entire process of the research study. Saunders et al. (2012) defined research strategy as the general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research questions. On a similar note, (Bryman 2008) identified research strategy as a general orientation to the conduct of research. Research strategy, provides the overall direction of the research, including the process by which the research is conducted. Saunders et al. (2012) mentioned that an appropriate research strategy has to be selected based on research questions and objectives, the extent of existing knowledge on the subject area to be researched, the amount of time and resources available, and the philosophical underpinnings of the researcher. Furthermore, the methodology is an important chapter for any thesis because the essential assumptions about the manner in which the world is perceived is contained in it (Saunders et al., 2016). Such assumptions are important because they support the research methods and strategies in the study. Based on the above definitions, research methodology is focused on the problems to be investigated in a research study and hence is varied according to the problems to be investigated.

Saunders et al. (2016) presented the overall research methodology in the form of an "onion", in which the thoughts with regard to the research problem lie in the centre and thus, several layers have to be "peeled away" before coming to this central position. Before elaborating on the methodological decisions of this study, the research 'onion' has been diagrammatically illustrated below in Figure 5.1

Figure 5.1: The Research 'Onion'

The Research Onion diagram showing concentric layers: Philosophy (Positivism, Critical realism, Interpretivism, Post-modernism, Pragmatism), Approach to theory development (Deduction, Abduction, Induction), Methodological choice (Mono method quantitative, Mono method qualitative, Multi-method quantitative, Multi-method qualitative, Mixed method simple, Mixed method complex), Strategy(ies) (Experiment, Survey, Archival research, Case study, Ethnography, Action research, Grounded theory, Narrative inquiry, Cross-sectional, Longitudinal), Time horizon (Cross-sectional, Longitudinal), Techniques and procedures (Data collection and data analysis)

Source: Saunders *et al.* (2016, p. 164)

These layers are the important aspects to be considered in determining the research methodology for a particular research study. Accordingly, research philosophy, approach to theory development, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon, and techniques were the layers identified. Whilst different classifications and definitions of these terms exist, classification put forward by (Saunders *et al.* 2016) is preferred here, as it provides an unambiguous overall framework for the complete research process.

Adopting a quite different approach, Yin (2017) recommended that a particular research strategy has to be selected based on three (3) conditions; the type of research question, the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioural events, and the degree of focus on contemporary or historical events. There are various different research strategies with distinctive characteristics available from which a researcher may select based on the above criteria. Both Saunders et al. (2016); Yin (2017) acknowledged that although various research strategies exist,

there are large overlaps among them, and hence the important consideration would be to select the most advantageous strategy for a particular research study. Some of the common research strategies used in business and management are the experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research, cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies and participative enquiry (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Collis and Hussey, 2012; Creswell, 2014; (Saunders et al., 2016). The method used in answering the research questions will be influenced by the philosophy and approach to the theory development of the research. Subsequently, the research philosophy and approach to theory development will influence the selections shown in the next three layers of the research onion figure 5.1 (Saunders et al., 2016). Through these three layers, the research questions are transformed into a project.

The research methods that will be used in this thesis as a guide to present the structure of the methodology will be elaborated on using (Yin, 2017) research approach and (Saunders et al., 2016) research onion structure because it illustrates the path of this thesis methodology.

5.1 The Purpose of Research

In the interest to conduct productive research, the purpose of the research serves as a guideline to researchers. According to Kent (2007), the objective of the study provides an idea of how a research is designed and the aim of the research, such as exploration, description, or explanation. Saunders et al. (2016) state that research purposes are of three types, they are exploratory, descriptive and explanatory.

Exploratory research, which is the most suitable for this study, proposes to investigate phenomena with little or no information with the view of creating new propositions instead of testing them. The focus is on seeking new perceptions and accessing situations in a fresh light (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Hence, exploratory research is helpful to produce ideas, theories and discover insights (Saunders et al., 2012). Specifically, exploratory research is useful if the researcher wishes to clarify their understanding of an issue, problem or phenomenon, such as being unsure of its precise nature. It may be that time is well spent on exploratory research as it might show that the research is not worth pursuing (Saunders et al., 2016). Exploratory research can be conducted in numerous ways; these include a search of the literature, interviewing 'experts' in the subject, conducting in-depth individual interviews or conducting focus group interviews. Because

of their exploratory nature, these interviews are likely to be relatively unstructured and to rely on the quality of the contributions from those who participate in helping guide the subsequent stage of the research (Saunders et al., 2012).

According to Saunders et al. (2016), the exploratory study is a valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest. Research questions that are exploratory are likely, to begin with, 'what' or 'how'. Questions that are asked during data collection to explore an issue, problem or phenomenon will also be likely to start with what or how. The advantage of the exploratory study is that it is flexible and adaptable to change. When conducting exploratory research, change of direction is inherent, which may be as a result of new data appearance or new insights that occur. Usually, exploratory research may commence with a broad focus, but this will become narrowed as the research progresses (Saunders et al., 2016). For the purpose of this research, the exploratory research design is adopted because it explored the organisational (SMEs) perception of management and employees on the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms; that is organizational structure, culture, leadership style. Also, it employs qualitative strategies to answer the research questions. Additionally, it is clearly indicated by the objectives of this research that the purpose of this study is to examine the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs, and it will be done through the in-depth interview which is some characteristics of exploratory research (Saunders et al., 2016). In order to gain new insight on the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice.

5.2. Research Philosophy

Collis and Hussey (2014) referred to research philosophy as a systematic and methodical procedure of inquiry and investigation with a notion to increasing understanding and knowledge of the world. Such understanding and knowledge affect the way researchers grasp the world. Similarly, Saunders et al. (2016) defined research philosophy as a system of assumptions and beliefs about the development of knowledge. Hence, the philosophy of the research performs a vital part in developing the knowledge and belief on how the researchers perceive the world because they affect the research strategy and method. There are three types of research philosophies: Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology. Ontology and epistemology are the two

major philosophies or approaches, both of which provide a contrasting view with reference to how knowledge and the research process is grasped (Yin, 2017).

5.2.1 Epistemology

The epistemological considerations are concerned with whether the social and natural studies can retain the same methods and principles to study reality or not and what is acceptable as valid knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2017). It concerns assumptions about knowledge that is reliable, acceptable and how such knowledge is communicated to others. According to Creswell (2014), under this assumption carrying out qualitative research entails that the researcher needs to get very close to the participants under study in order to understand their views on a subject matter. Therefore information is gathered based on the experience of individuals. It then makes conducting research in the 'field' where the participants live and work important. Also, the longer the researcher interacts with the participants, the more they gathered first-hand information (i.e. knowing what the participants know). In summary, the researchers endeavour to minimize the distance between themselves and the participants being researched (Creswell, 2014). The two main approaches, which are positivism and interpretivism approach, can be used to explain it further.

The positivist position is derived from that of natural science and is characterised by the testing of hypotheses developed from existing theory (hence deductive or theory testing) through the measurement of observable social realities (Creswell, 2014). This position presumes the social world exists objectively and externally, that knowledge is valid only if it is based on observations of this external reality. Also, that universal or general laws exist or that theoretical models can be developed that are generalisable can explain cause and effect relationships, and which lend themselves to predicting outcomes.

While the Interpretivist/ constructivist stance advocates that social phenomena are dependent on social actors and social sciences are basically not the same as natural sciences thus, Bryman and Bell (2007) state that researchers need to use more than one method and process for social studies but cannot apply natural science methods. Simply put, researchers need to interpret

reality since the subject matter of social science (such as people, institutions) is basically not the same as the subject matter of natural science. Also, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Creswell (2014) who referred to this stance as social constructivism, says that grasping the world where they live and work is what the individuals/researchers seek. Subjective meanings are developed by their experiences (i.e., meanings pointed toward certain things or objects), and such meanings are multiple and varied. Hence, instigating the study to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few ideas (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The study then aims at relying as much as possible on the participant's view of the situation. Furthermore, subjective meaning is often negotiated socially or historically (Creswell, 2014). Thus, they are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives and are not simply imprinted on the individuals (Creswell, 2014). Interpretivist generates or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning rather than start with a theory like the positivists (Creswell, 2014).

The interpretivist stance is explained by Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) as anti-positivist and post-positivist because they argue that between the subject matters of natural and social sciences, there is an elementary difference. In the social world, it is contended that how individuals and groups perceive a circumstance or situation depends on their recollections, personal experience and expectations. Hence, through experience promoting in many varying interpretations, meanings are over time constructed and continually re-constructed. In this paradigm, discovering and understanding these meanings is viewed as necessary as well as the contextual factors that influence, determine and affect the interpretations arrived at by independent individuals. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) assert that the interpretivism stance reckons with the fact that multiple realities exist. Also, interpretivists seeks to work together with others because 'all knowledge is relative to the knower'; therefore, in order to understand their perceptions; they grasp, obtain meaning and create their realities, and also interpret these experiences in the context of the academic experience of the researchers and that is inductive or developing theory (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006).

When considering the phenomena under study here, the interpretivist position seems to provide the most appropriate frame because understanding what the individuals (CEO, supervisors and employees are thinking, feeling and how they communicate, verbally and non-verbally are important to answering the research questions also, given the subjective nature of the interpretivist approach and the emphasis on individual perceptions it is associated with qualitative approaches

of data gathering. Furthermore, the interpretivist approach was selected because Interpretivism seeks to describe and best understand the meaning rather than the frequency of certain phenomena, which is not the case with the positivist approach (Saunders et al., 2012).

Also, the interpretivism approach allows the study to interpret the meanings others have about the world; hence multiple realities are constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others. While with the positivists, a single reality exists and can only be approximated (Creswell, 2014). Interpretivism was therefore deemed appropriate, as the broad objective of this study, which is to identify and examine the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice within SMEs, will be dependent on the individual views and experiences of the social actors (i.e. what management and employees in SMEs think and feel about direct employee voice mechanisms will help to identify the factors). This research also employed a semi-structured interview that allowed the researcher to discuss, interact, and interpret findings based on her experiences with the participants where they live and work to understand their historical and cultural settings, which could not have been achieved using a survey or questionnaire.

5.2.2 Ontology

The ontological consideration is described as that which is concerned with the nature of realities and social entities (Collis and Hussey, 2014). It observes if social reality and phenomena stem from the perceptions and actions of social actors or not.

The ontological considerations have two main stances, objectivism and subjectivism. In *objectivism,* according to Bryman and Bell (2007), the objectivism stance suggests that social actors have no effect on social situations and reality. Hence, they are superficial factors that can't be changed and influenced. Bryman and Bell (2007) assert that an interaction that is in a "constant state of revision" is evident amidst social realities, situations and actors. While in *subjectivism*, the subjective stance asserts that social reality and phenomena are dependent on and continually impact of social actors. The focus of the researcher is on understanding the meanings and interpretations of 'social actors' and to understand their world from their point of view, which is highly contextual and hence is not widely generalisable (Saunders et al., 2016). Understanding what people are thinking and feeling, as well as how they communicate verbally and non-verbally, is deemed important (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Additionally, given the subjective nature of

this paradigm, and the emphasis on language, it is associated with qualitative approaches to data gathering (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Creswell, 2014). The close nature of the researcher and the researched in this paradigm and the risk that any interpretation is framed within the mind of the researcher means that steps must be introduced to avoid bias. In light of the phenomena under study, the ontology adopted was subjectivism because subjectivity would enable the complex variety of interpretations to be understood and discover multiple realities, which will allow the researcher to understand the individual feelings or perceptions of management, supervisors and employees towards the factors influencing the quality of direct voice channels in SMEs. On the other hand, the objectivism stance emphasizes only objective criteria of evaluation and eliminates any subjective evaluation, which is not the aim of this current research.

5.3 Research Approach

The primary aim of this study is to inquire into what individual perceptions (experiences and opinion) exist across the organisation with respect to the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in small and medium size firms, interpreting these findings in the context of the academic literature on the micro-organisational factors that influence voice in SMEs. The research approach, which determines the research design depending on the relationship between the theory and study, are of three types: deductive approach, inductive approach and abductive approach**.**

The most suitable for this research is the ***Inductive Approach;*** according to Bryman and Bell (2007) inductive approach makes use of a variety of scientific methods that starts with a gathering of general opinions and concludes with general inferences. That is moving from a specific to a general study (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This approach, as explained by Saunders et al. (2012), doesn't take after the aforementioned pattern of deductive research. Hence, a hypothesis is formulated as a result of the research, which is another area of observation for the scientific approach. This means that conclusion about the theory is deduced considering the data and observations. Additionally, the research is permitted to present second opinions with respect to the social situation under study by this approach.

Considering the nature of this study, the inductive approach is the most appropriate as the study, which is specifically 'focused on the factors influencing the quality of direct voice channels

in SMEs, will be generalised based on the findings from the interviews, observation and analysis of documents. Thus, in employing this approach, the researcher begins by collecting data that is relevant to the factors influencing direct employee voice. After collecting a substantial amount of data, then patterns in the data will be explored in order to develop a theory that can explain those patterns. This means that when an inductive approach is used in a study, it starts with a set of observations and then moves from those particular experiences to a more general set of propositions about those experiences. In other words, they move from data to theory or from the specific to the general. Figure 5.2 displays the steps involved with an inductive approach to research.

Figure 5.2 Steps to Inductive Research

Gather data	Look for patterns	Develop theory
Specific level of focus	Analysis	General level of focus
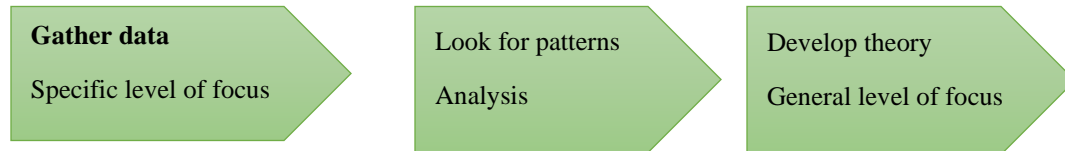
On the other hand, the deductive approach wouldn't have been appropriate for this study because it begins with a social theory that the study finds compelling, and then its implication is tested with data (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, this approach moved from general to specific. Also, a deductive approach is normally associated with scientific investigation. Saunders et al. (2012) explain that in using the deductive approach, the author explores previous studies and existing theories related to the area of research and then test the hypotheses that arise from such theories. Figure 5.6 displays the steps involved with a deductive approach to research.

Figure 5.3 Steps to Deductive Research

Theory/hypothesis	Analysis data	Hypothesis supported or not
General level of focus	Specific level of focus	Specific level of focus
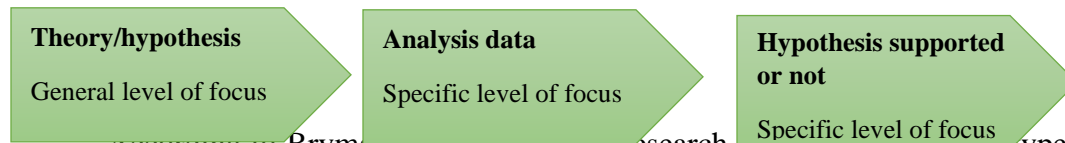
According to Bryman and Bell (2007), research strategies are of two types, quantitative and qualitative strategies. The major difference between these two strategies is that quantitative strategy makes use of measurement and quantification as regards the collection of data and analysis. While the qualitative strategy doesn't, instead it uses words in terms of data collection and analysis (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Also, the quantitative strategy entails a deductive approach,

while the qualitative strategy primarily emphasises an inductive approach to the relationship between research and theory (Bryman and Bell, 2007). The section below provides more details on the qualitative strategy which was employed in the research.

5.4.1 Qualitative Strategy

Qualitative research studies participants' meanings and the relationships between them using a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution (Creswell, 2003). Bansal and Corley (2011) point out that while qualitative research is characterised by methodological variations, it remains vital irrespective of the method used to demonstrate methodological rigour and theoretical contribution. When using this research method, data collection is normally non-standardised. Hence, the questions and procedures may alter if new data emerge during a research process that is both naturalistic and interactive. Furthermore, a qualitative study is likely to use non-probability sampling techniques. According to Creswell (2014), the success of the researcher's role is dependent not only on gaining physical access to participants but also on building rapport and demonstrating sensitivity to gain cognitive access to their data. The qualitative research design may use a single data collection technique, such as semi-structured interviews and corresponding qualitative analytical procedures. Such a technique is referred to as a mono method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2016). Also, more than one qualitative data collection technique and corresponding analytical procedure may be applied. This is known as a multi-method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2016). A researcher can decide to collect qualitative data using in-depth interviews and non-participant observation and employ qualitative procedures in analysing these data.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that, generally, qualitative research is often associated with an interpretive philosophy. Because researchers want to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meanings expressed about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Such research is sometimes referred to as naturalistic since researchers operate within a natural setting, or research context, in order to establish trust, participation, access to meanings and in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2014). Like quantitative research, qualitative research may also be used within realist and pragmatist philosophies. Most types of qualitative

research commence with an inductive approach to theory development, such that a naturalistic and emergent research design is used to build theory or to develop a richer theoretical perspective than already exists in the literature (Saunders et al., 2016). However, some qualitative research strategies start with a deductive approach to test an existing theory using qualitative procedures (Yin, 2017). In reality, much qualitative research uses an abductive approach to theory development where inductive inferences are developed, and deductive ones are tested iteratively throughout the research (Saunders et al., 2016).

In this study, the qualitative research strategy was adopted because of the following reasons. Firstly, a qualitative approach was adopted, which focused on data concerned with opinion, interpretation and understanding of context (Collis and Hussey, 2014). This will encourage the interviewees to answer the questions in such a way that covered the particular themes inherent in the questions for the successful achievement of the objectives of this research. Secondly, as discussed previously, in a context where there appears to be limited research in qualitative data in comparison to quantitative data on the concept of the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms from an organisational perspective, this approach will provide this research with new and illuminating data. In depth exploration of the organisational (management and employee) experience aided understanding of any underlying or non-obvious issues that influence the quality of direct voice mechanisms. A strong handle can then be gained on what 'real life is like for an organisation when they experience voice (direct) in the workplace. This will not be possible with quantitative methods as collection takes place through questionnaires, surveys and experiments, meaning responses are generalised, specific and definite (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Saunders et al., 2016).

Additionally, quantitative methods cannot provide a wider understanding of the behavioural complexities associated with such constructs (i.e. factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms). Contrarily, a qualitative method allows for a wider and more exploratory way of observing the behavioural constructs through facilitating in both depth and detail the investigation of issues. In this process, the researcher is the instrument and, without being constrained by a rigid questionnaire, approaches the fieldwork (Saunders et al., 2016). This approach contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry, which differs from quantitative research because it requires using standardised measures to fit people's varying

perspectives and experiences into a limited number of response categories (Patton, 2015). Additionally, employing the qualitative strategy enabled the researcher to develop a broad understanding of the factors influencing employee voice by triangulation (i.e. the method of using multiple methods or data sources). Patton (2015) asserts that triangulation is also considered as a qualitative research strategy for testing validity by merging information from different sources.

5.5 Research Design

The research design provides a framework for data collection and analysis. In general terms, a strategy is a plan of action to achieve a goal (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Hence, a research strategy may be defined as a plan of how the research will go about answering the research questions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), it is the methodological link between the philosophy and subsequent choice of methods to collect and analyse data. The research design contains the clear objectives derived from the research question(s), specifies the sources from which data intends to be collected, how data analysis is proposed and discuss ethical issues and the constraints that will inevitably encounter (e.g. access to data, time, location and money) by the researcher. Significantly, it shows that the elements of the specific research design of the study have been thought through (Saunders et al., 2016). Concurrently, Collis and Hussey (2014) say that the research design decision demonstrates the researchers' priority about the detailed plan of the research methods and process for conducting the study.

Therefore, Creswell (2014) and Yin (2017) believe the key to the choice of research strategies is that a reasonable level of coherence is achieved throughout the research design, enabling the specific research questions to be answered and objectives met. Hence, the choice of research strategy will be guided by the research question(s) and objectives, the coherence with which these link to the philosophy, the research approach and purpose, and also to more pragmatic concerns such as the extent of existing knowledge, the amount of time, other resources available and access to potential participants and to other sources of data (Creswell, 2014), (Saunders et al. 2016).

Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) comment that in their experience as researchers, the choice between qualitative research strategies is likely to cause the greatest confusion. This confusion is often justified given the diversity of qualitative strategies, with their conflicting

tensions and 'blurred genres'. However, if a researcher encounters a problem in selecting a research approach, Creswell (2014) suggests the following (i) the concern to be addressed needs to be fully considered, and the research should be designed that best matches the problem. (ii) the skills and experience of the researcher need to be considered, and the best approach that compliments it assessed (iii) also the audience, whom the findings from the research will be addressed needs to be considered by the researcher. Figure 5.4 lists some of the research designs used in social sciences, some of which are adaptable for use under either paradigm. Also, the right-hand side of the diagram outlines the research designs that can be used when employing the interpretivism approach, which is the selected approach for this study.

Figure 5.4 Research Design Associated with the Main Paradigms

Positivism

Experimental study

Survey

Cross-sectional study

Longitudinal study

Interpretivism

Hermeneutics

Ethnography

Participative inquiry

Action research

Case study

Grounded theory

Feminist, gender and ethnicity studies
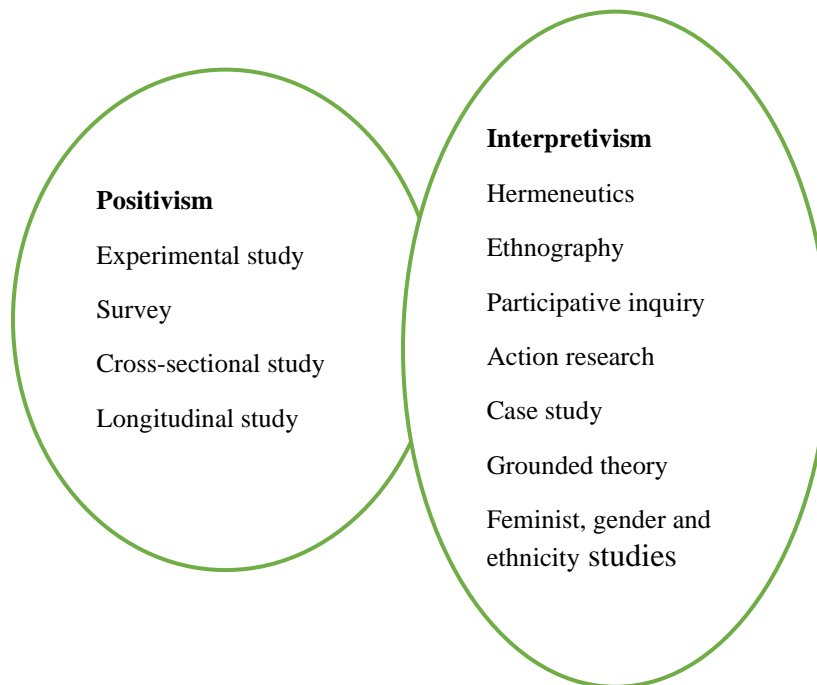
All the research designs listed in figure 5.4 above can be used when using the interpretivism approach. However, for the purpose of this research, the case study was the proposed design selected as the most appropriate in order to achieve the objectives of this study compared to other designs. Hence, a detailed explanation of what the case study entails and why it was appropriate is given in the following section.

5.5.1 The Case Study Research

According to Yin (2017), a case study research approach is an in-depth inquiry into a topic or phenomenon within its real-life setting which can be employed in conducting natural studies. Using a variety of methods to obtain thorough knowledge on analysis of a single phenomenon (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Generally, as quoted by Bryman and Bell (2007:62), this case is a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence". For instance, 'case' in case study research may be a person (e.g., a manager), a group (e.g. a work team), an organisation (e.g. a business), an event (e.g. an annual general meeting) and many other types of case subject (Saunders *et a*l. 2016). However, Flyyberg (2011) notes that an essential factor defining a case study is selecting the case to be studied and determining the boundaries of the study. Subsequently, comprehension of the dynamics of the area (i.e. the interactions between the subject of the case and its context) being studied within its context or settings is run (Creswell 2014).

When compared to other research approaches mentioned above in the previous section, (Ridder et al., 2014) suggests that the ability of the case study strategy to generate insights from intensive and in-depth research into the study of a phenomenon in its real context makes it advantageous. Hence, leading to detailed, empirical descriptions and the development of theory (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Ridder et al., 2014; Yin, 2017). Dubois and Gadde (2002) further points out that through in-depth case studies, the interaction between a phenomenon and its context can best be understood. Thus, an in-depth inquiry is designed to identify what is happening and why and possibly to understand the effects of the situation and implications for action. Also, Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) states that, in achieving such insights, the case study research draws on quantitative or qualitative research and frequently uses a mixed-methods approach to understand the dynamics of the case thoroughly.

However, Flyvbjerg (2011) argues that case study design has been criticised by some as a research strategy because of 'misunderstandings' about their ability to produce generalisable, reliable and theoretical contributions to knowledge. This is largely based on positivist criticisms of using small samples and more generally about using interpretive, qualitative research. Such criticisms has been countered in many works such as (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Buchanan, 2012; Saunders et al, 2016) and is generally losing favour as the value of qualitative and mixed methods research

is being recognised much more widely as noted by (Bansal and Corley, 2011; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Traditionally using case studies has resulted in them being designed in different ways and for different purposes. For instance, the 'positivist' has used them as well as 'interpretivist' researchers; deductively as well as inductively; and for descriptive, exploratory or explanatory purposes. Few positivist researchers have advocated using case studies inductively to build theory and develop theoretical hypotheses, which can be tested subsequently (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, Ridder et al., 2014). For instance, at the early explanatory stage of the research using the case study is advocated as a complement to deductive research (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). This approach is called 'indicative case study research', designed to reveal 'specific attributes' rather than elaborate descriptions (Ridder et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Yin (2017) notes that the case study may be used not only for exploratory but for descriptive and explanatory purposes. An explanatory case study is likely to use a deductive approach that is using theoretical propositions to test their applicability in the case study to build and verify an explanation. Interpretivist researchers are more interested in initially developing a richly detailed and nuanced description of their case study research (Ridder et al., 2014). For some interpretivist, making comparisons with existing theory is unnecessary. Flyvbjerg (2011) notes that some interpretivist researchers prefer to describe their case studies in ample detail. Thus, allowing readers to make their own links to existing theory. While, other interpretivist researchers work inductively, analysing their data, identifying themes and patterns in these data, and at some point locating this in existing literature in order to refine, extend or generate theory (Ridder *et al*. 2014).

The case study approach can be either in the form of single or multiple cases (Yin, 2017). The single case may be used to represents a critical, extreme or unique case because it provides the research with the opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon that few have considered before (Saunders et al., 2016). However, an important aspect of using a single case is defining the actual case. That is, it is important to establish that this approach will be suitable for the nature of the research question and objectives. In comparison, multiple cases can be incorporated to represent more than one case in research. It is used because it enables the research to focus on whether findings can be replicated across cases. That is the cases may be carefully selected on the basis that from each one, similar results are predicted to be produced. Additionally, a multiple case

study strategy combines a small number of cases chosen to predict literal replication and a second small number chosen to predict theoretical replication (Yin, 2017). If all the findings from these cases are as predicted, this would clearly produce very strong support for the theoretical propositions on which these predictions were based. Thus, this approach to case study strategy begins deductively, based on theoretical propositions and theory testing, before possibly incorporating an inductive or abductive approach (Saunders et al., 2016). However, if the findings are in some way contrary to the predictions in the theoretical propositions being tested, then reframing these propositions becomes necessary, and another set of cases will be selected to test them (Creswell, 2014).

However, choosing between a single or multiple case study is not just related to producing more evidence. Because while a multiple case study is likely to produce more evidence, the purpose of each approach is different. A single case study approach is chosen because of the nature of the case (i.e. because it is a critical, unique or typical case etc.) (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, a multiple case study approach is chosen to allow replication. Therefore, what is important is, whatever strategy the research is using, it should ensure that the approach chosen is suitable for the nature of the research question and objectives (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, in the development of a qualitative case study identifying the case is one of the inherent issues. The case selected may be broad in scope or narrow in scope. It all depends on the case study researcher's decision on which bounded system to study in the midst of several other possible candidates for selection worthy of studying (Saunders *et al.* 2016). Therefore, the researcher must consider whether to choose single or multiple cases. However, Creswell (2014) notes that considering whether to study a single or multiple case study sometimes poses a threat because the study of more than one case diluted the overall analysis. Hence the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case.

In conclusion, a study can choose either single or multiple cases. But Creswell (2014) suggest that no more than four of five cases can be selected in a study because what motivates the researcher to consider a large number of cases is the idea of generalizability, a term that holds little meaning for most qualitative researchers (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, in selecting the number of cases, the researcher is required to establish a rationale for his or her purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the case and for gathering information about the case. Another challenge of the case

study design is deciding the boundaries of a case (i.e. how it might be constrained in terms of time, events and processes). Some case studies might not have clear beginning and ending points. Hence, the researcher's needs to set boundaries that adequately surround the case (Creswell, 2014). For instance, how much time can be spent in each fieldwork site and what methods of investigation to employ (Stark and Torrance, 2005).

The research methods that are most commonly used in case study analysis are interviews, documentary analysis (e.g. operational policies, clinical protocols, service specifications, audit outcomes) and observation, "with the balance between them being largely determined by the resources available and the disciplinary and professional tradition in which the case study is being conducted" (Stark and Torrance, 2005:35). Ethnographic fieldwork, discourse analysis, and textual analysis are other qualitative methods used in case study research. When considering the phenomena under study here, the case study design explained above seems to provide the most appropriate frame for this research. Figure 5.5 below could be viewed as a summary of the methodological decisions of this research, drawn from the review of this section.

Figure 5.5: summary of methodological decisions
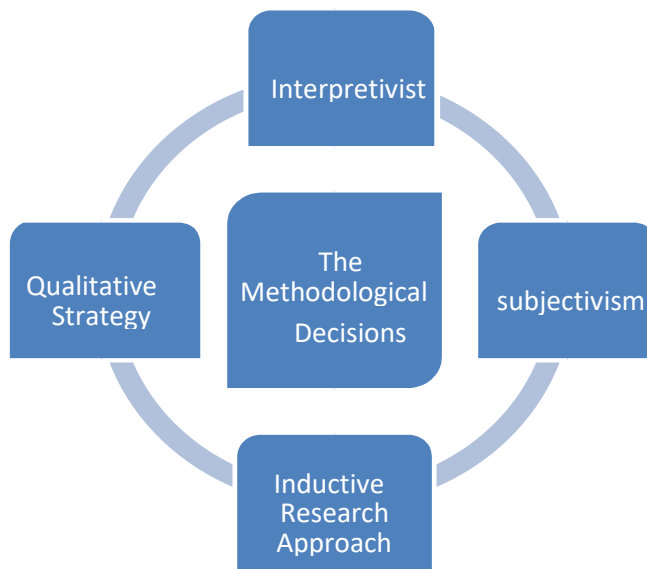
5.6 Research Methods

The Research method is the tools or techniques used in data collection, analysis and interpretation in academic research. These methods are usually classified in terms of qualitative techniques, which apply interviews, naturalistic and systematic observation and focus groups, as well as quantitative techniques that apply statistical calculations (Scott and Morrison, 2006). Also, through these methods, which comprise of procedures, academic researchers are able to confirm that the knowledge they have created has reliability and validity. Scott and Morrison (2006) identified three types of rule-focused procedures for research which includes (i)the rules for establishing the key elements of research, like hypothesis, research questions, theories, postulations and concepts and objectives, (ii)the rules for data collection, (iii)the rules for analysing and interpreting data. This study adopted these three rule-focused procedures. This choice was based on the applicability of the procedures to the research phenomena. The research was conducted using a case study research method: in-depth interview, direct observation, and document analysis.

Therefore, prior to discussing the knowledge claims and the strategies of inquiry that guided this study, this section provides an explanation of the qualitative methods used for data collection. The following section (5.6.1) will explore the qualitative methods used for primary data collection in this research and will discuss the reasons for selecting the chosen qualitative methods (interviews, case studies, and observation), as well as provide specific information on the interviews and observations conducted in the SMEs.

5.6.1 Qualitative Methods used for Primary Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative methods used for data collection were interviews, direct observation, and documents in all the SME case study firms. These constituted the basis of the case study analysis. The target population is the complete group of specific population elements relevant to a research project (Collis and Hussey, 2009). For the purpose of this research, the target population comprised of Nigerian SMEs listed in the database of the Nigerian chamber of industry and commerce in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Usually, the population was too large for this research to attempt to observe all of its members. Hence, a small but carefully chosen sample was used to represent the population. The sample reflected the

characteristics of the population from which it is drawn. Sampling is referred to as the sampling procedure, which involves the selection of a sample of units from a set of data in order to measure the characteristics, beliefs and attitudes of the people (Collis and Hussey, 2014). The aim of sampling is to produce a representative selection of the population.

5.6.2 Qualitative Sampling

The qualitative sampling of this study was the purposeful non-random sampling strategy. According to Patton (2015:45), qualitative inquiry typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples that are 'purposefully' selected. The rationale of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases provide an opportunity to learn about issues of innermost importance to the purpose of the research. This strategy sees the number of people interviewed as less important than the criteria used to select them. In purposive sampling, participants are chosen because they exhibit particular features or experiences that will enable a detailed understanding of the central themes and puzzles the researcher wishes to study. It is also described as 'judgement' sampling or 'criterion based' sampling (Creswell, 2014). Patton (2015:264) states that: 'the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases. In-depth information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling.

Hence, For the purpose of this research, the chief executive officers, supervisors and employees from six SMEs in Nigeria were recruited. Companies classified as SMEs were identified through the Nigeria Chamber of Commerce in Kaduna state Nigeria (KADCCIMA) to gain access to the participant organisations for the study. Kaduna state Nigeria was the location chosen due to the researcher's familiarity with the locations and access, which is important when taking up a case study and interview research approach (Creswell, 2014). Also, the location was selected because it is among one of the locations with the highest number of SMEs particularly in the manufacturing and service sector. Furthermore, SMEDAN (2016) definition of SMEs was employed. Therefore, a firm was defined as small in any sector if its total assets (excluding land and building) are above Five Million Naira (10,000 pounds) but not exceeding Fifty Million Naira (100,000pounds) with a total workforce of above 10, but not exceeding 49 employees. While Medium Enterprises will be those enterprises with total assets excluding land and building) are

above Fifty Million Naira (100,000pounds), but not exceeding Five Hundred Million Naira (1,000,000 pounds) with a total workforce of between 50 and 199 employees. Table 3 below summarises the total number of interviews conducted for this research.

Table 5.1: Summary of interviews

	Number of interviews
Management	36
Employees	95
Total	131

5.6.3 Case Study Research and Interview

In a case study research, data collection involves a broad selection of procedures based on how the research builds an in-depth picture of the case under study (Creswell, 2014). There are multiple forms of data collection, as mentioned by (Yin, 2017) that may be used in case study research. He identified six of them as follows: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. The study was be conducted using three data collection methods: in-depth interviews, direct observations and secondary data.

Interviews and case study research are a common data collection approach applied by social science, organisations and HRM researchers (Bansal & Corley, 2011). Interviews are geared towards gaining an understanding of how people make sense of and create meaning out of the objective aspects of organisations (Creswell 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Exposing this understanding by means of transcription of interviews allows for the exposure of what has up to then been tacit, hidden away, or merely been inferred from an actor's actions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). These understandings may include perceptions, connotations to meanings, implicit consensus, and intentions. Qualitative interviews were therefore chosen as the most appropriate means of gathering the data. They are classified into three groups: personal interview (one on one), telephone interview (researcher interviews by phone), and group interview (researcher interviews informants in a group). For the purpose of the study, both person (one on one) and telephone interviews were used, as will be explained later on in this Chapter. Employing interviews in research, as noted by

Creswell (2003), has some benefits, such as they can be useful when informants cannot be directly observed, can provide historical information, and can allow the researcher to "control" the line of questioning.

In this research, personal interviews were employed the most compared to the others because, in a personal interview, the interviewer asks the respondent's questions in a face-to-face situation with already established general topics for investigation. Personal interview differs in terms of their degree of structure and openness. Personal interviews, especially unstructured interviews, have an advantage over telephone interviews or postal surveys in that they have the highest response rates and helps the researcher to generate a great wealth of meaningful data through using non-verbal communications and visual aids (Bansal & Corley, 2011). This method also allows for the exploration of emergent themes and ideas rather than relying only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview (Easterby-Smith, 2008). An interview guide with set questions is utilised, which poses the same questions to all the categories of respondents. The questions are asked in similar order and format to make a form of comparison between answers possible. Another benefit of this method is that it creates scope for pursuing and probing for a novel, relevant information through additional questions often noted as prompts on the schedule. The interviewer frequently has to formulate impromptu questions in order to follow up leads that emerge during the interview. The interviewer's role is engaged and encouraging but not personally involved. The interviewer facilitates the interviewees to talk about their views and experiences in-depth but with limited reciprocal engagement or disclosure.

However, some downsides of interviews are that they can provide "indirect" information pervaded through the opinions of interviewees, rather than the natural field setting provides information in nominated "place" and the responses of the interviewee may be influenced by the presence of the researcher (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, the meaning and interpretation is another key issue in interviews (Barbour and Schostak, 2005:42); "the meaning heard by one individual may not be the same as that intended by the speaker". Also, "if there are multiple meanings, then the interpretation is critical… however, what rules, what approaches, what frameworks can be employed to underpin the process of making and selecting appropriate, 'correct', 'significant' interpretations?" (Barbour and Schostak, 2005:42).

As a research technique, the subjectivity of interviews is increased by meaning and interpretation issues, and this was why the researcher noted earlier in this chapter that although not on purpose, this thesis assumed a subjective point of view in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative findings. The level of subjectivity in the interpretation of interview findings in this study was faced with one major issue, which is the interpretation of the responses in the analysis was subject to the researcher's personal comprehension of the factors affecting the quality of the direct employee voice within their firm, irrespective of the fact that the author quoted the (translated) interviewees. But the researcher made efforts to increase the level of objectivity in interpreting the interviews across the analysis by, Firstly, translating interview data using the "back translation" method in order to verify the quality of the translation and improve the reliability and validity of the research, secondly, by using semi-structured interviews, as it will be explained subsequently in this chapter, in order to create data that would be, to some extent, compared and cross-validated by other interview responses. Thirdly, by interviewing both management [i.e. CEO and HODs] and employees, in order to compare and cross-validate interpretations and findings. Fourthly, by comparing through the triangulation strategy the qualitative findings of the study. Thus, the interviews and observations combined with secondary sources of data (in section 5.7) established the foundation of case study analysis.

Based on the reasons explained above and in the previous section, the researcher decided to study multiple cases (specifically six) SMEs in this research. The selection of cases was made based on the representation of small and medium-sized firms in Nigeria (using SMEDAN), the industry in which the SME operate (manufacturing/service) and the location of the SMEs (i.e. Kaduna state). Other factors that influenced the cases selected were; their position on the database (Kaduna State Chamber of Commerce and Industry) used in obtaining these SMEs and ease of access. Each case study was given the same amount of fieldwork time. Also, uniform research methods were used to analyse all the cases (i.e. interviews, direct observation and secondary data sources). The interviews conducting in each SMEs with management and employees is explained in more detail in the following two sections (i.e. 5.6.3.1 and 5.6.3.2), while the observation as a data collection method in this study will be explored in section 5.6.4.

5.6.3.1. Interview Protocol: Management in SMEs

The semi-structured, face-to-face (i.e. personal) interviews, which lasted for about 45 minutes, were conducted with each participant in their offices and at an appropriate location in the company. These interviews were requested through email initially and then booked afterwards via phone call. Before proceeding with each interview, a brief outline clarifying the nature of the research, the interview approach (i.e. content, confidentiality, consent, and recording methods) and points regarding the onward use of the data as described. The interviewee was provided with the opportunity to clarify any points and asked to confirm that they were happy to proceed. The interviews were either tape-recorded, or detailed notes were kept precisely in cases where tape recording was impossible. Some follow-up interviews were done by telephone, and detailed notes were kept. Then data was transcribed in each case study in Microsoft word. In order to provide in-depth information on specific research questions and information on the firm, semi-structured interviews were selected. The section of the interviews that was structured was designated to assist the researcher in comparing to an extent the data gathered from the interviews. While the unstructured section helped in gaining more clarifications and knowledge on several issues that came up during the interview.

All the interviews were conducted in private areas, and with the permission of the participants, the responses of the interviewees or any potential issues with the interview protocol itself were tape-recorded and note taken. Open-ended questions were used in the interviews to draw out stories and perceptions on the experiences of both employees and management in the context of quality direct employee voice mechanisms and the workplace environment. Interviews were conducted in English. Data were recorded in the form of field notes and tape recordings (clearance was obtained for the use of a tape recorder). This method was used with the purpose of prompting storytelling through qualitative analysis of the participants' verbal accounts that resulted in a description of coherent and consensual meanings amidst the specified context of factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms. Furthermore, observations were made regarding the interviewees' demeanour.

The duration of each interview was noted. Also, each interview was closed with a brief note that repeated the research purpose, how the content from the interview would be used, and confidentiality retained concerning the interviewee identity, along with appreciating them for their

time. All through the process of the interviews, a log was kept, and any constraints or deviations from this standardised approach was noted. Also, where interviews were allowed to overrun, or comments are made after the formal completion of an interview, consent was requested to use such statements, and when granted, the additional information was included in the interview transcript. Each interview was later transcribed by hand and captured in Microsoft word, and then moved to an Excel spreadsheet for organisation and a wider view. Saunders et al. (2016) note that for the phenomenological analysis, it is necessary that the interviews be transcribed because this provides a foundation for the data to be evaluated. Each participant was provided with an interview number to maintain anonymity. Prior to the interviews, a literature review was undertaken to give the researcher insight into the area being explored and to provide a framework for specific questions related to the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice. The Interview guide summarised the questions that formed the basis of the interview.

The questions were intended to be general, neutral and exploratory. Specific revisions have been included to debrief the response from the initial interviews. A generic set of questions was proposed to be used for all interviews, and several core questions, supplementary probes were included for each category of interviewees across all the case study organisations. Additionally, general probes such as 'what do you mean by that?' and 'can you give me an example?' or 'is there anything else you would like to add?' were used as their need arose. At the onset of the interview, when interviews gave information that addressed later questions, such questions were omitted or were easily used to clarify earlier points. In the courses of the interview, each participant was asked whether or not they had any reference materials to support their response. Each interview was transcribed and with relevant attention towards confidentiality. Such measures were aimed at reinforcing the validity of the research design.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) echo that with the interpretivism approach, a common risk linked with it is whether the study does 'clearly gain access to the experiences of those in the research setting' and that validity issues can influence the generalisability of the findings. Also, each personal interview uncovered some other perspectives on the factors influencing the quality of direct voice employee mechanisms in SMEs, which was not encapsulated by the literature review. It has a lot of relevance to the development and growth of these SMEs. The interview

guide is accessible in appendix D. See Appendix A for the introductory email used to request the participation of the case study firms.

A total of 131 interviews (one-on-one and telephone interviews) has been carried out with management in the small and medium sized firms. In the organisations, a total of 36 interviews were carried out: 24 interviews with the owner-manager, 12 interviews with the HODs in all the case organisations. The SMEs are represented by (6 companies) with 39 interviews conducted (one-on-one and via phone). The interviewees (specifically the HODs) were from three different departments in each case organisation because i) they were the most suitable respondents to provide the required information (e.g. the HR manager was among the HODs interviewed) and ii) there was no access to another individual. The HODs interviewees were the same number across each case organisation. Each category of participants had similar interview questions, which were into parts. The first part had three questions which had sub-questions that sought in-depth information on a] the direct/ informal voice mechanisms used in the firm, b] which mechanisms are effective and ineffective, c] how quality these mechanisms are in information sharing, communication and consultation and codetermination and control. The second part of the interview questions consisted of 9 questions which sought thorough information on the;(a type of culture (b type of structure and (c type of leadership style in operation in each of the organisation. A total of 11 questions open-ended questions were asked to all participants. This information was meant to gather more information on the individual firms and to help in creating a number of case studies that can be compared. The interview questions can be found in Appendix E. Table 5.2 below shows the types of organisations that participated in the interviews, their product market, the interviewee's position in the organisation, the number of interviews conducted, and the method of registering data.

Table 5.2: Case Study Interviews – SMEs Management

	SMEs	Product market	Size (employees)	Interviewees	Number of interviews	Int. 1	Int. 2	Int.3
1	SME-1M	Roofing sheets	130	CEO, HODs; manufacturing Administration Marketing	22	Tape-recorded	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)

2	SME-2M	Cable and wire production	153	CEO, HODs; Production Personnel Administration	21	Tape-recorded	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
3	SME-3M	Aluminium production	175	CEO, HODs; Human Resource Production Administration	22	Tape-recorded	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
4	SME-4M	Bakery & pastries production	68	CEO, HODs; Production Personnel Sales/marketing	23	Tape-recorded	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
5	SME-5M	Galvanised Products production	122	CEO, HODs; Production Administration Human resource	21	Tape-recorded	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
6	SME-6M	Plastic products productions	89	CEO, HODs; Manufacturing Human resource Administration	22	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)	Telephone interview (notes)

5.6.3.2. Interview Protocol: SMEs Employees

While for the SMEs employees, a total of 95 interviews were carried out with the respondents from the six case study companies. Majority of which were conducted face to face and individually with each employee across all the SMEs. But about 1, were done via phone and it was conducted with some specific employees. Such employees were the line managers or foremen across the case organisations because they were the only employees the organisations allowed to share their contact with the researcher for follow up questions. Also, they were the only participants across all the organisations whom the HODs assigned to the researcher as a caretaker of the other employees in the firm. All the participants had the same interview question. The interview questions were in two sections, and the first part had three questions which had sub-questions that sought in-depth information on a] the direct/ informal voice mechanisms used in the firm, b] which mechanisms are effective and ineffective, c] how quality these mechanisms are in information sharing, communication and consultation and codetermination and control. This was the same with the interview questions management. While the second part of the interview questions consisted of 10 questions that sought thorough information on the;(a. type of culture (b. type of structure, and (c. type of leadership style and HRM practices in operation in each of the organisations. Also, they were like those of the management interview questions across all the case organisations.

Table 5.3: Case Study Interviews – SME Employees

	Number of employees	Non-managerial employees' interviews	Managerial employees' interviews	Int 1	Int 2
SME-1	15 employees	15	6	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
SME-2	20 employees	15	9	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
SME-3	20 employees	16	7	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
SME-4	17employees	15	5	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
SME-5	19 employees	14	6	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)
SME-6	20 employees	15	5	Tape-recorded	Telephone interview (notes)

5.6.4 Observation Protocol

An observation which is one method of conducting a case study analysis involves four different approaches (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). They are; structured observation, unstructured observation, shadow studies and participant observation. For the purpose of this study, the unstructured observation was conducted because it involved passively observing by sitting at one side of the room and recording the subjects' activities within that particular space; "Broad decisions are made in advance about the kinds of things to be recorded, either on the basis of analysis of other data already collected (e.g. an interview or questionnaire data) or derived from the focus of the research" (Jones, 2005:140)

In the case organisations, restricted observations that were unstructured in nature took place. Thus, after the researcher had conducted all the initial interviews across the participants of the SMEs, observation of some department and brief meetings in all the case study firms was carried out, and a brief exploration around the organisation's immediate environment and workspace to gain more insight and confirm the responses gotten from the interviews. However, the observed brief meetings provided more evidence, precisely regarding the quality of direct voice mechanisms used in the case organisations and organisational culture. That is, observations of the organisation's workforce interactions with one another provided some information on the firm's culture, co-worker relationships, and the extent of power distance between HODs and employees. Furthermore, additional evidence was provided from observing the organisation's establishments and structuring of workspace. Especially observations of interactions between the participants in

each case on the work floor, overhearing direct conversions between line managers and employees about their jobs provided evidence on the authority of the participants in the workplace and the way daily communication issues are controlled/managed. The above-mentioned observations made in the course of the case study by the researcher indirectly influenced the interpretation of the findings of this study. Following the discussions on the qualitative methods used for primary data collection, the sources of secondary data that were used in this thesis will be analysed in the following section.

5.6.5 Secondary Data Collection Methods

The secondary data collected were intended to support primary data and present a robust comprehension of the background of each SME case study organisation. Documented information (whether paper or electronic) is often relevant in case study research because, in some cases, it helps corroborate the result of the interview questions (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, several company documents were utilised, for instance, quarterly and yearly reports, organisational charts, press releases, company newsletters/bulletins, employee handbooks, and information provided on the official websites of the companies. The background analysis of the case studies examined in Chapter 6 contains a variety of information originating from these sources. In addition to these sources used for the analysis of case study companies, other secondary sources used for the investigation of the research area included official national statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics publications on several SMEs in Nigeria, Kaduna state Chambers of Commerce, Mining Agriculture and Industry, as well as official legal sources. A variety of these sources were used to analyse the SME business environment in Chapter 6.

5.6.6 Qualitative Analysis

Employing qualitative methods in a study can be extremely conflicting, complex and nuanced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Bansal and Corley (2011) assert, analysing qualitative data can be done mostly either by qualitative content analysis or thematic analysis. However, Braun and Clarke (2006); Patton (2015) argues that thematic analysis ought to be considered as an inherent approach for qualitative analysis because it will provide the valuable basic skills for carrying out

various other types of qualitative analysis. Thus, the thematic analysis should be the primary qualitative analysis method qualitative researchers grasp as an independent and reliable qualitative approach to analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The following section elucidates more on these methods of qualitative data analysis as well as the method used in this thesis. Additionally, the diagram in Figure 5.6 summarises the comparison of the main features of thematic analysis and content analysis in qualitative research.

Figure 5.6: Main Features of Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis in Qualitative Research.
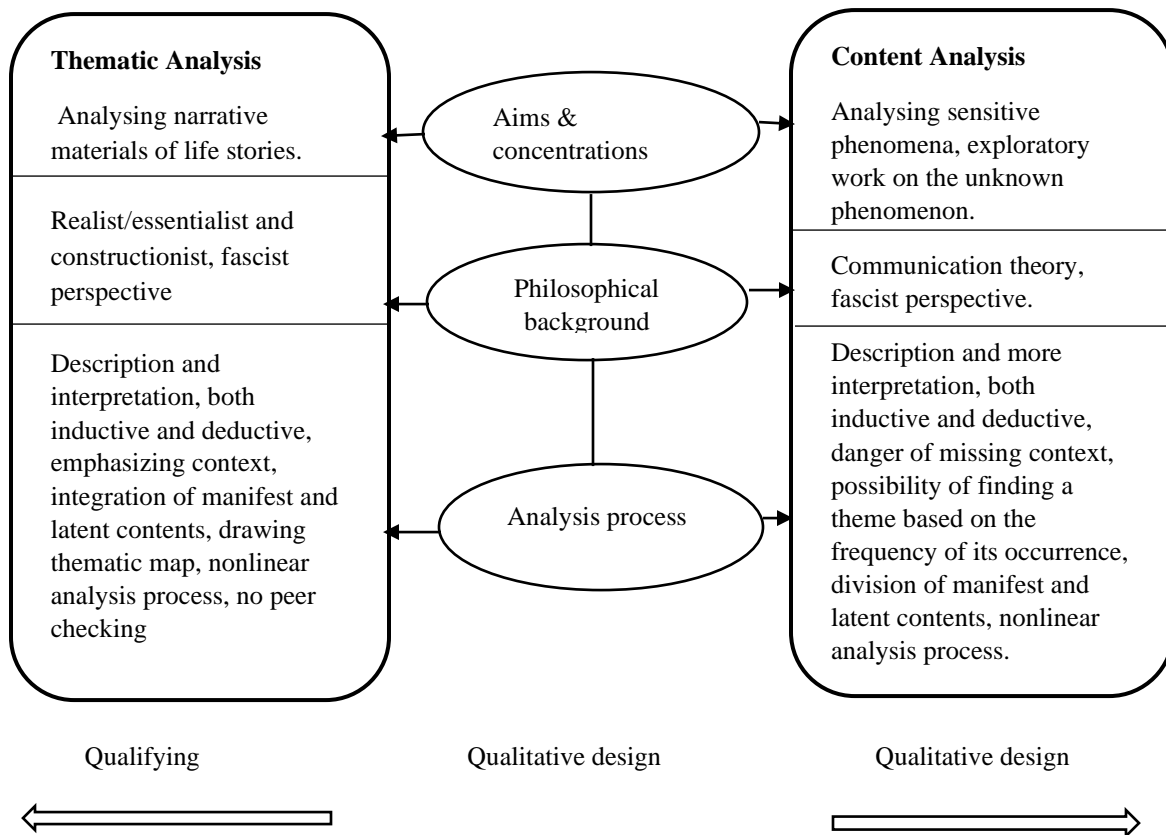
5.6.6.1 Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis, as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005:12), is "a research method for the subjectivist interpretation of text and data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns". Similarly, Mayring (2004:23) deduced that

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qualitative content analysis is: "an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step-by-step models, without rash quantification". This means that content analysis is a general expression for several strategies employed in analysing text (Tuckett, 2005). It is a coding and classifying systematised method used in searching bulky textual information unobtrusively to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency and relationships, and the constructs and communication dialogues. (Mayring, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Grbich, 2012). The goal of content analysis is to examine who said what, to whom, and the repercussions through describing the characteristics of the content of documents (Zhang and Wildenmuth, 2009).

5.6.6.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis as an independent qualitative descriptive approach is mainly described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). Basically, data set are organised and described in rich detail with thematic analysis. Also, it usually takes a step further than this and explains the different aspects of the research area (Tuckett, 2004). Although thematic analysis is acknowledged, no concurrence is existing regarding what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Tuckett, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, the thematic analysis does not precisely emerge as an analysis with a name just like other methods (e.g. content analysis; narrative analysis). It is often viewed as a poorly branded method. Usually, thematic analysis is not clearly affirmed as the method of analysis in reality, whereas many analyses are fundamentally thematic. Rather, such analysis is either stated as something else (i.e. discourse or still content analysis) or not associated at all to any specific method (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In using thematic analysis, Attride-Stirling (2001) argues that in reporting the process and detail of analysis, insufficient detail is often provided. Rubin and Rubin (2012:226) claims because 'you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews'; such a method of analysis is exciting (i.e. appealing). Other analytic approaches that seek to describe themes/patterns across qualitative data (for instance, 'thematic' discourse analysis, thematic decomposition analysis, Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory) are different from thematic analysis. Thematic decomposition analysis is a particularly confirmed type of 'thematic'

discourse analysis that identifies themes or stories within data and theorises language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social (Braun and Clarke, 2006). While both the IPA and grounded theory are theoretically bounded, though they seek themes/patterns in the data. The term thematic discourse analysis is used to refer to a wide range of pattern-type analyses of data, ranging from thematic analysis within a social constructionist epistemology (i.e., where patterns are identified as socially produced, but no discursive analysis is conducted) to forms of analysis very much similar to the interpretative repertoire form of DA. Basically, an inquiry for established patterns/themes through an entire set of data, instead of just within a data item, is shared by all these various approaches or methods (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For instance, interviews or interviews from an individual, like, the case study types of analysis such as narrative analysis (Tuckett, 2005; Grbich, 2012).

Definition of a Theme: A theme is any significant or major data discovered with reference to the research question. Furthermore, Braun and Clark (2006) note that it reveals within the data set some level of patterned responses or meanings. Also, what counts as a theme /pattern, or the size the theme needs to be, is an important inquiry to address as regards coding (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Several occurrences ideally will be available across the data set; however, countless occurrences of a theme do not necessarily mean it is more important to the data set (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Hence, in some data sets, a theme may be given little or no space in the data set (i.e. it might appear in rather few if the data set) and significance space in others. Grbich (2012) notes that in order to determine what a theme is, the judgement of the researcher is required, which makes flexibility an important part of the process and rigid rules quite meaningless.

5.6.6.2.1 Inductive vs Theoretical Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that there are two main ways to identifying patterns or themes within data set in thematic analysis; firstly, is the inductive or bottom-up method, this method entails that the identified patterns are strongly related or linked to the data themselves as such grounded theory and this method of thematic analysis has some similarities (Patton 2015). In this method, the themes identified may have a minimal relationship with the precise question the respondents were asked, if the data has been collected particularly for the study (e.g. through observations or interviews). Also, they would not be compelled by the theoretical interest of the

researcher in the topic or area (Patton, 2001). Hence, the inductive method of analysis is a means of coding data without attempting to fit it into an already existing coding frame or the analytical perceptions of the researcher (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In this regard, this type of thematic analysis is data-driven. Elo and Kyngas, 2008) notes that it is necessary for the researcher to know that separation of themselves from their theoretical and epistemological responsibility is impossible. Therefore, in an epistemological vacuum, data are not coded.

While in the second form of thematic analysis, which is the theoretical or deductive or top-down, thematic analysis will likely be driven by the theoretical or analytic interest of the researcher in the area and is hence, more clearly analyst driven (Tuckett, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006). This type of thematic analysis tends to provide a more detailed analysis of certain features of the data but a minimal rich description of the entire data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Basically, choosing between both types of thematic data analysis depends on how, as well as why the data is being coded. Thus, it can be done for a rather particular research question that links more to the theoretical method, or the particular research question can develop through the process of coding, which is correlated with the inductive approach (Grbich, 2012).

5.6.6.2.2 Semantic and Latent Themes in Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed that the decision about the level at which themes can be identified can either be a semantic/explicit or a latent/ interpretive level, and it is necessary for a researcher to be aware of which one to choose because normally a thematic analysis emphasises mainly on one level. At the semantic level, themes/patterns are established within the surface or explicit meanings of the data, and beyond what has been said by the respondents or what's has been written, the researcher does not search for anything further (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Ideally, the process of the analysis entails movement from the *description*, (i.e. where the data have simply been organised to show patterns in semantic content and summarised) to *interpretation*, (i.e. where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications) (Patton, 2001).

Contrarily at the latent level in thematic analysis, it moves beyond the semantic level of the data and go-ahead to identify and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisation that are purposes as shaping or informing the semantic level of the data. Attride-

Stirling, (2001) gathered that thematic analysis around the latent level is likely to originate from an interpretivist/constructionist paradigm.

5.6.6.2.3 Epistemology: Realist vs Constructionist Thematic Analysis

Both the realist/essentialist and constructionist/interpretivist paradigms can use the thematic analysis; however, for each of them, the outcome and focus will be different (Tuckett, 2005; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). If the research is being conceptualised, then the question of epistemology must be addressed because it may resurface during the analysis process when the focus of the research may change to an interest within the distinctive features of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). What can be said about the data and informs(demonstrates) how meanings are theorised is directed by the research epistemology. For example, with a realist approach, motivations, experiences, and meanings can be theorised in an elementary manner. Simply because mainly one way relationship is assumed between meanings and experience (Elo and Kyngas, 2008)

While from an interpretivist/ constructionist point of view, instead of inhering within, such meaning and experience are produced and reproduced socially (Braun and Clark, 2006; Tuckett, 2005; Elo and Kyngas, 2008). Thus, thematic analysis conducted in a constructionist framework seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and systematic conditions that allow the narration of individuals that is provided. But such a framework cannot be focused on motivation or individual psychologies. Thematic analyses that are based on latent themes are likely to begin to intersect with thematic discourse analysis. Though not every latent thematic analysis is constructionist (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In contrast, from a constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced rather than inhering within individuals (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). Therefore, thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist framework cannot and does not seek to focus on motivation or individual psychologies but instead seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that enable the individual accounts that are provided (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thematic analysis that focuses on 'latent' themes tends to be more constructionist, and it also tends to start to overlap with thematic discourse analysis at this point. However, not all 'latent' thematic analysis is constructionist.

In summary, thematic analysis requires exploring through a set of data, such as a range of texts, numerous interviews, or focus groups, to find reoccurs themes or patterns of meaning. From the aforementioned, there are different types and outcomes of thematic analysis. Hence, addressing them prior to and during thematic analysis is important in a qualitative study (Tuckett, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Those approaches that study meanings across the whole data set (semantic themes) and are realist often cluster together, while those that study particular aspects (latent themes) and are constructionist tend to often cluster together. However, different combinations are not impossible, and in relation to this, no firm rule (Patton, 2015).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that, when engaging with the literature relevant to the analysis, there are different positions to consider; like the view of the researcher may be narrowed as a result of early reading resulting in the analysis focusing more on some features of the data at the expense of other potential significant features. However, Elo and Kyngas (2008) argue that the researcher can be informed about more subtle aspects of the data through engaging with the literature prior to the analysis. Hence, for thematic analysis, there is no moral compass to proceed with reading. Though, not engaging with literature at the beginning of analysis would enhance a more inductive approach. While engaging with literature before the analysis is required in a theoretical approach (Tuckett, 2005; Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The Table 5.4. shows a summary of the various stages involved in thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that it is necessary to know that the principles of qualitative analysis are not rules that must be ahead. Hence, following the basic principles should be applied with the flexibility to fit the questions and data of the study. Thematic analysis is not an even procedure that is simply moving from one stage to the next; neither it is a recursive procedure that is where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is a more *recursive* process, back and forth movement as required, throughout the stages. Also, over time the procedure develops, so it does not need to be rushed. In this research, the theoretical thematic analysis at the semantic level was followed.

Table 5.4 The Six Phrases of Thematic Analysis

	Thematic analysis phase	Illustration of the process
1	Familiarise myself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generate initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3	Search for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Review themes	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Define and name themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6	Produce the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, the final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006)

5.7 Research Access

The appropriate organisations (SMEs) that meet the research criteria were selected from the database of the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Kaduna state, which is one of the major locations of SMEs in Nigeria. After identifying the organisations to be used for the research, an effort was made to make initial contact with the organisations. Altinay and Wang (2009) assert that a key element of research design for any study is research access. It is very important to carefully plan well ahead of time, what data to collect, where to locate the data and how much time might be needed for the process (Altinay and Wang, 2009). Buchanan (2012) suggested that it is important to be aware of the phases of "getting in," "getting on," "getting out," and "getting back "stages as these steps bring about reflexivity in the research process. Thus,

through personal contacts and gatekeepers from individual organisations, appropriate respondents within the organisations were selected. A detailed presentation was also made to the organisations on the need for this study which further enabled access and willingness to participate.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

There are ethical considerations to deal with whenever the research involves interactions with human subjects (Sanjari et al., 2014). In this study, I made contacts with selected SME owner-managers, first to obtain their consent for their organizations to participate in the study, and secondly, to interview them during the process of data gathering. I ensured complete compliance with the London South Bank University ethics code and did not commence interaction with participants until the LSBU ethics approval form was obtained for the study to commence. Participation in this study was voluntary, and I made this known in clear terms to potential participants at the point of recruitment. All participants were required to sign the consent form (see Appendix C) before participating in the study. The purpose of the study, the level of involvement of participants, and the possible uses of the research outcomes were made known to the participants. I was very transparent in dealing with the potential participants to avoid any forms of deceit, coercion, and misrepresentations.

Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants is a critical ethical issue (Creswell, 2014; Sanjari et al., 2014). I ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of the six SMEs and their participants are strictly maintained. This was achieved by using codes to represent each of the participating SMEs. Only demographic data like company age, number of employees, nature of business, and size of the organization were requested from the participants. Personal information like names, place of birth, ethnicity, religion, and age was not requested from the informants. Any personal information was omitted from the transcription process; participants were referred to as 'Interviewee by Number'. Interview recordings were only used for the purpose of the transcript, and this data was treated in line with London South Bank University Ethical procedures. Data were stored in passworded files, and access to all data storage devices are restricted by using passwords where applicable in addition to the physical security of devices. Recordings were deleted after transcription and analysis. Also, participants were within their rights to withdraw from taking part in this project at any point.

Additionally, the researcher encountered other ethical dilemmas, such as some of the participants that took part in the interview process were selected by the management of the organisation. Hence, I ensured that my request for a space in each organisation where only myself and each participant were alone was met in each case study firm to encourage the respondents to speak freely. However, this influenced the response of some of the participants being that some of the questions asked during the interview were not answered. However, such participants were reassured constantly that the purpose of the interview was solely for the researcher's utilisation and not the organisation. This prompted some of the participants to speak more freely while, the account of other participants who still refused to answer such questions were excluded from the data analysis process.

5.9 Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive description of the philosophy, strategy and methodology that has been followed in conducting this research. This research was aligned with the interpretivist and subjectivists paradigms using in-depth interviews and unstructured observations as the primary method of collecting data and company documents as the secondary method of data collection. A question guide was designed based on the theoretical discussion given in the previous sections, which was used to obtain data on the research problem. Also, because multiple cases were employed in the research, a detailed description of each case and themes within the case was provided (i.e. within-case analysis), which was followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (i.e., cross-case analysis) and an interpretation of the meaning of the case. The choice of research methodology was justified, and the research protocol was discussed, explaining the sources of data and analysis techniques utilized. Figure 5.7 below is a summary of the steps in the research process.

Figure 5.7 The Steps in The Research Process

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┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Identifying the research │──────▶ │ Exploratory and          │
│ problem                  │        │ understanding oriented   │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Literature review        │──────▶ │ Justifying the research  │
│                          │        │ problems identification  │
│                          │        │ of gaps                  │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Participants selection   │──────▶ │ Extracting of            │
│                          │        │ participants perceptions │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Data collection          │──────▶ │ Interview Protocols,     │
│                          │        │ observation protocols    │
│                          │        │ and secondary data       │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Analysing & interpreting │──────▶ │ Thematic data analysis   │
│ data                     │        │                          │
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Reporting &evaluating    │──────▶ │ Micro organisational     │
│ the results              │        │ factors influencing the  │
│                          │        │ quality of direct        │
│                          │        │ employee voice mechanisms│
└─────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────┘
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The following chapter centres on the presentation of findings from the qualitative data collected. More detailed profiling and choice of the case study organisations is provided.

CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

6.0 Introduction

To rearticulate, the overarching aim of this research is to investigate the perceptions on the factors influencing direct employee voice channels in SMEs. Through management and employees' lens with a view to gaining situated understandings of how the micro-organisational factors influence the quality of direct employee voice channels in SMEs, using Nigeria as a context. Qualitative research methods were employed in the treatment of data. Therefore, a case study design was used in order to answer the research questions. The first research question was answered through gathering and exploring data from previous literature reviewed in the area of this research:

(1) What are the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs in Nigeria?

(2) How do these identified factors influence the quality of direct voice of employees in SMEs in Nigeria?

While the second question was answered through the qualitative research design used in this study, the study was conducted using a case study research method. This incorporated in-depth interviews, unstructured observation, and document analysis.

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative research methods employed. The qualitative method (i.e. the case study) adopted a fully subjective measure of the internal organisational factors and the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms by discussing themes identified through in-depth interviews and unstructured observation. Additionally, the analysis from the company document was used to support the primary data (i.e. in-depth interviews and unstructured observation) by providing a robust comprehension of the background of each SME case study organisation. Thematic data analysis was carried out on the research data, and the findings are presented in the following sections.

6.1 Analysis of Organisation Profile

A total of six organisations were used for this research case study design. All the organisations employed are from the manufacturing and service industry of SMEs in Nigeria and have all been in operation for more than 15years. Basically, an overview of background information of the case study firms (SME) is provided in this chapter. The case study firms have been coded to protect the anonymity of the firms. The coding represents the firms' geographic range of operations and organisational size. For each organisation, "SME" stands for the small and medium-sized enterprise. The letters following the numbering of each case study refer to their organisational size: "S" for small and "M" for medium. The Manufacturing and service sector case study is coded as "MSS". However, all the case study firms are from similar sectors. Also, EPs stands for employees. Each section of this chapter is relevant to the analysis of a case study firm. The analysis includes (depending on the availability of information): (i)company product market, (ii)company size (number of employees and departments), (iii) Company age, and (iv) Number of interviews. Table 6.1 below provides an overview of case study firms included in this research.

Table 6.1: Overview of Case Study Organisations

	Companies	Product market	Size (employees)	Age (year)	Number of departments	Set of interviewees	Number of interviews
1	SME-1M	Roofing sheets and zinc products manufacturing	130	25	six	CEO, 3HODs,15 EPs	22
2	SME-2M	Cable and wire manufacturing and installations	153	28	six	CEO, 3HODs 20, EPs	21
3	SME-3M	Fabricating aluminium building parts for constructions	175	29	seven	CEO, 3HODs, 20 EPs	22
4	SME-4S	Production of breads/ pastries and provided of restaurant services	68	15	Four	CEO, 3HODs, 17EPs	23
5	SME-5M	Galvanised building materials production and industrial services	122	28	Five	CEO, 3HODs, 19 EPs	21
6	SME-6S	Plastics and rubber productions and supply	89	20	Five	CEO, 3HODs, 20 Eps	22

6.2 Overview of themes arising from the data analysis

Interviews and observations were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In the first process of analysis, the forms of the data that manifested were of interest (Grbich, 2012), then to demonstrate the search for themes across all the data set, focusing on the form (as against content), the term thematic analysis was selected. The complete sets of data were included for this analysis (i.e. the transcripts of the entire 131interviews, unstructured observations and the company documents). The main reason for the analysis was to understand and examine the participants' perceptions of the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs. Additionally, it intended to analyse the perceptions on the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs. The data collected from all the participants was transcribed. Throughout this stage, initial ideas and thoughts were taken note of because at this stage of analysis, and it is regarded as fundamental (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). Subsequently, the data transcribed was read and re-read rigorously, and to confirm the accuracy of transcription, the recordings were listened to several times. In order to classify emerging themes and categories.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this process of ''repeated reading'' and the use of the recordings to listen to the data leads to data immersion. That is intensifying the researcher's closeness with the data. (Patton 2015) describes this process as reducing the text to smaller units and arranging them as per in groups or categories. Hence, a large form of data segments and annotations is produced. It is addressed that the literature and background reading, the researchers' experience and values influenced the groups that were identified; they did not just emerge from the data set (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). While it was established that such features add to the process of conceptualisation, caution was ensued to validate that the data was evident in the groups and, instead of forcing the data to fit in with the groups, the groups fit the data.

Succeeding the initial stage, developing thoughts and notes produced by transcribing and immersing data is the coding phase. Thus, aspects of data that are found relevant to the research questions were identified from the coding phase. Also, equal attention was devoted to the entire data set because it is inherent to this method to ensure that adequate examination is given to themes that are repeated within the data. The third phase covers looking for themes; it clarified larger parts of the data through joining different codes that may have been considered the same aspect within

the data or may have been very similar. In order to obtain the categories based on one of these groups gotten, the method of coding is produced (i.e. outline). Either precisely from the data (i.e. the 'bottom-up' approach) or from the previous theoretical framework of the researcher (i.e. 'top-down' approach) and previous knowledge of the literature is required on the subject matter under study (Patton, 2015).

For the analysis in this research, 13 groups were derived from the data (i.e. the 'bottom-up' approach) and were subsequently merged into three main categories. Hence, the interview data was reduced through these categories, as demonstrated in table 6.2. All initial codes relevant to the research questions were incorporated into a theme. Additionally, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), developing thematic maps is important to help in the generation of themes. It aided in visualising and considering the relationships among the themes. Therefore, at this phase, any themes that were too diverse or had insufficient data were removed. This modification of the themes was conducted in two steps, firstly confirming a systematic pattern was developed with the coded data. Secondly, after the systematic pattern was developed, the themes were examined in reference to the entire data set. This verified, the themes validly reproduced what has been apparent in the entire data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Furthermore, to ensure that no codes were missed in the initial phases, additional coding was conducted. After a well-defined picture of the different themes and how they fit together materialised, the analysis proceeded to the fifth phase, which entails naming and defining themes. All themes are required to be defined distinctly and supplemented with a completed analysis. Analysis was formed without focusing only on the narrative from the individual themes, but how this narrative related to the overall narrative that was evident within the data. Also, it was very necessary to produce short but badass names/meanings that carried instant evidence of the theme's essence. The last phase, which is also the production of the report stage, concerned selecting models of the transcript to summarise the components of the themes. The issues within the theme and a clear summary of the point being made is clearly recognised through such illustrations. The process of data analysis and coding is illustratively represented in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Process of Data Analysis and Coding
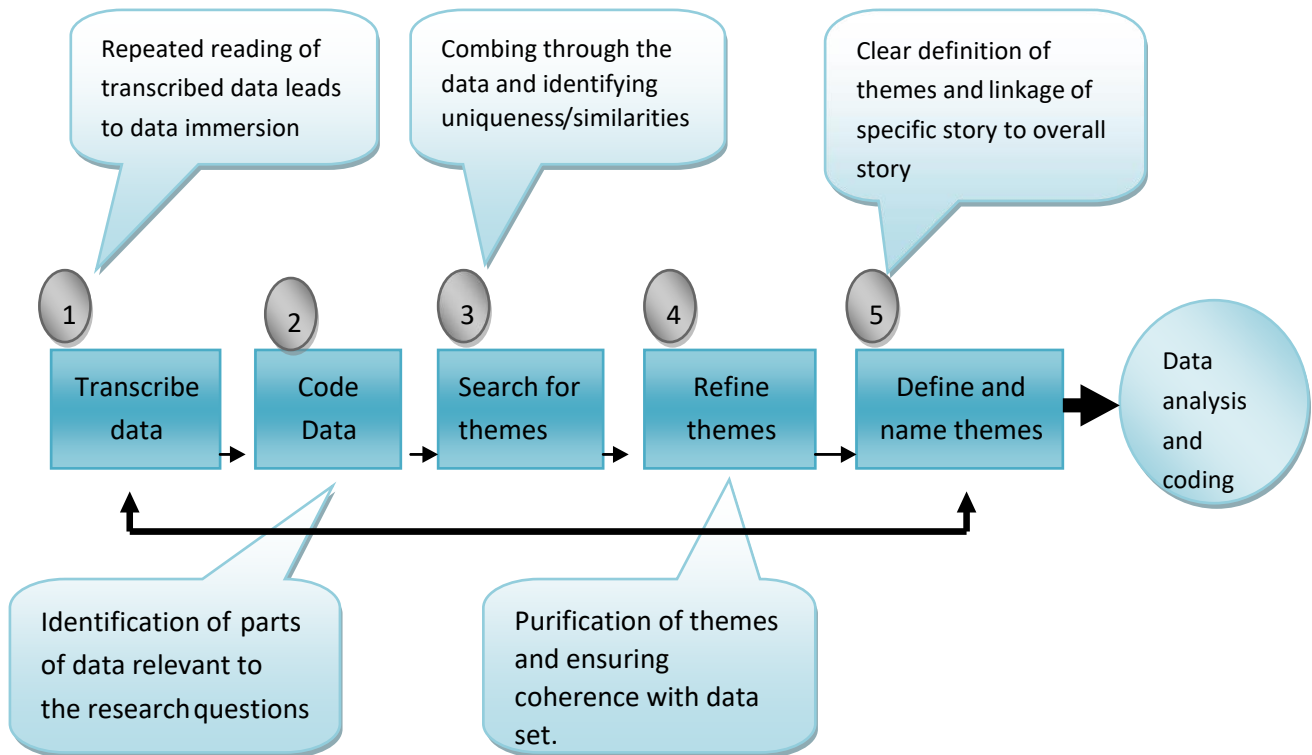
The Thematic Analysis Findings

The thematic analysis process that was administered to the data transcripts obtained significant ideas that were apparent in the data. In order to modify the perceptions of all the respondents, these themes were considered fundamental. These groups/ categories have been marked as ''Organisational Culture,'' "Organisational Structure", and ''Leadership style''. Also, there are obvious features of the inferences of the respondents that correspond across these groups. Basically, this should be considered as a suitable explanation of perceptions and attitudes, which are all connected to each other and certainly not made up of isolated ideas.

Table 6.2 Structure- Code Groups

Number of Groups	Factors
G1	Effort
G2	Efficiency
G3	Formalisation
G4	Tradition
G5	Participation

G6	Supervisory support
G7	Communication
G8	Integration
G9	Emphasis on trainings
G10	Welfare
G11	Autonomy
G12	Innovativeness
G13	Performance feedback [Rewards]

The codes were collated into potential themes, and all related data was gathered to each potential theme, in order to identify the themes. Afterwards, in a thematic analysis network, the themes were grouped (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in a logical way that is illustrated in a diagram of the themes in Figure 6.2 below. Three main topics were identified under which the themes were grouped. These are; 1) organisational culture includes effort, efficiency, formalisation, tradition 2) structure; supervisory support, participation communication, integration, emphasis on training, welfare includes and 3) leadership style; autonomy, innovativeness and performance feedback. The others (i.e. rewards and warmth) were merged with performance feedback. The three groups are elaborated on in the following sections.

Fig 6.2 Thematic Analysis Network- Displaying the 13 Categories Grouped into the Three Main Groups
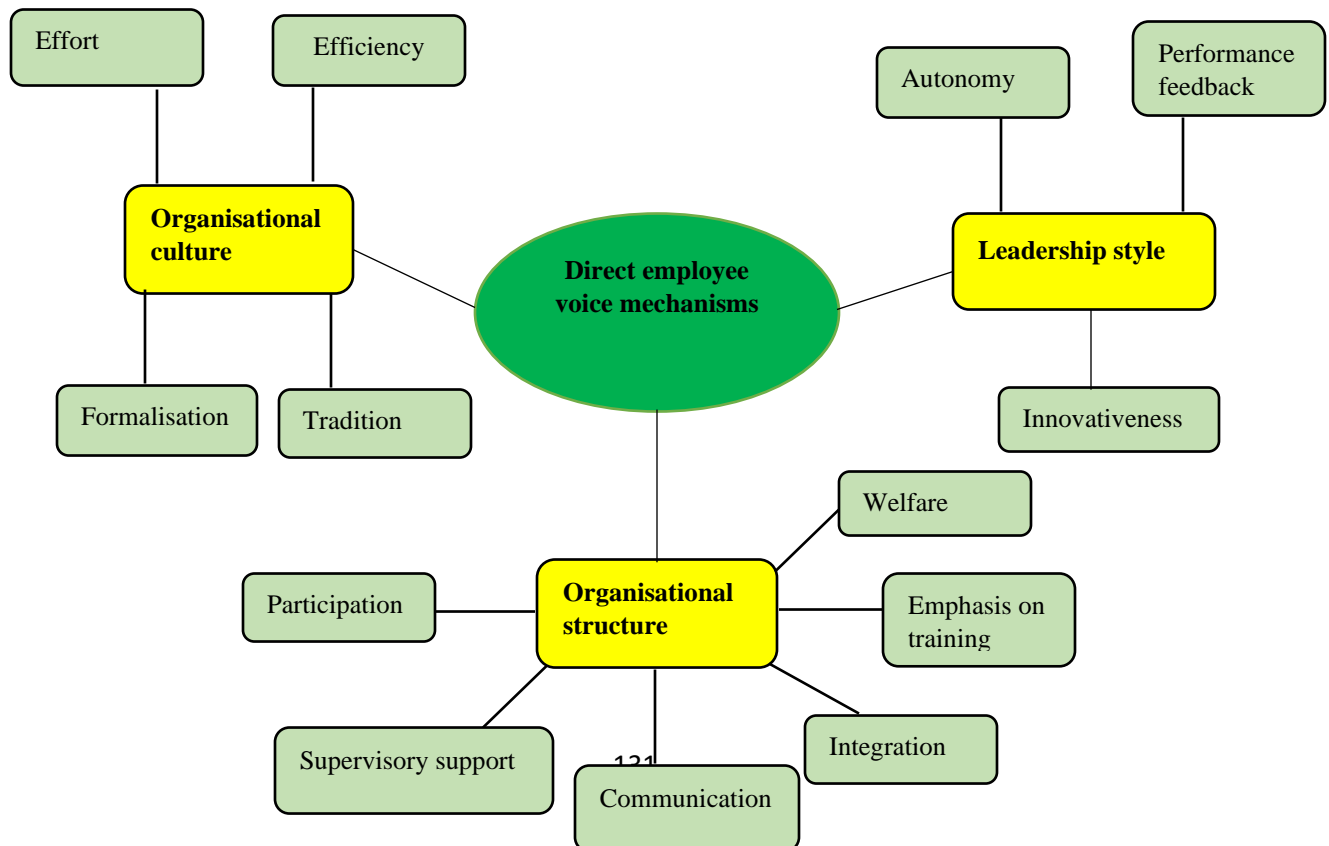
Looking at the discussion above on the different case study firms, it is obvious that all the six cases present both similar and different characteristics with regards to the methods management use to communicate with the employees and vice versa in the organisation and the factors that influence these direct voice mechanisms. Below is a discussion on the comparison amongst the case study companies understudy in relation to the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs.

6.3 Comparisons on the quality of direct voice mechanisms in the SMEs

There was a variety of informal communication mechanisms functioning in each case study organisation. However, based on the analysis above (i.e. section 6.2), Cable Co [SME-2], Plastic products Co [SME-5], Aluminum Co [SME-3], Roofing sheets Co [SME-1], and Galvanized Co [SME-6] all have very similar direct employee voice structures except for Bakery & Restaurant Co [SME-4]. The table in Appendix F provides a comprehensive picture of the direct employee voice mechanisms that were identified as effective and ineffective in each case study organisation.

Table 6. 3 Summary of Quality of Direct Employee Voice Mechanisms in The SMEs

($\sqrt{}$ = effective; X = ineffective)

Direct voice mechanisms	SME-1R	SME-2C	SME-3A	SME-4B	SME-5G	SME-6P
Information sharing						
Employee Handbook	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	X
Open Door Policy	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Notice Boards	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
E-Mail	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Newsletters	X	X	X	X	X	X
Individual Briefings	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Team/Department briefings	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Memos	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Quarterly Reports	X	X	X	X	X	X
Annual Reports	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	X
Large Scale Staff Meetings	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Communication /consultation						
Suggestion Schemes/box	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Comment Cards	X	X	X	X	X	X
Team briefings	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Focus group/quality circles	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Online discussion forum	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	X	X
Workforce attitude survey	X	X	X	X	X	X
Codetermination /control						
Team briefings [joint consult]	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Open Door Policy	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$

E-Mail	X	X	X	X	X	X
Formal Grievance Procedures	X	X	X	X	X	X
Union representation	X	X	X	X	X	X
Speak up schemes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Company intranet	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collective bargaining	X	X	X	X	X	X

When considering **Information sharing,** the interviewees across all case study firms were of the perception that the company noticeboards is very effective in spreading company information and activities within the organisation. Table 6.4 provides a summary based on the observation analysis in the SMEs of how the noticeboard works. Also, some participants in the different cases identified other methods of sharing information see Table 6.3. For instance, Roofing Sheets Co, Bakery & Restaurant Co and Plastic Co had a company email through which employees receive information from management. while Cable Co own a company WhatsApp channel where employees receive information. In some way, this substitutes for the email used by other companies, looking at it from a similar angle. However, the noticeboard stood out for all the respondents because of its manageable and consistency features as described by the management and employees.

> "*Any information that I need to pass to employees will always be on the notice board first, but for we the key management staffs we are usually called by the MD either for managerial meetings or via open door policy. The noticeboard is the most effective because it is easier and faster, the meetings take longer because we keep going back and forth, even though the aim of such brief meeting sometimes was just to make the employees aware of any changes we have made, also individual briefings can be time-consuming most times [Production head]*

As for the email mechanism, the owner-managers felt that although management forward information to employees via emails, its correspondence was seriously underused within the firm because not all employees are skilled in using such form of communication, especially the older members of the workforce. The email was indicated as an ineffective mechanism as

> "*Various incidents have occurred where our employees had missed important information and meetings as they neglected their email accounts, and they didn't have access to the internet on a regular basis*" [CEO].

Therefore, the noticeboard played a vital role in all the case study firms, particularly in getting their employees informed on company activities. More so, it was evident from the

employees' point of view that the noticeboard was very efficient in getting them involved in the operations of the business because, as they noted, it is always available and accessible by all members of the workforce. One respondent noted:

> *"We use them very often here because employees receive the information directly, and they don't require much time to spread information. For instance, the noticeboard is put in three different areas in the company, so once we place any information there, the employees will see it, but if we decide to share newsletters, not everyone may receive it, like the employees that are not on shift however with the noticeboard they can view it whenever they come into work because the message is usually left on it for a while". [Admin head]*

Additionally, Bakery & restaurant Co were of the view that the company noticeboard was mandatory for sharing information productively within the company when compared to other methods available, particularly when compared to the department meetings because it was easier. Both management and employees agree that the noticeboard was essential and efficient, particularly in sharing information about daily changes in the company.

> *"For information from management, we get them from the noticeboard more. But before usually they call for short meetings to address employees most of the time. But they aren't that frequent anymore because it wastes time" [Ep 46].*

> *They use memos, noticeboard, open-policy, individual briefings, team meetings, large scale meetings that is the annual meetings. Yes, newsletters are used, but not all the time. As for emails, it's just once I have gotten information through email; rather, text messages are more. Among all the methods I have said, the noticeboard is the one that the company uses almost all the time[Ep 60].*

However, on that note, conversely, the owner-managers in Plastic Product Co did imply that using the noticeboard was not effective in spreading some certain type of information to the employees to prevent miscommunication amongst them. Hence, they preferred more direct mechanisms like open-door policy or individual briefing via daily meetings, and it was obvious from the analysis of the meeting observations. Undisputedly, the admin managers did explain that although the noticeboard was indeed effective in feeding information to employees, it also caused a commotion in some cases because sometimes, information has been analysed incorrectly by

some vocal employees, which leads to confusion within the firm than when they are relayed more directly via the meetings or individually.

> *It depends on the information. Some information is placed on the noticeboard for employees to read/ see, and sometimes, we convey information to employees individually. Hence if it is general information for all employees, then the noticeboard is used but if it is for certain employees, then I do it individually as well as other supervisors [sales/marketing]*

When considering **Communication and consultation,** with regards to communicating and seeking ideas as well as getting employees involved in the business activities, the majority of the case study firms agreed that the quality circles, department meetings, team and individual briefings large scale/general meetings and the open-door policy were used most by management and employees. Table 6.4 provides a summary of how such voice mechanisms are utilised. The respondents of all the case study firms concur that except for the large/general meetings, the other mechanisms are very effective in feeding them information and collating their ideas and concerns about organisational matters. Because not only are they easily accessible, they allow employees to present or relay their opinions to the firm and obtain rapid feedback, whether negative or positive. Also, the management at SME-4B and SME-5G implied that through the company team briefings, a better understanding and reasons for any changes within the organisation is grasped by the employees.

> *"The meetings and open-door policy are the most effective because the meetings are frequent, and employees are able to ask me any question about their duties or whatever information I gave them. Also, they can meet me in my office for more consultations when they want". [Personnel head]*

Similarly, the employees pointed out that they are always keen on using the team meetings as a means of airing their views, particularly the department meeting because besides being very useful in their communication with their managers, they also noted that they are effectively involved in deliberations that are work-related. Therefore, they could have face-to-face discussions with their HODs and sometimes the CEO on a personal level and in teams. Correspondingly, their CEOs did explain that suggestions/views from their employees must come through the meetings or via open-door policy (i.e. HOD/supervisors), and this was a procedure that employees must follow in other to participate or be involved in the decisions making process of the company.

However, the production and administrative heads at SME-2C and SME-6P explained that the effectiveness of the open-door policy primarily depends on their workers exploiting it because not all the employees have the boldness to approach management independently. Also, they identified the company meetings, particularly the general meetings, as being pointless because, in most cases, they ended in disarray despite the fact they are not done frequently. Evidently, analysis via the direct observations confirmed that the general meetings did constraint meaningful employee involvement because it took place annually, bi-annually or quarterly. Compared to the department and brief meetings was held every week and sometimes monthly depending on the department. Also, it involved only employees of the same department with the department head, but the general meetings involve all the employees and management. Also, the respondents did mention that the general meetings were not organised frequently.

Furthermore, the employees did note that the quality circles, which was implied as useful, was ineffective in some instances because it was mainly for discussions on production and improvement, which diminished their enthusiasm to speak their opinions on other company matters arising. Resultantly, the employees noted that they were inclined to voice their opinions to the manager through certain management employees (i.e. HODs) whom they felt were reliable or had confidence in or trust. In relation to this, few respondents implied that jobs were scarce due to the current nature of the economy; hence, they didn't want to take any risk in their current jobs.

> "The head of the department is effective because, through our department meetings, they are more accountable in presenting suggestions to the manager compared to some of us employees. Even our so-called employee reps are not bold enough sometimes. Then meeting the manager direct is ineffective because not all of us have the confidence to approach the manager" [Ep 61]

Mechanisms like the suggestion box were observed as greatly being ineffective across all the case study firms because even though it was good that their opinions were being listened to, employees felt that often their ideas were not acted on by management. Even the HODs described the suggestion as being too slow because there was no specific procedures or department to handle it. Furthermore, at organisations like SME-4S, the company suggestion box was mainly for customers and not employees. The owner-manager explained that because of the size of the firm, the company suggestion box was not popular. Hence, employees were encouraged to make suggestions directly to management through the HODS or individually. Additionally, the general

meetings were perceived as being ineffective as some respondents in SME-2, SME-3, and SME-5 implied that it wasn't an appropriate setting for them to discuss their opinions or suggestions. Instead, their employees preferred to discuss matters among their team/department and company focus groups (i.e. quality circle) as they felt that their opinions would be better heard and the risk manageable. Also, the HODs at SME-6 were of the perception that the popularity of the brief/ team meetings was due to the fact that they give employees the most opportunity to take part in the company's decision-making process, are very consistent than the large-scale meetings, and the opinions of the employees are being sorted on various changes as they occur in the company.

When considering **Codetermination and Control (i.e. Raising complaints),** other than SME-4B, there was an employee forum for raising grievances used in all the case study firms, particularly for employees expressing any dissatisfactions about their jobs or with management. Also, the majority of the respondents did note that the open-door policy was being used in some cases. More specifically, the open policy is used to project discontent or grievances amongst the employees to management. The respondents in SME-4 did imply that the primary mechanism to articulate grievances or dissatisfactions both with management and employees was the open-door policy. Correspondingly, the CEO did explain that because the company had a small workforce, they didn't really see the need to have a section for it.

> *"Grievances are settled directly or individually either by myself or any of my managers; also, the employees are allowed to come to me when they want. We don't have an employee forum because our company is not that big. I mean I see all my employees virtually every day" [CEO]*

hence, grievances brought to the notice of the management were addressed head-on and immediately by him or the management staff. The distinction among the codetermination and control procedures in the other case study firms and SME-4B was interconnected with their levels of management and wider workplace culture or experience, which was evident from their business size and structure, as revealed from the analysis of the company documents (in section 6.2).

Looking at Table 6.1, all the case study companies except Bakery &restaurant Co have been in the industry for over 20 years. Also, Aluminum Co had about 175 employees in total, Galvanised product Co employed about 122 employees. Plastic Products Co had about the same number of employees as bakery & restaurant Co., but Bakery &Restaurant Co had the lowest number of employees compared to all the other firms under study. Also, they did have fewer

departments compared to the other case study firms. Furthermore, in SME-4B, because of the size of the company workforce compared to other case study firms, the noted means of codetermination and control throughout the organisation is the open policy which is more direct and informal than in the other companies, where the employee forums were used, which is a bit less direct, especially when compared to the open-door policy. The employee forum consists of several employees and the HR manager. However, the other case study firms did confirm that the open policy was an option available to the employees as well for raising complaints and dissatisfaction to the organisation. Also, the majority (i.e. SME-1R, SME-2C, SME-3A, SME-5G) of their employees did imply that they preferred the employee forum the most because, to a large extent, it provided them covering to voice their criticism and feelings earnestly. In comparison, most of the respondents in SME-6P preferred the open-door policy (i.e. owner-manager) rather than through an intermediate because they felt that their involvement delayed the information feedback process. The employees implied that relying on others for information put them in an unknown stance.

> *Through the committee, which is made up of employees as reps, however, it is supervised by one head of department. Hence when employees have conflicts, they channel them through their committee executives and also, through us, the supervisors /heads of the departments when it is for personal/work schedule or task-related complaints. Depending on the gravity of the issue, both ways are usually very effective. [Admin]*

> *Our employee reps and HODs are both effective because most of the time, it depends on the type of complaints. None is ineffective like I said, it just depends on what the complaint is about [Ep 35].*

> *Whenever I have a problem, I forward it to the manager through the employee forum or any key management staff and in my own opinion, they try their best to address the matter. However, I think they should do more, especially when it has to do with other matters (i.e. personal issues outside the business), not only our job role in the company [Ep 24].*

Furthermore, the consensus amongst the employees was that the open-door policy is effective mainly to reconcile complaints within themselves. At the same time, the employee forum was the most suitable for channeling dissatisfactions concerning management about their jobs and welfare in the company. However, SME-4B did not have an employee forum like the others. Hence, their meetings were sometimes used as a forum by employees to bring forth their

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grievances with management in the company. All in all, the company team briefings (brief and department meetings) were described by all the respondents as the most valuable mechanism of direct voice because, as explained by SME-1R respondents, the meetings were the most effective scene for the company management to communicate and consult their subordinates on changes and other activities committed to development in the business. Likewise, the employees in other case study firms concur that the meetings that are held frequently present a setting for them to raise suggestions, talk through issues with management and ask questions about company changes. Compared to the other direct employee voice mechanisms mentioned above.

Table 6. 4 Summary of Direct Observation from The Case Study Firms

Forms of direct observation	Application	Findings
Briefing meetings	Organised frequently, depending on the urgency of the issues	Very brief, does not involve all the employees. it involved mainly employee on duty. However, employee performance, goals and concerns are discussed.
Department meetings	Organised at the beginning of every week and sometimes just monthly depending on the particular department.	Takes about thirty to one hour. Involves all the employees in the specific departments. Deliberations of operational employees matters and opportunity for employees to raise work related issues.
Quality Circles	Organised at any time, depending on whatever issues that are being debated on by production approximately six to eight employees representing all departments.	Unscheduled, involves about six to seven employees from all the departments in the company depending on the organisation. however, more employees from production or manufacturing department. Themed deliberations depending on the areas of performance and production efficiency. Also, opportunity for employee to raise concerns precisely from other employees about limitations in their job roles
Employee Forum	Organised depending on the gravity of the grievances or conflicts.	Takes a bit of much time. It involves several employees and the HR or Administration managers. It depends on the reason for the grievance. Also, a communication opportunity for employees to raise other concerns.
Individual meetings	Organised by various HODs with very few employees. Particularly from the continuous service department (i.e. production or quality control). Evaluations on the individual performance of some employees.	Takes about half an hour depending on the number of persons. Also, HODs workloads and issues concerning the employees present are outlined then they are given a chance to raise concerns or add their opinions.
General meetings	Organised annually or bi-annually with quarterly follow-ups. All employees are usually involved.	No observations.
Company Health and Safety meetings	Organised at any time of the day, month or yeah, depending on the ongoing issues or current updates	It did not take much time, all employees who are interested are allowed to attend
Noticeboard	Messenger to all the above-mentioned mechanisms. It is located in the central areas of the organisation.	Permanent, at least two or more were available in all the case study firms. The organisations that were bigger in size had more noticeboards

6.4 Determinants of Effective Direct Voice Mechanisms in the SMEs

This section explains the factors influencing the voice mechanisms in the case study firms. That is the factors that influence the willingness of employees to voice their opinions and participate in the organisation both for work-related and general activities through the mechanisms specified as being effective in the section previous section. Figure 6.2 in the previous sections depicts a summary of the identified factors influencing direct employee voice and how they were measured.

Table 6.5 Summary of Factors Influencing the Quality of Direct Voice in The SMEs

($\sqrt{}$ = present; X = absence)

Organisational Factors	SME-1R	SME-2C	SME-3A	SME-4B	SME-5G	SME-6P
Organisational Culture						
Effort	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Efficiency	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Pressure to produce	X	X	X	X	X	X
Formalisation	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Tradition	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	X
Outward focus	X	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$
Organisation structure						
Participation/collaboration	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Supervisory support	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Communication	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Integration	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Quality	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Emphasis on trainings	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Welfare	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Leadership style						
Employee autonomy	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Flexibility	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reflexivity	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Performance feedback	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
clarity of organisational goals/SC	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	X	X	X
Innovativeness	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Others						
Rewards	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$
Warmth	X	$\sqrt{}$	X	X	$\sqrt{}$	$\sqrt{}$

6.4.1 Organisational culture

In all the case study firms, the power and group culture appear to be very common. Based on the accounts of the interviewees in each case study company, there was common perception about the importance of formal procedures, going through channels and the level of employees' efficiency and productivity at the workplace in order for them to participate in the organisation's decision-making process. For instance, as depicted in Table 6.5, the HODs in SME-1R, SME-2C and SME-5G were of the perception that their organisational cultures are distinguished by a system and structured working environment (i.e. tradition), so that the involvement of their employees would be influenced through the set company procedures, rules and different hierarchical levels (i.e. formalisation). Undoubtedly, the CEOs in the case study firms implied that the level of support between their employees and management staff was essential for employees to project their ideas/opinions for the growth of the business. Figure 6.3 displays how the culture in SMEs influences their voice mechanisms. The group culture is the topmost and has the most impact on the employee voice mechanisms in the SMEs, while the rational culture appears to have a minor effect. However, all these cultures work together in the SMEs in influencing their direct employee voice channels.

Figure 6. 3 Organisational cultures influencing the quality of direct voice in the SMEs
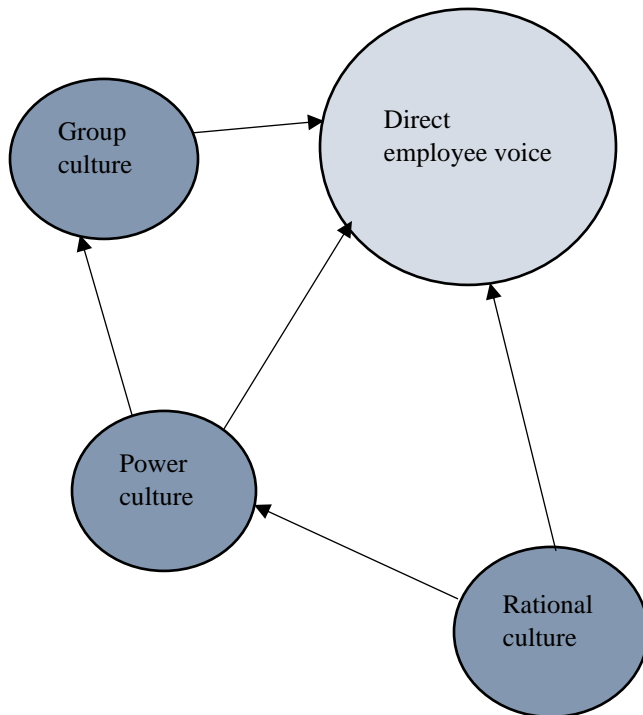
Furthermore, the respondents (i.e. HODs) implied that their company culture enables them to coordinate, organise and govern what the employees do. While allowing employees the chance to voice their opinions and still maintain the smooth running of the business is important because aside from it being their duty, the long-term concern of the organisation is stability and growth. It was obvious from the analysis of the unstructured observation in Table 6.4 that both senior and junior employees have a working relationship. However, the culture of SME-3M was leaning most on the power culture because of the size of the workforce and the nature of the business, which the CEO described as delicate and hence needs extra managerial coordination.

> *The kind of job we do is delicate, and there is a procedure for doing it. It is mainly when we are introducing a new method then we gather ideas and come to a conclusion on how it should be done, and all employees have to abide by it. The thing with aluminum is that once it is ruined, it is ruined, and it is quite expensive. Hence, while employees having/using their ideas is also welcomed, it is also important that they run it through their supervisor just in case there is a backlash, then the employee doesn't take the fall. If the HOD is not aware and there is a problem, then the employee will face the consequence [C.E.O]*

Additionally, the organisational culture in SME-4 and SME-6 was laced with a rational culture based on the views of the respondents. In addition to their power and group cultures, rational culture was also evident in both firms. The management at SME-6 explained that their employees are normally given a clear description of their job role in the business, including the significance and impact of the task to achieving the business goals and then asked for their contributions when necessary. Similarly, the respondents at SME-4B implied that management supports new ideas and innovative methods from employees. The CEOs at both case study firms were of the perception that their company culture engenders and accepts changes rapidly.

> *"I know that without the employees being fully functional, the company will not progress as it should. Hence their maximum effort is needed for continuous increase in productivity" [Production head]*

> *Being the head of a department, I know the importance of maintaining a positive work environment to maximise and enhance employees' efforts to achieve the business's goals. I show genuine concern for employees by encouraging them, getting employees fully involved in decisions related to their job post and allowing them the freedom to carry out their duties in the best way they know.*

However, I am very watchful of them so that they don't take advantage of the freedom being that they are human beings. [Human Resource]

Comparably, their employee verified that individual resourcefulness and flexibility instigating increased growth in the business are supported and sometimes rewarded. But few employees in SME-4B implied that management did not reward them enough. Also, in all the other case study firms, the employees were of the perception that sometimes their supervisors did not communicate their ideas to the firm management and even when they did, they were miscommunicated such that recognitions weren't given to them, or their request wasn't treated. The management did, however, imply that the employees are encouraged to participate and communicate their views to management, especially when it involves their duties and the progress of the business because, as services providers, they have first-hand contact with consumers. However, formalisation is a very important factor that is considered when employees intend to approach management. Their CEOs, just like in the other case study firms, implied that the set organisation procedures and guidelines are in place to monitor the involvement of employees to prevent chaos in the organisation.

"I wouldn't say we encourage our employees to get involved on a wider scale but going on with what I said earlier on uniformity, getting them involved on wider issues will bring chaos because all the employees have their own way of doing things. Most times, when we take opinions, we get varying opinions, so we try to select the meaningful ones. Therefore, for decision making, I would say they tell their head of department what they think, and if they can't lay it to rest there (i.e. handle it), then they bring to me" [CEO]

"It depends on the idea because sometimes employees can appear insensitive to the situation of things in the company nevertheless any suggestion that is being brought to us is weighed before we decide on whether to proceed to management or abort. It also depends on who the employee meets at the point in time because if it is a sensitive management staff, they might not act. Generally, most of the time, I listen because most of these employees are in the field that is the work with customers directly while we spend more time in the office or outside so in most cases, their ideas are productive because it comes with experience, and it may be the right thing to do. Except it is an idea that will take the company time to achieve, especially when we already have an ongoing agenda on that matter, which that idea may disrupt" [sales/marketing head]

6.4.2 Organisational structure

All the respondents of the case study firms implied that decision making involves all employees, i.e. senior and lower employees in the organisation. The management at SME-1 was of the perception that consulting lower-level employees in company decision making promotes participation at all levels which allows them to be innovative, creative and tackle problems in their various departments, all of which are necessary for the business growth. However, majority of the employees across all the case studies were of the perception that strategic decision making was for top management mainly (i.e. manager and senior employees). The structure of majority of the case study firms was decentralised, as demonstrated by their company structure see Appendix H. However, their decentralisation was at different levels. The owner-managers implied that employees are allowed to participate in decision making through the implementation of either a narrow or wide decentralised organisational structure to maintain control. That is by sharing their suggestions, opinions, and dissatisfactions through the company HODs. For instance, as explained in the previous section, the company structure of SME-2C, SME-3A, SME-5 and SME-1R, as revealed from the analysis of their company documents in Appendix H (i.e. deduced from their annual report), indicated a decentralised structure that is wider because of the more sub-chains of command; also, they have a larger number of employees. Compared to SME-4 and SME-6, whose company document displayed a wide decentralised structure. Also, they have the lowest number of employees compared to the other SMEs.

The CEOs in the case study firms except for SME-5G and SME-3A were of the perception that most lower-level employees, specifically those new to the company, were not yet experienced and skilful enough to participate in some company decisions, particularly the strategic ones. Hence, they limit employee involvement to work-related issues, which, as pointed out by the CEO (i.e. SME-1R), is where their skillsets lie. In SME-3A, most of their employees are highly skilled in the industry, as revealed by their CEO due to the nature of their business. Additionally, the other CEOs in the case study firms implied they were more concerned about meeting the business goals which was stated in their company documents in summary as rapid and continuous growth; thus, they incorporated a wider decentralised structure. However, the employees across all the case study firms implied that decisions concerning their job roles in the company were normally presented to them for further deliberations and in most cases, their ideas are considered and implemented specifically when it involves production matters (i.e. operational).

HR practices within the Organisational structure

It was evident in all the case study firms that management does prioritise the development of employee skills and their welfare. Based on the general consensus, training and development, employee welfare and performance feedback (i.e. rewards) were highlighted by the respondents in each case study firm. However, training and developing practices was the most common HR practices in all the case study firms because, as implied by the manager, this practice was important to maintain consistent growth in the business. Also, workplace wellbeing was recognised by the employees as being practised because they noted that the firm provided them with any current health and safety training. Supportively, the respondents across all the firms noted that they received health and safety training very frequently, just like the skills development training.

> *It is a policy of this company to conduct training for employees at all levels. Additionally, it is among the labour law in Nigeria. Hence training and workshops are organised to improve the productivity of the employees and the company as a whole. Employees (both senior and junior) receive training on employee participation in the business, especially with regards to employee and employer relationships and occupational safety at the workplace. The company has a training centre in the building where such training takes place [C.E.O].*

> *I encourage employees by praising them and appreciating their efforts or contributions in the presence of other employees, for instance, during some of our usual brief meetings. Also, when they do wrong, I correct them the same way so that they don't feel like they can behave anyhow. They are important to the company, yes but not at the expense of my job because the same way they answer to me, I also answer to the manager and other heads too [Personnel head].*

In terms of performance feedback, the respondents (i.e. employees) were of the perception that the firm's compensation system wasn't regular, they felt that management wasn't consistent with their reward policies because, sometimes failure to recognise their efforts was recurring and when management did, the financial reward attached wasn't followed as stated. Hence, the employees were saying that management needed to put more effort, particularly with regards to financial compensation. Specifically, in SME-4B, the respondents were of the prescription that outstanding employee contributions in the business were not rewarded as agreed and job promotions and bonuses weren't happening as they ought to. Similarly, the employees at SME-1R

felt that the financial effort management put into training could be redirected to upgrading their salaries and other rewards. Also, except for SME-3A, the majority of the respondents in the other case study companies implied that they were not satisfied with their salaries. As a result of this, some of the employees expressed their desire to exit the firm but could not as a result of the scarcity of jobs. However, the CEOs did infer that although the firm had a formal financial pay structure which they implemented, the economic situation of the country was the reason for the stagnancy in the pay system. Also, the HODs indicated that exceptionally employee efforts were recognised and commended.

Furthermore, the training and development programs in some case organisations differ from the others. For instance, the CEO at SME-3A stated that the firm had access to more sophisticated and trending training because of its experience in the industry and the nature of the products manufactured. Also, their head of production explained that the constant training and development of their employees on the new techniques of production was compulsory to stay on the same level with their competitors in the market.

> "*From time to time, the company has industrial induction courses that come up quarterly, bi-annually or annually, and the workers are arranged into groups to be trained for such courses as they all cannot receive the training at the same time. Such courses include health and safety, workspace management and electrical electronics training. When such courses come up, those who are affected are advised to take parts/participate to improve their efficiency in their job and increase output in the business" [Manufacturing head]*

6.4.3 Leadership style

Based on the perception of the respondents across that case study, firms with the exception of the common leadership style in their organisations was the transactional, transformational, and democratic leadership style. But the transformational leadership appeared to be dominant in all the case study firms. The transformational and transactional leadership styles were centred on social interactions through two-way communication between supervisors and their subordinates. The HODs in the case study organisation implied that they encourage their employees to be resourceful by providing them with enough information for work implementation, such that they know their jobs well and do not need to double-check all their decisions and by monitoring their performances.

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Furthermore, they explained that their duty was to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of employees within the organisation. Therefore, they allowed employees some degree of control over their tasks in the company. This was done as described by SME-3A respondents (i.e. management) by providing employees with adequate information on the processes and rules they must follow through the noticeboard, the brief meetings and the open-door policy, all of which were observed as effective means of communicating and involving employees in the organisation's decision making and activities. In figure 6.4, the leadership styles revealed by the respondents are displayed. As revealed by the majority of the SMEs, transformational leadership was identified as the most common leadership style influencing the voice channels in all the SMEs, hence its position in the middle of the transactional and democratic leadership on the diagram.

Figure 6.4 Leadership Styles Influencing the Quality of Direct Voice in SMEs
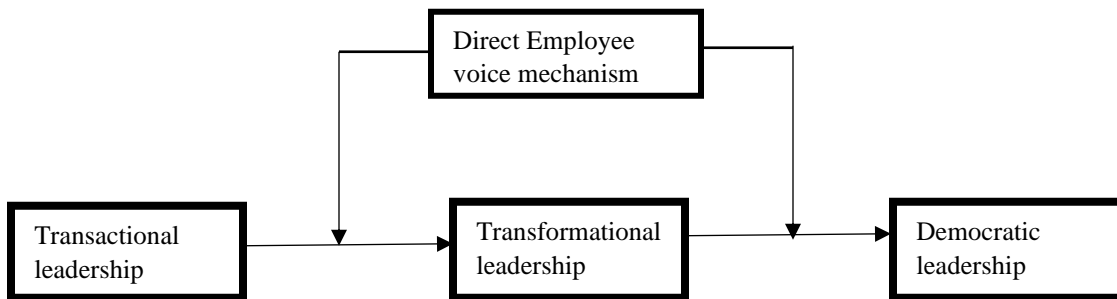
SME-1, SM-2, SME-3 and SME-5 display transactional and transformational leadership styles. Concurrently, the employees attest that they are provided with enough information to do their jobs which promoted individual employee involvement and helps them execute their tasks.

In contrast, SME-4 and SME-6 leadership styles was a combination of transformational and democratic leadership, as revealed by the respondents of this organisation. The employees revealed that the HODs allowed them the freedom to express themselves, particularly with matters regarding productivity in the company, through more frequent and direct means of deliberation; hence they influence their participation in the organisation's decision-making process. The analysis of the meetings observation confirmed this, as shown in Table 6.4. Also, SME-6P employees were of the perception that most of the decisions management will take, linked explicitly to production, will initially be run through them for their ideas and suggestions. However, management still makes the final decisions, likewise, in the other case study firms.

Simultaneously, the managers implied that although their employees are involved in the decision-making process to motivate them to be put effort and efficiency into their task, this facilitates employee participation. However, management may or may not apply their ideas to the business.

Although the other case study firms did display some features of a democratic leadership style, SME-4 and SME-6 were the only cases that emphasised it the most. However, their transformational leadership style was also dominant in the organisation. Based on the statement of the respondents, it was evident that management involvement of employees in the organisation's business decisions gave the employees the feeling of being important because the employees felt that the HODs recognise their capabilities and abilities. Hence, they noted that they were aware of the reasons behind changes in the company and cooperated with management to achieve the business goals by putting more effort into their job roles. Similar to the other case study firms

> *"The relationship between employees and management in our company is cordial. we have a flexible method which encourages employees to flow well with us [management]. As a departmental head most times I implement the 'carrot and stick method' that is I draw employees closer through brief meetings make them happy by commending them and make corrections when necessary, then sort their opinions. This helps not to destroy the relationship with employees and still make corrections, so they do their duties efficiently". [Admin head]*

> *"Our management does listen and support us employee most times we meet and discuss, but mainly on issues related to our work, like say suggestions and complaints related to our immediate work productivity [Emp 18].*

The employees in all the case study firms accept that they are allowed task autonomy. However, SME-4B employees implied that it depends on the gravity of the issue because in most cases, they deal with customers directly, so any small error in judgement can affect the company as a whole, so, whatever decisions they took independently must be in favour of the company, and they also must report back to management. This experience factor was mentioned in the other case study firms by the owner-manager and employees. The employees in SME-1R and SME-3A ascertain that experience influence decision-taking in the business. Likewise, the HODs were of the perception that the longer you remain in the company, the more task autonomy they were entitled to.

"Most of our employees in the company are highly experienced. Some of them have spent over ten years in the company; hence that autonomy is there. These employees are allowed to mitigate the work problem. However, if it is beyond them or interferes with the company policy, then they must inform their head of department or line manager" [C.E.O]

On this topic, the issue is this because I have to write reports and submit at the end of the month and also take stock. I do not give that much degree of control to employees under me except the ones that have been working with us for a while so that they can meet up with the needs of the company. Personally, we work with deadlines as well as the employees so that we all can meet up with the demands of the consumers and the company. [Marketing head]

Yes, they do allow autonomy, but it's based on your longevity in the company and workspace or duty in the company, but other decisions have to be conveyed to the H.O.D first for approval. [Ep 1]

Basically, the involvement of employees in managerial decision making across all the case study organisations were not constrained. However, employee participation is basically focused on operational matters and are extremely reliant on managerial authority. Also, from the above findings, it was clear that the case study firms depend on different levels of information mechanisms and consultation, with limited (i.e. average) demonstration of their employee involvement in decision making. However, the majority of the respondents did not directly profess dissatisfaction or the desire to be more involved in the firm; instead, they displayed more concerned about the firm's fluctuating performance feedback system (i.e. HR strategy). The following chapter will elaborate more on these themes.

6.5 Summary

Chapter six has presented the research background, participants' SMEs demographics, and the procedures for participants' selection and data collection. The data collected was analysed in two stages. The first stage involved the within-case analysis of data using the descriptive coding method to identify codes and categories from relevant segments that provide answers to the research questions: What are the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria, and how do these identified factors influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria. The codes and categories identified from the six

cases were presented in tables according to the twelve interview questions, which consisted of two sections.

The second stage of data analysis involved a cross-case thematic analysis which led to the emergence of 13 themes from the 20 categories that were identified in the first stage analysis across the twelve interview questions. These thirteen themes were found to be relevant to the research questions. Hence, they were grouped under the three main headings, which were described in detail in this chapter. Also, examples of participants' statements and company documents that supported these themes were presented. The similarities and differences in the themes across the six cases were analysed, and the frequencies of the thirteen themes were presented across the six cases. Additionally, evidence of trustworthiness for this study and its outcomes was rendered.

Also, credibility was ensured by recruiting capable participants that volunteered credible information regarding the study phenomenon. Transferability was confirmed by presenting detailed and transparent procedures for the recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis. The thesis was rooted in a generally accepted theoretical foundation for employee voice studies, thus ensuring dependability for the study. Therefore, the result of this study reflects the experiences of the study participants and not my personal opinions and biases, thus ensuring the confirmability of the study. The main findings show that the majority of the SMEs use similar direct voice mechanisms such as team briefings, employee forums and the noticeboard.

The next chapter will present the interpretation of the findings and discussed how these findings relate to existing knowledge in the literature regarding factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion and interpretation of the key findings from the data analysis, highlighting the direct employee voice mechanisms revealed to be effective and ineffective in the SMEs understudy, and examined the factors that influence the quality (i.e., scope, depth, and level) of these employee voice mechanisms. This chapter encapsulates the qualitative findings interlaced with some of the respondents' (CEOs, HODs and employees) comments and opinions through interviews, direct observations, and documents from the SMEs understudy. Then, the interdependence between the factors influencing the direct voice mechanisms was examined. The six case study firms used in this research were investigated, depending consistently on the data available, within each section of the discussion. Considering that six case study firms will be recurring continually in the following section, Table7.1 below serves as a quick reference to guide the reader.

Table 7.1: Key Characteristics of Each Case Study Firms

Company	Industry sector	Age [years]	No Employees	Description of products
SME-1R	Manufacturing	Twenty-five	130[medium]	Roofing sheets manufacturing
SME-2C	Manufacturing	Twenty- eight	153[medium]	Cable wire
SME-3A	Manufacturing	Twenty-nine	175[medium]	Aluminium production
SME-4B	Manufacturing & services	Fifteen	68[small]	Food and pastries production
SME-5G	Manufacturing	Twenty-eight	122[medium]	Galvanised products manufacturing
SME-6P	Manufacturing	Twenty	89[small]	Plastic products production

Adapted from the company documents (i.e. annual report) of the case study firms.

7.1 Effective Direct Voice Mechanisms in Place

The objective of the thesis is to identify the factors influencing the quality of direct voice in SMEs, to analyse the identified factors and enquire how they influence the employee voice

mechanisms in SMEs. According to Marchington and Cox (2007), although a robust channel for employee voice may be in operation within the organisation, it would be wrong to think that they are in use and functional within the organisation. Hence, it is important to consider how useful each mechanism used within the organisation are and why (Wu et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al. 2020). In the same way, Gollan (2007) and Gautam and Markey (2017) assert that there is a connection between how consultations occur repeatedly and their perceived value. Therefore, it was vital to initially identify the perceptions of management and employees on the direct voice mechanisms utilized within the organisation and their quality (Dundon &Wilkinson, 2018; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Before going further to explore the factors that influence them. The upcoming section explains what was revealed based on the perception of the respondents in the SMEs understudy.

7.1.1 Information sharing

The study revealed that, although all the SMEs had different mechanisms for sharing/spreading information within the organisation, there was a general concurrence from the respondents across the different companies on the importance of the noticeboard particularly for spreading/ sharing information within the SMEs. Figure 7.1 displays how the noticeboard operates with other voice mechanism in this SMEs.

Figure- 7.1 The Noticeboard in Action
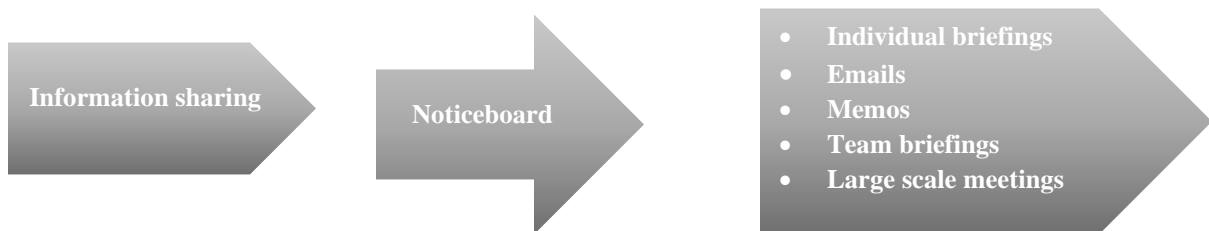
Information sharing mechanisms in SMEs.

The noticeboard, which presents a means of sharing information mostly from management to employees that is downward communication (Dundon and Gallon, 2007; Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018), was opined by the majority of the respondents as being a very important voice mechanism for spreading information within the SMEs. Although there were other mechanisms available within the SMEs, as shown in Fig 7.2, the consistent use of the noticeboard reflects management and junior employees' cooperative and receptive attitudes to each other because although the

noticeboard may allow one-way or downward communication from management to employees, it is used as a direct means of communication thus, serving as a messenger for two-way voice mechanisms to occur. This affirms Dundon and Gallon (2007); Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) findings that for some direct voice mechanisms to operate efficiently in an organisation, there should be some form of structures to foster the two-way communication mechanisms.

Furthermore, the respondents did reveal that the reason for the constant use of the noticeboard was because it is consistent and easy to access compared to the other voice mechanisms. This means that in spreading information about changes and business affairs within an organisation, management will always use any mechanism that is the most suitable and accessible first so that the information gets to all the employees, to 'win their hearts and minds' (Wilkinson and Dundon, 2010; Kwon and Farndale, 2016; Wilikinson et al. 2020). Similarly, the employees who are mainly the beneficiaries of these voice mechanisms (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011, Wu et al., 2015, Wilkinson et al., 2018) revealed that the company noticeboard did provide them with the opportunity to receive information promptly, making them aware of daily changes and activities in their workplace. However, the fact that the noticeboard does not provide employees with the ability to receive feedback or get a better understanding of the information was not deemed an important factor by the participants because, as indicated by management, the noticeboard is primarily for sharing information within the organisation. This affirms the research of Marchington and Cox (2007: 238), who states that some direct communication systems "can be viewed as nothing more than a neutral device to inform workers about specific issues or as an instrument to reinforce management prerogatives.... management inevitably controls what (and when) information will be passed to employees, and its objectivity is likely to be in some doubt since the information communicated is invariably selected by management".

Even with the presence of other sophisticated methods such as the company WhatsApp group and emails, the noticeboard was generally accepted as the most effective means of communication by all the case study firms compared to the other methods because they could not spread information to all the employees efficiently which would make communication ineffective and impede employee involvement in the workplace. This correlates with the work of Dundon and Wilkinson (2018), that although downward forms of voice allow the involvement of employees largely to the firm's process of decisions making, it provides the employee minimal input.

Furthermore, in SME-4B, the respondents also revealed that the team briefing was the most commonly used method previously for information sharing, but it wasn't as effective as the company's current means of information sharing, which is the noticeboard. Because sharing information via team briefings resulted in time exhausting arguments and conflicts. The employees noted that the company using the noticeboard for information was essential and not optional because of the convenience it provided especially for accessing company news and for them to share information amongst themselves. Similarly, the heads of department in SME-4B also noted that the use of the company noticeboard for information from management to employees was substituted for the brief meetings because the use of the meetings turned out to be futile. Also, it was bothersome and time-consuming.

This means that, in the process of getting employees informed about company matters and changes, the team briefings (i.e. meetings) may take up a lot of time because there is usually a lot of unnecessary opinions (i.e. disagreement), thus making this mechanism time consuming but that doesn't mean it is not productive for other forms of participation. Therefore, the noticeboard is more productive in informing the employees about daily happenings in the company, which may provide the employees with knowledge of the meetings, and also on matters to raise suggestions or views on to their managers whenever they decide to consult them through the meetings as revealed by the participants. This supports the findings of Wilkinson et al. (2013); Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) that although team briefings (i.e. upward communication) may provide feedback from management considering the fact that they can be used as a one-way communication method, the information may be lacking relevance or not being timely. Hence resulting in management not being able to effectively communicate the information to the employees (Della et al., 2021).

Barry and Wilkinson (2016) argue that these forms of voice practices (i.e. two-way) are set up by management to increase the stock of ideas available to them, promote cooperation in the workplace and urge embracing change in the organisation. While obviously presenting a greater level of voice for employees than downward communication, they have been identified by critics as problematic, particularly because employees are encouraged through them to help to resolve problems relating to work by collaborating with management (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Hence, as asserted by the respondents, the use of the noticeboard was restored fully by management to foster effective communication. This implies that, in general, company management will use the most

reliable voice mechanisms to communicate with their subordinates on happenings or changes in the business that they want them to know (Johnstone and Ackers 2015; Gautam & Markey 2017; Della et al., 2021).

In contrast, it was only the respondents in SME-6 that had a negative opinion about the noticeboard being the most effective for sharing information in their company. Mainly the owner-manager disclosed that using the noticeboard sometimes limited information sharing because not all information could be spread using it in order to avoid miscommunication and conflicts. This agrees with Dundon and Wilkinson (2018), who argue that downward forms of employee voice can sometimes simplify two-way dialogue among management and employees, hence presenting such employees the opportunity to (potentially) influence managerial thinking and organisational decisions through communicating their opinions and concerns. This may have been as a result of the company size in terms of the number of employees as shown in Table 7.0 as eight-nine employees as revealed from the company annual report. They preferred the more interactive means such as the individual/team briefings or open-door policy instead because a wide range of information can be spread through them. Undoubtedly, the employees revealed that they get enough information frequently about changes in the organisation and why they occur directly from their managers. This promotes involvement, and managements get to hear their views on such information, and this makes communication a win-win for the employees and the organisation. This concurs with Wilkinson et al. (2013), who stated that "although briefings themselves can be planned as one-way, downward communications, there is often provision for feedback up the line management chain in order to clarify issues and ensure that senior managers are aware of workers' feelings". However, the majority they say carries the vote; hence the noticeboard is the most effective mechanisms for information sharing in the SMEs.

7.1.2 Communication and consultation

The participants revealed that the most common mechanisms used within the SMEs for communication and consultation are the open-door policy, dept meetings, quality circles and general meetings to involve and seek the views/opinions of the employees. All these mechanisms can be classified under team briefings. According to Armstrong (2012), team briefing is a means of direct communication where meetings are held between managers and the workers to

communicate with the workforce or for interaction to obtain the ideas/views of employees on various organisational matters. They can be in a small or large group of individuals. The majority of the respondent had something positive to say about the open-door policy as an effective means of communication and consultation. For instance, SME-1, SME-3, SME-6, SME-5 respondents (HODs) revealed that the company's open-door policy is effective because it gives employees the opportunity to participate in workplace affairs on a one-to-one basis and in small groups. Hence with the open-door policy in operation, in seeking the opinions and suggestions of the workforce in SMEs, the employees are encouraged to approach management individually and speak out more. Also, management noted that their offices were always accessible to all employees to express their thoughts and concerns without fear of repercussions. This correlates to Marchington and Suter (2013), Wilkinson et al. (2018) research that asserts that when interacting with their employees, management has a preference for more direct voice mechanisms of communication if given a choice.

The respondents in SME-4 thought otherwise about the open-door, they revealed that it was not all matters they could consult their management on individually; sometimes going as a group was preferable because of their job security. They also added that often it depends on the relationship the employee has with the HOD. Furthermore, the managers at SME-2 and SME-6 did reveal that the effectiveness of the open door depends on the employees utilizing it because not all employees had the confidence to meet them personally. In general, great importance was attributed to the open door by management because they see it as a means for their employees to communicate with them and gain direct feedback from them and, in some cases, straight away, concerning any production/ work-related issues employees have.

Similarly, brief and dept meetings were revealed to be effective in the SMEs. The majority of the respondents concurred that the departmental meetings are effective, particularly for communicating business information on work-related issues and airing opinions. However, not so much when the matter involved grievances with management, which is not surprising because, according to Wilkinson et al. (2013) and Dundon and Wilkinson (2018), the aim of team briefing is to make sure that every employee knows and understands what they and others are doing in the organisation and why and not for settling conflicts. Instead, the employees opine that they would rather go via the company employee forum, which they identified as the most effective for raising

a grievance and sometimes suggestions. The team briefings were used as an upward problem-solving tool of communication to promote two-way voice (i.e. from employees to managers and vice versa) rather than only downwards (i.e. managers sharing information with employees). Which is the case of the noticeboard mentioned above. Additionally, two-way voice mechanisms provide employees with a greater degree of participation in the company than managerial communication (Wilkinson et al.2020; Kwon and Farndale, 2020; Della et al., 2021).

Management (i.e. CEO and HODs) stated that the department and company meetings give their employees the freedom to speak up more directly to them about changes or happenings that they need more insight or understanding on. Continuous interaction between the HODs and their employees, especially in smaller organisations, fosters more informal exposure to participation. According to Psychogios et al. (2016) and Dundon and Wilkinson (2018), the day-to-day interactions between employees and management may engender more informal dimensions to participation, particularly within the smaller businesses lacking many formalized HR systems. In contrast, other mechanisms limit participation to formal institutions and procedures, such as memos, newsletters or upward-problem-solving methods (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Gautam & Markey 2017). Both management and employees agree that the team briefings extensively allow employees to participate in the daily activities of the business. Through these meetings, employees were given enough freedom to raise any issues they had concerns over with their heads of department, the managers, and other employees, whether the issue relates to their job role or the business in general. Also, the departmental meetings appeared to be the most common voice mechanism used by the SMEs for communicating and consulting between management and employees. This departmental meeting, which is brief most times as revealed from direct observations, was executed regularly in some case study firms, as shown in Table 6.4, not only when management has urgent matters to discuss. Hence, the team briefings were observed as being productive, particularly for both senior and lower-level employees. These findings correlate with Townsend and Mowbray (2020), who affirms that directly involving employees in the firm's affairs is appealing to supervisors because it gives them opportunities to explain issues to employees directly. While also exerting the option of incorporating the ideas of employees or not. It also encourages most of the employees and management to develop a closer (i.e. interpersonal) relationship in SMEs (Mallett & Wapshott 2017; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018, Della et al., 2021).

The large scale/general meetings were not as favourable as the dept/brief meetings because they usually took place once or twice a year depending on the situation in the organisation. The employee respondents across all the case study firms had some reservations towards the general meetings as they felt that their voice was not heard, and the majority would have reservations about voicing their true opinions in such an open environment. The large-scale meetings did consult and inform the employees but did not provide them with the opportunity to influence the decision-making process within the organisation significantly compared to the dept and team meetings in these SMEs.

Also, it is important to note that with the exception of SME-4, all the other case study firms had quality circles in their workplace. However, the participants (employees) did note that although this mechanism did involve the employees in consultation and decision making in the firm, it is only on specific issues relating to productivity and nothing more thus, limiting employees in decision making. This contradicts the finding of Okpu and Seth (2014), who notes that quality circles will pose a problem for organisations that are hierarchically structured because quality circles work best with flatter organisational structure, which is the case of the organisational structure in the firm's understudy. A quality circle is a permanent discussion group originating from the lower hierarchy that meets on a voluntary basis at regular intervals, and their aim is to improve the productivity and quality of the organisation (Elvins, 1985). Subbulakshmi (2019) contend that quality circles create a means for employees to have more voice in the workplace because it is believed that employees know more about their problems than anyone else. Hence, they are best qualified to finding solutions. Also, directly involving employees in decisions that affect them will lead to an increase in their sense of achievement, pride and self-confidence (Holland et al.,2017; Lai et al., 2017). Consequently, a higher level of commitment to the job and the firm follows (Okpu and Seth, 2014; Gautam & Markey, 2017; Della et al., 2021).

### 7.1.3 Codetermination and control

The participants in each SME except SME-4 revealed that the company had an employee forum, which is very effective for raising issues and tackling grievances. Also, the owner-managers noted that sometimes the organisation open-door policy operation was in place for control. As revealed by the participants, precisely the employee forums were discovered to be a

very effective mechanism, particularly with regards to employees expressing their grievances both interpersonal and with the company. While the open-door open policy was noted to handle mainly interpersonal conflicts in the SMEs. In SME-4, due to the structure of their firm being small, as revealed by their company document (i.e. annual report), management did not require extra methods for control; hence, they mainly utilised the open-door policy. This confirms the findings of Wu et al. (2015), who found that the number of employees in SMEs influences the direct voice mechanisms used. In general, employees did display a preference for the more formal mechanisms of involvement in the organisation, preferring the employee forum the most especially regarding more sensitive issues, such as salaries or general working conditions. Undeniably, Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) concluded that the opportunity to express their views and grievances openly and independently must be given to employees through a voice system rather than being able to raise only task-related problems.

Overall, other mechanisms like the suggestion schemes, emails and memos were available in the case study firms. But they were viewed as ineffective by both management and employees because the management (i.e. CEOs and HODs) preferred to interact with the employees directly or through an intermediate such as the noticeboard as they revealed that information was often misinterpreted, or sometimes important information not read in time like in the case of the email. Thus, creating more disorganisation in the long run. As for the suggestion scheme run by management, the owner-managers are considered as an important mechanism within the SME because they claimed that it was put in place to grant employees anonymity in the process of making their points clear to management. However, the employees felt that using such a channel of communication only gave them the opportunity to express themselves on common matters and that on several occasions' management did not take their suggestions/opinions on board. This corresponds with the findings of Bryson et al. (2007), who asserts that not every direct voice channel will enhance perceptions of managerial responsiveness, also that of Wilkinson et al. (2020) that when employees offer their suggestions and receive no recognition for it, they tend to feel disengaged from the firm. The diagram in Figure 7.2 displays a summary of the direct voice mechanism found to be functional in SMEs.

Figure 7.2 A Summary of The Effective Direct Voice Mechanisms in SMEs
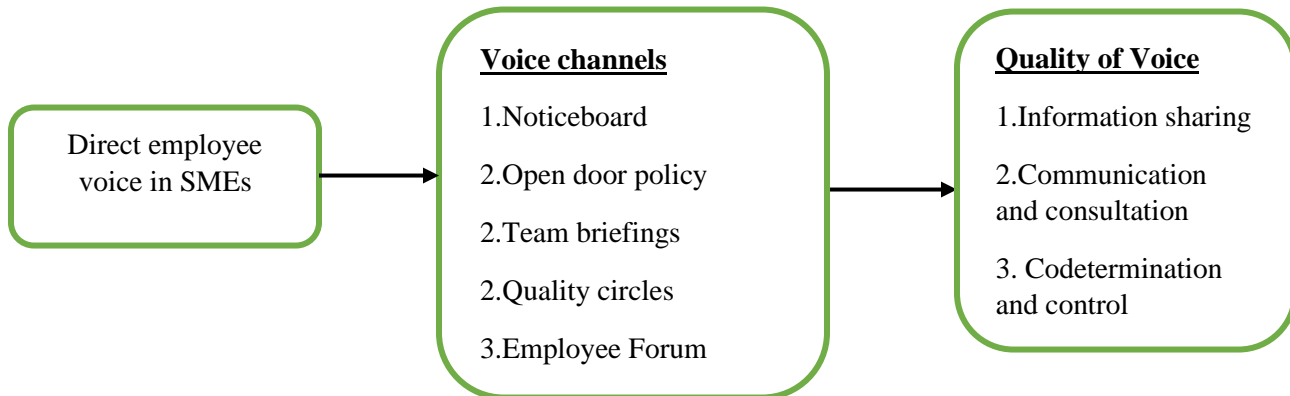
7.2 The Factors Influencing the Quality of Direct Employee Voice in SMEs

The main objective of this thesis was to identify the factors that influence the direct voice mechanisms operating in the SMEs, as explain in the section above, and explore how these factors influence the quality of these voice channels. Therefore, this section will answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?

2. How do these identified factors influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?

7.2.1 Organisational culture and direct employee voice in SMEs

The findings of this thesis reflect the questions raised at the beginning of the study. Firstly, what are the factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms. Secondly, how do these factors influence direct employee voice mechanisms. Firstly, in any organisation, culture plays an important role in fostering direct employee involvement within the business environment. Similar to the findings of previous researchers (e.g. Gilman et al., 2015; Kaulfman, 2015; Kwon et al., 2016; Pyscolosis et al., 2016; Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017) have identified the importance of organisational culture in shaping employee voice in the workplace. The organisation culture found in some case study firms were different from others which is not surprising because not all

organisations have the same culture. They may be similar in structure (i.e. size, age, departments etc.), but their values, beliefs, ideologies and systems may be different. In the SMEs investigated, based on the general consensus, it was found that the power, group and adhocracy cultures were in operation. For instance, SME-1, SME-2 and SME-3 and SME-5 displayed the same cultures, unlike SME-4 and SME-6, who had the same cultures. But, overall, the SMEs had similar cultures. They were respectively power and group cultures, and power and rational cultures, being that organisational culture of the SMEs under study was characterised by formalisation, effort, efficiency, and traditions. The table in Appendix G defines these characteristics.

The group and power cultures came out very strongly from the participants as an important factor affecting the direct voice mechanisms in the SMEs. Thus, *Formalisation,* which is an aspect of both cultures, was found to influence the effectiveness of the direct voice mechanisms across all the SMEs. It is concerned with the degree to which the firm's rules, procedures and policies are written and articulated. While *Tradition* (i.e. the level at which established ways of executing the workplace activities are valued) was also found to influence the direct employee voice channels. Also, tradition being similar to formalisation because they both share an internal focus, as shown in Figure 3.1, which denotes the group culture too. In an organisational environment, the behaviour of the employees is controlled using these written rules and regulations. Hence, their involvement in decision making is monitored to maintain orderliness in the organisation, as was revealed by the participants. This concurs with Mohelska and Sokolova (2015), who argues that group culture is practised by organisations for the group (workplace) maintenance.

Furthermore, according to Naidoo and Martins (2014)**,** rather than the hierarchy rules and regulations, the growth and participation of human resources within the firm is the primary concern of the group culture. Likewise, the participants in the SMEs revealed that employee participation and hence voice is encouraged in the organisation because it increases their commitment to the organisation. This makes them perform their duties in the workplace efficiently and effectively (Okpu & Kpakol, 2018). Thus, establishing *efficiency* (i.e. the degree of importance placed on employee efficiency and productivity at work). This concurs with Farndale et al. (2011:116), who stated that "voice may engender long-term positive attitudes because employees perceive the potential to influence decisions, regardless of whether the impact of employee voice on the decision outcome is realised". However, Kwon et al. (2016:3) argued that the 'Perceptions of

voice' without extensive voice might "motivate employees to respond as organisations desire". Similarly, the employees in the case study firms revealed that getting involved in the firm's affairs must be done through the designated voice mechanisms. Further discussion with management also disclosed that they allow employee involvement in the workplace, but not without going through the known direct channels of communication.

The culture of the SMEs understudy is characterised mainly by controlled procedures and role descriptions that are highly valued by the management in the SMEs. Looking back at the direct voice mechanisms that were identified as effective by the interviewees in Table 6.3, their culture expands more on why the noticeboard is described as effective because although it presents one-way means of communication which is from top to bottom, it is perceived as the most predictable and consistent system of sharing information around the organisation to all its inhabitants. Also, the noticeboard is a means of briefing the employees regularly, which they all know and have access to, unlike the emails which were identified as ineffective because not everyone has regular access to it. Even more direct voice channels like the team briefing, i.e. dept meetings, the open-door policy and quality circles were not known to be effective for sharing information because they were described by some participants as time-consuming and sometimes lead to miscommunication. Also, Marchington (2015) asserts that downward or one-way communication channels, to some extent, represent the most dilute form of direct voice channels because it does not challenge the status quo existing within the firm. Therefore, such a mechanism (i.e. noticeboard) may be considered as nothing more than a means to convey information to employees about a particular matter (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Affirmatively, the respondents in the case study firms agree that informing and educating employees about managerial actions is the common purpose of their company noticeboards.

Additionally, all the other direct voice mechanisms (i.e. open-door policy, team briefings, quality circles) identified as effective by the participants presents upward solving problem channels of communication, so they involved direct interactions with the HODs one way or another who is clearly the organisation's delegated authorities (Ruck et al., 2017; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020) and hence, have the power to give and receive information in the company. Additionally, those voice methods present two-way communication, which brings in the group culture that was found. Two-way communication promotes interpersonal relationships with management and

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employees, which motivates employees to participate and remain in the organisation (Kim et al., 2010; Barry and Wilkinson; 2016; Mallett and Wapshott, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020). These two-way voice mechanisms are a means of communication that allows subordinates to make enquires and entreat clarification, thus stimulating shared understanding in the business. Furthermore, the performance, team building, commitment and employee relations of the organisation's employees are improved with the group culture in operation (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Naidoo and Martins, 2014; Nam and Kim, 2016, Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017). All these characteristics of a power and group culture can be summarized as being result-oriented and foster a positive organisational environment.

This means that management engages the employees in the activities of the firm through direct means of communication to exchange views, solve employee problems and get feedback on specific matters. To increase their effort and efficiency towards their jobs, hence productivity which is the group culture. However, management imbibes procedures and guidelines to monitor or limit the involvement of their subordinates, through the use of the noticeboard, in other to maintain order or minimize deviating from the organisational objectives that is taking autonomous decisions driven by self-interest, which is the power culture (Nam and Kim, 2016; Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko, 2017). Also, if an organisation practice just one of each culture, it may negatively affect the direct involvement of employees because although these cultures may accentuate flexibility and collective participation, or formalisation. Their organisational culture towards employee voice will be internally concentrated on individual or group shared values instead of shared dispositions [i.e. gatherings] at the organisational level. This means that the scope of employee voice in such firms may be limited to specific issues and can only be described as ample when often those issues and decisions that are normally reserved for management are influenced by the lower employees (Dundon & Rollinson., 2011; Marchington & Suter, 2013; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Della et al., 2021). Normally, employees require more voice and influence than the organisation provides, insinuating that the balancing process is not only slow but also only relatively successful (Kaufman, 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018, Townsend & Mowbray, 2002). This means that if the voice preference of management and employees are not the same, the gap is bored by the employees because typically, the preference of management is domineering. This correlates with Kaufman (2015) that the magnitude of the gap in voice is influenced by the organisation's relative power positions, workplace failures and gravity of the market.

In the case of SME-4 and SME-6, their organisational was found to be a combination of group and adhocracy cultures. The group culture, as explained above, emphasises formalisation, tradition and efficiency. While the adhocracy culture is concerned with an outward focus. *Outward focus* is the extent to which the organisation is responsive to the needs of the customer and the marketplace in general. The diagram in Figure 3.1 throws more light on what adhocracy/rational culture entails. Management in SMEs implements this rational culture because it prioritises productivity, goal fulfilment, and achievement. This corresponds with Naidoo and Martins (2014) research that organisations adopt rational culture with the main aim of establishing awareness, innovation and handling the ever-changing market effectively. This means that the organisational cultures of these two SMEs (4&6) may be externally orientated. That is, it promotes individuals (customers) at the central point of the firm. However, Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko (2017) argued that considering the concept of this culture which suggests that a group of like-minded individuals pursue the organisational goals, surviving can become difficult for such organisations. Looking at Table 6.5, in these case study firms (i.e. SMEs 4&6), the power culture is also implemented, perhaps to exert control on employee's participation and achieve the goals of the organisation. Also, normally, with a rational culture, such power is flat. Hence formalisation and centralisation are low in the organisation (Pinho et al., 2014; Long et al., 2016).

Judging from the accounts of the interviewees in this SMEs particularly the owner-manager, these rules and procedures (i.e. power culture), play an important role in influencing direct employee voice because it helps control the tone of voice such that employees do not overstep those boundaries (i.e. go against the organisation policy) when given the opportunity to get involved (i.e. through information and consultation) in the affairs of the company. Also, it is obvious that their management in the case study firms is customer-focused; hence, employee involvement is influence by the scope of voice. This means that employees who voice out more constructive opinions, particularly work-related/productivity, may be accepted by management and subsequently will be involved in those decisions that are reserved for management. According to Dundon and Rafferty (2018), such organisations develop into a pro-market orientation where voice is mainly predicated on assumed value for shareholders and the firm interests rather than a right to increase democracy in the workplace. This means that professional or highly skilled employees may be given more voice in that organisation than other employees in other to meet the firm's goal of increased productivity and more profit.

7.2.2 Organisational structure and direct employee voice in SMEs

Secondly, in SMEs, the structure of the organisation plays a vital role in influencing employee voice within the workplace. The respondents in all the SMEs revealed that their organisational structure was characterised by communication, participation, integration, supervisory support, and quality. All these factors found in the SMEs understudy best describes a decentralised structure because such a structure involves a process where lower-level employees of a company are provided with the opportunity to participate in decision making as well as the affairs of the organisation with the support of management employees (i.e. supervisors or HODs) through corporation and trust (Holland et al., 2017; Funminiyi, 2018). Hence, all the SMEs had decentralised structures, but not perfectly, such that some employees were very satisfied with the level of participation their organisation direct voice mechanism provided them, while some respondents were not.

In SMEs understudy, the respondents revealed that they were mostly happy with the way their views and suggestions were addressed when it was related to the productivity of their job roles but were not satisfied with the level of influence they had on some changes in the firm. The employees revealed that management not involving them in some affairs affected their sense of belonging and being represented in the firm. This indicates that in the SMEs, their use of more direct channels of communication within the organisation will provide employees with the key function of assistance and support with their views and concerns. But lacks in engaging a proactive role to make the employees feel that they are important and part of the firm. This echoes Knoll and Redman (2016) findings that employees in the organisation who feel represented in the organisation and display a strong intellectual connection with the firm tend to engage in promotive voice (i.e. speaking up to improve work practices and procedures). Also, they noted that employees might engage in pro-social silence, that is, "withhold views that might disturb the unimpeded functioning of the workplace" and withhold their opinion or concerns if they think expressing them would challenge relationships at work.

From the factors shown in Table 6.5 that constitute the organisational structure in the SMEs understudy, the participants revealed that the most important structure factor that influences direct voice mechanisms in their organisations was the supervisory support (i.e. presence of their HODs). Incontestably all the direct channels of communication that were identified as effective in the

SMEs, as shown in Table 6.3, involved the HOD/supervisors. Coincidingly, Holland et al. (2017) note that with the absence of employee unions, especially in SMEs, more importance has been accumulated on the reliance on supervisory support and hierarchical structure of communication in firms. Hence, the organisation's HODs and line manager are the key personnel that deliver a two-way communication between the employees and higher-level management in the SMEs (Long et al., 2016; Townsend and Mowbray, 2020). From the accounts of the respondents, their suggestions and ideas are communicated to their HODs and left to them to either act or not, which is forwarding the requests and suggestions of employees to the owner-manager or top management. However, the respondents revealed that some of their supervisors were unapproachable, and sometimes they didn't communicate their voice completely to the CEO. Therefore, the intermediate role of management employees (i.e. supervisors) in fostering employee voice means that the nature of management employees plays an important role in ensuring that without any concerns for prejudice or counteraction, employees are able to approach them and communicate their opinions.

Similarly, the relationship between the firm and the employees and the level of trust between the employee and the firm are represented by the persons (i.e. HODs) who interact directly with the employee and thus represent the organisation for the employee. The organisation relationships for employees are shaped by the relationships with individuals who have direct contact with employees such as the HOD, HR, line manager, other team members etc. It is these relationships that influence the quality of the direct employee voice in SMEs. Additionally, efficiency and tradition factors identified initially from the organisation culture of the SMEs indicates standardisation. This system of control is used to influence the efficiency of employees, while the decentralised structure control is used to influence productivity (Funimiyi, 2018). This shows a link between the organisational culture and structure and direct employee voice. This means that direct voice mechanisms in the SMEs under study allows their employees at all levels to participate in the company's decision but through the support/ supervision of key management employees to positively influence the productivity and enhance rapid delivery of employee services as well as promote the organisational development. As well as simultaneously control the efficiency of the employees and generate quality products that give them an edge in the global market. The standardised structure is incorporated, such that written procedure, job descriptions, instructions, rules and regulations are employed to standardise the routine aspects of tasks.

The fact that the respondents in SMEs (management and employees) revealed their standardised system of control shows that they are aware and may follow this uniform and consistent way of doing their jobs. This means that the decentralised structure in SMEs can influence employee voice through employing standardisation. On the other hand, it was revealed by just a few participants in the SMEs (4) understudy that this tight control from management as a result of the size of their firm can influence the depth to which direct voice mechanisms are integrated within their company practices. Also, the extent to which the employees have an actual opinion on issues that affect them and the level at which employee involvement occurs. Nevertheless, the voice mechanism identified in the SMEs understudy as effective in Figure 7.2 obviously means that two-way communication is highly used to communicate, which encourages participation at all levels. Because by involving employees in the company decisions through direct methods, regardless of the depth, scope and level of voice, employees will have a better understanding of some business decisions and will hence show more commitment to the company's actions (Klaas et al., 2012; Ruck et al., 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021).

HR practices within the organisation

Usually, in any organisation where an employee works, certain provisions are expected by the employees from management that would facilitate their jobs. In return for the work done by the employee, they assume that their efforts will be acknowledged, recognised, or rewarded by the firm. Many of the factors that influenced the direct voice channels of the participants were based on this reciprocal (i.e. give and take) relationship between the employee and the organisation. The participants across all the firms acknowledge that their organisation prioritised the development of their skills through frequent training and their welfare. Also, they mentioned performance feedback (i.e. Rewards).

The factors welfare (i.e. quality and safe workplace), training and development (T&D), and performance feedback from management are identified by the participants as important for increasing employee involvement in the workplace, being that they are providing services to the firm. All the identified factors would contribute to a better performance of the employee and better results for the firm. Also, indirectly such factors benefit the firm because they lead to a better quality of work (i.e. productivity) that is provided by the employee. Likewise, for the effort of the

employee, they expect certain dividends in return that show their representation in the organisation and a conveyance of their voice, such as work recognition, salary and job security. The participants of the study revealed that salary and work recognition were among the important factors influencing their involvement and hence direct employee voice in the workplace, compared to the other factors. While welfare (i.e. quality and safe workplace) was indicated as a factor that would aid good performance and subsequently participation.

In general, the most crucial factors that influence the quality of direct employee voice in the SMEs, as revealed by the participants, are the ones that affect the different relationships between the employees and the firms, mainly the relationship between the HODs or line managers and the employees. Also, the provisions for employees for rewarding good performance, influence the involvement of employees in the workplace. Although some participants mentioned that they had the intention of leaving the firm because their requests for increased salaries were not meet. They could not because, according to the employees, the job market is not favourable due to the ongoing downturn in the economy. It was noteworthy to mention that although most of the participants did not mention this, it was clear from their company annual reports that they didn't have a formalised HR system to handle such matters may be because of their size. However, they did have HR managers, but it was more like just an individual rather than a unit.

7.2.3 Leadership style and direct employee voice in SMEs

Thirdly, in SMEs, the leadership style in the organisation plays a vital role in influencing employee voice within the workplace. According to Long et al. (2016), leadership is generally considered as part and parcel of an organisation's existence regardless of the type of business organisation. The leadership style revealed in the SMEs understudy was transactional, transformational, and democratic leadership. Innovativeness and autonomy were found to be the mediating factors of this leadership in SMEs. The respondents in the case study firms attested to it. It was revealed that autonomy and innovativeness in the workplace has an influence on direct employee voice because the participants in the SMEs noted that through the noticeboard, briefing meetings, and dept meetings (i.e. social interactions), the management (i.e. HODs) provides them with detailed information of their duties in the workplace to be able to efficiently and effectively execute their task to increase productivity in the firm. This correlates with Northouse (2018) that

organisations employ transactional leadership to achieve their present objectives more efficiently by ensuring employees have all the resources they require to complete their jobs and by linking work performance feedback to valued rewards. While transformational leaders provide their employees with enough information and resources to do the job, allowing individual autonomy in work and show appreciation (Northouse, 2018). Hence, an essential factor considered for tasks completion in the firm is a high level of autonomy.

Also, based on the description of the participants, autonomy can be portrayed as the freedom given to the employees by the firm to enable them to employ creativity towards the implementation of their jobs. Management revealed that on their part, they encourage and support the new ideas from employees on how to execute their job role greatly by getting them involved in organisation affairs to enable them to meet the goals of the firm through a steady increase in productivity. And according to Walumbwa et al. (2008), leadership is a two-sided interaction between leaders and employees to achieve a common goal. This means a high level of autonomy in the workplace will not only increase innovativeness but promote social interactions between employees and the organisation and subsequently direct employee communication with management. However, based on the general consensus from participants, experience (i.e. level of skill) and age in the firm was found to influence the level of autonomy in their workplace. This means that with the duration of the employee in the workplace, the organisation gives more importance to the relationship between them and such employees, which would enable them to communicate their concerns and receive feedback. Also, the work recognition was discovered to be more for employees that have stayed longer in the organisation, as they would most likely be more devoted to their jobs and would want the firm to recognise their devotion and effort to the firm. Also, in the higher echelon of the firm structure, the opinions of such employees would gain more importance, the same way the opinions from top management employees in the firm are most likely to be deemed relevant in improving the performance of the firm and are hence, most plausibly trusted and accepted.

Likewise, the increased importance given to relationships (i.e. experienced employees) with other employees was influenced by the size of the firm (i.e. number of employees) because, for an employee working in a firm with a larger number of people, these relationships would become very relevant for them. Such that employee satisfaction (i.e. integration) may be attained.

Employee satisfaction with regards to communicating their concerns appeared to be directly linked with their feeling of being represented. This means that employees feel more represented, if they observe that the concerns they raised are being addressed by the firm. Hence, with the concerns of employees being tackled by the organisation, they are more likely to be satisfied. This correlates with the findings of Marchington, Suter (2013), Kpakol et al. (2016); Lai et al. (2017) that management by informing and involving their employees in their decision making, either via representatives or direct methods, will make the employees find satisfaction in their jobs and have a sense of relevance and oneness with the firm (Dalluay & Jalagat 2016). Although most of the participants in the SMEs accept that the organisation allows task autonomy. Those in SME-4 imply that whatever decisions they make on their own must be accurate and in favour of the company, and they also have to report back to management. Thus, the employees in this case study are still saying that experience influence independent decision-making in the business, so they are of the opinion that the longer you remain in the company, the more autonomy you are entitled to in carrying out your duties. Therefore, experience appeared to be a reoccurring factor in all the SMEs under study. Overall, it can be said that employees in the organisation that are mature/experienced may have a good working relationship with management, which would encourage them in sharing opinions and suggestions more freely with their HODs, not only on job-related issues. Compared to the other employees because of lack of trust/confidence in management for receiving feedback.

Although the transformational leadership style in SME-4 and SME-6 was dominant, it was important to note that the democratic leadership also adopted in these firms as revealed by the participations may be the reason why their team briefings were sometimes deemed as incompetent for some form of communication because although democracy allows the employee the freedom to express themselves with the support of management, through social interactions that is participation and discussions. Arriving at an agreement over an issue was not easy as revealed by the employees and managers in the firm, because of the many different opinions of the employees which management may choose from, hence affecting the decision making in the organisation. This affirms Dalluay and Jalagat (2016), who opined that in an organisation where the democratic leadership style is in use, the level of cooperation and trust, motivation and job satisfaction of the employees is increased. But more time is required to arrive at decisions due to the difficulty involved in sorting out from the wide range of opinions which may cause biased decisions. The

following section provides a detailed explanation of the interconnection of these factors and how they influence the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs.

7.3 The Interconnection Between the Factors That Influence Direct Employee Voice

The organisation environment in the SMEs understudy has, in different aspects, revealed an interconnection among the factors that influence the direct voice of the employees in the workplace. The section will discuss in more detail this interconnection among these factors that influence the quality of voice mechanisms, and this would be established in the context of other research works and how they influence direct employee voice in SMEs. Figure 7.3 displays the relationship among the factors that affect direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs.

Figure7.3 Conceptual Framework of Micro-Organisational factors and the Quality of Direct Employee Voice Mechanisms in SMEs

Micro-organisational factors of direct voice mechanisms

- Team briefings
- Open door policy
- Employee Forum
- Noticeboard
- Quality Circles

Group & Power culture

- Formalisation
- Tradition
- Innovativeness
- Effort & Efficiency

Decentralised & standardised structures

- Communication
- Participation
- Integration
- Supervisory support

Transformational & Transactional leadership

- Autonomy
- Innovativeness
- Performance feedback[rewards]

HR policies

- Training & Development
- Wellbeing

Quality of voice mechanisms

(Scope, depth, level)

- Information sharing
- Communication and consultation
- Codetermination and

Outcomes

- Employee satisfaction
- Skilled & Experienced workforce
- Improved productivity

The culture found in the SMEs was a mixture of power culture, group culture, and rational culture. This identification was obtained from Harrison's typology of organisational culture (Naidoo & Martins, 2014). Power culture emphasises internal efficiency, uniformity, coordination, and evaluation. It is focused on control thus, rewarding conformity and penalising non-compliance (Brenyah and Obuobisa,2017). The culture of the organisation will influence the level of voice employees are given. Naidoo and Martins (2014) contend that, generally, organisations often demonstrate a mixture of cultures in order to enable the members of the firm to achieve their objectives. Suppose their activities are routine and steady (group culture is appropriate), if it is innovative (rational culture), in times of crisis or policy directing (power culture). This observation clearly explains the reason why a mixture of cultures was found in the SMEs in Nigeria. Therefore, organisational cultures in SMEs can be defined and established through managerial action (Franco & Matos, 2015; Psychogios et al., 2016; Madhukar & Sharma, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Cameron and Quinn (2011); Long et al. (2016) notes that the reason why any organisation will use a mixture of cultures may be because of the way they conduct their business, treats employees, customers, and the wider community. Also, the extent to which autonomy and freedom are allowed in decision making and the strength of employee dedication towards collective objectives (Madhukar & Sharma, 2017). The power and group cultures were the most common organisational culture found in all the SMEs in Nigeria. This means that although management engages the employees in the activities of the firm through upward communication with them to exchange views, solve employee problems and get feedback on specific matters in order to increase their productivity in the workplace. Company policies are put in place to curtail or limit the involvement of their employees in other to avoid over participation or deviating from the organisational objective by taking autonomous decisions driven by self-interest. Hence, these cultures existing in SMEs influence the direct employee voice channels. This coincides with Naidoo and Martins (2014); Brenyah and Obuobisa-Darko (2017) that contends that management needs to identify which type of organisational culture is most supportive for building an atmosphere that fosters employee participation in the workplace. This is because there is a match between the type of organizational culture and the type of voice channels required to motivate

employees in an organisation. Therefore, the research can conclude from the discussion of findings that a mixture of organisational culture is present in SMEs in Nigeria.

Strong evidence of a decentralised bureaucratic structure was found in the SMEs in Nigeria. In a decentralised structure, authority is transferred to those lower in the command structure. This structure can be connected to the power and group cultures seen in SMEs. That is, the employees are given the privilege to participate in the decision making in the firm through direct information and consultation by their heads of department. In the SMEs, majority of the decisions made at the lower levels are related to the production or operational activities of the organisation in order to encourage the employees to be creative and productive in their respective jobs in the workplace. But the involvement of the lower-level employees in the SMEs was controlled by management implementing rules and procedures to maintain uniformity and consistency in the business environment in order to achieve the business goals. This explains the operation of the power and group culture which was found in the SMEs.

Furthermore, the decentralised structure found in SMEs can be referred to as delegation. According to Funimiyi (2018), delegation is a more modern system of decentralisation, where the lower-level employees are involved in the organisation's decisions, and likewise, more authority is given to them within the organisation. This means that stability and control accentuate the structure of the SMEs such that the direct interaction between management and employees is influenced. Therefore as stated by Mullins (2008); Lai et al. (2017), the involvement and attitude of each employee in the organisation is influenced by considering their opinions and concerns and increasing or lessening them from their working conditions. Simultaneously, this organisational structure supports the employees to display positive reactions, increase their work pace and productivity in the SMEs. This study found that in SMEs, management wishes to maintain control and also want employees to be involved in decision making. Employing a centralised structure will only produce a controlled environment with decision making retained at the top level. While a decentralised structure will transfer decision making to the lower level but with little or no control. Therefore, a combination of the group and power culture with the decentralised structure appears to be the answer to what management seek in the SMEs. This is supported by Funminiyi (2018), who argues that an effective organisational structure that will be aligned with the strategy of the business and flow with the company culture should have a positive impact on the employees and

the business. Hence, this entails clarifying the jobs and responsibilities and developing skills of the employees to allow them to work effectively and together with management to achieve increased productivity.

The goal of any organisation is to be the best among its competitors in the same industry. The productivity of the organisation must be high to achieve this competitive advantage (Subbulakshmi, 2019). Hence, whatever structure they adopt can have an influence on the devotion of employees to the firm because (Perrin 2003; Madhukar & Sharma 2017) notes that the organisation's way of doing business, implementing changes, communicating within the workplace and the strategic plan for enhancing the involvement of employees is demonstrated by the structure of the organisation. So, the supervisors in the organisation, who are the managers of the human resource, play an important role in implementing and maintaining the structure of the firm through effective leadership. In the SMEs, the leadership style found was a mixture of transformation, transactional and democratic. However, the transformational and transactional leadership styles were the most common, discovered to be in operation in the SMEs in Nigeria.

Kwon et al. (2016) report that the communication atmosphere in the firm is not developed by chance. Rather it must be developed consciously because an open atmosphere of communication does not spontaneously emerge. Therefore, the organisation's atmosphere is basically as a result of the behaviour of management and the policies and decisions they make. However, Holland et al. (2017) argued that it is not enough to emphasise only open communication and trust that is needed between employees and management. Also, carefully planned and consistently implemented policies, which are embedded in a proper organisational culture, will contribute to the creation of a healthy open communication climate (Brenyah & Obuobisa-Darko 2017). The leadership styles that exist in the SMEs in Nigeria were focused on social interactions between management and employees to stimulate a supportive communication environment through task autonomy and innovativeness in the workplace. This influences employee voice because the voice mechanisms indicated as effective, particularly for communication and consultation, were the organisation team briefings that sustainably encourage face-to-face and daily interaction between employees and management, both individually and in groups. This concurs with Okpu & Obiora (2015) and Wilkinson et al. (2018) that, in a compatible culture, team

briefings promote consultation and a more open climate, thereby serving as an effective employee voice mechanism.

It can be recalled that this study found that a positive organisational environment in SMEs entails incorporating power and group cultures with a decentralised structure that encourages task autonomy in the workplace through the guidance of transformational and transactional leadership styles. The case study organisations all have a mixture of employees with mixed levels of skills and work experience. Hence a high level of autonomy is considered an essential tool for tasks implementation. Autonomy can be described (based on the description of the participants) as the freedom employees have, which enables them to exercise their creativity and propose innovative ideas needed for involvement to occur. Autonomous individuals are empowered to make and execute decisions needed to implement a task. Autonomy is one of the themes/factors that was indicated by the participants to significantly affect direct employee voice among the selected internal environment factors, as shown in Figure 7.3. Specifically, under the leadership factor, autonomy is one of the factors identified in facilitating a supportive communication environment. Thus, it is an internal factor impacting on a positive organisational environment. Another finding that emerged from this study, which is worth mentioning, is the fact that not only are employees given the autonomy to take decisions related directly to their job role in the SMEs. But are encouraged to contribute to the workplace decision-making process through the organisation's employee forum mechanism as revealed by the participants.

In SMEs, autonomy is an important contributing factor that noticeably affects the effectiveness of direct voice channels, and it is an important aspect of effective leadership in the workplace. Effective leadership was found to be a combination of transformational and transactional leadership behaviour in SMEs. The leaders in the SMEs promote autonomy in the workplace by designing a task to promote the opportunity for an individual employee to recommend suggestions either as an individual team member or an entire team to improve productivity. Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016) affirmed that some forms of transformational and transactional leadership styles are exhibited by every leader in SMEs, with each leader aligning more to either transactional or transactional leadership styles. This affirmation was reaffirmed in this research. Likewise, Franco and Matos (2015) revealed that managers in SMEs do not really observe any specific style of leadership. However, they were found to demonstrate some levels of

transformational and transactional leadership styles, with some aligning more to either transformational or transactional leadership style. The findings of this research on the factors influencing direct voice show that the SMEs in Nigeria do not follow a particular leadership style. Also, the case study SMEs indicated some features of transactional and transformation leadership styles which influenced the voice channels in the workplace. With the transformational leadership style taking the lead role.

Autonomy, innovativeness, and performance feedback (i.e. rewards) which were the most common leadership themes, provided evidence that the direct voice mechanisms in the SMEs, such as team briefings and open-door policy, encouraged a close relationship between management and employees. Consistently, Dundon and Wilkinson (2018) findings indicated that managers perceive that the employees will increase their commitment to the organisation as well as job performance when they feel involved in the workplace decisions. In this research, a strong social relationship was portrayed by the Nigerian SMEs managers interviewed through their direct voice channels with their employees in exchange for loyalty and maximum job performance. The existence of the trust and mutual relationship between the employees and management interviewed in this research provided evidence that they do demonstrate transformational leadership behaviour from this context. Furthermore, it was revealed by Mittal (2016) that in SMEs, transformational leaders establish trust between themselves and their employees, thus, enhancing their organisational commitment.

Though the managers in the SMEs interviewed maintained a close relationship with their employees and cared about their welfare through their communication methods, the majority of their employees imply that these are short-term measures that tend to address the immediate socio-economic circumstances of the employees. This means that SME's management does not operationalise transformational leadership principles. Instead, they obtain the loyalty of their employees by ensuring a good relationship with them and attending to their immediate welfare and social needs. This approach may not benefit from the long-term benefits of voice, which is acquired from maximum employee satisfaction (Gautam & Markey 2017; Della et al., 2021)

Training and development (T&D) focus on developing employee skills to enable them to participate in workplace activities by suggesting creative ideas in the production of goods and services. Welfare is the extent to which the organisation values and cares for employees. It was

revealed by the participants in the SMEs that more often, the organisation introduces training and development programs for the self-development of employees and improvements in their production process. Also, the participants noted that there are a dedicated team of employees (i.e. quality circles) working on innovations daily. The majority of the SMEs reiterated the importance of product and process innovation as an important driver of their productivity, which foster a positive employee voice climate in the organisation. Organisation's that are just beginning, specifically SMEs tend to be more concerned with product innovation than large firms because they are new to the industry; hence, survival will be their main objective (Mohammed and Nzelibe, 2014; Ifekwem & Ademola 2016; Miao et al., 2020). Therefore, to remain in the market, grow and develop, innovativeness plays an important role. However, this depends on the sector as it differs among the industrial sector (Pinho et., al 2014; Nam and Kim., 2016 Subbulakshmi, 2019).

The role organisational leadership plays in communicating and encouraging employees, that innovation is expected of all members of the organisation cannot be overemphasised. This support from management can be in the form of supporting creative ideas, recognition of employees who articulate ideas and supplying the necessary resources or expertise. On the other hand, employees shall be encouraged by such attitude of management to creatively tackle problems, seek opportunities to communicate in a proactive manner and perform their jobs in the workplace efficiently (Northouse, 2018). A supportive organisational environment is a forerunner of autonomy, this gives confidence to the employees to be innovative and productive, and the foregoing foster employee voice in the workplace.

The SMEs viewed the participation and consultation of employees as the day-to-day interactions with management and employees and their involvement in the decision-making process. Specifically, management described employee involvement as an organisational factor that stimulates creative ventures in growing businesses. Also, the owner-managers revealed that the employees are empowered to a large extent in the workplace to be able to function independently in their jobs. That is the extent to which employees are allowed to make decisions on completing their tasks in the manner they assume is most effective to enhance productivity. This corresponds with Mallett and Wapshott (2017), who established that employees could make decisions regarding their task process in a creative work environment and are rarely denounced for

failures during the innovation process. The organisation may tolerate these failures in order to nurture creative, proactive and risk-taking behaviours among employees.

From the annual report of the SMEs understudy, it was revealed that the majority of the organisations had been in the industry for about twenty years, and almost all the management positions were held by the most skilled employees. The owner-manager mentioned that majority of their employees have been with the company since they started. Hence, the level of skill and experience of the workforce was part of the popular factors impacting employee voice in SMEs. Also, such employees were involved and consulted most by management. The organisational structure in the SMEs was revealed to be decentralised, which encouraged employees to be informed and consulted on more important matters, but mostly on the progress of their job in the workplace using the firm's most direct/ interactive voice channels (i.e. team briefings). Also, having workers in the SMEs with many years of experience on the job suggests some level of familiarisation and knowledge of their work. Hence, management empowers such workers by granting them the mandate and support to independently take decisions towards improving business activities. This means that such employees were given a higher level of autonomy in the workplace.

Dundon and Rafferty (2018) concur that such employees (experienced and skilled) are given more managerial responsibilities. Sometimes, the organisation go as far as involving them in decisions meant for management, such as initiations of innovations and plans to purchase new equipment. One of the issues emerging from this finding relates specifically to the fact that a positive organisational climate will not only predict the success of an organisational financially but also facilitates employee involvement and empowerment in decision-making, hence employee voice. This current finding appears to be consistent with other researchers (Rama Devi, 2009; Owoyemi et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2015; Neo et al., 2018), who found that firms that focus on maintaining a positive organisational environment, particularly with regards to the welfare of employees, their flexibility, and T&D, revealed an increase in productivity compared to those that reiterated these to a lower degree. This further correlates with the earlier observations from this study, which revealed that an increase in the performance of the employees could improve the productivity of the firm, which will promote management consultation and involvement of employees in the organisation's decision making. This conforms with Felstead et al. (2010) and

Ruck et al. (2017), who established that improving the involvement of employees in the workplace can increase their performance in the organisation.

Consistently, this current finding appears to be consistent with Funminiyi (2018), who deduced that the involvement of employees with a decentralised structure would engender an increase in performance. Also, if the organisation supports individual participation, employee discretion will rise. This will, in turn, increase loyalty and commitment in the workplace. All the participants in this research affirm the importance and impact of leadership styles as an essential factor in shaping organisational atmosphere for direct employee voice in the workplace. The leadership style in the workplace positively forms perception of the workplace environment. Such that high performance is promoted by planning a supportive work environment that fosters employee confidence and trust in management and giving enough autonomy to employees by decentralization of authority in the workplace. This stimulates the tendency of the workforce to be creative and productive. The combination of management and employee interaction gives rise to empowered and involved employees in the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Mallett and Wapshott, 2017; Towsend and Mowbray, 2020). The results which this thesis has produced corresponds with the findings of several previous researchers in this area (Dundon &Gallon, 2007; Gilman et al., 2015; Kaufman, 2015; Morrison, 2014; Mallett and Wapshott, 2017; Nechanska et al., 2020). Some of these findings are that human resource (i.e. employees) adds the highest value to the firm. One of the key factors used in determining the involvement and consultation of employees that is quality of employee voice is productivity in the workplace because the main characteristics of increasing productivity in SMEs (as mentioned earlier) are having a workforce that is extremely involved, well engaged and participatory in the activities of the organisation (Omolo et al., 2013; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Msangi, 2020).

Mowbray et al. (2015); Miao et al. (2020) contends that the productivity of employees in the organisation has the most beneficial influence on the voice mechanisms that are functional in the workplace. Funminiyi (2018) ascertained that an organisation's approach to the involvement of employees (i.e. involving employees by practising power decentralisation) and the motivation through an increase in productivity champions open communication and inspirational goal setting. This promotes the commitment and involvement of the employees by providing encouragement and feedback (Wallace & Trinka, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2010; Holland et al., 2017; Northouse,

2018). Other researchers have declared that organisational environment influences the direct involvement and consultation of employees in the workplace (Morrison et al., 2011; Marchington &Suter, 2013; Ruck et al., 2017; Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018; Nechanska et al., 2020).

From the qualitative data analysis, the organisational environment (culture, structure and leadership style) subfactors/themes that came out as influencing direct employees voice are effort, efficiency, formalisation, tradition – participation, supervisory support, communication, integration, emphasis on training, welfare – autonomy, performance feedback, innovativeness as shown on Table 6.5. For instance, welfare is the level of concern shown to the employees by the organisation see Appendix G. The respondents constantly emphasised the importance of showing care and concern for the employees. It is the duty of leaders in the workplace to clearly communicate the business goal and ensure that required resources and support (supervisory support) are provided to ensure it is achieved. Also, emphasis on training for productive output is indicated as an organisational structure factor that impacts the quality of direct employee voice. The supportive climate management creates as the leaders of the organisation give the workforce the autonomy to make decisions using their knowledge and skills, thus involving them in the process of decision making. The aforementioned are contributory factors that impact the quality of direct employee voice in the workplace.

This corresponds with the findings of Kaufman (2015), Barry and Wilkinson (2016), Prouska et al. (2021), who explored organisation environmental factors influence on employee voice methods in the workplace. Barry and Wilkinson (2016) considered organisational behaviour as an antecedent of employee voice because it is a part of the firm that cannot be avoided. Rather, establishing it is needed so that it is supportive and favourable not only for employee voice but for other organisational outcomes. The workplace environment influence employee voice, and this finding is supported by some empirical studies in the theory of employee voice literature (Morrison, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Kaufman, 2015; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016; Nechanska et al., 2020) establishing that the organisational environment within a workplace impacts on the way employee voice systems functions. According to Msangi (2020), some of the notable measures of a positive organisational environment are organisational leadership and support, empowered employees, creative efforts being rewarded and availability of resources. These measures create a

workplace environment, which shapes the view of employers and employees and their interest in pursuing HRM activities.

Positive climate and the involvement of employees in the workplace decisions process can be immersed in the positive organisational behaviour (POB) theory. According to Luthans (2002: 59), POB is all about ''the application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace''. POB examine the conditions under which employees thrive and contribute to organisational success because it is immersed in high performance in organisations. The workplace climate has a major influence on employee voice through its impacts on motivating the individuals in the firm and job satisfaction. All this are done by the organisational environment, by creating expectations about what consequences will follow from different actions. Likewise, certain rewards and satisfaction are expected by employees based on their perception of the organisation's climate. The persons in organisations have certain expectations, and fulfilling them, is dependent on their perception of whether the organisational environment matches their needs or not (Long et al., 2016; Uchehara, 2017; Opute, 2020).

The findings from this analysis support the conclusion that organisational climate influences the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs. Such as the perception of a supportive environment through the leadership style encourages autonomy which gives employees rationality for task ownership and scope for taking decisions. Autonomy and innovativeness are the themes that have been identified by this study as the factors that impact the effectiveness of direct employee voice in SMEs. Without a positive organisational climate influenced by a decentralised structure with supervisory support and integration, employee voice initiatives will be minimal if at all inexistent, especially in SMEs or non-union firms. Hence, the leadership style within the organisation plays a key role in influencing the organisational structure and creating an effective employee voice climate. Important measures of positive organisational climate are supportive leadership atmosphere which allows task autonomy and encourages innovative tendencies of employees. These factors create an organisational, which shapes the view of employees and their interest in utilising the direct voice mechanism in the workplace (Dundon & Gallon, 2007; Morrison, 2014; Kaufman, 2015; Nechanska et al., 2020).

The HR practices within the organisation

Under the organisational structure in the SMEs, the respondents revealed some HRM practices. HRM practices are one of the most important organisational factors (Dundon and Rafferty, 2018; Msangi, 2020). The assumption justifying the practice of HRM strategy is that the organisation's key resources are people, and the performance of the firm depends mainly on them. Hence, the organisation develops and implements an appropriate range of useful HR practices, and then the operation of the firm will be influenced substantially by their human resources. In this study, the HRM themes that were found are training, rewards and welfare (i.e. T&D and workplace wellbeing practices). The majority of the respondents noted the importance of the workforce perceiving a climate where they feel the organisation treats them fairly, values and care for them (i.e. welfare). This is regarded as one of the ways an organisation can influence climate perception positively. A range of organisational factors can be responsible for the perception of being treated fairly (e.g. organisational HR strategy focus, leadership style and HRM policies).

For employee participation/involvement to be achieved in SMEs, through encouraging their performance in the organisation, it is important to implement HRM practices that support the skills and knowledge development of the employees. To create a group of involved and empowered persons who contribute to the decision-making process and hence help in accomplishing the goals of the firm. T&D can be described as the method of obtaining or transferring knowledge and skills required in executing a particular task. Hence, T&D can benefit both the employees and the employers, thus, the need to make it strategic. T&D provides a wide range of learning actions and knowledge sharing to improve the business affairs and the involvement of employees in the decision process of these affairs. Also, T&D focuses on the career growth of the employee, hence, expanding the effectiveness of the individual, group, and organisation. Several studies have highlighted that T&D need to be strategic so as to achieve the firms present and future goals and established the link between training and direct involvement/ employee voice (Felstead et al., 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2010; Inanc et al., 2015). Also, efficiency and training have been associated together because it allows employees to perform their job more competently (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014) as well as being able to contribute to the decisions making in the firm (Inanc et al., 2015).

Specifically, training helps the employees satisfy the demands of the more participatory work environment by bestowing them with the skills that they need. Rabie et al. (2016) noted that training has been recognised as one of the valuable attributes to a positive work environment, and a good economic situation for the firm and improved productivity. Hence, without the right skills, employees cannot be able to fully contribute to the opportunity to influence business decisions (through employee voice), to improve performance and the rewards for doing so (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Rabie et al., 2016; Leitao et al., 2019). Therefore, creating an opportunity for employees to learn is important because active development of skill plans will not improve only the competencies of the employees but also will motivate management to involve employees in the firm's decision-making process (Inanc et al., 2015; Msangi, 2020). Employers investing in training do not only promote the personal growth of the workforce, but they also make the employees feel valued as a member of the organisation. This promotes the perception of a positive organisational environment and hence impacts on direct employee voice. Possessing the necessary skills will increase the performance of the employee and then participation in the workplace decisions. Several studies have mentioned that in firms where individual T&D schemes are invested, their employees tend to reciprocate task-related practices that are desirable (Georgiadis & Pitelis 2012; Omolo et al., 2013; Anitha, 2014; Msangi, 2020).

In the six case companies, people development is one of the greatest values adopted (as evident from their organisational structure). Conclusions have been made by other researchers that both the managers and employees take part in the exploits from training (Tharenou et al., 2007; Omole et al., 2013; Leitão et al., 2019). However, it was noted by Birdi et al. (2008) that training in some environments has a robust positive impact on productivity while in others impacts negatively. It is unclear why this is so; however, a potential reason can be variability in the standard of application. Another reason can be that the influence of T&D on the productivity of the workforce is extremely dependent on the environment/climate of the organisation. Training provided by the organisation means an investment in employees. Hence it may also contribute to motivation because the employees may interpret it as an indication of the organisation commitment to them (Tharenou et al., 2007; Birdi et al., 2008; Anitha, 2014; Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016). Employees that are highly skilled are very most likely to be involved and consulted by management due to their bulk of experience in the field, which may help the firm meet their goals. Also, their relationship with management is enhanced and beneficial to both parties.

Tharenou et al., (2007) studies revealed that training is related to positive human resource outcome indicators. Put simply, most organisations seem to benefit from training. However, what may appear to yield more benefits would be combining the needs of the organisation (i.e. management and employees) as closely as possible. Efficiency can be described as the productivity of the workforce in their job roles. As indicated earlier, effort on the part of the employees is necessary to achieve efficiency, and a lot of factors will determine how much effort they put into a job. Normally, organisations train employees in order to ensure that they have the right skills to execute jobs, but becoming an efficient employee depends on the personal values and the level of discretionary effort they are willing to devote to the job (Tharenou et al., 2007). Furthermore, the motivation to use discretionary effort is required on the part of the employees. According to Fischer et al. (2019), motivation is grouped into three forms: mutual trust/employees as stakeholders, extrinsic/financial and intrinsic. Through creating an atmosphere of trust and urging the workforce to consider themselves as stakeholders in the organisation, motivation can be fostered by the organisation. Extrinsic factors involve a variety of incentive pay schemes, like individual performance pay, or commission, staff share-ownership programs and group-based performance pay. Finally, Intrinsic motivation is associated with how much employees are satisfied with their jobs and enjoy doing them. The performance gains of motivated employees are that they are hardly absent and seldomly quit their job.

One unanticipated finding that emerged from this study is the influence of training and efficiency on a positive organisational environment and subsequently influencing the quality of direct employee voice. Not only is the finding unexpected also it suggests that for training to engender productivity (i.e. efficiency), some other factors must be taken into account, such as the supervisory support and rate of training transfer. The organisational environment has been identified as significant for training transfer to be achieved (Anitha, 2014). Hence, a firm whose environment is favourable for transfer to occur is deemed as "supportive", while those whose environment hinders transfer are termed as "unsupportive" (Tharenou et al., 2007; Inanc et al., 2015). Efficiently transferring the skills and knowledge acquired during training to the real job is a way to improve employee productivity, as well as competence and then their involvement in the firm's decisions (Tharenou et al., 2007; Omolo et al., 2013; Anitha, 2014). The efforts and leadership of the firm in improving workplace participation can be viewed as a supportive transfer environment by implementing a method that is goal oriented. The firm's vision should create an

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environment that could motivate the workplace performance of its employees. Also, employees may be prepared to put in more effort by being more creative, helpful and being more heedful to details when executing their task in the right circumstances (i.e. management supporting their voice) and with the right incentives. To make use of the opportunity to use their discretionary effort through participatory work practices, it is important that employees have an appropriate level of skills. Therefore, besides the usual recruitment and selection process to confirm that employees are appropriate, T&D can be implemented to ensure that employees are competent to participate in the firm's decision-making process (Anitha, 2014).

7.4 Summary

This chapter presented a discussion of the results from the qualitative findings of the research. This was done by examining the results and highlighting the key findings but, more importantly, lending support to the arguments by providing evidence from previous research that supports or contradicts the findings of this current research. This research set out to examine the internal organisational factors (culture, structure, leadership style and HRM practices) that influenced the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria and answered the research questions. The next chapter presents the conclusion and implications of this research and provides recommendations for organisations and SMEs, and finally highlights possible considerations for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

8.0 Recapping the Research

This study investigated the factors that influence the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs in Nigeria. The study started by exploring the existing literature on the area of this research. This exploration revealed that most research on this area of employee voice has mostly been focused on the influence of employee voice in unionised and non-unionised large firms using mainly a quantitative approach and focusing on the objective measures of the factors influencing employee voice. This compelled the need for further investigation from a deeper perspective and using a richer and subjective methodological approach, a research methodology allowing comparison and triangulation. Hence, six SMEs from Nigeria were selected for a qualitative methodological approach where data from all the firms were subjected to thematic analysis.

The purpose of the present thesis was to critically assess the management of direct employee voice mechanisms within SMEs with regards to the quality (i.e. the depth, scope, form, and level) of voice from the perceptive of management and employees. Specifically, the study identified the factors within the control of the organisation influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs, analysed these identified factors, and examined how they affect employee voice in SMEs. In order to educate management on the usefulness of managing direct employee voice channels in building workers involvement in small organisations and to their own advantage. It aimed at answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?

RQ2: How do these identified factors influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria?

The direct employee voice mechanisms were identified, and the factors influencing these voice mechanisms were examined in the six SMEs. Interviews were conducted across all the six SMEs, direct observations were executed, and company documents were retrieved in the six SMEs. The internal organisational factors influencing employee voice were identified from previous research and was adopted in formulating and guiding the question for the interviews. The interviews and other data sources (i.e. company documents and direct observations) were analysed

using thematic data analysis. Chapter six presented the findings from the six case study firms. The findings from the interviews and other sources of data were confirmed by comparing them with the literature reviewed.

This investigation revealed that the culture, structure, and leadership style of the workplace have an impact on direct employee voice. However, when these factors are combined together, they complement the other and create a positive organisational environment that fosters an integrated team that is highly collaborative. Thus, leading to an increase in productivity and subsequently promote the involvement and consultation of employees in the workplace (Bakker et al., 2008; Anitha, 2014; Miao et al., 2020). In any organisation, if given the autonomy and encouragement to contribute to decisions relating to their job role, the workforce will be committed to the goals of the firm and achieve higher productivity. The organisation focuses on employee development through training and welfare practices, such that employee involvement in the firm's decision making will yield improved employee productivity.

The majority of the existing literature has either explored one or two of the factors identified (e.g. Dundon and Rollinson, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Mowbray et al., 2014; Kaufman, 2015; Ruck et al., 2017; Msangi, 2020) or showcase the relationship between individual factors and employee voice (e.g. Naidoo & Martins, 2014; Holland et al., 2017; Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018), but none has so far investigated how these factors specifically influence the direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs. This research is the first work to combine the impact of the organisational factors influencing employee voice, merging it with the direct employee voice mechanisms present in SMEs, specifically isolating and indicating the impact of each factor on the direct voice channels in SMEs.

8.1 Research Contributions

8.1.1 Factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs

This study investigated the factors influencing direct employee voice and how these factors influence the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms. This study has shown that a positive organisational environment, notably with a supportive leadership atmosphere, encourages the autonomy of the employees of SMEs, facilitate innovativeness and involvement of employees in

the organisation's affairs. Such an environment positively encourages employee involvement by way of consultation or participation, involving employees in the decision process related to their job role and strategic matters. The findings of this study revealed the significant factors (i.e. culture, structure and leadership style) that influence direct employee voice in SMEs. Which are respectively (i) formalisation, tradition, effort & efficiency (ii) communication, participation, supervisory support, integration, emphasis on training &welfare (iii) autonomy, innovativeness & performance feedback (i.e. rewards). These factors create the organisational atmosphere that precipitates the involvement and consultation of the workforce through more direct channels in the SMEs. The direct voice channels that were found to be most functional in the SMEs were noticeboard, open-door policy, team briefings and employee forum.

As a result of the leadership style of management in the SMEs, which was found to be supportive (i.e. transformational and transactional) and an overall organisational supportive climate, employees feel obligated to reciprocate the favourable treatment from the firm with positive approaches and actions. It appears that employees who are allowed more autonomy and hence significant involvement and consultation in the decision-making process are those who have stayed longer in the organisation and are experienced in the field. Also, such employees had a better relationship with management compared to other employees such that they are included in managerial decisions. This leads to the discovery that the experience/ duration of employees in SMEs influence the quality of the direct voice channels in the workplace.

The six Nigerian SMEs used for this study revealed supportive leadership properties that were consistent with a positive [organisational] communication climate. The SMEs exhibited these factors of supportive leadership atmosphere that influenced employees to be involved in decision making. A supportive leadership behaviour that spurs a workplace of consistent interactions between management and employees is perceived positively by employees and will further the effectiveness of the workplace communication systems (Dalluay & Jalagat 2016, Northhouse et al., 2018). Furthermore, management employing a supportive leadership style in the workplace helps employees achieve their full potentials, which facilitates their empowerment and increase levels of job satisfaction (Schyns et al., 2009). Hence, all levels of a firm, precisely the individual, team and organisational levels, should be involved in the proposed leadership strategy.

On investigating the impact of the organisational environment (i.e. culture, structure and leadership style) on direct employee voice mechanisms, a number of significant factors were established to impact the voice mechanisms in the SMEs as shown on table 6.2. This finding implies that generally, the workplace climate within an organisation affects the direct employee voice systems and how they function in the workplace. The propensity of the direct voice mechanisms to be effective in the workplace is invariably encapsulated by the internal climate of the organisation (Verreynne et al., 2013; Ruck et al., 2017; Dundon &Wilkinson., 2018; Neo et al., 2018). This result corresponds with previous research, which identified the following organisational factors as essential for employee voice to effectively function; effort-efficiency (Schneider, 2009; Wu et al., 2015) for increased productivity, autonomy (Northouse, 2018), supervisory support (Holland et al., 2017; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020) for new ideas, participation in strategic decision making (Kpakol et al., 2016), and innovativeness (Miao et al., 2020) for creativity. These authors confirmed that a positive/supportive organisational environment would influence the participation, involvement and engagement of employees and concluded that a supportive organisational environment is an antecedent of quality employee voice (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Klaas et al., 2012; Kaufman, 2015; Funminiyi 2018; Della et al., 2021).

In analysing the impact of the organisational structure on the quality of direct employee voice, this research investigated the influence of these organisational factors and the direct voice mechanisms in the workplace: communication, participation, emphasis on training and welfare, and integration. This study used these sub-factors/themes to explore the factors that influence direct voice mechanisms and how they impact the effectiveness of the voice system in the workplace. This result agrees with the literature that suggests that these organisational factors mould the organisational environment, and that employee voice is influenced by the organisational environment. This finding is supported by previous researchers (Naidoo &Martins, 2014; Gilman et al., 2015; Kaufman., 2015; Gautam & Markey; 2017; Ruck et al., 2017; Funminiyi, 2018; Nechanska, 2020).

A key finding to emerge from this study is that these organisational structure factors (i.e., autonomy, supervisory support, emphasis on training, innovativeness and performance feedback(rewards)) were prominent factors impacting the quality of direct employee voice mechanisms in SMEs in Nigeria. Researchers such as Msangi (2020) and Opute (2020) assert

that (HR)practices are the principal concern of the organisation that influence the behaviour, attitudes, and performance of the employees in the workplace. Thus, HR practices are significant for supportive organisation environment and also employee involvement and voice (Naidoo and Martins, 2014; Kwon et., 2016; Okpu and Kpakol, 2018; Noe et al., 2018). One of the HR practices the thesis found that influences the quality of direct employee voice is T&D. This corroborates the work of Felstead et al. (2019. p1675) that states that 'for involvement to be effective employees need the abilities and capacities to participate fully in decision-making processes. Training is one of the means through which these abilities are developed'. In addition, Omole et al. (2013) contend that an effective T&D program will positively affect employee participation in the workplace, but it is the responsibility of management to identify the factors that hinder learning from being effective and then take actions required to counterbalance their impact on the involvement of employees. Overall, training can boost the commitment of employees by improving their competencies and enabling them to have a voice in the workplace.

Accordingly T&D practices do not only create advantages for the organisation, but also benefit the employees by increasing their performance through the development of their knowledge, competencies, and behaviour (Paradise, 2008; Owoyemi et., al 2011; Anitha, 2014, Okpu & Jaja, 2014; Lai et al., 2017). Hence, motivating management to involve and consult them in the firm decision process (Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). Highly skilled and qualified employees are known to be of great value to any organisation due to their capabilities. However, in order to influence the organisational structure, T&D should be planned, developed and coordinated jointly with the general workforce and overall business strategy. Hence, HR practices generally and especially T&D helps create skillful, motivated, competent and satisfied employees who will want to work effectively and efficiently. This will increase production and employee involvement/voice in strategic decisions (Lai et al., 2017).

Rewards as a result of good performance have also been observed as an important factor that motivates employees to increase their participation in the workplace. Rewards based on participation have an impact on improvements in employee involvement. Rewards based on participation/involvement will prompt and motivate employees to be more innovative in producing additional effort (Tharenou et al., 2007; Leitao et al., 2019). Therefore, if employees perceive the rewards for participation to be low they are unlikely to express their voice in the workplace.

Organisations should consider all the above-mentioned aspects when implementing the most appropriate T&D practices and designing rewards for good performance to meet the expectations of the business, but also consider the influence these practices have on employee motivation and voice in the workplace.

8.1.2 Theoretical Contributions

Several investigations on the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice have been carried out (Dundon & Gallon, 2007; Morrison, 2011; Klaas et al., 2012; Morrison, 2014; Mowbray et al., 2015; Kaufman, 2015; Kwon and Farndale, 2020) but they all appeared to be mostly established within the context of Western countries and unionised organisations. without a particular emphasis on the connection of the factors that influence the voice mechanisms highlighted in this research and little or no evidence of analysis in SMEs.

Through the introduction of the conceptual framework detailing the interconnection of the organisational factors and their impact on employee voice mechanisms in SMEs, beneficial lessons for both practitioners and academics alike can be drawn from this study. The conceptual framework developed for this thesis provides a robust representation of factors influencing direct employee voice. Theoretically, this study contributes to the research on employee voice determinants (Klaas et al., 2012; Gilman et al., 2015; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016) by thoroughly reviewing the literature on organisational culture, structure, and leadership style, revealing the internal factors that influence direct employee voice and how they affect the quality of employee voice in SMEs. Additionally, the influence of these factors adopted in this study can be applied to any analysis of the workplace environment. It could be used in investigating the influence of effective leadership strategy on direct employee voice or in understanding the role of the firm supervisory strategy on direct employee voice. This study makes several significant contributions towards employee voice theory by propounding a framework in which culture, structure and leadership play a significant role in influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs.

Two unique contributions are made by this framework of this study: Firstly, it provides a theoretical explanation grounded in employee voice theory for the organisational factors that influence the quality of direct voice. Specifically, this study has contributed to the research of Gilman et al., (2015), who explored the contours of employee voice in SMEs. Gilman et al. (2015)

found that voice and wider HR practices are not stable and would change over time in reaction to specific performance challenges encountered by the firm. Their work and other related conceptual studies (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2007; Morrison et al., 2011; Barry and Wilkinson, 2016; Psychogios et al., 2016, Prouska et al., 2021) was reviewed in this study in order to build an integrative employee voice model. This was achieved by incorporating key concepts and ideas from the micro organisational factors influencing employee voice in SMEs and also utilising direct employee voice channels.

The organisation environment factors are used to explain the characteristics of a positive organisational environment in the case study firms by using traits of culture, structure and leadership style and blending them with the organisational environment characteristics evident in the case study firms. The findings of this thesis advance the research in the area of internal/micro (i.e. firm-level) factors and employee voice by developing and empirically analysing a model to explain how internal organisational factors impact the quality of employee voice. Therefore, instead of focusing on just employee voice in non-union or large firms, this thesis moves forward to the literature concerning direct employee voice in SMEs by highlighting the voice mechanisms that are present in SMEs in order to highlight the ones that are functional in providing employees with the opportunity to take part in the firms' decision-making process. Through expressing their views as well as dissatisfactions.

Secondly, this study fills a gap in the literature regarding voice in SMEs, particularly the role of micro-organisational factors in explaining the quality of direct voice channels. The factors impacting on employee voice has been previously investigated using single micro-organisational factors, or combined all the internal factors (i.e. culture, structure and leadership style) and external factors (i.e. economic and legal factors), but no single study has explored their influence on the quality of direct employee voice channels in the SMEs based on literature explored. For example, internal and external organisational factors and employee voice (Morrison, 2014; Kaufman, 2015; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018 Nechanska et al., 2020), internal organisational factors and employee voice (Dundon & Gallon, 2007; Buech et al., 2010; Morrison, 2011; Kim et al., 2010; Klaas et al., 2012;Krog, 2014; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016), organisational culture and employee voice (Naidoo & Martins, 2014; Parent & Lovelace, 2015; Kpakol et al., 2016; Reis et al., 2016; Nam & Kim., 2016; Brenyah, & Obuobisa 2017; Subbulakshmi, 2019; Miao et al., 2020), leadership style and

employee voice (Pyman et al., 2010; Farndale et al., 2011; Dalluay & Jalagat, 2016; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018, Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018; Townsend & Mowbray, 2020) and organisational structure and employee voice (Bryson et al., 2007; Felstead et al., 2010, Mallett & Wapshott, 2014; Ugwoji, 2014; Holland et al., 2017; Funminiyi, 2018, Della et al., 2021). All these researches were conducted within large firms using both forms of employee voice. There were a few investigations of the determinants of employee voice in SMEs (Wilkinson et al., 2007; Gilman et al., 2015; Msangi, 2020). But none of these academic pursuits examined the influence of the internal organisational determinants primarily within the context of direct employee voice and precisely within the SMEs with respect to quality (i.e. dept, scope and level). This is the first study to investigate the role of organisational environment on the determinants of quality of direct employee voice within a traditional organisational setting. This allows this research to be more applicable in understanding organisational factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice within SMEs.

Hence, in expanding on the impact of each of these factors (culture, structure, leadership style) on the quality of employee voice, this study unites all three factors to examine the influence of internal workplace climate on the quality of direct forms of voice. This research did not only spotlight the influence of each of these factors on the quality of direct employee voice but also exhume the interconnection between these factors and the quality of direct forms of voice as well as detailed the role of the positive organisational environment on employee voice in SMEs.

8.2 Practical Implications

It is evident from this study that a supportive organisational environment provides a productive ground for employee voice mechanisms to function effectively in the workplace by providing employees autonomy, enabling innovation and involving employees in the organisation. This finding is beneficial for SMEs because one of the difficulties that were identified as militating against their survival is poor HRM practices, particularly employee relations practices. This is connected to the management of voice in the workplace and the role it plays in shaping communication within the organisation. Traditionally, the voice mechanisms used in SMEs are direct (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2016). An organisation with a supportive environment is more likely to have quality direct voice systems. Establishing a

workplace environment with supportive leadership through supervisory support, catering for the welfare of employees and encouraging autonomous and involved employees through training practices and rewards for good performance all contribute to the perception of a supportive organisational environment.

From the results of this study, it is obvious that knowledge and skills, either by maturity in the firm or through T&D, influence the quality of employee voice, which in this case may increase the efficiency of employees and promote employee involvement in decision making. Likewise, supervisory support and autonomy are important because employees that have a better relationship with management are more often consulted by management. Organisations can improve the quality of employee voice through an increased focus on T&D which will increase the productivity of employees and hence may promote employee involvement and consultation in decision making.

Providing employees with enough training may not automatically translate to having a productive workforce. However, the perceptions from the respondents in this study about T&D means that training the workforce must be done in order for SMEs to have the potential of achieving efficiency. Additionally, to encourage the workforce to apply the new knowledge and skills acquired from training and integrate it into their daily work-life, the organisation should create a workplace that facilitates training transfer. SMEs naturally depend more on the input of the workforce. Hence, there is a strong emphasis on developing the workforce. Involving employees in the organisational decision-making process can increase employee morale, job satisfaction and commitment to the firm and improve productivity as well as the quality of production. Thus, organisations should be completely conscious of such advantages and put in place more strategies to simplify the implementation of employee involvement and participation in decision making. Also, management allowing face-to-face and daily interactions with the employees on the job role directly or indirectly affects their performance. Thus, encouraging employees to take part in other decision processes in the workplace increases task ownership and commitment, retains the firm's best employees, and fosters an environment in which individuals choose to be motivated and committed. It also increases employee attachment to their work and the firm, empowers workers, and gives them increased job autonomy.

Presently, many firms are replacing employee unions with non-union forms of employee voice and are dependent on direct feedback to the organisation's supervisory team. Hence,

delegated means for makings ideas, suggestions, and complaints have become highly reliant on immediate employee supervisors, other team members and the firm's HR departments (i.e. where there is one). If the employees do not feel comfortable communicating with any of the direct voice channels for expressions of concerns or opinions, it can be counter-productive for the firm. As found in this study, employees didn't feel the need to give opinions or make complaints to anyone in the firm, while their organisation did not have an HR department in place. This is a very important revelation in the case study firms because there is no HR department, and because employee voice is so crucial in SMEs, there needs to be an investment in line managers and how they can enable direct voice in small workplaces. SMEs can make available continuous training programs focused on employee relations management and not just on developing skills for improved productivity in the workplace, considering that the quality of line management plays an important role in ensuring that employees are able to voice their opinions and grievances.

8.3 Recommendations for SMEs in Nigeria

SMEs in Nigeria that wants to survive and grow should generate an organisational environment that is conducive for innovative and proactive practices. Rewards should be awarded for innovative efforts, organisational leadership and support, and employee empowerment should be encouraged. Furthermore, having such a positive environment would increase employee involvement. This can lead to the growth and survival of SMEs in Nigeria. By involving the workforce in the affairs of the workplace, both management and employees will benefit. One of the reasons identified by several studies for the low rate of survival of Nigerian SMEs is the failure to manage human resources effectively (Mohammed and Obeleagu-Nzelibe, 2014; Roman et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2017; Lawal et al., 2020). SME owners should focus more on the management of employee relations within the workplace.

Some studies (Owoyemi et al., 2011; Abdullahi & Sulaiman, 2015; Yusuf & Dansu, 2013; Oladele & Akeke, 2016; Rabie et al., 2016) have argued that SMEs in Africa have low levels of workplace T&D as a result of their organisational culture. These studies concluded that it was no fault of the employees rather, it was the employers who reduced the training budget because of the global economic downturn. This stream of research has found that SMEs implement high levels

of T&D in the workplace for human capital development. This correlates with Gilman et al. (2015) and Lai et al. (2017), who found that voice and wider HR practices are not stable and would change over time in reaction to specific performance challenges encountered by the firm. However, senior management should invest more in line managers' training to enable them to effectively manage employees. Therefore, it is recommended that SMEs invest not only in training for improving the growth and performance of the organisation but also, training for managing and improving employee participation and voice. Furthermore, management engaging in high involvement practices like rewarding empowered behaviour can encourage employee efficiency. To achieve quality direct employee voice that is favourable results from employee involvement and from a workforce that is feeling recognised, valued and compensated appropriately for the extra effort. Finally, SMEs should disseminate involvement/engagement schemes for employees, and high involvement should be rewarded.

8.4 Research Limitations

Although this research has investigated the factors influencing the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs, it encountered some limitations which are explained in this section. Firstly, the sample is not a representation of all the SMEs in Nigeria because it was limited to six firms (manufacturing and service sectors). Therefore, the results may not be generalised to all firms. Also, the research was limited to just one city as all the participating firms were located in the northern part of Nigeria (Kaduna); a broader geographical sampling would provide a better reflection of the national profile. Further research is required across a wider geographical area.

Secondly, the thesis would have benefited from the use of data collected by other researchers that have already conducted research on the factors influencing direct employee voice in business environments that are closely similar to the manufacturing industry in terms of internal organisational characteristics, as well as the presence of SMEs. The reasons for not employing such data were due to time and resource limitations, which will be addressed thereafter. However, it is within the researcher's future plans to use such comparative evidence to further develop the theoretical model presented in this study regarding the factors impacting the voice model and its implications for organisations. Such research can focus on identifying other factors that can affect

this model, as well as focusing more on exploring internal leadership strategy or HRM potentials present in such firms and their potential to yield competitive advantage. This analysis, now lacking from the present thesis due to insufficient data, can shed more light on the way these internal organisations factors can shape the quality of direct employee voice channels. Furthermore, the current research only explored the factors that can be controlled within the business environment, the macro-environmental factors (i.e. factors that exist outside the firm and are beyond their control) were not examined. Including such evidence is important in achieving extensive conclusions on the factors that impact on the quality of direct employee voice in the workplace.

Thirdly, this study recognizes the fact that several factors, apart from the ones identified in this study, contribute to the internal organisational environment, and it is mindful of the fact that there are other factors impacting the quality of direct employee voice in an organisation beyond the ones found in this research. Similarly, this study is not oblivious to the fact that a number of other factors can also constitute a positive organisational environment for SMEs other than those found in this research. The foregoing shortcomings of this study uncover potential areas for further research, in that other factors apart from the current ones highlighted by this study can be studied to improve the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs

Lastly, resource limitations restricted this study, particularly funding and time, which have always been controlling factors and, to a considerable degree, these factors have also defined the extent of this research as well. The research was conducted with a number of SMEs in Nigeria, and several trips to the different locations within and outside Kaduna State Nigeria were required for the collection of case study data by administering questions through organised numerous interviews, direct observations of some company meetings and the business environment. Clearly, additional funding and time could have made it possible to answer research questions that have surfaced during the processing and evaluation of data collected (through additional interview data). In addition, the time limitation was also an important factor that limited the researcher's ability to conduct an extensive study exploring other locations and sectors within the SMEs and also the macro-environmental factors that influence the quality of direct employee voice in order to further develop the research findings.

8.5. Future Research Directions

This study sought to investigate how the factors impacting employee voice influence the quality of direct voice mechanisms in SMEs. A resonant research methodological stance was adopted, as explained in Chapter 5, with the view of providing a comprehensive and complete view by examining those underlying internal organisational factors and bringing to the fore how they contribute to perceptions of a positive/effective organisation climate and ultimately influence the quality of direct employee voice. The limitations of this research addressed in the previous section, the findings and contributions all uncovered a rich vein of ideas for further research:

1. Future research could make use of a broader sample of SMEs, especially consider looking at sectors that were not part of this research sample. This would help to reveal if this research can be replicated in a different sector and generate a similar outcome. In addition to that, the geographical location of the sample organisations should possibly represent a wider geographical distribution (sample to be drawn from East, South and North). It would be interesting to find out if the geographical difference could change the dynamics of the organisational factors and their influence on the quality of direct employee voice.

2. Another area that could be the focus of future research is the selection of interview participants. This research only interviewed three senior management in each SME with the exception of the CEO, due to time constraints, cost and logistically issues related to arranging numerous interviews. Even though non-managerial employees were included in the interview, their questions were limited to save time and prevent them from digressing from the topic presented by the interview questions, with a little opportunity of adding more personal opinions on specific topics presented by the research questions. This could have provided the study with deeper insights. Therefore, it is recommended that a mixture of structured and unstructured interview questions can be used for the highest population sample. Also, including a few more managerial employees could generate richer and deeper insights into the research topic.

3. There is the need to investigate how the positive organisational environment factors of direct voice impact employee performance in SMEs because a majority of the respondents reiterated that no matter the quality of voice channels they employ, what was most important to the organisation is meeting their goals of increased productivity and profit. Hence, if employees were to be fully involved and engaged in the firm's decision making, it must be to the advantage of the business

first and then maybe the employee second. For instance, the kind of structure the firms have will determine the HR policies they will implement.

4. Finally, this research combined the internal organisational factors (i.e. culture, structure, and leadership style) and examined their influence on the quality of employee voice. A further investigation employing both the internal organisational and external environmental (i.e. market pressure, structural influences, etc.) factors in exploring their impact on the quality of direct employee voice should be conducted. Such research can provide more insight on the connection of these factors and the impact that they have on the quality of direct employee voice (for instance, exploring the influence of HRM practices precisely T&D and market pressure on the quality of direct employee voice in SMEs).

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APPENDIX A: ACCESS REQUEST

The following email will be used to invite potential informants to participate. This note may be followed by a telephone call to their office

Dear xxxxx

I am currently undertaking doctoral research at London South Bank University. My particular field of enquiry is on the factors influencing the quality of direct voice mechanisms and how they impact SMEs. This research study involves examining organisational culture, organisational structure and leadership styles which were identified based on the literature reviewed as the most important determinants of informal voice mechanisms. The choice of SMEs is as a result of their potential in supporting the economy.

As an executive of an organisation, I would like to understand your perceptions, perspectives and experiences on this phenomenon as well as that of some of your company supervisors and employees. I would be grateful if you were able to devote some time to discuss this with me as part of my doctoral research in the form of an in-depth interview. Also, I will want to conduct a direct observation of the company activities. Furthermore, some company documents such as the annual reports or quarterly reports, newsletters and employee's handbooks will be required for further analysis as part of the research. Furthermore, if access is granted, I will take a walk around the company environment or workspace to gain more insight into the culture of the company.

All data gathered will be collected in the strictest confidence and will be reported anonymously. I would be happy to answer any other questions you may have. The interview would take approximately an hour and could be scheduled at a time convenient to you. Your answers will provide valuable information of which will be analysed as part of a PhD research. Also, if you desire feedback from the project, I will be happy to send a written report to you once the research is completed.

I will be following up with a phone call to discuss the above mentioned further with you. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Uzoamaka E Iloekwe.

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT FORM

![London South Bank University logo]

DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY OF INFORMAL VOICE IN SMES IN NIGERIA

LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

You are invited to take part in a research study. Prior to your decision to formally accept this invitation, it is important that you understand the purpose of this research and what it will involve. Please read the following information with care.

The purpose of this research project is to analyse the determinants of the quality of informal employee voice and how it influences small and medium-sized firms in Nigeria. Knowing about employee voice systems alone will not achieve the long-term features/point of voice behaviour in terms of employees believing and having confidence in those mechanisms. Understanding how voice is configured and performs, particularly in the workplace, is also important.

Therefore, this research study attempts to fill this gap by examining individual perceptions (employees, supervisors and executives) on the quality of determinants of informal voice in their organisations. It will assess the determinants that influence how willing employees feel in using direct methods to express their voice (i.e. share ideas, raise issues and conflicts) in the workplace. How much do employees know about informal voice channels that are available to them, and what factors influence the degree, scope, level and forms of these direct voice mechanisms from executives/supervisors and employee views. Additionally, this study will seek the views of participants on what they suppose could improve the quality of informal voice channels.

The result of this research will be of importance to researchers and practitioners of management. It will educate management on the usefulness of managing informal employee voice in building workers involvement in small organisations and to their own advantage. Furthermore, it will demonstrate to management the importance of creating an enabling structure and culture that would facilitate employee participation and involvement in decision making

The interview will take no longer than one hour. Your answers will provide valuable information of which will be analysed as part of a PhD research.

If the participant wishes to omit or change any information, they are free to do so at any point. The interviewer will print two copies of this document. Both parties are required to sign the document prior to the interview commencing. Both parties will keep a signed hard copy of the document. By completing this interview, you agree to the following terms: You have read and understood the information for participants document above dated June 2019, you have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time any data collected will be destroyed.

Signed Interviewee No: ………………………………………

Signed Interviewer: ………………………………………………… (Uzoamaka Iloekwe)

I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. If you have any questions, please contact me at iloekweu@lsbu.ac.uk

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

London South Bank University
EST 1892

Full title of Project:

Ethics approval registration Number:

Name:

Researcher Position:

Contact details of Researcher:

Taking part (please tick the box that applies)	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet/project brief and/or the student has explained the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐	☐
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing a reason.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the above study.	☐	☐

Use of my information (please tick the box that applies)	Yes	No
I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand that my data/words may be quoted in publications, reports, posters, web pages, and other research outputs.	☐	☐
I would like my real name to be used in the above.	☐	☐
I agree for the data I provide to be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and I understand it may be used for future research.	☐	☐
Note for Principal Investigator/Supervisory team: Include statements below if appropriate, **or delete from the consent form**:		
I agree to the interview/….being audio recorded.	☐	☐
I agree to the interview/… being video recorded.	☐	☐
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.	☐	☐
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to [*Name of researcher]*	☐	☐

_____
Name of Participant   _____   _____
                             Date   Signature

_____
Name of Researcher   _____   _____
                             Date   Signature

Project contact details for further information:
Project Supervisor/ Head of Division name:
Phone:Email address:

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE OF QUALITY DIRECT VOICE MECHANISMS IN SMES IN NIGERIA

LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

My name is Uzoamaka Eunice Iloekwe. I am a doctoral candidate in the above-named university. I am working with Dr Rea Prouska and Dr John Opute, who are both lecturers in the school of Business. Interviewer to start with introductions.

A. THANK THE PARTICIPANT FOR THEIR TIME.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today to discuss your understanding and perception of the determinants of informal voice. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that will be discussed. I am simply interested in your opinions and experience. This is a completely confidential conversation and information that is recorded, and your company name or demographic information will not be kept by London South Bank University.

B. EXPLAIN THE PROCESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL DEPTH INTERVIEW

Today's process involves an individual depth interview to discuss your opinions and feelings about your perception of your organisation. I expect that the complete process will take approximately one hour. I would like to record the interview because this discussion will be transcribed for analysis purposes. When we have completed the analysis, I will write and provide you with a copy of the summary report for feedback and to ensure that your views have been appropriately represented. As part of the university's ethical clearance policies, I also require you to complete the two forms in front of you:

Participant and consent form: it is part of the university's requirement policy to complete this form. It is to confirm the confidentiality of this process. Hence, you will not be personally identified in any publications or conferences on whatever is discussed today.

Participants debriefing form: it is the general information about the research study and what the researcher requires from the company. Only the researcher will be privy to this information.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PART A: BACKGROUND ON INFORMAL VOICE MECHANISMS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

1a. How does the company convey information about major decisions or events happening in or (within) the company to employees?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Yes	No
Employee Handbook		
"Open Door" Policy		
Notice Boards		
E-Mail		
Individual Briefings		
Team/Department briefings		
Memos		
Quarterly Reports		
Annual Reports		
Large Scale Staff Meetings		
Newsletters		

If yes, how do you [company] use them?

1b. How does the company enable employees to share their own views, suggestions and ideas about the organisation?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Yes	No
Suggestion Schemes/box		
Comment Cards		
E-mail		
Focus group/quality circles		
Online discussion forum		
Workforce attitude survey		

If yes, how do you [company] use them?

1c. How does the company enable employees to raise issues/complaint that concerns them?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Yes	No
"Open Door" Policy		
E-Mail		

Formal Grievance Procedures		
Union representation		
Speak up schemes		
Company intranet		
Collective bargaining		

If yes, how do you use them?

2a. Which of the above mechanisms would you rate as being particularly effective or ineffective to convey information's/decisions with employees within this organisation?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Effective	Ineffective
Employee Handbook		
"Open Door" Policy		
Notice Boards		
E-Mail		
Individual Briefings		
Team/Department briefings		
Memos		
Quarterly Reports		
Annual Reports		
Large Scale Staff Meetings		
Newsletters		

Why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly effective or ineffective in conveying information in the company?

2b. Which of the above mechanisms would you rate as being particularly effective or ineffective to enable employees to share their own views, suggestions and ideas within this organisation?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Effective	Ineffective
Suggestion Schemes/box		
Comment Cards		
E-mail		
Focus group/quality circles		
Online discussion forum		
Workforce attitude survey		

Why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly effective or ineffective in enabling employees to share their views?

2c. Which of the above mechanisms would you rate as being particularly effective or ineffective to enable employees to raise issues/complaint that concerns them in the company?

Employee Voice Mechanism	Effective	Ineffective
"Open Door" Policy		
E-Mail		
Formal Grievance Procedures		
Union representation		
Speak up schemes		
Company intranet		
Collective bargaining		

In respect of the mechanisms, you have rated as being EFFECTIVE or INEFFECTIVE why do you feel that these mechanisms are particularly effective or ineffective in enabling employees raise issues or complaints?

PART B: DETERMINANTS OF INFORMAL VOICE

(A)INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR C.E.O

Organisational Culture, structure and leadership style

4. In your opinion, does the informal voice climate of this company encourage employees to speak up [i.e. share ideas and raise complaints as well]? How?

5. How does the organisation involve employees when decisions are to be made about the overall state of the company? For instance, if…………………

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced			
Change of Structure Company			
Plans to introduce new tech			
Working Practices			
Any changes to products/services			
Company Finances/Budgets			
Housekeeping Issues			

6. Could you give me an example of a time when you consulted with employees on a matter and took their suggestions into consideration?

7. How would you describe the structure of this company with regards to decision making/participative management? For instance, would you say decision making is kept at the top level (centralized/hierarchical) or delegated to the lower level (decentralized/flattened)?

8. In your opinion, what HRM strategies (e.g. training) do the firm have to promote/motivate employee participation in the company? If any

9. Does the company allow task autonomy in the workplace (i.e. allowing workgroups a greater degree of control)? If yes, how?

10. How often does the company trust employees to make work-related decisions without getting permission from management?

11. How does the company facilitate the involvement of employees in decision making on a wider scale?

12a. What is the organisation's policy about employees making complaints or raising grievances about their work and relationships with other staff?

12b. Does the policy encourage openness towards expressing complaints and raising grievances? If yes, how. If no, why not?

(B)INTERVIEW QUESTION FOR SUPERVISORS

Organisational Culture, structure and leadership style

4. From your perspective, how do you encourage the employees in your team to speak up about their problems and share their ideas?

5. How does the organisation involve employees when decisions are to be made about the overall state of the company? For instance, if…………………

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced			
Change of Structure Company			
Plans to introduce new tech			
Working Practices			
Any changes to products/services			
Company Finances/Budgets			
Housekeeping Issues			

6. Could you give me an example of a time when you consulted with employees on a matter and implemented their suggestions or ideas into a decision?

7. How would you describe the structure of this company with regards to decision making/participative management? For instance, would you say decision making is kept at the top level (centralized/hierarchical) or delegated to the lower level (decentralised/flattened)?

8. Besides the minimum amount of training employees need to do their jobs, is there training or practices available for employees to develop their skills further for improved participation in the company?

9. With regards to allowing workgroups/employees a greater degree of control in their work tasks, would you say that the company supports task autonomy?

10. From your perspective, does this company encourage employees to take decisions without permission from supervisors/managers? (i.e. Self-management participation amongst employees in the workplace

11. How do you, as a supervisor in the company, facilitate the involvement of employees in decision making?

12. How does the company handle conflicts among employees or complaints relating to work issues?

(C)INTERVIEW QUESTION FOR EMPLOYEES

Organisational Culture, structure and leadership style

4. What experience have you had when you spoke up about a problem, raised a grievance or shared an idea /suggestion for improvement in the company?

5. For which of the following topics are employees informed, consulted or not involved in at all by the company's management?

Topic	Informed	Consulted	Neither
Competition Faced			
Change of Structure Company			
Plans to introduce new tech			
Working Practices			
Any changes to products/services			
Company Finances/Budgets			
Housekeeping Issues			

6. Has there been a time when your views or suggestion for improvement were listened to and acted upon?

7. How would you describe the structure of this company with regards to decision making/participative management? For instance, would you say decision making is kept at the top level (centralized/hierarchical) or delegated to the lower level (decentralized/flattened)?

8. Can you give me an example of a time the company advised you to develop your skills for better participation in the organisation?

9. Can you give me an example of a time when the company allowed/ encouraged you to take control of a work situation and make a decision on your own without your supervisors' approval?

10. In your view, does the leadership atmosphere of the company facilitate the involvement of employees in decision making on a wider scale? [i.e. is the leadership context characterized by an open and collaborative human resource strategy where employees are in control and free to exploit their knowledge and skills].

11. Can you tell me of a time when the business information of the company was shared with employees with the aim of providing them with the opportunity to have a say in the business decisions on a wider scale?

12. In terms of employees communicating their grievances (complaints), do you have confidence in the company's authority response system?

APPENDIX F: EMPLOYEE VOICE MECHANISMS IN THE SIX CASE STUDY

Direct Mechanisms Identified as Effective and Ineffective Across the Six Cases

Company	effective	Ineffective	others
SME-1M [Roofing Sheets Co]	Memos, noticeboards, Employee Forum, Quality circles	Emails, largescale meetings, suggestion box, open door	
HOD	Noticeboards, dept. meetings, open-door policy, Employee Forum, Quality circles	Emails, suggestion box, open door	
Employees	Noticeboard, Employee Forum, dept meetings, open-door policy (via HOD), quality circles	Suggestion box, noticeboard,	Phone calls, text messages
SME-2M [Cable Co]	Noticeboard, meetings, suggestion box, Employee Forum, quality circles	General meetings.	
HOD	Dept meetings, open door policy, Noticeboard, HOD (open door), Employee Forum, quality circles	Suggestion box, open door	
Employees	Noticeboard, dept meetings, open door, quality circles, suggestion box, Employee Forum	HOD (open door), suggestion box,	WhatsApp's group
SME-3M [Aluminium Co]	Noticeboard, quality circles, Open door policy (via HOD), Employee Forum	Open door (via Manager)	
HOD	Open door, noticeboard, dept. meetings, large scale meeting(+ep), quality circles, suggestion box, Employee Forum	Join consultation	
Employees	Open door policy (HOD), individual briefings, quality circles, noticeboard, suggestion box, Employee Forum	Open door policy, no suggestion box	

SME-4S [Bakery& Restaurant Co]	Open door policy [HOD][Manager], Noticeboard, quality circles		
HOD	Text messages, noticeboard, open door policy, meeting, quality circles	Emails, [no Employee Forum]	
Employees	Noticeboard, general meeting[9AS], open door policy, individual briefings, phone, quality circles	Dept. meetings, open door policy[manager], suggestion box, no union[7AS]	
SME-5M [Galvanised Products Co]	Noticeboard, general meetings, dept meetings, Employee Forum, open door policy [Manager], quality circles	No suggestion box[6G], general meetings	
HOD	Open door policy, noticeboard, Employee Forum, individual briefings, quality circles.	Dept. meeting[8P],	
Employees	Open door policy, dept. meeting[8BB], noticeboard, suggestion box, Employee Forum, quality circles	Memos, newsletters[8BF], suggestion box, open door [HOD], general meeting [5BH]	
SME-6S [Plastic Products Co]	Noticeboard, Open door policy, quality circles, [HOD], Employee Forum	Emails, suggestion box	
HOD	Noticeboard, open door policy [8S], meetings, quality circles, Employee Forum	Email, general meetings [8S], dept. meeting [8R], suggestion box [9S], joint consolation	
Employees	Dept meetings, Open door policy [9BJ], noticeboard, HOD [10BH], Employee Forum, suggestion box	Brief meetings[8BJ], suggestion box, open door policy[manager], reps[10BK],	

APPENDIX G: MICRO ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

List and Definitions of Micro Organisational Factors

Themes	Definition
Autonomy	Job design in ways that give employees broad scope for work implementation
Participation/collaboration	Employees have considerable influence over decision-making
Communication	The freedom of information sharing throughout the organisation
Welfare	The extent to which the organisation values and cares for employees
Formalisation	A concern with formal rules and procedures /employee manner of approach. / when there is an emphasis on" red tape" and going through channels, or that there is a loose and informal atmosphere
Supervisory support	The level of support and understanding experienced by employees from their immediate supervisor
Integration	The level of interdepartmental trust and cooperation
Emphasis on training	A focus on developing employee skills
Reflexivity	A concern with reviewing and reflecting upon objectives, strategies, and work processes in order to adapt to the wider environment
Outward focus	The extent to which the organisation is responsive to the needs of the customer and the marketplace in general
Innovativeness	The extent of encouragement and support for new ideas and innovative approaches
Flexibility	An orientation toward change
Tradition	The extent to which established ways of doing things are valued
Performance feedback	Rewards for good/excellent performance in the workplace.
Pressure to produce	The extent of pressure for employees to meet targets
Quality	The level of focus given to quality procedures
Efficiency	The degree of importance placed on employee efficiency and productivity at work
Effort	How hard people in organisations work towards achieving goals
Clarity of organisational goals	A concern with clearly defining the goals of the organisation
Rewards	The perceived fairness of the pay and promotion policies. That is being rewarded for a job well done, highlighting positive rewards rather than punishments

APPENDIX H: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE SIX CASE STUDY SMES

List of case study SMEs and their organisational structure.

	SMEs	Organisations' Structure
1	Roofing Sheets. Co	The company has a total number of around130 employees, and its contribution to the economic advancement in the metal industry has provided further employment to Kaduna state Nigerians. The organisation is made up of six departments which are; manufacturing, administrative, quality control/ improvement, marketing/sales, accounts department and personnel departments.
2	Cable. Co	The company is made up of a number of 77 employees in general 153 employees. The managing director/CEO, General Manager and heads of departments. There are administrative departments, personnel/HR department (separate before they managed to cut cost), finance department, sales/marketing department, maintenance department and production department
3	Aluminium. Co	The company is made up of the following departments, production, administration, sales/marketing, HR, finance, quality control. The company has over 100 permanent staff, 55casual workers, and a group of contractors (about 20) selected to fit the company's philosophy. The management of the company's daily activities is managed by a team of experienced expatriates.
4	Bakery & Restaurant Co	The group employs about 68 handpicked personnel qualified to meet the standards of the foods production industry. They have four departments, which are the production, sales/ marketing, Admin/ purchasing and HR departments
5	Galvanised Products Co	The company has 122 employees in total and comprises of five dept: Personnel and quality, accounting, production, administration, sales/marketing departments.
6	Plastics product Co	The company is made up of a total number of 89 employees with five departments. There are administrative/HR, quality/maintenance, production, finance, sales, and marketing department.