The Link between Managerialist Employment Relations and Work-Life Imbalance: The Experience of Nigerian Banking Sector's Workers

Abstract

Work-life balance concept is increasingly generating scholarly attention and undergoing enrichment process. In continuing this prominence, this current study incorporates the interface of managerialist employment relations practice, which can trigger work-life imbalance among employees. The study context is Nigeria, which has a history of a troubled employment relations (ERs) and human resource management (HRM) practice that includes but not limited to issues of work-overload, long hours of work, working on weekends and bank holidays, which are considered managerialist-oriented agenda that overly prioritises shareholder's profit maximisations and often compromise WLB effort. This approach to ERs and HRM practices trigger challenges of WLB – leading to work-life imbalance among workers. This phenomenon is further exacerbated due to economic hardship, declining employment opportunity and servant-master relationship and culture of respect for superiors, which employers capitalise on to exploit workers – and thus compromising their work and life balance. To support this contention, the study employs a thematic analysis of data from 32 employees across 4 banking firms. Findings of the investigation and scope for further research will be presented following empirical data presentation and analysis.

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Introduction

This study explores work-life balance (WLB) challenges using the interface of managerialist employment relations, which scholars view can trigger work-life imbalance among employees. As noted by Kelly, Moen, Oakes, Fam, Okechukwu and Davis (2014), the importance of balancing work and obligations outside of work – for improved employees' and organisational wellbeing – is increasingly capturing the interest of stakeholders (including academia, government, labour policy makers, corporations etc) across the globe. Broadly concerned with the requirements inherent in the management of work and life outside of work terrain (Visser and Williams, 2006), WLB describes the extent to which employees feel "equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work role and family role'' (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw, 2003, p. 513). The concept explores the degree to which a worker can perform effectively and satisfactorily in both domains of work and life outside work (including family life) (Clutterbuck 2003; Lewis and Cooper, 2005).

While WLB definition remains largely contested (Brough and Kalliath, 2009), some writers view the concept as a prognosis for work and non-work-related activities to be considered as complementary keys to a full life – rather than competing priorities (Clark, 2000; Manfredi and Holliday, 2004). It is against this backdrop that Feeney and Stritch (2017) conceptualised WLB effort as the need for organisations to not only initiate family-friendly policy; but also, to legitimise non-standard work – in order to enable employees to attend to family (among other domestic) obligations. Thus, the logic behind WLB effort is to ensure that work and

employment relations practice increases flexibility, to enhance workers ability (as responsible agents), to be able to pursue better integration of work and life outside work, which is crucial for their mental health, physical wellbeing, job satisfaction, work commitment and productivity (Clutterbuck 2003). However, the efficacy of WLB effort will be futile without bringing to perspective the interface of managerialist employment relations practice, which is a widespread phenomenon at work -particularly in the banking sector (Adegbaju and Olokoyo, 2008). For instance, Clarke and Newman (1997) noted that corporations that are managerialist-orientated in practice are inclined not to ensure that employees experience positive WLB, due to pressure of managerialism, which requires managers to act solely in line with organisational strategic trajectory including (but not limited to) cost-cutting and shareholder's profit maximisation (Brunetto, 2002). According to Klikauer (2015), managerialism (which is a derivative of managerialist employment relations) endorses transaction-cost economic agendas and the assumption that labour givers (capitalists) are rational entities driven by economic self-interest, a philosophy which view that managers must act solely in the parochial and subjectively-defined interest of employers – often at the detriment of employees well-being. Yildiz's (2018) empirical study found a rising trend in negative psychological, physiological and social challenges experienced by workers, which are rooted in managerialist approach to employment relations (ERs) policies and practices. This observation has been widely confirmed in the extant literature (see Tham, 2007; Asegid et al., 2014; Adisa et al., 2016; Mushfiqur, 2018; Oruh, Adisa, and Akanji, 2019). Thus, as Timinepere et al. (2018) pointed out, the absence of organisational justice, which often manifest in the context of managerialist approach to ER and HR practice (Mueller and Carter, 2005) - necessitates work-life imbalance for employees – particularly in the developing economy such as Nigeria (Adisa et al., 2016). Induced by managerialist-orientated employment relations, lack of flexible work dynamic (WLB) in Nigerian employment terrain triggers exhaustion, lethargy, burnout and stress (among others) for employees. Hence, given the importance of employees as vital resources to organisation success and long-term sustainability (Alarcon and Edwards, 2011), managerialist-orientated employment relations philosophy is continuing to attract significant research attention, for deepening understanding in (and reconciling) employer-employee relationship (Brunetto, 2002). However, there remains paucity of studies on the implication of managerialist employment relations on WLB, a gap which this present study aims to fill.

The genesis of WLB
As Chandra (2012) observed, the proliferation of WLB started gathering momentum since the 1960s – as scholars intensify effort to establish the relationship between work and family roles as well as the implications balancing of these two domains may have on employees. While WLB may be relatively new; Crompton et al. (2007) noted that the concept has been mainstreamed across most developed economies – relative to issues bordering on rates of participation in labour market, aging population and technological change as well as globalisation among other work-related variables, which makes WLB difficult to manifest. According to Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003), with fertility rate being considered to be increasingly waning, WLB debate appeared to be gaining more prominence among stakeholders including in particular debate among policy makers within the European Union (EU) on the need for organisation to develop informed intervention mechanisms and policies that will help employees manage challenges that are associated with this phenomenon. In light of its assumption as the degree to which individual employees feel equally engaged and

satisfied with their work and family role, WLB has become a core element of the EU's framework for equality and gender equality (Greenhaus et al., 2003, p. 513). This effort is hinged on the view that all employees regardless of social status or gender has a right to experience "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, p. 751), hence paid work and life after work should not be viewed as competing concerns but complementary to full life (Adisa et al., 2016). Evidence from numerous studies have demonstrated that lack of reasonable WLB not only poses both mental and physical health risks to employees' wellbeing (Visser and Williams, 2006); but also impact their level of satisfaction, commitment and productivity (Adisa et al. 2017). For instance, fatigue, exhaustion and depression among other physical ailment are some of the negative outcomes that are considered consequences of employees lacking control of their work (Kossek et al., 2012) and pressures of excessive workloads that are frequently imposed on them by managers and supervisors (Feeney and Stritch, 2017). All of these are considered hallmark of managerialist employment relations, which presents WLB challenges to employees (Brunetto, 2002; Oruh et al., 2019) – as shall be elucidated in the following sections

Managerialist employment relations

According to Mueller and Carter (2005), managerialist employment relations is a derivative of managerialism, which according to Klikauer (2015) is largely anchored on agency theory and transaction-cost principles. Described as organisational system hinged on the assumption that employers of labour (or capitalists) are rational entities essentially driven by competition and self-economic interest, the fundamentals of managerialism centres on the belief that managers act in the interest of employers and thus are predisposed to maximally entrench their subjectively-defined strategic goals (Bambacas and Kulik, 2013). Critics of managerialist-orientated "organisational culture" (Tham, 2007, p. 1442) and practices (Asegid et al., 2014) have shed lights on how this approach to employment relations (ERs) and human resource (HR) management may not only influence negative job satisfaction; but also trigger work-life balance challenges among employees (Mushfiqur et al., 2018; Oruh et al., 2018). Moored to a neoliberal and capitalist mindset, managerialism shapes organisations' operational systems and cultural ethos that are in large autocratic, authoritarian, hierarchical, non-participatory and shareholder-centric (Pollit, 1990). In turn, this creates a work environment – in which non-managerial employees are systematically excluded in decision making processes that relates to their wellbeing – including WLB affairs (Adisa et al., 2019; Babatunde, Mordi, Simpson, Adisa and Oruh, 2019).

The ideal of managerialism legitimises and normalises unequal power distribution and unjust handling of workers by labour providers, which materialises via the instrument of ER and HRM practices that are oblivion to the need for engagement, voice, and wellbeing (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Shepherd, 2018). The ascendancy of managerialist-orientated mechanics has manifested in what Muller and Carter (2005, p. 370) "described as (global) managerialism", which according to Miller (2009) broadly emphasises command and financial control, cost saving, efficiency, competitiveness and performance management concerns, leading to overly transactional approach to management and what Adisa et al (2019) consider WLB challenges that stem from over-exploitation of workers in Nigerian employment terrain.

In this direction, Brunetto (2002) defines the ideology of managerialist-orientated mechanism as a set of ERs and HRM policies, practices and procedures, designed by employers to harness better management of organisational resources (including employees), in order to advance organisational strategic goals that includes power centralisation, efficiency, cost reduction, profit maximisation, competitiveness and high performance. Therefore, this study views managerialist employment relations as a vehicle for achieving organisational strategic and economic gains for shareholders (Politt,1990) - through the instrumentality of lopsided engagement process, managerial control and dominance as well as exploitation of employees, which can trigger work-life imbalance and stress among employees (Klikauer, 2015). According to Abbott (2006), this process is aimed at suppressing employees' dissent regarding lopsided employer-employee power distribution and sustaining management control and work structure, which makes it near impossible for employees to challenge practices that may compromise their autonomy, rights, fair treatment and WLB effort at work(Oruh et al., 2019). It is this context of ERs and HRM practices that permeates the Nigerian employment terrain, which has a history of problematic, non-participatory and tensed employer-employee relationship – making it different from that noticeable in the UK and other developed economies (Miller, 2009).

The Study Context
Located in West of the African continent, Nigeria is considered possibly the most populous black nation in the world – with a population of over 195 million people, which according to the National Population Commission of Nigeria (2017) spread across 250 ethnicities or tribes. By tradition, the Nigeria has a cultural convergence among these tribes, which helps to describe the country along the line of collectivist society (Hofsted, 1980). This submission is evidence in the country's social structure wherein individuals are strongly and closely committed to their in-group membership, which b   egins with the nuclear (or immediate) family, followed by extended families and beyond including extended relationships. According to Aluko (2003), being a society where every member of the family assumes responsibility for one another, Nigeria society is assumed to foster strong relationship. Nonetheless, the country has been under the stranglehold of military government until late 1990, which according to Ubeku (1983) has influenced (and is continuing to influence) the shaping of its political dispensation as well as the leadership and practice of corporations operating in the country till date (Otobo, 2016; Oruh et al., 2019).

Indeed, the country's political landscape and patriarchal systems are assumed to pervade its socio-economic and organisational *modes operand* (Ahiauzu, 1989), which incubates high power distance index (PDI), unequal power distribution, servant-master relations (Hofstede, 1980), employee voice marginalisation and violation of right at work (Fajana, 2006, 2009). Amongst numerous factors, Otobo (2016) noted that poor regulatory framework and ineffective systems of corporate governance are considered key incubators of this organisational practice, as the provision of Labour Act (1974) and the associated regulatory initiatives are just basic with limited intervention from the government, which presents challenges for WLB efforts in Nigeria. For instance, work flexibility and daily hours of work among other arrangements that concern WLB are subject to mutual agreement between overbearing employers and voiceless

employees, which manifest discrimination, exploitation, human right abuse and work-life imbalance for employees (Adisa et al. 2016), particularly women (Ajayi, 2013; Fapohunda, 2014).This view is shared by a report from Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 2008), who urged the Nigerian government to do more in ensuring that organisations improve the condition of workers, through the development of more family-friendly policies, especially for women whose prospect of experiencing WLB has continued to diminish (CEDAW, 2008, p. 23).

While the country is recognised potentially as one of the biggest economies in the continent – hence it is often referred to as "the giant of Africa" (Watts, 2004), ironically, it remains a low- and middle-income economy. Based on report from the Central Intelligence World Factbook (2015), Nigeria has about 52 million workforce – with about 24% rate of unemployment, which employers capitalise on to exploit vulnerable employees and their right to WLB across its employment terrain (Adisa et al., 2017) including the banking sector (Adegbaju and Olokoyo, 2008). Although the banking sector has continued to encounter different nature of challenges, it is arguably one of where most of the prominent white-collar job exist. In the 1990, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) took drastic measures in repositioning the sector, in order to address the weak capital base of most of the banking institutions (Mordi et al., 2013). This move was tagged a sustainable banking effort, which saw the minimum capital base for all banks raised from 2 billion to 25 billion Naira - leading to merger and acquisition of many banks and significant reduction in the overall number of banking institutions operating in the sector (Adegbaju and Olokoyo, 2008). With these revolutionary measures, the few well recapitalised banks started to adapt stronger approaches to workforce planning and stricter HR measure of control including downsizing and restructuring (Kirfi and Abubakar, 2014) as well as long working hours culture , burnout, stress and denials of WLB (Adisa et al., 2017; Mushfiqur et al., 2018), which makes the banking sector a unique research interest.

Studies on WLB in Nigeria

Work-life balance concept is increasingly generating scholarly attention in recent times – particularly in the developing countries – such as Nigeria, where multinational corporations (MNCs) have inculcated high performance work-systems among other Western approach to employment relations and human resource management practices, which is believed to have driven work-life imbalance among employees (Adisa et al., 2017). Numerous studies have engaged work-life balance in Nigeria from the realm of the practices and policies (Mordi and Ojo, 2011; Mordi, Mmieh and Ojo, 2013; Ojo, Salau and Falola, 2014; Oludayo, Gberevbie, Popoola and Omonijo, 2015; Ugwu, Amazue, and Onyedire, 2017; Oludayo, Falola, Obianujuand Demilade, 2018) and organisational culture (Adisa, Mordi and Osabutey, 2017). Others have captured it from the contexts of Job resourcefulness (Karatepe, 2011; Salolomo and Agbaeze, 2019; Egbuta, Akinlabi and Nanle, 2019), ICT perspective (Awolaja, 2011; Adetayo, Olaoye and Awolaja, 2011). Further studies have explored work-life balance using the perspectives of HRM (Igbinomwanhia, Iyayi and Iyayi, 2012; Umukoro and Oboh, 2017), commitment, motivation, performance (Nwagbara and Akanji, 2012; Obiageli, Uzochukwu and Ngozi, 2015; Akinyele, Peters and Akindele, 2016; Mmakwe and Ukoha, 2018), role

conflict and coping mechanism Akanji, 2012, 2013). Perhaps the most covered area of WLB study in Nigeria is gender-realted (Alutu and Ogbe 2007; Ajayi, 2013; Fapohunda, 2014; Ugwu, Orjiakor, Enwereuzor, Onyedibe and Ugwu 2016; Akanni and Oduaran, 2017; Tunji-Olayeni, Ogunde, Joshua and Oni, 2017; Turner, 2017; Aladejebi, 2018; Kayode, Adebayoand Emmanuel, 2019; Asawalam, Asuquo, Alabere and Ogbuehi, 2019) and family-marital status (Amazue and Onyishi, 2016 Babatunde et al., 2019). This shows that WLB is increasingly becoming widely topical in Nigeria. However, to the best knowledge of this current study's author, no study in Nigeria has specifically and critically explored the nexus between managerialist employment relations and work-life imbalance, which is where the current study takes departure- in emphasising the need for policy change, on the rise of managerialist employment relations practices.

Conceptual framework

In order address policy change that is crucial in intervening against WLB challenges facing employees in the modern world of work – particularly in the developing economies, it becomes important to locate and apprehend managerialist employment-oriented mechanism, which prioritises entrenching organisational strategic agendas predominantly (Politt,1990), while relegating employees wellbeing to the backburner (Klikauer, 2015), and thereby compromising their right to WLB. Figure 1 below operationalises this contention.

Fig.1: Apprehending/Mitigating Managerialist Factors & Work-Life Balance Challenges (AM-WLBC)
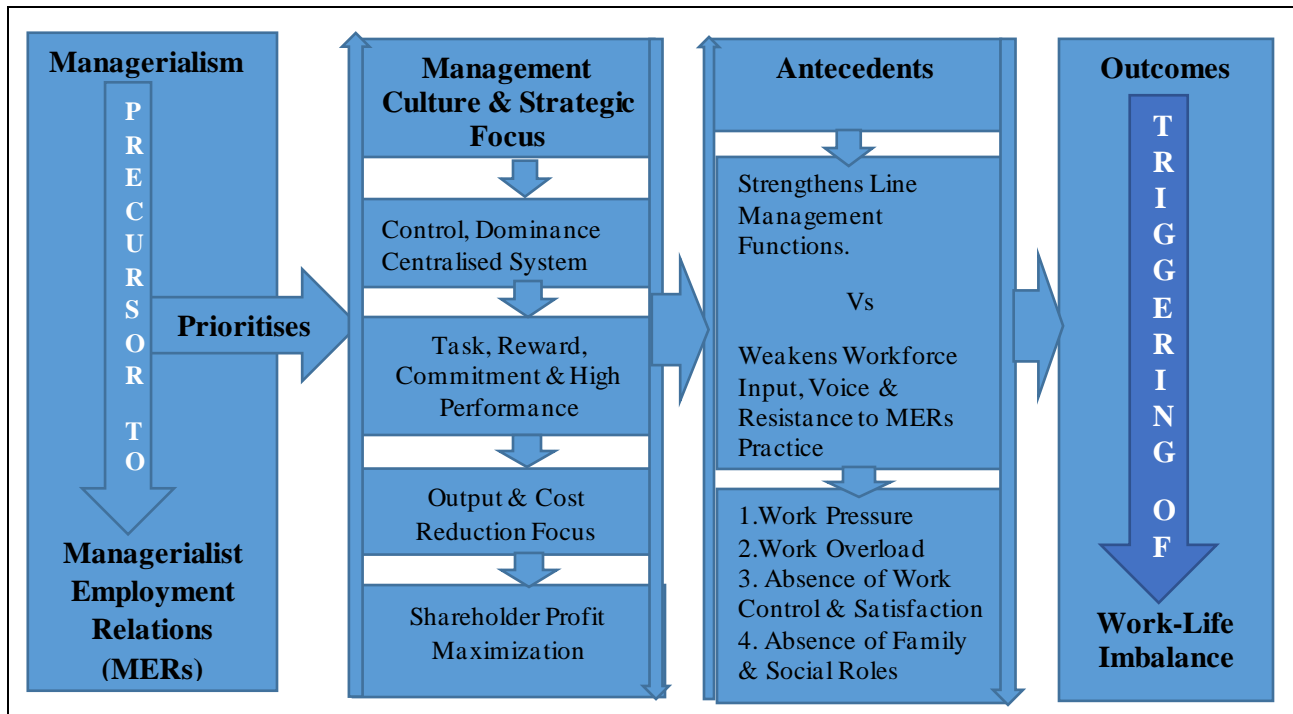
Sources: Politt (1990), Diefenbach (2009), Klikauer (2015), Oruh et al. (2019)

The basis of the figure 1 – AM-WLBC – the conceptual framework of this study is that managerialist employment relations (MERs), which is a precursor to managerialism is all about

management culture that prioritises organisational strategic focus (Politt, 1990; Diefenbach, 2009) at the detriment of employees' wellbeing (Oruh et al., 2019) and WLB. In order to achieve strategic focus, organisations adopt instrumentality of control, dominance and centralised system (Klikauer, 2015), which is aimed at strengthening of management's (managers') function (and roles) – while weakening workforce's input, voice and resistance to managerialist practices that result in the erosion of employees' WLB and overall wellbeing (Shepherd, 2018). According to Foucault (1980), authority figures such as managers are characteristically considered to have 'right answers' to all employment relations issues (Ward, 2011), and as such – subordinates such as employees should not challenge their decisions, which according to Oruh et al. (2018) inhibits constructive criticise or makes it near impossible speaking truth to power regarding work (mal)practices that often manifest in WLB challenges for employees. In advancing the debate on managerialist employment dynamic, Oruh et al (2019) viewed that such employment terrain and culture would only work to normalise disempowerment and erects organisational silos between the superiors (management executives, managers) and subordinates (employees), which is a system underpinned by a high power distance organisational mechanism (Hofstede, 1980).

This nature of a lopsided and non-participatory approach to employment relations is largely exacerbated in work environment where government support for employees' desire for better working condition is non-existence (Oyelere 2014). Nigeria come across as a typical example of this phenomenon – where employees are automatically excluded in decision making process relating to work policy formation and related matters (Otobo, 2016; Okpu, 2016). Thus, by deploying the instrumentality of control, dominance and centralised system, managements (managers) are able to entrench (without resistance of employees) their parochial and self-interested agenda of not only work commitment, reward and high-performance; but also prioritises output focus, cost reduction and shareholders profit maximisation (Klikauer, 2015; Shepherd, 2018). Employees are helpless and unable to challenge this work trend due to a range of factors, which may include but not limited to economic hardship, rising unemployment (Otobo, 2016) and the prevailing high-power distance culture of respect, which makes challenging superiors (e.g. employers) difficult or near impossible for subordinates (employees) (Hofstede, 1980). Consequently, this bread issues of work pressure, work overload, stress, absence of work control and satisfaction as well as absence of family & social roles, which triggers WLB challenges for employees (Adisa et al., 2017; Mushfiqur et al., 2018). The following section is preoccupied with the methodology of the study.

Methodology
A qualitative interpretive research method is adopted in this study, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding (Saunders et al., 2012) of how a managerialist employment relation practices can trigger work-life imbalance for employees. The nexus between managerialist employment relations and work-life balance challenges is central to the epistemology of social constructionism - adopted in this study. As opposed with the assumption that there is a naturally shaped world out there; social constructionism provides that human reality is constructed by social actors, who must be engaged through qualitative instruments (such as interview, focus group or observation), to determine how they construct social reality and the underpinning

motives (Creswell, 2013). In this direction, the social actors that will be engaged in this study are 32 managerial and non-managerial staff of 4 firms operating in the Nigerian banking sectors, in order to establish their perception on how managerialist employment relations can implicate work-life balance for employees. Data gathered will be recorded with digital recorder, manually transcribed and critically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis, which can facilitate a vigorous procedure for data analysis

Conclusion

This study proposes that there is a link between a managerialist employment relations practices and work-life imbalance for employees. This is particularly assumed the case in the developing countries such as Nigeria, which has a history of troubled employment relations (ERs) and human resource management (HRM) practices including challenges of work-overload, long hours of work, working on weekends and bank holidays, which are considered managerialist-oriented agenda that often compromise WLB effort. Given the growing economic hardship, rising unemployment and the servant-master relationship that underpin cultural environment, employees find themselves unable to challenges this approach to employment relations practices (Otobo, 2016). The practical implication of this contention for businesses - is that managerialist approach to employment relations practices need to be apprehended and mitigated against triggering work-life imbalance for employees, through infirmed policy change (Pollit,1990). To support this contention, the study intends to employ a thematic analysis of empirical data from 26 employees across 4 banking firms. The findings of the investigation and scope for further research will be presented following empirical data presentation and analysis.

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