An exploratory investigation into the impact of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment

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An Exploratory Investigation into the Impact of Downsizing on Occupational Stress and Organisational Commitment

Honours Thesis

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Bachelor of Business Honours
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USE OF THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Downsizing has become an increasingly widespread organisational strategy to reduce costs in order to improve performance and remain globally competitive. However, the negative effects associated with survivor syndrome, a term used to describe a set of attitudes, feelings and perceptions that occur in employees who remain within an organisation following involuntary dismissal, continue to plague many organisations post-downsizing. Despite this prevalence of downsizing, little attention has been paid to explore the interrelationships between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment of those who remain. Thus, the purpose of this research is to understand the effects of downsizing on survivors’ occupational stress and organisational commitment. The research questions explore this relationship from the viewpoint of eight academics from within one Western Australian (WA) education institution who experienced changes following the downsizing process in terms of an increased workload with less recognition and support. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and was analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns. Three significant findings emerged: (a) employees experienced symptoms of survivor syndrome including increased insecurity, decreased morale and several negative emotions associated with the downsizing; (b) the downsizing produced an increase in perceived occupational stress among participants; and; (c) participants’ increased occupational stress directly affected their organisational commitment, although the degree of impact varied. The findings from this study may potentially impact organisational change by helping to minimise the effects of survivor syndrome resulting from organisational change, by understanding the impact of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment. This study also highlights the need for organisations to increase communication and transparency and encourage employee participation throughout the entire process to help to minimise the negative effects associated with downsizing.
The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with a review of background information on downsizing, occupational stress and its importance in determining organisational commitment. The purpose of this research study is then highlighted, along with its significance within the business and human resource management context. This is followed by the proposed research questions and subsequently an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

In the past two decades, the Australian university sector has undergone large-scale organisational change (Dasborough, Lamb, Suseno, 2015) resulting from government funding cuts and competitive and economic pressures (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001; Shu-Yuan, 2006). Downsizing is a current widespread issue confronting many organisations and the last two decades (Day, Armenakis, Field & Norris, 2012) has seen a dramatic increase in organisations implementing this strategy. While business objectives among organisations may differ, the aim of downsizing is to reduce costs and improve performance (Day et al., 2012). As this strategy becomes more prevalent, there is a growing need to manage the organisational outcomes associated with downsizing. A significant proportion of literature tends to focus on the negative effects associated with downsizing (Nieman, 2010; Marques, Galende, Cruz & Ferreira, 2014) including the emotions and attitudes experienced by remaining employees, otherwise known as ‘survivor syndrome’ (Brockner, 1988).

As a consequence of these changes within the Australian university sector, studies examining the effects of downsizing conclude that after a downsizing event, survivors are likely to experience a dramatic increase in occupational stress (Biron et al., 2008; Nathan & Neve, 2009). A reduction in employee numbers resulting from the downsizing has the potential to generate various occupational stressors including, but not limited to, an increase in workload and work demands, organisational politics and heightened job
insecurity. (Chien-Chung, 2003; Colligan & Higgins, 2006; Smollan, 2015). This increase in stress can ultimately result in negative employee outcomes (McHugh, 1997). Furthermore, if these outcomes of stress are not controlled, it can reverse the intended objectives of downsizing (Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2010; Flewellen, 2013). For example, there is compelling evidence linking occupational stress to reduced organisational commitment among survivors (Chien-Chung, 2003; Shu-Yuan, 2006). Examining the impact of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment is crucial since absenteeism and turnover can significantly affect those organisations that have reduced their workforce.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

There is limited literature focusing on the interrelationship of downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. While quantitative research examines the relationship between any two of the three constructs, no known singular studies examine the interrelationship of all three. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of this interrelationship in order to ascertain the extent to which occupational stress can affect the commitment levels of remaining employees. Existing literature shows that downsizing generally leads to a decrease in organisational commitment (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004), however, there is paucity in the research examining the intervening construct, occupational stress, that may link downsizing and organisational commitment in survivors. Therefore, the focus of this study explores survivors of downsizing, their perceptions of occupational stress and how this may impact on their organisational commitment.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Literature pertaining to organisational change indicates that an ineffective implementation of a downsizing exercise has the potential to negatively impact the future of the organisation as well as the well-being, commitment and
retention of its employees (Wolfe, 2004). This study is significant in that it seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment and provide an impetus for future research to further explore these constructs within other sectors. Key findings may assist management in understanding how downsizing may trigger occupational stress and how to take proactive steps to reduce the negative outcomes of downsizing and maintain employee commitment following changes to the organisation. It may also assist management on how to better support survivors of future downsizing processes.

1.4 Research Questions

While the literature comprises a number of studies of the effects of organisational downsizing on occupational stress or organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003; Jamal & Azhar, 2013; Knudsen et al., 2003; Marques et al., 2014; Nieman, 2010), there appears to be a gap in the literature on how downsizing affects both stress and commitment within a singular study. Therefore, this research focuses on the interrelationship of these three constructs and attempts to answer the following questions:

• What is the relationship between downsizing and perceived occupational stress?
• How does an individual’s perceived occupational stress affect their organisational commitment?

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This research study is presented in six chapters. Chapter Two is divided into three sections, providing an overview of the relevant literature centring on: downsizing as a type of change management, occupational stress and organisational commitment. Chapter Three outlines the adopted research approach (qualitative), including the theoretical framework, research design and methodology. Chapter Four presents the findings from the interviews with the presentation of evidence of primary themes emerging from the data
analysis process. Chapter Five then illustrates the comparisons between these findings in relation to the current literature pertaining to downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. Finally, Chapter Six presents the conclusions about the research questions as well as the contributions and limitations of the study. The implications for management practise and recommendations for future research are then outlined, followed by a concluding statement.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment of remaining academics within a WA tertiary education institution. In order to understand this relationship, the review will examine the existing literature on the interrelationship between any of the three constructs.

2.1 Downsizing as a Type of Change Management

In response to the numerous internal and external factors (Senior & Fleming, 2006) influencing the operational and strategic management of organisations (Todnem, 2005; Pieterse, Caniels & Homan, 2012), it is becoming increasingly important for organisations to effectively and efficiently implement and manage change from within. There is an abundance of research highlighting the change management process in organisations (Jones & Recardo, 2013; Vora, 2013; Zoran, 2015), with Murthy defining change management as “the process of implementing major changes in information technology, business processes, organisational structures and job assignments to reduce the risks and costs of change and optimise its benefits” (2007, p. 22). Murthy (2007) further indicates that these changes may also occur within administration and management practices.

Organisational change is an episodic activity (Robbins, Judge, Millet & Boyle, 2011). In other words, it starts at some point and progresses through a series of stages in the hope that there are improved outcomes. While there are many organisational change theories, Lewin’s (1947) exemplary three-step model (see Figure 1) remains relevant in that successful change involves unfreezing the present level, proceeding to a new level and refreezing this new level (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Burnes, 2004).
Lewin (1947) recognises the need to discard old behaviour, structures, processes and organisational culture before successfully adopting new approaches. While Lewin’s (1947) work dominates the theory and practice of change management, it attracts major criticisms. Burnes’s (2004) re-appraisal of Lewin’s planned approach, particularly the three-step model concludes that his work: assumes organisations operate in a fixed state, is only suitable for isolated change situations, ignores the role of power and politics and supports change driven by a top-down managerial approach. Despite this criticism, Burnes (2004) concludes that rather than being out-dated, Lewin’s (1947) approach to change shows a continuing relevance to the needs of the modern world. This model is specifically relevant when exploring those employees who remained within the organisation and their experiences during the three stages of the downsizing process.

For many organisations, the change management process involves corporate restructuring. The concept of corporate restructuring is broad; however, it can be referred to as a major change in the structure of an organisation’s assets, as well as a change in its business strategy. There are three distinct types of corporate restructuring: portfolio, financial and organisational restructuring (Carbery & Garavan, 2005). Specifically, organisational restructuring, also referred to as organisational change, often occurs as a by-product of portfolio and/ or financial restructuring and is a common strategy used to increase an organisation’s efficiency and
effectiveness (Carbery & Garavan, 2005; Pieterse et al., 2012).

Literature pertaining to organisational change indicates downsizing as a type of organisational restructuring (Flewellen, 2013). A response to economic and global pressures including changing technology, market demands and global competition has led to continuing downsizing in a number of workplaces (Knudsen et al., 2003; Robbins, Millett & Waters-Marsh, 2004; Waddell et al., 2011). Downsizing has been defined as the deliberate reduction in employee numbers as a cost-cutting measure to improve the organisation’s overall productivity and performance. Reductions can be achieved through voluntary (natural attrition, hiring freeze, early retirements, buyouts) and involuntary (layoffs, retrenchments) means (Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012; Erickson & Roloff, 2008; Flewellen, 2013). While downsizing has been a common change management strategy that organisations have adopted for more than two decades (Gandolfi, 2007), the primary motive for most downsizing practices is often the need for an immediate reduction of costs and organisational survival (Ramlall, Al-Sabaan & Magbool, 2014).

According to Knudsen et al. (2003), downsizing as a strategic approach not only affects those who lose their job, but it also has an impact on those employees who remain in the organisation, also referred to as ‘survivors.’ Furthermore, this finding corresponds with Devine, Reay, Stainton and Collins-Nakai’s (2003) study on survivor syndrome. The term ‘survivor syndrome’, coined by Brockner (1988), is used to describe a “set of attitudes, feelings and perceptions that occur in employees who remain in organizational systems following involuntary employee reductions” (Noer, 1993, p. 13). Symptoms of survivor syndrome can include fear of job loss, mistrust, anger, depression and guilt (Devine et al., 2003). In addition to these symptoms, survivors may also experience insecurity, decreased organisational commitment and productivity, lack of motivation, decreased morale and an increase in absenteeism (Nieman, 2010; Marques, Galende, Cruz & Ferreira, 2014).
The literature indicates that the downsizing can further affect employees through a breach of their psychological contract. A psychological contract is understood to be “a set of predictable expectations and obligations between an employee and the employer” (Faul, 1999, p.7). Essentially, it is the bond between the employer and employee. This unspoken and implied relationship is a conceptual understanding between both parties where a principle trade-off exists. This means that the employee contributes their knowledge and experience to the success of the organisation in return for payment for their contribution. This can be in the form of social benefits, money, power and job security (Faul, 1999). When a downsizing occurs, this action is perceived to be a breach of psychological contract since the organisation no longer rewards the employees' dedication with these forms of payment, specifically in terms of employment security (Donia, 2000). Consequently, this breach has the potential to negatively affect an employee’s attitude towards their employer.

Brockner’s (1988) study brought attention to the effects of downsizing on the remaining employees and reveals that ‘survivors’ of downsizing are likely to experience high levels of stress as well as lowered levels of organisational commitment and motivation. However, this study offers no empirical evidence to explain the link between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment; instead, it provides a recommendation for future research to be conducted in this area of study.

A review of the literature shows that there is a negative association between downsizing survival and organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003; Jamal & Azhar, 2013; Knudsen et al., 2003; Marques et al., 2014; Nieman, 2010). For example, Chien-Chung (2003) found that the five factors associated with downsizing including “career uncertainty, job insecurity, increased work hours, promotion uncertainty, and higher job stress are significantly negatively correlated with organizational commitment” (p. 108). In contrast, high commitment practices including supervisor support, work-life balance and employee empowerment often result in higher organisational commitment (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Erickson et al., 2008). Nonetheless, studies examining downsizing and organisational commitment reveal that
survivors exhibit lower levels of organisational commitment during the downsizing (Knudsen et al., 2003).

Organisational commitment is considered one of the most challenging concepts in human resource management and organisational behaviour research (Bell-Ellis, Jones, Longstreth & Neal, 2015; Cohen, 2003; Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005). While current quantitative research reveals that downsizing generally leads to a decrease in organisational commitment (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Marques et al., 2014; Taylor, 2015), existing research in this area does not adequately explain the reasoning behind why survivors display lower commitment. This highlights the need for qualitative research to explore and reveal the underpinning aspects of organisational commitment resulting from the process of downsizing (Caulfield, Chang, Dollard & Elshaug, 2004).

2.2 Occupational Stress

Lazarus (1993) refers to stress as a condition that occurs when the demands of an external situation are perceived to be beyond an individual’s perceived ability to cope with them. Occupational stress, also referred to as workplace stress, is an important aspect in the study of organisations because of its potential impact on both individual and organisational outcomes (Chien-Chung, 2003). Recent global trends towards downsizing are more likely to increase occupational stress and affect employees’ wellbeing (Smollan, 2015).

Newman & Beehr (1979) define occupational stress as “a situation wherein job-related factors interact with the worker to change his or her psychological and/or physiological condition such as the person is forced to deviate from normal functioning (Newman & Beehr, 1979). In other words, occupational stress is said to be the feelings that an individual may experience if their job demands exceed their ability to cope. In the contemporary context, Smollan (2015) highlights that stress is a consequence of fewer people taking on larger workloads and feeling much less secure about their employment.
Research reveals that there are a number of standard models of occupational stress, incorporating the notion of individual perception of a work situation, which results in some form of a response of behaviour (French, Caplan & Van Harrison, 1982). Drawing upon these standard models, Devine et al. (2003) developed a specific model of examining occupational stress. They propose that the model identifies downsizing as a stressor, which in turn produces different levels of perceived stress. This perceived stress results in psychological, behavioural and physical stresses for those involved in the event. Unlike other models, Devine et al.’s (2003) model specifically examines occupational stress in the context of downsizing and recognises that while two employees may experience the same stressor, their perceived stress levels may significantly vary.

During downsizing, organisational changes that may impact on various aspects of employees’ job roles have the potential to add additional stress (Mak & Mueller, 2001). Research reveals that while employees may experience negative outcomes of stress, it can also produce positive outcomes such as increased creativity (Le Fevre, Matheny & Kolt, 2003) and enhanced performance (Avey, Luthans & Jensen, 2009). Despite these possible benefits, however, there is no doubt that stress can result in poor job performance, increased absenteeism, increased turnover levels, decreased motivation and health problems (McHugh, 1997; Smollan, 2015).

Changes resulting from downsizing can also create job uncertainty, which is a major cause of occupational stress due to possible terminations, transfers, new management and a change in career paths (Ashford, 1988; Chien-Chung, 2003). Since the aim of downsizing is to change organisational strategies to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness, it is likely that a reduction in staff will cause an increase in workload and responsibilities for those remaining employees. This idea is supported by Winefield and Jarrett (2001). In their study involving 2,040 general and academic staff in Australian universities, increased workload is in fact the main source of occupational stress.
Indeed, by examining the literature in detail, it reveals a number of factors that contribute to occupational stress as a result of downsizing. These factors range from changes in work procedures and technology, competitive pressures and economic factors to heavier workloads, workplace conflict and heightened job insecurity (Chien-Chung, 2003; Colligan & Higgins, 2006). Downsizing also creates changes in the workplace environment. Such changes in the workplace, consequently give rise to a number of major occupational stressors including role conflict, lack of job autonomy and career development opportunities, inadequate resources to do the job, organisational politics, harassment, mandatory overtime and high demands, workload and time pressures (Choudhury, 2013). A study conducted by Winefield et al. (2003) that included 8,000 respondents in 17 Australian universities found that 43% of academics and 37% of general staff report experiencing high levels of psychological distress. A qualitative study conducted by Biron et al. (2008) in 15 Australian universities, further shows that the major sources of stress for employees is the lack of resources, funding and support; the lack of career development and promotion opportunities, recognition and reward; as well as poor management, leadership and job insecurity (Biron, Brun & Ivers, 2008).

Several studies examining the impact of stress further highlight that occupational stress is negatively related to organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003). These studies are quantitative in nature. Generally, employees’ organisational commitment and willingness to accept organisational change decrease when they encounter high levels of stress (Shu-Yuan, 2006). Specifically, Velnampy and Aravindhan’s (2013) study concludes that although low levels of stress can benefit an employee’s performance, high levels of stress or even low levels of stress sustained over long periods can lead to a decrease in job performance and job satisfaction.

This idea is similar to Orly, Court and Petal’s (2009) earlier study examining the impact of job stress on the organisational commitment of a sample of 131 mentoring coordinators from six different educational mentoring branches around Israel. Their study reveals that occupational stress specifically influences employees’ affective commitment, an individual’s emotional
attachment to their organisation, reporting a higher level of affective commitment when the level of stress decreases. When examining the relationship between occupational stress and continuance commitment, which is an employee’s perceptions of the costs associated with leaving the organisation, they found that coordinators reported high levels of continuance commitment when role expectations were not clearly outlined (Orly et al., 2009). This however contradicts the study by Wu & Norman (2006) who indicate “an employee is likely to be satisfied and committed to his work if his role is clear and respected in the right earnest” (p. 45). Lastly, it was found that there was no correlation between job stress and normative commitment, an employee’s moral obligation to remain within the organisation. In this case, the coordinators feel that stress in their job does not lower their normative commitment. These different dimensions of organisational commitment have been shown to have an impact on employees’ work behaviours and highlight how organisational commitment is a moderator of stress.

As indicated earlier, occupational stressors have all been considered to have a negative impact on the organisational commitment of remaining employees (Chien-Chung, 2003). While there are singular studies examining any two of the three constructs of organisational downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment, there is limited literature focusing on the interrelationship of all three within a singular study. Therefore, the question to understand the outcome of downsizing in terms of occupational stress and its consequent impact on organisational commitment still remains to be explored.

2.3 Organisational Commitment

The literature on downsizing highlights that the effectiveness of this strategy is largely dependent on its impact on the survivors’ work attitudes and behaviours. Compelling quantitative evidence indicates that there is a relationship between downsizing and the following outcomes: job insecurity, intent to quit, job satisfaction, productivity and decline in loyalty, trust and organisational commitment (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004; Erickson & Roloff, 2007;
This study focuses on examining organisational commitment further. This is due to the fact that quantitative studies have not significantly revealed the underlying aspects of organisational commitment. In other words, while the measures associated with organisational commitment and its potential links to other constructs are known, there is no clear context to provide an understanding beyond the superficial level. Specifically, understanding organisational commitment is crucial because the “levels of commitment have been linked to financial outcomes such as job performance, absenteeism, and employee turnover” (Knudsen et al, 2003, p. 267). Survivors of downsizing are largely responsible for the success and implementation of the organisation’s business performance post-downsizing. An employee who displays high organisational commitment has a greater chance of contributing to organisational success and is likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, which in turn, can reduce absenteeism and employee turnover (Lee & Corbett, 2006). Thus, the study of organisational commitment is crucial since absenteeism and turnover can have serious consequences for those organisations that have reduced their workforce as a result of restructuring.

The literature highlights multiple definitions of organisational commitment (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Sheldon, 1971) including that of Buchanan (1974), who provides a basic definition of commitment as being a bond between an employee and their organisation. However, commitment is a complex attitude and Porter, Steers, Mowday & Boulian (1974) indicate that it can be parcelled into three major components. They provide a more precise meaning of organisational commitment as

The strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organisation . . . characterized by at least three factors: (1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization’s goals and values; (2) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and (3) a definite desire to maintain organizational membership. (p. 604)
In simpler terms, Meyer and Allen (1991) define commitment as whether an employee wants to, needs to or should remain within their organisation. Meyer and Allen’s (1991) three-component model (TCM) is indeed the dominant theory for the study of organisational commitment. Their model was developed in an attempt to incorporate existing conceptualisations of organisational commitment, including that exposed in Becker’s (1960) side-bet theory. The side-bet theory refers to the accumulation of an individual’s valued investments that would be lost if they were to leave the organisation and highlights that these perceived costs are what influences the individual to remain (Cohen, 2007; Powell & Meyer, 2004). Meyer and Allen’s (1991) model argues that organisational commitment has three distinctive components: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. While each of these components has different patterns in relation to employees’ job behaviours and performance (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Paramanandam, 2013), the TCM proposes that these components primarily describe the relationship between the employee and the organisation and that the components of organisational commitment decrease the likelihood of turnover as well as employee job performance and absenteeism (Jaros, 2007).

First, affective commitment refers to the involvement, in and the emotional attachment to the organisation and its beliefs and values. Therefore, employees who display strong affective commitment remain within the organisation because they value their relationship with the organisation and believe in its core values and culture. In other words, these employees remain because they want to do so (Jaros, 2007; Orly et al., 2009; Rusu, 2013).

Second, continuance commitment refers to an employee’s awareness of both the economic and social costs associated with leaving the organisation. These perceived costs may be monetary (loss of salary and benefits), professional (loss of seniority or acquired job-related skills) and/or social (loss of friendship ties within the organisation). Employees who maintain strong continuance commitment are inclined to remain within the organisation because they have to do so (Jaros, 2007; Orly et al., 2009; Rusu, 2013).
Lastly, normative commitment reflects the degree in which an employee feels obligated to remain within the organisation, or believes that staying with the organisation is the right thing to do. Here, an employee who displays high normative commitment believes that they *ought* to stay. (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Rusu, 2013; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008; Ugboro, 2006). Adding to this notion of normative commitment, Randall and Cote (1990) recognise it as an employee’s moral obligation as a result of investments made within their organisation. Studies show that normative commitment is higher in those organisations that value loyalty and are able to communicate this through the provision of incentives and rewards for employees (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

While the TCM conceptualisation of organisational commitment is considered the dominant theory in organisational commitment research, quantitative studies reveal that the model is not fully consistent with empirical findings (Ko, Prince & Mueller, 1997). Several studies highlight a discrepancy between the TCM scale, a psychometric scale measuring the three components of commitment and other tests more commonly used to measure work attitudes (Armstrong-Stassen, 2004) such as Porter et al.’s (1974) organisational commitment questionnaire. Ko et al. (1997) finds that the reliability of the two commitment scales, affective commitment scale (ACS) and normative commitment scale (NCS) were satisfactory, however, in regard to the continuance commitment scale (CCS), the reliability of this scale tends to be low. Cohen (2007) also highlights that commitment has different meanings over the course of an employee’s career.

In addition, extant studies reveal that affective commitment is likely to have the strongest positive relation compared to normative commitment. On the other hand, continuance commitment either does not relate or is negatively related to desirable work behaviours (Cohen, 2007; Ko et al., 1997; Meyer, Allen & Smith, 1993; Rusu, 2013; Sanjeev & Rathmore, 2014). While there is extensive research on affective and continuance commitment, Rusu (2013) notes that there is paucity in the research surrounding normative commitment. In this study, the three components of organisational commitment will be
explored and examined further.

Furthermore, Ko et al’s (1997) study investigating the TCM model of organisational commitment with samples from two different organisations in Korea, highlight some conceptual problems with the model. They found that Meyer and Allen’s (1991) study does not provide a definition of commitment that incorporates all three of its components. The original research merely noted that ‘psychological state’ is a commonality between these three components that essentially links the employee to the organisation. However, the term psychological state is not adequately defined (Ko et al., 1997). Next, their criticism focuses on the relationship between affective and normative commitment and their findings reveal a lack of discriminant validity between the two concepts.

Since the development of Meyer and Allen’s (1991) model, some changes in the scales have been proposed and tested. Although Ko et al. (1997) note that the psychometric properties of the scales has since been revised and improved, researchers still face the dilemma of knowing which version of the scales to use. Despite this criticism, the TCM model still remains the most prominent and widely used model when examining organisational commitment. Although the effects of each of these components are different, they tend to bind the employee to the organisation and limit their intentions to quit (Rusu, 2013). This research will allow for this model to be further explored in-depth when examining individuals’ perceptions of occupational stress on organisational commitment.

### 2.4 Summary

A review of current literature highlights that organisations are implementing downsizing as a means of cost reduction and increased organisational performance (Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012; Erickson & Roloff, 2008; Flewellen, 2013). However previous studies indicate that this strategic approach produces symptoms of survivor syndrome for employees who remain within the organisation. These can include, but are not limited to: job
insecurity, increased absenteeism, decreased morale, mistrust, anger, depression and guilt (Devine et al., 2003; Nieman, 2010; Marques et al., 2014). It is noted that during downsizing, changes to an individual’s employment conditions can give rise to a number of occupational stressors including inadequate resources to do the job, high workload and demands, time pressures and a lack of career progression opportunities, support and recognition and reward (Biron et al., 2008; Choudhury, 2013).

While extant studies highlight the link between downsizing and occupational stress, there is a gap in the literature examining the interrelationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. The literature review in this chapter highlights several singular studies examining the relationships of these constructs in isolation, however, in order to understand the impact of downsizing on survivor syndrome in-depth, it is important to explore the interrelationships of the three constructs.

As highlighted in this Chapter, in order to understand the underlying aspects of commitment, this study will further explore this construct. In simple terms, organisational commitment is defined as whether an employee wants to, needs to or should remain within their organisation. Meyer and Allen’s (1991) TCM as the dominant theory underpinning workplace commitment will be used in the study. While previous studies examining occupational stress and organisational commitment indicate that increased stress levels directly impact on employees’ affective and continuance commitment, it has not been found to impact on their normative commitment (Orly et al., 2009). In this study, the three components of organisational commitment will be explored as the resulting outcome of downsizing and occupational stress.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework and the research methodology used in this study. Support from the literature is provided to justify the chosen research methodology. A comprehensive account of the methodology utilised in this study is also provided in detail to ensure the study’s reliability as a requirement of qualitative research. Subsequently, the ethical considerations pertaining to this study are discussed.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study examines the relationships between the constructs of downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. This research acknowledges Lewin’s (1947) framework as the theoretical underpinning of change management and aims to understand the participants’ perceptions regarding the stages of unfreezing and refreezing, in order for organisations to entirely benefit from such downsizing exercise. The framework (see Figure 2) adopts Lewin’s (1947) model by considering that the unfreezing stage occurs prior to the implementation of a change management process. The framework then highlights downsizing as a type of change. Subsequently, the refreezing stage of Lewin’s (1947) model is depicted in this study to encompass the outcomes of occupational stress and organisational commitment.

Specifically, the TCM model based on Meyer and Allen’s (1991) study is used to depict affective, continuance and normative commitment. Through examining the three components of organisational commitment, the research aims to build on this theory of commitment by illustrating the type(s) of commitment that is/are predominantly affected by occupational stress arising from the downsizing process. Key findings can be used to contribute to the literature of the impacts of downsizing and occupational stress on survivors’ commitment to ensure that they remain committed to their workplace.
There is limited literature focusing on the interrelationship of all three constructs within a singular study. Quantitative research examining the relationship between downsizing and occupational stress, downsizing and organisational commitment and/or occupational stress and organisational commitment indicates that there is a direct link between these constructs. However, there is a lack of qualitative research exploring individual perceptions of occupational stress and how it links downsizing to organisational commitment, highlighting a need for further qualitative research in this area.

Downsizing literature recognises that there are various short-term benefits for the organisation such as cost-cutting. However, it has been found to not only negatively affect those employees who lose their jobs, but also those who remain (Knudsen, Johnson, Martin & Roman, 2003). Further literature examining the effects of downsizing on survivors, reveals that these remaining employees are likely to experience both increased occupational stress and decreased levels of organisational commitment (Brockner, 1988; Chien-Chung, 2003; Shu-Yuan, 2006). Even so, the literature does not expand on how occupational stress, arising from downsizing, affects survivors’ organisational commitment.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study explored the impact of downsizing and occupational stress on the organisational commitment of remaining employees. A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of participants’ perspectives and

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**Figure 2** Theoretical Framework of the Study

Unfreeze

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change (Downsizing)</th>
<th>Occupational Stress</th>
<th>Organisational Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Refreeze

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affective</th>
<th>Normative</th>
<th>Continuance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
experiences of downsizing and their perceived occupational stress as illustrated in the first research question. Similarly, the qualitative methodology was also relevant to the second research question when examining participants’ experiences of occupational stress and its subsequent impact on organisational commitment. Mack et al. (2005) highlight that the strength of a qualitative study is its provision of textual descriptions of complex human experiences. As such, qualitative methods are useful for exploring individuals’ perceptions and their social influences, those intangible factors that may not be readily described by quantitative data (Mack et al., 2005).

Furthermore, Stebbins (2008) highlights that qualitative methods are best suited to a situation that has received limited or no empirical study. As there were no known studies exploring the interrelationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment, an exploratory approach was necessary. This study used semi-structured interviews with a sample of academics from a tertiary education institution in WA to investigate this interrelationship, as elaborated in the following section.

3.3 Sample

In the past two decades, the Australian university sector has undergone large-scale organisational change as a result of competitive and economic pressures and government funding cuts (Dasborough et al., 2015; Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua & Stough, 2001; Shu-Yuan, 2006). This research examined downsizing in the context of a WA government funded tertiary education institution, which had recently undergone downsizing as a restructuring strategy.

A research sample is a set of data sources drawn from a larger population (Marshall, 1996). Patton (1990) and Morgan (2008) highlight that one feature of qualitative research is that it only requires a small sample of participants, nested in their context and studied in-depth. The broad aim of qualitative sampling is to draw a representative sample of a population so that the results can be generalised back to the population (Marshall, 1996). Therefore in qualitative
methods, researchers generally adopt strategic and purposive sampling methods since random sampling can create bias in small samples.

To examine the effects of downsizing on those who remain in the organisation, the target group of this study was academics across a range of age, tenure, gender and professional hierarchies. There are numerous sampling strategies in qualitative data collection including, but not limited to, purposive, convenience, criterion, quota and snowball sampling (Mack et al., 2005). This study, however, used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling was the preferred method of recruitment because it allowed for the differentiation of groups of academics based on a range of demographic profiles. Guarte and Barrios (2006) describe purposive sampling as “a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population with the most information on the characteristic of interest” (p. 278). These respondents were selected for their experience within tertiary education and were able to communicate their perceptions of the downsizing process, occupational stress and their organisational commitment in a reflective manner. While purposive sampling was initially used to recruit potential participants, snowball sampling, was then used to recruit further applicants through the initial respondents’ networks (Mack et al., 2005).

The sample comprised eight academics who had remained within the organisation following a prior downsizing exercise. Recruiting current employees provided an insight into the effect of downsizing while minimising the influence of factors that may have played a role in departing employees, such as redundancy packages. Participants were selected from different academic ranks within the institution, including lecturers, senior lecturers and associate professors and ranged in age, gender and tenure within the organisation. This selection process ensured maximum variation in the attempt to minimise potential bias towards any specific group of participants.
3.4 Instrument

The data collection methods used in qualitative research include interviews and observations. Interviews are the most common source of qualitative data collection (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2011) and were used exclusively in this study (see Appendix I- Interview Guide). Interviews allow the researcher and participants to form an ‘informal bonding’ in which sensitive and potentially complex topics such as stress can be openly discussed. Semi-structured interviews also allow the researcher to draw on participants’ personal histories, subjective perspectives and experiences of downsizing and occupational stress, giving an informed and in-depth understanding of how these concepts affect their organisational commitment (Mack et al., 2005).

One advantage of semi-structured interviews is that asking open-ended questions and probing offer participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses (Green et al., 2014). This may also provide the research with unanticipated responses that are meaningful to the participants. Semi-structured interviews also strengthen the relationship between researcher and participant, making it less formal than structured interviews and allowing participants to respond in greater depth if they feel it is pertinent to the discussion (Mack et al., 2005).

3.5 Data Collection

Participants were initially contacted by email to participate in the study. Participants were provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the research (see Appendix II) and were also asked to sign an informed consent form prior to their interview (see Appendix III). The interviews varied in length from 45 minutes to one hour at a time convenient to both the participant and researcher. Interviews were conducted in familiar settings chosen by the participants in order to reduce potential problems such as feelings of nervousness and anxiety and to encourage openness and honesty (Thomas et al., 2011). With the participant’s consent, the interviews were digitally recorded to ensure the accuracy of the interview data. Following the interview,
respondents were thanked for their participation and offered a copy of the interview transcript for review, to correct any errors and/or contribute additional information. Recordings were then transcribed for analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the participants’ responses. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data to identify patterns or themes that displayed commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns or theoretical constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat, 2010). The data was analysed in accordance with Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase guide for thematic analysis (see Table 1).

Coding is the first step of a systematic approach to preparing and ordering data for analysis and reporting. In qualitative methods, a code is often a term or short phrase that assigns an attribute to a segment of language-based data (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher employed a range of coding methods including colour coding, holistic coding and values coding which were used across a number of cycles to identify and classify common themes.

Colour coding, a visual cue, enabled the researcher to identify emerging patterns at a glance and compare a number of interview transcripts simultaneously. It also identified similarities and commonalities between the participant’s responses (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). After colour coding to identify the common threads (see Appendix IV), holistic coding was used to examine the data as a whole rather than in segments. This approach was used after the researcher had acquired an overall understanding of the emerging themes of downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment as well as the relevant sub themes within each of these constructs. Lastly, values coding revealed participants’ common values, attitudes and beliefs (Saldaña, 2009), representing their perspectives of the downsizing process. This assisted in exploring the participants’ experiences and actions regarding occupational stress and organisational commitment resulting from downsizing. The analysis
was iterative in order to develop deeper links between an idea and the data.

Table 1  *Phases of Thematic Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  Familiarising yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.  Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.  Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.  Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.  Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.  Producing the report:</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), p. 87.
3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethics clearance was sought from Edith Cowan University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants who indicated willingness to take part in the research were given a written information sheet describing the purpose of the study, assurance of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, and a right to withdraw from the research without explanation or penalty. Participants were requested to read the information sheet and consent form carefully before signing their agreement to the conditions. All information gathered in the interview remained strictly confidential and anonymous throughout the research. In the final reported findings, no identifying details of participants and the organisation were revealed. In accordance with the university’s ethics requirements, interview recordings, transcripts and data analysis are kept confidential on the researcher’s personal laptop, restricted with a secure password.

3.8 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. Lewin’s (1947) model is the theoretical underpinning for change management and assists in examining the participant’s’ perceptions throughout the unfreezing and refreezing stages of the downsizing. Furthermore, the framework for this study outlines the effects of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment. Specifically, Meyer and Allen’s (1991) TCM model is used to illustrate how the three components of commitment: affective, continuance and normative are impacted by participants’ perceptions of occupational stress arising from the downsizing.

This study adopted an exploratory approach and thus is qualitative in nature. The researcher employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. The data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with eight academics from one WA tertiary education institution. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet.
outlining the purpose and nature of the study and were also required to sign an informed consent form. During the interview process, interviews were digitally recorded. The data was then transcribed verbatim and analysed in accordance with Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase guide for thematic analysis. This study was conducted in accordance with the research procedures and conduct set by Edith Cowan University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents findings from eight face-to-face interviews relating to participants’ experiences of the downsizing process and how this has impacted on their perceived occupational stress and organisational commitment. The results are presented in a descriptive manner where participants’ quotes are used throughout this chapter to give voice to their individual perceptions. The primary themes that emerged from the data include downsizing, symptoms of survivor syndrome, occupational stress and organisational commitment. Many themes had a number of sub-themes that emerged and these are explored in turn.

4.1 Profile of Participants

The profile of the participants is illustrated in Table 2. Of the eight academics, two were male and the others were female. Seven of the eight academics possess a PhD and are employed full-time, while the remaining academic is a sessional lecturer who is currently a PhD candidate. Due to the sensitive nature of this study, participant confidentiality has been assured and any identifying characteristics such as job position and academic discipline have been excluded from the participants’ profiles.
4.2 Downsizing

Participants disclosed their perceptions and experiences throughout the downsizing process. They further highlighted their concerns about the downsizing process and indicated their experiences with regard to survivor syndrome. These include the change in their attitudes in terms of increased insecurity and decreased morale as well as a change in their emotions in terms of anger and resentment, detachment and withdrawal, distrust and sadness.

4.2.1 Perceptions of the Downsizing Process

During the interviews, participants provided detailed responses regarding their perceptions of the downsizing process. Two major concerns that were clearly evident within the interviews were a lack of strategic direction and ineffective planning and communication. Findings in relation to each of these themes are described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Type of employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD candidate</td>
<td>Sessional Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Profile of Participants
4.2.1.1 Lack of Strategic Direction

The eight participants expressed their concerns about the lack of strategic direction throughout the entire downsizing process and the rationale behind the change. Participants voiced that the downsizing was purely a consequence of rationalising international commitments and a decrease in demand resulting in a financial loss to the organisation. This then led to a number of employees taking redundancy packages. The participants revealed that the decision to offer voluntary redundancy was ineffective. While it provided the opportunity to get rid of the ‘dead wood,’ (P1, 2, 8) it resulted in a loss of ‘valuable and talented’ employees:

*We didn’t lose the right people and part of it was that voluntary redundancy is always the easiest way to manage change . . . But when you think about who puts their hand up, it’s either people who think they’re at the end of their career and have nothing to contribute, or people who are really good who say ‘Stuff you people. I’ll take your money and now I’ll move onto something bigger and better,’ which a lot of our really good people did.* (P8)

Participants viewed management’s lack of strategic direction due to the short-term vision of the downsizing. Management did not consider the strategic, long-term outcome of this process and this is reflected in the current period of growth that the organisation is experiencing:

*It’s not strategic because it was a short cost-cutting exercise without the long-term vision that really, if you cut a cost now, you’ll want to grow at some stage in the future and who are going to be the people that deliver the growth with?* (P8)

As a result of this growth, a number of employees who had taken voluntary redundancy have since returned to the institution as sessional staff. All participants expressed their concern for the lack of management’s strategic vision when re-employing past employees, questioning whether if “*initially that was the right thing to do*” (P6). P8 explained that: “*a lot of them have come back as consultants and been paid a lot more money than when they were here. So it actually in a negative way affects what the objectives were, which was the*
cost-cutting.” Adding onto this notion, three participants (P1, 2, 4) revealed that there was not a clear, well-researched rationale behind the downsizing. P4 went on to say: “downsizing is stupid. It’s not a good way to operate a business. There’s always alternatives and they need to be investigated thoroughly before they downsize and they don’t do that.”

Overall the findings suggest that downsizing was perceived to be a short-term fix. Management in fact did not account for the organisation’s long-term growth, which is evident with the return of consultants and sessional academics. The entire approach to the downsizing was not perceived to be effective and six participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7) noted that they strongly believe that the lack of strategic direction has had an impact on the future direction of the organisation.

4.2.1.2 Ineffective Planning and Communication

During the initial stages of the downsizing, six of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8) expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction with the planning and communication between management and employees. The consensus was that the process was short-sighted, lacked transparency and most importantly, planning and communication in relation to the downsizing process was poor:

There wasn’t really much communication between management and employees of the impact, we didn’t really know to what degree or nature the changes would be . . . . I think they could have been a bit more transparent, I think they could have talked more to the people that would be impacted by the changes to see potentially what those could have been. (P1)

While the organisation carried out a consultation process, five out of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 5, 8) indicated that they felt as though there were hidden agendas behind the rationale for the downsizing. They perceived that the consultation process appeared to be a tokenistic gesture and that it was “very much a process” (P3) – a tick in the box. Furthermore, P1 claimed:
The perception is that they’ve asked for our feedback, we go along to the workshops, we give our two points . . . then we never hear anything else about it . . . the perception is that it’s just ticking the box and that’s consultation.

Conversely, P7 believed that the consultation process was effectively communicated via email and in direct communication sessions and felt that those who were affected as a result of the downsizing had available support systems. During the interview, she disclosed that there was no direct impact on her and therefore she may not have understood the ramifications that the downsizing had on colleagues.

4.2.2 Symptoms of Survivor Syndrome

During the interviews, participants were asked to identify what aspects they believe affected them the most throughout the downsizing process. Several themes emerged from the data and the aspects that the participants felt to be important were categorised under their attitudes and their emotions. These included attitudinal changes in terms of increased insecurity and decreased morale, and emotional changes in terms of anger and resentment, detachment and withdrawal, distrust and sadness. Findings in relation to these aspects are described below.

4.2.2.1 Increased Insecurity

During the interview, seven of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8) revealed that they experienced some form of insecurity or uncertainty prior to, during and/or following the downsizing. Prior to and during the downsizing, four participants (P1, 2, 3, 7) expressed that they had experienced a level of uncertainty about the future and nature of the change resulting from management’s lack of communication and transparency. For example, P1 remarked:

*I think it was a bit unnerving. Don’t really know what the future is. [Due to the lack of communication] . . . it was a*
P6 felt particularly vulnerable throughout the entire process. As a sessional lecturer without a PhD, employment options are limited and she worries whether she would gain meaningful employment following the downsizing process: “It’s the anticipation waiting to see what will happen . . . it could be the last week that numbers aren’t there and then you don’t get the hours and so there’s the insecurity.”

Following the downsizing, four participants (P2, 3, 4, 8) voiced their insecurities about the future. With a change in management, they foresee that another downsizing may occur in the near future:

> The problem is that there is a big level of uncertainty still because we’ve come out of this one but then there’s another one pending and some of our areas are perhaps not looking too good… so now people are also thinking well are our jobs under threat. (P3)

Similarly, P3 and P6 noted that they are still experiencing some level of job insecurity and fears of job loss. P3 specifically stated: "I constantly do wonder in the back of my head if I’m still going to have a job here in five years’ time."

### 4.2.2.2 Decreased Morale

Amongst the issues affecting participants throughout the downsizing process, the data revealed that all eight of the participants placed an emphasis on decreased morale. The consensus among the eight participants was that they believed that a lack of collegiality and collaboration contributed to the decrease in both individual and/or organisational morale. The findings suggest that as a result of downsizing, reduced staff numbers has led to a lack of socialisation between colleagues and feeling of isolation: "There’s not the collegiality because there’s just not the volume anymore. You have too many other things to do so you’re tending to be a bit more isolated in your research
and your interactions" (P4). Similarly, P1 denoted that she has expressed a more individualistic work attitude, stating:

> Seeing all the changes happen, losing a lot of good people . . . . It’s moved us from being more of a collaborative, working together, getting enjoyment from that side of things, to now let’s see how far we can go and what we can achieve individually.

In addition, another participant expressed her concern of the downsizing process in relation to her morale: "I just think it affected morale. It affected that sense of purpose of coming to work . . . . The less tangible things about downsizing are that the effect it has is huge and that’s morale, a sense of disconnect" (P2).

Three out of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3) revealed that the lack of morale may have also resulted from the change in discipline structure. The anticipated aim of the change was to increase socialisation and collegiality between employees; however, these three participants perceive that the change has had the opposite effect. With the "disciplines splitting up, you become a bit more isolated, so there’s not as much cohesion or collaboration going on that we used to have" (P1). Similarly, P3 claimed: "by taking away the natural synergies of who you work with and trying to put it on this thing which isn’t in order and structure just throws everything out."

On the other hand, P7 revealed that she perceived the office restructure to be beneficial because it allowed for staff interaction between colleagues from other disciplines, stating: "I prefer to know people from various backgrounds to learn from each other." With all eight respondents reflecting on the negative impacts of downsizing on their morale, the findings demonstrate that the participants are experiencing feelings of isolation and apathy. It appears that management did not take into account their emotional needs when implementing such a dramatic organisational restructuring such as downsizing. The findings show that the work environment that has emerged from the downsizing process has not been viewed favourably by any of the participants, apart from P7 who could see some benefit to these changes.
4.2.2.3 Anger, Frustration and Resentment

Seven out of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) reported feelings of anger, frustration and resentment towards management and/or colleagues during and following the downsizing. The findings suggest that the greatest source of dissatisfaction was management’s approach to the process. After analysing the data, it appears that management did not investigate alternative cost-saving measures thoroughly before offering employees redundancy packages. Furthermore, there was a lack of analysis and rationale behind the decision and participants expressed their frustration with one participant claiming that redundancy packages were offered to volunteering staff without a feasibility study or audit. Participants were further frustrated by the management’s practice to re-employ past employees as sessional staff after assuring remaining staff that the organisation would not re-employ those who took redundancy. P2 asserted that:

One of the things that really annoys me is the attitude of management here, who have taken it upon themselves, that anybody who took a package, if they were to apply for a job back here, we’re not going to take them.

The ‘return’ of past employees as sessional staff has indeed created feelings of resentment towards management, as participants’ perceived these actions to be exploitive and hypocritical. P2 went on to say “it’s sending mixed messages. We don’t want you back full-time, or on tenure, but we’ll grab all of your career knowledge and all your skills under a sessional banner.” Similarly, P8 expressed greater anger and resentment in that while she had experienced the ramifications of the downsizing, other staff members were able to accept a significant redundancy and later return to the organisation.

4.2.2.4 Detachment and Withdrawal

During the interviews, the majority of participants revealed that following the downsizing, they were less inclined to reciprocate their commitment towards the organisation. Six participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8) indicated that the revised
workload model was not flexible and did not accommodate for extra undertakings beyond their prescribed job role. This resulted in them withdrawing and no longer feeling obligated to go above and beyond for the organisation and/or colleagues:

_There’s no blurring of the lines for the people who go over and above. So someone might go over and above with their teaching, but that’s not compensated by the fact that their research may be lacking or they’re doing a lot more administration, but they’re not getting acknowledged for that. So I think a lot of people are looking at that and going I’m just going to do what’s in my job role and that’s it._ (P1)

Furthermore, P8 reflected on her individualistic approach towards her job stating:

_I’m more focused on me than the organisation now. I would have put the organisation before myself . . . and I would have put it before me and my health... Now I’m putting me first . . . I’m not putting them ahead of me again._ (P8)

In general, participants believed that any extra effort was not acknowledged and this has eventually fostered a culture where employees are now more focused on themselves and less inclined to go out of their way to support colleagues.

The data also revealed that a number of participants who have undergone previous downsizings have displayed signs of detachment. They express a ‘here we go again’ attitude and indicate that they would prefer to ‘sit on the fence’ than involve themselves in the process because they believe that regardless of their concerns and input, management will ultimately determine the outcome. P5, for example, claims that:

_The best thing to do is just to sit on the fence, there’s no point complaining, because it’s a waste of time . . . I’ve seen enough bad decisions before to realise that this is just another bad decision, let’s adapt._

In addition, P2 remarked: “it’s just a cycle of life and organisations do these things every few years.” Six participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8) revealed that they
understand organisational change is an inevitable process and that downsizing is a widely used strategy across a number of other organisations in the education sector. Therefore, while they view their employment conditions within this organisation as unfavourable, they understand that their conditions may not be any different if they were to be employed in another tertiary education institution.

4.2.2.5 Distrust

The findings revealed that five out of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 7, 8) experienced distrust towards management during the downsizing process. Similar to their attitudes towards management’s ineffective planning and communication, they added that the lack of transparency during the consultation process created silos and low social integration among members of the organisation. In particular, P2 confirmed this consensus revealing:

I didn’t trust the information that I was hearing and being given, I always thought that there was a hidden agenda, I never thought they were transparent about the whole process . . . the culture here is one of cynicism, mistrust, suspicion, it’s a closed culture and it’s not open.

P2 went on to say: “they broke all the rules, they made out that they were communicating and getting people to give feedback but it was just clouded in secrecy.” The responses from the five participants reveal growing feelings of distrust. They claimed that the management seemed to not want to ‘reveal the ultimate truth’ and that the communication process appeared to be one-sided. The data indicates that this negative mentality among employees has contributed to the demise of a productive and collegial culture.

4.2.2.6 Sadness

The downsizing also produced feelings of sadness among participants. Several participants noted the lack of social interactions following the downsizing: "I think the biggest thing is that we used to have a lot of social
things, but that’s not happening at the moment, there’s no kind of opportunity to interact” (P2). Feelings of sadness and grief also appear to be directly linked to the loss of colleagues, supervisors and/or mentors. Specifically, P7 revealed that she was emotionally impacted by the loss of her former supervisor and mentor, stating:

> When he was here we were doing joint publications and he was there as a mentor to direct me, but now he’s not here so I don’t have anybody. It’s like you’re stuck . . . You feel that you’ve lost one of your supportive peers.

While participants acknowledged that they have since been able to develop new professional relationships with other employees, they revealed that the loss of previous relationships has to some degree, impacted on their emotional attachment to the organisation.

Similarly, P2 and P8 expressed sympathy for their colleagues regarding the approach to voluntary redundancy. They claimed that a few of their colleagues did not want to leave the organisation but feared that if they did not accept the package, they ultimately risked involuntary redundancy because they did not possess a PhD. Specifically, P8 remarked:

> Although it was called voluntary, they thought they needed to go or else they’d be embarrassed, which is sad . . . So there were people who went who felt that it wasn’t voluntary and that if they didn’t put their hand up then they’d be pushed.

Furthermore P2 expressed sadness for those who had left and those who management failed to acknowledge and recognise for their contribution towards the organisation. This participant claimed that many staff only wanted a simple ‘thank you, you’ve done a great job’ gesture, however, management made no attempt to do this.
4.3 Occupational Stress

During the interviews, participants provided detailed responses regarding their perceptions and experiences of general stress as well as the strategies used to overcome stress. Furthermore, they highlighted explicit factors in relation to their employment that they perceived to be the major sources of their stress. Participants revealed three key sources of occupational stress including *increased workload and work demands, lack of recognition and reward and lack of managerial and/or peer support*. The findings in relations to these factors will be explored in the following section.

4.3.1 Perceptions and Experiences of Stress

During the interviews, participants were asked to express their perceptions of stress. While the participants disclosed varied responses, the general consensus was that stress meant: having a constant feeling of worry; inability to meet deadlines; and experiencing poor sleeping patterns. Three of the eight participants (P3, 6, 7) expressed their perceived stress in relation to their job revealing that stress occurs as a result of time constraints and inability to keep up with workloads. In particular, P3 and P6 expressed their concerns for job insecurity with P6 specifically stating that stress meant:

> When you start to worry about when you're going to have a job in the future, worry about losing your job . . . I think stress means waking up in the middle of the night and worrying about those types of things that can be quite stressful.

When participants were asked to express their views about how they experience stress, the general consensus was that they mainly experience physical stress and emotional stress to a lesser degree. When stressed, participants reported suffering physical symptoms including feelings of tiredness and agitation, as well as an increased heart rate and trouble focusing. Six participants (P3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) also reported feelings of emotional stress including changes in their mood and the inability to sleep and cope as well as
they should in other situations.

It was interesting to discover that all eight participants experienced varied levels of perceived occupational stress throughout the different phases of the downsizing process. During the transition phase, it was noted that participants experienced the highest levels of perceived stress through feelings of uncertainty. This was attributed to the management’s lack of planning, communication, support and transparency. In the initial stages following the downsizing, these factors, specifically an increase in workload and demands and lack of recognition and reward remained underlying causes of occupational stress. However, after a considerable amount of time since the downsizing took place, four participants (P2, 4, 5, 8) feel that they are no longer feeling stress within their current job role.

### 4.3.2 Strategies to Overcome Stress

After revealing their experiences of stress, participants were asked to reveal their coping mechanisms and strategies for overcoming their stress. Participants claimed that exercise and socialising were among the most effective strategies to assist in stress reduction. Five of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 5) revealed that they take part in regular exercise activities in order to ‘get out’ and ‘clear’ their minds. Similarly, some participants (P2, 3, 7, 8) find that socialising with colleagues, friends and family provides support and an outlet for their stress. However, while family is important, P6 claimed, “sometimes it’s difficult for family to understand what you’re going through because they’re a bit too close, so it’s actually having those wider support networks.” Other coping strategies include using checklists to remain focused (P1), not participating in organisational politics (P2), planning ahead of time (P6) and remaining optimistic by “looking at the bigger picture” (P4).

### 4.3.3 Sources of Occupational Stress

In the interviews, participants were asked to express their views on what factors they believe to be a direct source of their occupational stress. The
data revealed that participants were exposed to numerous occupational stressors throughout the downsizing process. The highest perceived source of stress was attributed to an increase in workload and work demands, lack of recognition and reward and managerial and/or peer support. Findings in relation to each of these factors are presented below.

4.3.3.1 Increased Workload and Work Demands

During the interviews, the participants were asked to highlight what factors they believe may have contributed to their perceived occupational stress. All eight participants noted that they experienced an increase in workload and work demands among all other factors. The participants claimed that a reduction in employee numbers meant that remaining staff were required to carry the extra workload as well as added time pressures and expectations to complete tasks: "There’s less people to do the same amount of work so obviously it has to get done" (P4).

Specifically, four participants (P1, 2, 4, 5) revealed that their work demands have shifted and a significant proportion of their time has been delegated to administrative tasks with P4 claiming: "I think the administrative role is increasing pretty markedly . . . . You’re now spending more time on administrative duties that you didn’t really do before . . . . We get no administrative support". Conversely, while P8 experienced an initial increase in workload and administrative duties, changes to her job role following the downsizing has since shifted her focus towards research and work within external bodies. This has effectively lowered her workload and occupational stress in relation to work demands.

Four participants (P1, 2, 3, 4) also revealed that the increase in administrative duties has hindered them from being able to work on other significant areas of their job including teaching and research. P1 remarked "I think the workload drags you away from research . . . . There’s the day-to-day admin and the coordinator role that just sucks out all your energy." Furthermore, P5 noted that these changes following the downsizing have helped to foster a
culture of individualism where employees are becoming more reluctant to support their colleagues because they feel overloaded.

4.3.3.2 Lack of Recognition and Reward

Participants revealed that a lack of recognition and reward has significantly contributed to an increase in their perceived occupational stress. Findings suggest that following the downsizing, five participants (P1, 3, 4, 6, 8) felt as though they were not recognised and acknowledged for their increase in workload and effort to perform extra undertakings beyond their prescribed job role: “there hasn’t been any recognition of the increased workload” (P4). Similarly, P6 added onto this notion stating:

You would be more realistic to expect that you won’t be appreciated for the extra amount of things that you’re happy to put in . . . . I will still put in effort but you won’t go beyond by too much because you know that you won’t be recognised for it.

One participant in particular stressed his concern for the organisation’s lack of recognition towards employees as those who provide the student learning experience. He particularly emphasised this when making the assertion that employees are not recognised in the organisation’s vision and mission statement: “There’s nothing about employees, it’s about customers and students and the community” (P4). He further claimed that the organisation provides no conscious career progression for employees, highlighting: "I think the fundamental cause of the stress is the lack of recognition and value . . . . There's no conscious progression of people, it's all individual." The findings suggest that the management’s lack of recognition for employees throughout the downsizing has led to employees no longer feeling obligated to exceed management’s expectations.
4.3.3.3 Lack of Managerial and/or Peer Support

Six of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8) disclosed that throughout the downsizing they experienced a lack of managerial and/or peer support. Findings suggest that this links back to management’s lack of leadership, transparency and ineffective communication between employees. Participants believed that they were not heard and that their opinions were not considered during the implementation of the downsizing process, noting that this lack of support is still prevalent within the organisation post-downsizing:

_The thing I found the most stressful was the lack of support and that’s still prevalent. You know, there’s this lack of spine and I mean, everyone needs a fair hearing and justice is important, but I don’t think some staff have felt supported and I certainly didn’t feel supported then._

In particular, participants felt the changing culture and the lack of administrative support. For example, P4 expressed his concerns and indicated that employees receive little administrative support stating: “we really don’t get any support, we have administrative staff that are more competing with us rather than supporting us, they're looking for how we've done things wrongly so they can report it to their superiors.” The limited (and at times, non-existent) administrative support is partly due to the culture that management has created in that there appears to be a ‘wall’ between the academic and administrative staff members. Management has been unable to create a supportive example. P4 reiterated that this issue reverts back to management’s inability to provide sufficient support claiming: “It’s a lack of support from management and administration, if managers don’t allow the administrative staff to support then they won’t.”

Furthermore, the findings in this study indicate this lack of support has had a detrimental long-term effect on one of the participants. P8 expressed feelings of cynicism towards management after the downsizing resulted in her demotion. She felt as though she lacked support and that the entire process was ineffective. She claimed that as a result of ineffective support and leadership, her relationship with those involved in the decision making process has been
affected in an irreversible manner: “I’m never going to have any time for those people . . . to me they have lost all credibility because they acted in an unethical way.”

Participants also revealed that changes throughout the downsizing including increased workload, change in discipline structure and loss of colleagues has led to a very individualistic culture - that is, every person to themselves. The collaborative nature that is the key to successful learning appears to be lost as a result of the downsizing process. Several participants noted that the individualistic culture creates a barrier to helping one another. One participant reflected on this, stating that:

I don’t really feel obligated to my colleagues, other than to do what you’re meant to be doing. It doesn’t really extend past there and I think that comes down to the fact that you probably get more issues if you do. If you go on the win for a colleague, sometimes it comes back and it’s a backlash for you, so you’ve got to weigh up whether or not it’s worth it. (P1)

P1 went on to say: “In the old culture, you’d do it, but now you wouldn’t, it’s all about yourself. It’s horrible to say that, but that’s the way it is.” It is understood that the majority of participants have adopted this attitude and reveal that, excluding close friends, they tend only to help others if they are likely to benefit.

4.4 Organisational Commitment

Findings suggest that both downsizing and perceived occupational stress have had an impact on participants’ organisational commitment. However, the degree in which both of these factors have impacted on commitment is varied. Findings in relation to the effect on affective, normative and continuance commitment are described below.
4.4.1 Affective Commitment

Throughout the downsizing process, findings indicate that the participants’ affective commitment was the most significantly affected component of organisational commitment. Prior to the downsizing, six of the eight participants (P1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8) demonstrated strong affective commitment with the majority of them linking their emotional attachment to their length of tenure within the organisation. On the other hand, the remaining participants (P2, 4) displayed weak affective commitment and while P2 claimed that she felt some attachment to the organisation, she acknowledges that it would not keep her there: “I feel some attachment to it because I’ve made friends, but I can honestly say if I cleaned out this office and walked out and went to another job . . . I’d just be looking at the next adventure.”

The downsizing had an influence on six of the participants’ affective commitment (P1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8) with the majority experiencing lowered or even lower levels of emotional attachment than previously reported. P1 and 2 revealed that they had become less attached to the organisation and adopted a more individualistic approach. P1 claimed that although “it was a lot more fun before the downsizing,” she still remains loyal to the organisation. P5’s lowered affective commitment is related to his transition towards retirement and he expressed no hesitation in leaving despite his emotional investment in the organisation. P6 highlighted that the level of her decreased affective commitment is linked to her job insecurity.

During the interviews, it was interesting to note that one participant in particular went through an extreme change of affective commitment. This participant, P8, experienced affective commitment that went from very strong prior to the downsizing process to very weak following the downsizing process. In fact, she claims that she no longer feels an emotional attachment to the organisation stating:

*I think I did for a very long time, and in a way I’m happy not to have that because I think that emotional connection was far too strong and one sided . . . I would have put the organisation before myself . . . and I would have put it*
before me and my health and I was because I wasn’t sleeping at night and I had so much on and I was working overtime, my children and my family were suffering as a result because I wasn’t there.

However, she later revealed that her emotional attachment is slowly improving, but reiterates that it is now on her terms, not on the organisation’s terms. Furthermore, she stated that her attachment “comes and goes depending on what I do and whom I’m working with I think.”

P3 and P4 experienced minimal change to their affective commitment following the downsizing although in comparison to each other, their levels of commitment significantly differed. P3’s affective commitment remained relatively strong despite some feelings of detachment and suggests this may be attributed to her emotional attachment relating to her area of teaching. P4’s affective commitment, on the other hand, remained weak following the downsizing:

I think that was my feeling always . . . I don’t feel any loyalty . . . they’re not a good employer, I’ve worked for a few companies and they’re easily the worst employer I’ve ever had anything to do with.

When examining occupational stress, participants were asked to reveal how their perceptions of stress impacted on their emotional attachment to the organisation. Five of the eight participants (P1, 4, 5, 6, 7) revealed that their stress levels did not affect their emotional attachment following the downsizing, providing various responses. P1 stated that she still remains loyal to the organisation despite an increase in perceived occupational stress. Alternatively, P4 claimed that his emotional attachment was not affected because he was aware of what the organisation was like before the downsizing as well as the implications of the process. P5 revealed that his emotional attachment is not influenced by stress and he adjusts accordingly. P6 and 7 expressed their positivity throughout the downsizing claiming that even though the downsizing brought about occupational stress; it had minimal impact on their emotional attachment because they remained optimistic.
In contrast, three of the participants (P2, 3, 8) revealed that their perceived occupational stress did have an impact on their affective commitment to the organisation. P3, for instance, revealed that her emotional attachment decreased resulting from a lack of involvement in decision making with colleagues. P2 further indicated that occupational stress resulting from the loss of friendships directly impacted on her attachment to the organisation:

*I’d say your emotional attachment decreases when the basis for your attachment is gone. So it’s relationships, my friends have gone. So it’s not to say that you don’t make new friends, but I think a downsizing decreases your emotional attachment because the things that you’re attached to have changed to an unrecognizable level or they’re gone.*

Finally, as experienced by P8, the downsizing brought about a change in her job role and as a result, this created significant occupational stress. As a consequence of this, immediately following the downsizing, her emotional attachment disappeared. However, she revealed that she no longer experiences occupational stress in her new job-role and subsequently, her emotional attachment is again gradually increasingly.

### 4.4.2 Continuance Commitment

The data reveals that participants displayed varied levels of continuance commitment following the downsizing. The participants have been grouped according to their level of commitment, displaying strong, moderate or no continuance commitment depending on their financial stability and ability to find alternative work. Four out of the eight participants (P3, 6, 7, 8) demonstrated high continuance commitment while indicating their awareness of the social and economic costs associated with leaving the organisation. Due to financial commitments and their presumed inability to seek alternative employment opportunities, these participants revealed that their lives would be significantly disrupted if they were to leave.
When the participants were asked if they would remain working if they won the Mega Jackpot in Lotto, P3 and P7 revealed that they would leave the organisation. P3 indicated that if this hypothetical situation occurred five years earlier, then she would have remained within the organisation. However, due to family commitments, if such a situation were to occur now, she would not hesitate to leave. Likewise, P7 indicated that she would “happily” leave and continue voluntary work and “help people in different ways rather than committing work.” On the other hand, P6 and P8 stated that they would remain within the organisation if they won the Mega Jackpot in Lotto. Both participants indicated that they would remain within the organisation because they enjoy their work, although they would negotiate employment on their terms including fewer contact hours and less workload.

Interestingly, two of the participants (P1, 2) displayed moderate continuance commitment. They revealed while their lives would be disrupted due to financial commitments, they believe that they are not limited by employment opportunities. When asked if participants would remain working if they won the Mega Jackpot in Lotto, P1 would remain within the organisation revealing: “I think I’d find it hard to quit my job . . . money is one thing, but you still need to keep the mind active, you still need to be driven, challenged.” On the other hand, P2 indicated that money would provide greater choices in life and that she would leave the organisation:

I’d absolutely leave this job and I would just sit back and do all the things that I do outside of work that I do now anyway and have a bit of a think . . . I’d still work, I couldn’t not work, but it would be in my private consulting capacity that I’d be able to, so on my terms.

Lastly, the remaining two participants (P4, 5) displayed no continuance commitment revealing that they have financial security and are not limited in their ability to seek alternative employment. When asked if they would remain working if they won the Mega Jackpot in Lotto, they provided different responses. P4 revealed that he would not leave because he was not motivated by money and generally enjoyed his job. On the contrary, P5 indicated he would
definitely leave the organisation because he is financially stable and close to retirement.

In relation to the impact of perceived occupational stress on continuance commitment, seven of the eight participants (P1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) reported that currently, stress has had no direct effect on their intention to seek alternative work. In particular, while P3 indicated that she has thought about it more in the last few years, she has not made any attempt to seek alternative work. On the other hand, P8 indicated that immediately following the downsizing she experienced a significant increase in occupational stress and was actively job seeking. However, at present, she is content within her current job-role and is not seeking alternative work. While both participants are content within the organisation, they revealed that if they received a better offer with higher remuneration, they would be likely to consider it.

P6 was the only participant who considered their perceived occupational stress to have an impact on their continuance commitment. As a sessional staff member, she expressed her concerns for job security and revealed that this source of stress has influenced her intention to seek work that will guarantee her employment. Each semester, P6 experiences uncertainty associated with being a sessional staff member in that management is unable to confirm her teaching load until student numbers are finalised. This has greatly influenced her decision to seek alternative employment: “You can’t wait until the last moment before you seek for other job opportunities . . . so you're put in that position where you’d definitely be looking for other opportunities.”

4.4.3 Normative Commitment

The data reveals that there is no relationship between downsizing, perceived occupational stress and normative commitment. Findings suggest that while following the downsizing, participants felt some level of obligation; their obligation does not influence their decision to remain within the organisation. Similarly, the consensus is that participants do not feel that they have invested too much to ultimately decide whether or not to remain within
the organisation. When asked if they would support future downsizing, participants revealed that they felt no obligation or sense of duty to support the process. However, three participants (P1, 2, 3) revealed that if the rationale behind the downsizing were for the right reasons then they would consider supporting it, though would not feel obligated to doing so.

Participants revealed that they felt an obligation towards their students to provide them with the support, knowledge and guidance to deliver a successful learning experience. For instance, concerning post-graduate supervision, three of the eight participants (P1, 2, 7) feel obligated to remain supervising their post-graduate students; however it would not influence their decision to stay with the organisation. They indicated that they would attempt to continue as an external supervisor. However, if this were not an option, then they would not feel obligated to continue supervision. Interestingly, only five of the eight participants (P3, 5, 6, 7, 8) feel a sense of obligation towards their colleagues including offering support and assistance where applicable.

In relation to the impact of perceived occupational stress on normative commitment, participants revealed that their stress has not affected their normative commitment. Specifically, P1 and P6 revealed that stress negatively affected their obligations because it changed their priorities:

*I think it (stress) has changed how much work you do. You still have a job that you have to do, but I think it’s what your obligations are now that have changed . . . . You just make sure you do what you have to do and then you work out from there if you can do anything else, so prioritising.*

However, their normative commitment is consistent with the remaining participants in that their decision to remain within the organisation is not related to their obligations, with P1 specifically stating, “*Your job is that you have to look after your students . . . . That’s your job, so that’s your obligation. Just because you have that obligation here, doesn’t make you want to stay here.*”
4.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the results in relation to the impact of downsizing and occupational stress on participants' organisational commitment. Following the downsizing, participants experienced feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, decreased morale, anger and resentment, detachment and withdrawal, distrust and sadness. In relation to participants’ occupational stress, the primary sources of occupational stress as indicated by participants, were the increase in workload and work demands, lack of recognition and reward and lack of managerial and peer support. Further analysis of the data also revealed the relationship between occupational stress and the different components of organisational commitment. First, while it may not be apparent amongst participants, there was a negative relationship between participants’ perceived occupational stress and their affective commitment. Next, the majority of participants did not perceive stress to have an impact on their continuance commitment and intention to seek alternative employment. Lastly, there was found to be no association between participants' occupational stress and normative commitment. While few participants revealed that stress affected their obligations, this obligation does not influence their decision to remain within the organisation.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study sets out to explore the interrelationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment among surviving employees. This chapter begins by reviewing the findings in relation to the research questions and the relevant literature. The first research question examines the impact of downsizing on employees, specifically their perceived occupational stress and how this is related to the literature pertaining to downsizing and occupational stress.

The discussion relating to the second research question centers on the impact of the participants’ perceived stress on their affective, continuance and normative commitment. In this chapter, the link between extant studies highlighted in the literature and the current findings of this study will also be outlined. The framework of this study incorporated Lewin’s (1947) model as a consideration in examining the participants’ perceptions with regards to the unfreezing and refreezing stages of the change management process. In this study, aspects of occupational stress and organisational commitment as the resulting outcomes of downsizing, are the components of organisational behaviour requiring effective unfreezing and refreezing processes for such change management to be effective.

The following research questions informed this study:

1. What is the relationship between downsizing and perceived occupational stress?
2. How does an individual’s perceived occupational stress affect their organisational commitment?

5.1 Downsizing

This study reveals that as a result of the downsizing, employees experience a number of survivor syndrome symptoms. In this study, participants perceive downsizing as the deliberate reduction of employee numbers as a means of cost-cutting, which is one of the reasons cited in downsizing literature
(Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012; Erickson & Roloff, 2008; Flewellen, 2013; Krasz, 2005). However, while the literature highlights the outcomes associated with downsizing, extant studies have not outlined the employees’ perceptions on the actual success of such downsizing exercise. The findings from this study reveal that participants view downsizing as ineffective. They believe that this method of cost cutting has in fact increased the organisation’s costs as a result of mismanagement of the downsizing.

In practice, downsizing is implemented as a means to cut short-term costs (Krasz, 2005) and it tends to create an expectation that a redundancy package is considered the norm and consequently, can reduce natural attrition and increase redundancy costs (Clarke, 2005). The participants disclosed that the downsizing was a direct consequence of rationalising international commitments and a decrease in demand resulting in a financial loss. This decision to rationalise international commitments was directed from top level management and the resulting outcome was a lowered number of international enrolments. Coupled with the appreciating Australian dollar in 2011 (Garton, Gaudry & Wilcox, n.d.), international students found enrolment fees prohibitive. This corresponds with the literature highlighting that the fluctuation of the Australian dollar (Marginson, 2012) significantly influenced international enrolments. In order to cut costs, redundancy packages were offered to any academics that volunteered, leading to a number of employees leaving the organisation.

Three years after the downsizing, participants reveal that the organisation has since entered a new period of growth. The participants were unanimous in that they believed that the short-sighted strategy did not take into account the growth that they are currently experiencing in terms of an increase in student enrolments. Resulting from a reduced number of staff members to deliver services to the increasing number of students, the organisation has resorted to employing more sessional staff members. The participants noted this problem by stating that a number of employees who had taken the voluntary redundancy during the downsizing, have since returned to the institution as sessional staff. This demonstrates the management’s lack of strategic direction, as they did
not consider the long-term outcome of this process. Consistent with the literature, while this downsizing process may have produced short-term effectiveness by reducing costs (Ramlall et al., 2014), the success of this process has been reversed with the re-employment of academics.

Participants revealed that the decision to offer voluntary redundancy also proved to have had a negative effect on organisational performance. Even though participants perceive that it provided the opportunity to lose unproductive employees, it also resulted in the loss of valuable and talented individuals who were clearly re-employable. This notion coincides with findings in other studies like that of Cascio (1993) which examine changes in organisational performance and productivity. Findings in his study indicate that organisational improvement was only evident in a minority of cases. In fact, many organisations did not achieve an improved organisational performance post-downsizing, with some even experiencing a decline in performance. Similarly, Sitlington and Marshall’s (2011) study highlights that knowledge loss through downsizing results in negative organisational outcomes.

As a strategic approach, downsizing can have wide-reaching consequences for the surviving employees (Knudsen et al., 2003). While organisations may carry out downsizing to achieve their objectives to reduce overall costs and increase efficiency, it is likely that alongside these outcomes, survivors may experience the adverse effects of survivor syndrome. These symptoms can include (but may not be limited to):

- increased absenteeism
- increased insecurity
- a decrease in morale
- increased levels of occupational stress
- anger and resentment
- depression and guilt
- reduced organisational commitment
- a decrease in productivity
• reduced job motivation

(Devine et al., 2003; Nieman, 2010; Wolfe, 2004).

In line with the literature, the eight participants from this study reported experiencing changes in their attitudes and emotions. These include attitudinal changes in terms of increased insecurity and a decrease in morale, as well as emotional changes in terms of anger and resentment, detachment and withdrawal, distrust and sadness. It is evident that the majority of these symptoms are related to management’s ineffectiveness to plan and actively communicate with employees during the unfreezing stage of the downsizing.

In addition, literature highlights survivor syndrome to be the result of a shift or breach in psychological contract (Faul, 1999). Psychological contract suggests that an employee contributes to the success of the organisation in return for a payment in the form of money, power, social benefits and job security (Donia, 2000; Faul, 1999). According to Noer (2009), while this implicit relationship exists, there is a mutual obligation for both parties to honour this agreement. When the downsizing was implemented in the tertiary education institution in this study, the action was perceived to be a breach of psychological contract and a direct cause of the majority of survivor syndrome symptoms experienced by participants. This specifically caused feelings of disengagement among employees. In fact, the majority of participants in this study reveal that the lack of reciprocal commitment resulted in feelings of withdrawal and a declining obligation to go above and beyond for both the organisation and/or colleagues. Furthermore, the findings reveal that one participant is still experiencing feelings of detachment and withdrawal as a result of the ineffective implementation of the downsizing; highlighting that their relationship with management has been affected in an irreversible manner. As noted in Dessausure-DeCoster (2013), this study demonstrates that while this feeling of disengagement may be temporary, it also has the ability to permanently affect the employer-employee relationship.

Wolfe (2004) recognises that survivor syndrome is more often than not associated with feelings of grief and guilt at having survived the redundancy.
However, the findings in this study suggest otherwise. While participants reported obvious feelings of sadness and grief for the loss of colleagues and professional relationships, none of the participants disclosed any feelings of guilt from having survived the downsizing. The findings suggest that this may be directly associated with the nature of the redundancy process executed by the organisation. Furthermore, none of the participants reported an increase in absenteeism during and following the downsizing process. While they reveal that the negative work environment has led to a decrease in morale, they do not intentionally avoid coming into work for research or teaching. However, some of the participants revealed that they often prefer working from home when appropriate. Since being employed as an academic often allows for work flexibility, it is difficult to anticipate whether the participants working from home would record higher levels of absenteeism if they did not have this level of flexibility.

The downsizing exercise was portrayed to be a voluntary exercise. Clarke (2005) suggests that the term ‘voluntary redundancy’ implies that employees are free to accept or reject a redundancy offer. Findings from Clarke’s (2005) study indicate that perceptions of the voluntary nature of voluntary redundancy can vary widely and while some may perceive it to be entirely voluntary, others may feel that they have been given no alternative but to accept the redundancy offer. These attitudes and beliefs were reflected in this study when participants noted that they knew of colleagues who took the package because they feared that if they did not accept the voluntary redundancy and remained within the organisation that they would risk involuntary redundancy in the future.

Pieterse et al. (2012) maintain that organisations are constantly changing and adapting in order to remain competitive in the expanding business market. Organisational restructuring thus appears to be a strategy that is frequently adopted by organisations. With the regular implementation of downsizing as an organisational restructuring strategy, extant studies note that some employees look forward to such change. Research by Dasborough et al. (2015), for example, highlight that apart from experiencing negative emotions, some employees anticipate and accept such change. The consensus among
participants in this study is that they perceive change as inevitable and acknowledge that downsizing is a widely used strategy across a number of organisations in the education sector. Consequently, the findings suggest that it was not specifically the downsizing that created these symptoms of survivor syndrome, but it was the management’s inability to execute the change successfully that made it difficult to adjust and understand the rationale behind the downsizing.

5.2 Occupational Stress

In this study, the participants experienced varied levels of perceived occupational stress during different phases of the downsizing process. Stress is a condition that occurs when the demands of an external situation appear to be beyond an individual’s perceived ability to cope with them (Lazarus, 1993). The consensus among participants is that stress occurs as a result of time constraints and their inability to keep up with workloads. This finding matches the literature in regard to stress within a workplace context, which occurs if an individual’s job demands exceed their ability to cope. Furthermore, this finding builds on the literature in that perceived job insecurity is a trigger of occupational stress. While two of the participants revealed that although their stress was not related to job demands, the thought of losing their jobs did increase their level of perceived stress. These findings support that of Chien-Chung (2003), which show that the practice of downsizing has the potential to increase an employees’ occupational stress and affect their wellbeing.

The findings from the data indicate that the majority of participants experienced an increase in occupational stress throughout the downsizing process. This research identified that the underlying sources of occupational stress resulting from the downsizing included an increase in workload and work demands, lack of recognition and reward and lack of managerial and peer support. These findings correspond with Gillespie et al.’s (2001) study examining the major sources of occupational stress in 15 Australian universities. Their study reveals that employees identified that the major sources of stress were the lack of resources, funding and support; lack of
career development and promotion opportunities, recognition and reward; poor management and leadership and job insecurity. Interestingly, the findings from this study suggest that at a broad level, other Australian universities are also experiencing similar sources of occupational stress. However, participants did not recognise a lack of funding support to be a contributing factor to their occupational stress.

Smollan’s (2015) study examining the causes of stress throughout the stages of organisational change, found that the majority of respondents’ perceived stress levels significantly increased during the transition phase of the downsizing. This is evident in the current study where participants clearly placed much of the responsibility for their stress on management within the organisation while the downsizing exercise was being implemented. During this phase participants revealed that their highest perceived source of stress was attributed to management’s poor planning, communication and support and lack of transparency. While the organisation carried out a consultation process, the majority of participants believe that the process was insincere and despite having an input, they perceived that their limited involvement in the decision-making process would not influence the management’s final verdict. This finding is somewhat similar to Biron et al.’s (2008) study revealing that occupational stress can occur as a result of low participation in decision-making. This finding also supports that of Pick et al. (2011), who found that employees who are excluded from the decision-making process and provided with poor information express resentment towards management.

In the refreeze stage, as depicted in Figure 2, a number of participants experienced changes in their job role and responsibilities resulting in continual stress. It was further noted that participants placed the highest emphasis on an increase in workload, work demands and lack of recognition amongst all the other factors contributing to their stress. Since the aim of downsizing is to change organisational strategies to increase efficiency and cost effectiveness (Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012; Erickson & Roloff, 2008; Flewellen, 2013), it is likely that a reduction in staff will cause an increase in workload and responsibilities for those remaining employees (Smollan, 2015). In particular,
the participants revealed that a reduction in employee numbers meant that
remaining staff were required to carry the extra workload as well as added time
pressures and expectations to complete tasks. This has helped to foster a
culture of individualism where employees are more reluctant to support their
colleagues because they feel overloaded. In addition, they did not receive
recognition for their increase in workload beyond their prescribed job role.
Again, this is a consequence of breach of the psychological contract where the
organisation failed to recognise and reward the employees’ dedication to the
organisation (Donia, 2000).

Previous studies on occupational stress reveal that job uncertainty is
considered to be major cause of occupational stress (Ashford, 1988; Chien-
Chung, 2003). The findings in this study, however, contradict this result as only
two out of the eight participants reported job insecurity to be a contributing
factor to their perceived increase in stress. Since one of the participants is a
sessional academic, job insecurity is seen to be an inevitable outcome of the
nature of this type of employment.

Three years after the downsizing, some of the participants revealed that
they are still being affected by the aftermath of this process. They are still
experiencing stress along with the ramifications of the downsizing process such
as an increased workload and decreased morale; suggesting that the
organisation did not effectively implement the anticipated changes during the
refreezing stage of the downsizing process. It was interesting to note that four of
the participants, however, indicated that they no longer experience occupational
stress within their current job role. The perceived reduction in their stress levels
could be attributed to a number of factors including: the passage of time and the
transitioning into retirement phase. While these participants may perceive to no
longer experience occupational stress, the findings suggest otherwise, as
participants emphasised that the majority of factors that originally contributed to
their stress, including the lack of recognition and support, are still very evident in
the current environment, post-downsizing. These participants transitioned
through various feelings over the course of the downsizing from experiencing
feelings of anger and resentment, to feelings of sadness and finally a feeling
of acceptance, which is similar to the findings in Zell's (2003) study. This suggests that participants may have become desensitised to the impact of the downsizing. As such, instead of experiencing feelings of stress, they tend to accept and adapt to the new changes even though they may not necessarily agree with them.

5.3 Organisational Commitment

Similar to occupational stress, organisational commitment is another component that exists within the refreezing phase of Lewin’s (1947) model. In this study, findings indicate participants’ perceived occupational stress to have a direct impact on their affective and continuance commitment, however there was found to be no relationship between their perceived stress and normative commitment. Existing research indicates that downsizing generally leads to a decrease in organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003; Jamal & Azhar, 2013; Knudsen et al., 2003; Marques et al., 2014; Nieman, 2010), however little is known about which specific dimensions associated with it undermine the commitment of survivors. A review of the findings illustrates how the downsizing specifically influenced each of the components of Meyer and Allen’s (TCM) model of affective, continuance and normative commitment.

Prior to the downsizing, the majority of participants displayed strong affective commitment and findings suggest that this is directly linked to their length of tenure within the organisation. Corresponding to the literature, the employees who displayed strong affective commitment remained within the organisation because they wanted to do so (Rusu, 2013). Subsequently, following the downsizing, the majority of the participants reported experiencing lowered levels of affective commitment. This was attributed to various reasons including transiting into retirement, job insecurity, and employees feeling that their dedication was not acknowledged and reciprocated by the organisation. Consequently, this negatively affected employees’ attitude towards the organisation, which also contributed to the lack of collegiality and decrease in morale. While participants’ emotional attachment considerably decreased, it generally did not affect their intention to leave the organisation. It is
suggested that this may be linked to their tenure within the organisation and that their perceived stress levels are not significant enough for them to consider leaving.

The participants revealed that the downsizing significantly impacted on their level of continuance commitment. Following the downsizing, it was reported that participants were highly aware of the social and economic costs associated with leaving the organisation including their own financial commitments and their inability to seek alternative work. These findings are consistent with the literature (Jaros, 2007; Orly et al., 2009; Rusu, 2013) in that, the employees maintained a strong continuance commitment throughout the downsizing and were inclined to remain within the organisation because they felt that they had to do so.

Normative commitment reflects an employee’s obligation to remain within the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Rusu, 2013; Solinger, Van Olffen, & Roe, 2008; Ugboro, 2006). The data reveals that there was no relationship between downsizing and normative commitment. While participants feel some level of obligation towards their students and colleagues, they believe that they do not choose to remain within the organisation based on these obligations. Similarly, while they admit to feeling that they have invested a lot of knowledge and experience in the organisation, it is not enough to be the deciding factor in their decision to remain. The participants also felt that they had no obligation to support future downsizing processes.

A review of the literature shows that there is a negative association between downsizing survival and occupational stress (Riollo & Savicki, 2006; Smollan, 2015), as well as downsizing survival and organisational commitment (Flewellen, 2013; Taylor, 2015). Furthermore, studies examining the impact of stress have found that occupational stress is negatively related to organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003). Overall, the findings from these singular studies suggest that ‘survivors’ of downsizing are likely to experience high levels of stress and decreased levels of organisational commitment (Chien-Chung, 2003; Jamal & Azhar; Knudsen et al., 2003;
While it is recognised that some degree of stress is considered normal and an inevitable lifestyle factor (Gillespie et al., 2001), the findings suggest that the majority of the participants in this study are experiencing maladaptive stress resulting from the downsizing; which has directly impacted on their organisational commitment, specifically their affective commitment.

Several findings in this study do not correspond with conclusions from previous studies examining stress and organisational commitment. Notably, Orly et al.’s (2009) study, examining the impact of occupational stress on organisational commitment reveals that occupational stress specifically influences employee’s affective commitment, reporting higher levels of affective commitment when stress levels decrease. However, in this study, findings challenged this component of commitment revealing that despite an increase in stress following downsizing, five of the participants revealed that their perceived stress did not impact on their affective attachment. In contrast, for those participants whose emotional attachment was negatively affected by their perceived occupational stress, the findings suggest that this may be linked to their loss of professional relationships, lack of involvement in the decision making process with colleagues and changes in job role. While the majority of participants believed that their perceived stress did not impact on their affective commitment, the findings suggest that the participants’ may be unaware of how those stressors are impacting on their emotional attachment to the organisation.

When examining the relationship between occupational stress and continuance commitment, Orly et al. (2009) also reported higher levels of continuance commitment when role expectations were not clearly outlined. Conversely, the findings in this study highlight that participants did not seem to experience stress resulting from uncertainty about their role expectations. Their strong continuance commitment was directly linked to their understanding of the costs associated with leaving. It is suggested that participants perceive that remaining within the organisation is most likely the easiest option. This may be attributed to the fact that they are aware of the organisational operations and are familiar with the systems within. Additionally, they reiterate that other
organisations within the same industry are experiencing similar change management practices suggesting that their current situation may not improve within another organisation.

Finally, Orly et al.’s (2009) study found that there was no correlation between occupational stress and normative commitment. Their findings correspond to the findings in this study, which revealed that stress was not perceived to have any impact on participants’ normative commitment. It is suggested that the participants’ obligations were directed more towards relationships that they have developed with colleagues and students, rather than the tertiary institution itself. However, those obligations had no direct influence on their decision to remain.

A contradictory outcome that emerged from the data was the difference between participants’ perceptions of occupational stress and the actual impact of stress on their organisational commitment. Although participants reported experiencing an increase in occupational stress, the majority of participants did not perceive it to have an impact on their organisational commitment. However, the findings in this study suggests otherwise, indicating that their occupational stress specifically impacted on their affective commitment. While it was not always explicitly stated, the participants expressed negative feelings resulting from these occupational stressors. This suggests that participants may not be aware of how these stressors directly impacted on their emotional attachment to the organisation.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the findings in relation to the research questions and relevant literature concerning downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. In the unfreeze phase of the change process, participants perceived the downsizing to be ineffective and shortsighted, as it did not account for future growth. While participants reported experiencing a number of survivor syndrome symptoms, they did not experience feelings of guilt having survived the redundancy. This was
associated with the voluntary nature of the redundancy process. In the change phase of the downsizing, the change in employment conditions gave rise to a number of occupational stressors and several participants still report experiencing continual stress as a result of an increased workload and decrease in morale. This suggests that the organisation failed to effectively implement the refreeze phase of the downsizing process, which in turn, has negatively impacted on participants’ affective and continuance commitment although has not had any influence on their normative commitment.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter provides conclusions based on the study’s questions relating to downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. Next, this chapter outlines how the findings from this study contribute to the literature pertaining to downsizing survival, occupational stress and employee retention. This chapter also highlights the limitations and practical implications of this study, as well as recommendations for future research within the field of human resource management and organisational behaviour. Finally, this chapter ends with brief concluding remarks.

6.1 Conclusions about the Research Questions

The aim of the research questions is to explore the interrelationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment. This study demonstrates that throughout the downsizing process, academics experience an array of survivor syndrome symptoms along with occupational stressors.

The following research questions were posed:

1. What is the relationship between downsizing and perceived occupational stress?
2. How does an individual’s perceived occupational stress affect their organisational commitment?

Question One explores participants’ perceived occupational stress throughout the downsizing process. This research supports existing literature in that downsizing leads to symptoms of survivor syndrome among the remaining workforce. The most common symptoms experienced by the participants are those that foster a negative culture and lack of collegiality among employees, including: a decrease in morale, grief, detachment and withdrawal. As a result of management’s lack of communication and transparency regarding the downsizing process, the participants also reported experiencing feelings of anger, resentment and distrust towards the management; as well as increased
insecurity prior to and during the downsizing.

Although based on a small sample, the findings of this study reveal a direct association between downsizing and participants’ perceived level of occupational stress. Findings reveal that participants encountered numerous triggers of stress throughout the downsizing, placing the greatest emphasis on an increased workload, lack of recognition and lack of managerial support. This demonstrates that downsizing has the potential to increase stress levels throughout the three different stages: prior to, during and post-downsizing.

With respect to Question Two, the findings of this study reveal a negative association between occupational stress and organisational commitment. In regard to affective commitment, the majority of the participants clearly stated that despite an increase in occupational stress resulting from the downsizing, it did not have an impact on their affective commitment: an employee’s emotional attachment to the organisation. While participants believed that their occupational stress did not have an impact on their affective commitment, the findings suggest otherwise. Participants experienced a number of negative feelings associated with occupational stress including feelings of detachment and withdrawal, which were found to implicitly affect their emotional attachment to the organisation. This indicates that while participants may experience occupational stress, they may not be aware of how those stressors are affecting their emotional attachment to the organisation.

Furthermore, the majority of participants did not perceive stress to have an impact on their continuance commitment and their intention to seek alternative employment. This may be attributed to their awareness of the perceived social and economic costs associated with leaving the organisation including a loss of monetary (loss of salary and benefits), professional (loss of seniority or acquired job-related skills) or social costs (loss of friendship ties within the organisation). The study reveals that the sessional academic was the only participant who perceived stress to impact on her continuance commitment. She indicated that this perceived stress was directly linked to her job insecurity and the uncertainty
associated with being a sessional staff member.

Finally, this study concludes that there is no association between the participants’ perceived occupational stress and their normative commitment. While two participants revealed that their perceived stress from the downsizing did affect their obligations because it changed their priorities, this obligation does not influence their decision to remain within the organisation.

### 6.2 Contributions of the Study

This research contributes to the existing knowledge and understanding of downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment both in the tertiary education sector as well as in the field of human resource management and organisational behaviour. While existing research tends to focus on the relationship between any two of the three constructs including downsizing and occupational stress (Dragano et al., 2005; Smollan, 2015), downsizing and organisational commitment (Jamal & Azhar, 2013; Marques et al., 2014; Nieman, 2010) and/or occupational stress and organisational commitment (Orly et al., 2009; Paramanandam, 2013), this study examines the interrelationship of all three constructs. This provides an in-depth understanding of how downsizing influences the survivors in terms of their occupational stress and organisational commitment. Explicitly, it examines occupational stress as a contributing factor by exploring the relationship between downsizing and organisational commitment.

This study also provides contribution in terms of occupational stress and the perceived stressors arising from downsizing. Existing research in this area highlights the negative outcomes of stress including increased absenteeism, poor job performance, increased turnover levels, decreased motivation and health problems (Chien-Chung, 2003; McHugh, 1997; Velampy & Aravinthan, 2013). Even so, there is an inadequate understanding of occupational stress in relation to survivors; specifically, which aspects of their work are perceived to be contributing factors to occupational stress and the feelings associated with
These perceptions. This study expands this literature by examining the attitudinal and emotional aspects of occupational stress.

This research is framed within a WA tertiary education institution experiencing institutional and demand changes. A quick-fix solution of downsizing was employed in order to tackle the issue of maintaining bottom-line profits. While literature highlights extensive studies on downsizing in private organisations, studies on downsizing with respect to public sector organisations receiving government/public funding are limited (Ashman, 2015). Biron et al., 2008, Dasborough et al. (2015) and Winefield et al. (2003) are some of the few studies that have examined organisational restructuring in the Australian higher education context. While Australian tertiary education institutions adopt downsizing as a cost-cutting strategy in this current economic climate, it appears pertinent to investigate the effect of downsizing on remaining employees; specifically academics, who are the first-point-of contact with their clients (i.e. students). The academics’ attitudinal and emotional changes could be affected as a result of downsizing. If these are not recognised and handled in a positive manner, they may create negative consequences of the delivery of academic services to students. In essence, this study is conducted to illuminate the behaviour patterns of survivors in an academic institution in terms of their occupational stress and organisational commitment.

An insight into employees’ perceptions and experiences of the significant changes to their work environment provides organisations and management with a better understanding of the ramifications of their cost-cutting decision on survivors. In particular, it is evident that survivors of downsizing experience symptoms of survivor syndrome as well as increased levels of stress, subsequently impacting on their organisational commitment. Therefore, key findings provide management of tertiary education institutions with specific and current information about the survivors’ experiences of survivor syndrome and occupational stress arising from downsizing. This knowledge is integral for management: as a means to design appropriate strategies and organisational policies to identify and minimise the negative outcomes associated with
downsizing in order to maintain employee commitment. It may also guide management on how to effectively support future downsizing practices. In addition, this study informs academics within tertiary education institutions undergoing downsizing practices, by providing an awareness of its consequences and the possible circumstances that they may face as survivors. Furthermore, this may equip employees with the knowledge to seek and implement effective support strategies in order to adjust to future changes and minimise disruptions to their employment conditions.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

While the findings contribute to the knowledge and understanding of downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment, the limitations identified can be attributed to various factors including: that of a small sample size, the issue of respondent bias, the possibility of confounding factors and the cross-sectional nature of this study.

First, in order to gain greater insight into survivors’ experiences, this qualitative investigation used a relatively small sample of eight academics from one faculty within a WA tertiary education institution. Each organisation has a unique context and motive for downsizing. Therefore, these findings may not be generalisable to academic and/or non-academic staff from other faculties within the same tertiary education institution, or other non-educational organisations undergoing radical forms of change. Nevertheless, a small sample as used in this study enabled a richer in-depth understanding of the influences on stress and commitment, which may be used to develop a questionnaire to inform future quantitative research.

Second, this research sought to explore how the participants’ perceptions of stress directly affected their organisational commitment. However, a limitation of this qualitative research is that stress is an individual subjective perception and participants’ perceptions and experiences of stress often vary which can create respondent bias. Therefore, researchers need to note that
there is an element of subjectivity in the participants’ reporting and interpretation of their individual experiences.

Third, the context of stress is complex and while this study explored the participants’ perceptions of occupational stress, other factors such as personality, family and financial commitments will influence their occupational stress (Jepson, & Forrest, 2010). The influence of such stressors could not be completely eliminated from this study; however, the interview questions solely focused on one incident of downsizing in an attempt to minimise other factors contributing to stress.

Last, this research is a cross sectional study focusing on one event of downsizing that occurred several years ago. This extended time frame has given participants time to adjust to the changes. With the passage of time and hindsight, it is reasonable to expect that if this research was conducted immediately following the downsizing, then participants would have provided different responses.

6.4 Implications for Management Practice

Findings from this study reveal several implications for organisations considering or undergoing downsizing. It is obvious that downsizing and occupational stress have the potential to negatively affect an organisation’s overall productivity and performance (Cascio, 1993; Chien-Chung, 2003). The way in which change is communicated and executed can have profound effects on the future of the organisation as well as the health, commitment and retention of its employees. Therefore, in order to reduce survivor syndrome symptoms and occupational stress, managerial support and communication is crucial.

First, this study indicates the need for management to increase staff consultation and transparency of management’s decision making in order to provide employees with as much open and truthful information as possible. In addition, it is recommended that employee participation be encouraged
throughout the entire process in order to help to minimise job insecurity and uncertainty. Second, it is crucial for management to develop suitable and realistic career progression opportunities along with recognition and reward processes to ensure that employees do not experience feelings of detachment and withdrawal resulting from a lack of reciprocal commitment. Last, in line with extant studies, the findings from this study also indicate that it is crucial for organisations to explore various cost-cutting alternatives before considering downsizing, as this may not always be the most effective strategy. While it may produce short-term effectiveness, this success can easily be reversed if the strategy is not effectively implemented.

### 6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This aim of this study is to explore the interrelationship between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment within one WA tertiary education institution. The results highlight that downsizing does lead to survivor syndrome and occupational stress, which subsequently impacts on the academics’ affective and continuance commitment however is not related to their normative commitment. This small-scale research may be considered a pilot study, providing a number of recommendations for future research.

First, it is recommended that future qualitative research target a wider cross section of an educational institution undergoing downsizing. This should involve a broader range of academics from different faculties, academic hierarchies and tenure within the organisation. A larger representation of academics may provide a greater understanding of the effects of downsizing on survivors’ occupational stress and organisational commitment and may assist in minimising those effects.

Second, it is recommended that future research examining occupational stress define the factors influencing stress in further detail. External factors such as those associated with family issues and financial commitments could
also be examined as these may influence the employee’s perceived occupational stress.

Third, this study examined academics’ responses and the remaining effects of downsizing several years after it was executed. Future research in this area highlights the need to conduct a longitudinal study examining the effect of occupational stress on organisational commitment prior to, during and after a downsizing process.

Last, the findings from this study may not be generalisable to other organisations undergoing downsizing practices. Given that the internal structure within tertiary education institutions varies, future research should conduct a comparison study between two tertiary education institutions to further explore the common themes relating to both organisations. This will create more generalisable findings relevant to the tertiary education sector.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

The primary objective of this study is to explore the link between downsizing, occupational stress and organisational commitment within a WA tertiary education institution. The findings reveal that downsizing does lead to survivor syndrome and increased occupational stress, which negatively impacts on survivors’ affective commitment. Further, findings indicate that occupational stress had minimal effect on academics’ continuance commitment but interestingly, occupational stress was not related to their normative commitment. The key findings from this study can assist tertiary education institutions undergoing organisational downsizing. In order to reduce the negative consequences associated with downsizing, organisations need to implement managerial support and effective communication throughout the downsizing process to support the particular needs of employees. Furthermore, it is necessary to involve all employees in the decision making process, thus, a high emphasis should be placed on downsizing practices that promote effective communication and employee involvement.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix I

Interview Guide

PARTICIPANTS’ EXPERIENCES OF DOWNSIZING

1. Describe your current job role?
   a. What do you do as a (their role)?
   b. Would you be able to give me one example of your responsibilities as part of your job role?

2. In [insert year], the [faculty] underwent a downsizing. Can you tell me what you have experienced throughout this process?
   a. How did you feel about these changes before this downsizing?
      - Did you think that this was an inevitable process?
   b. Was this change something to look forward to?
   c. How do you feel about these changes following the downsizing?

3. How has your job role, if any, changed since this downsizing?
   a. How did you react to these changes?

4. What are other aspects of work that have changed because of this downsizing?
   * Choose aspects from list if unable to think of any*

HOW DOWNSIZING HAS AFFECTED THEIR STRESS

5. What does stress mean to you?
   a. How do you experience stress?
   b. What strategies do you use to overcome this?

6. Can you describe a stressful situation you have experienced at work?
   a. How often do you experience this?

7. Tell me about how, if any, this downsizing process has affected your stress levels at work? (Can use list if stuck for answers)
a. Which areas from the list do you believe you are more stressed about after the downsizing process?
b. Would you be able to elaborate on why your stress levels are affected because of these changes?

8. Since this downsizing lead to a number of layoffs, has this put any particular stress or pressure on you to carry the extra load?
   a. Did you change or modify your day-to-day workload as a result?
b. How has this affected you/made you feel?

AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

9. On reflection, do you believe in the value of this downsizing process?
   a. In what ways?
b. Did [this organisation] conduct this downsizing process effectively?

10. Do you feel an emotional attachment to [this organisation]?
    b. In what ways?
    c. Has this changed before and after this downsizing process?

11. If there was to be another cycle of downsizing? How would this make you feel?
    a. Would this affect your desire to leave?

12. Since you have gone through this downsizing process, has this impacted on your perception of wanting to spend the rest of your working time here?

13. Based on your earlier responses, you had indicated that your stress levels were affected by… (Pick from the factors from Q.7). How does this change in your stress levels, affect your emotional attachment to [this organisation]?

CONTINUANCE COMMITMENT

14. If there was to be another cycle of downsizing, do you feel that you would have no choice but to go along with this change?
   a. Why do you say this?

15. Do you feel that you have too much at stake to resist any future
change?
   a. Why’s that?

16. Would too much of your life be disrupted if you decided to leave your job right now?
   a. How would this influence your decision to stay within [this organisation]?

17. Do you feel that you have too few options to consider leaving?
   a. If you were to win the mega jackpot in lotto, would this be a different story?
   b. How come?

18. Following this downsizing, would you still want to remain within [this organisation] if you had an alternative?

19. Based on your earlier responses, you had indicated that your stress levels were affected by… (Pick from the factors from Q.7). How does this change in your stress levels, affect your intention to seek for work elsewhere?

NORMATIVE COMMITMENT

20. Do you feel that you have a sense of duty to support future downsizing processes?

21. Would you say that you have a sense of obligation to your colleagues or students?
   a. Would you be able to elaborate on what you believe are your obligations to your colleagues or students?
   b. Does this make you want to remain at [this organisation]?

22. Do you think you have invested too much into [this organisation] to consider working elsewhere?
   a. In what way?
   b. If you are/were a supervisor for a postgraduate research students, would this change or confirm your view?

23. Following this downsizing how has a change in your work demands and pressures changed your perception of obligation toward [this organisation]?
a. If you are/were a supervisor for a postgraduate research students, would you feel obligated to remain supervising them until they complete their study that you feel it is not right to leave [this organisation] right now?

24. Based on your earlier responses, you had indicated that your stress levels were affected by … (Pick from the factors from Q.7). How does this change in your stress levels, affect your obligation to remain working for [this organisation]?

Possible Aspects of workplace stress

- Work demands
- Control of your work
- Relationships with others at work
- Managerial support/ peer support
- Role at work
- Physical working conditions
- Career related issues/ career progression
- Organisational culture and climate
Appendix II

Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Participants

Title of project: An exploratory investigation into the impact of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment

Dear

My name is Bridget Girak and I am writing to you as a student researcher at Edith Cowan University. I am conducting research that aims to explore and understand the relationship between downsizing and occupational stress and how this subsequently impacts on an individual's organisational commitment. I will be conducting the research myself as part of my Bachelor of Business Honours degree at Edith Cowan University. The benefits of the research will show how organisations that effectively implement downsizing may reduce occupational stress and ultimately increase their employees' organisational commitment and desire to remain within their organisation.

I would like to invite you to take part in the project. This is because I will be conducting a research project within [your] University. [Your] University is the only university in Western Australia that has been approached to participate.

What does participation in the research project involve?

As part of my research I am planning to conduct semi-structured interviews with current academic staff within the university. If you choose to participate in this project you will be asked to take part in a face to face interview for up to one hour. During the interview, notes may be taken and the interview will be audio-recorded. Should the need arise; you may be contacted for further clarification after the interview is transcribed. I anticipate that the further clarification should take no longer than 10 minutes.

Do I have to take part?

No. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. This decision should always be made completely freely. All decisions made will be respected by members of the research team without question.

What if I was to change my mind?

If a decision is made to participate, it will need to be made by mid August, 2015. Once a decision is made to participate, you may change your mind at any time. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you
decide to participate and then later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage, without explanation or penalty. There will be no consequences relating to any decision by you regarding participation, other than those already described in the consent form.

**What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?**

Information that identifies anyone will be removed from the data collected. All data will be digitised; voice recordings will be stored securely on a computer that can only be accessed by a secure password. The password is only available to the researcher and other nominated investigators. Pending digitisation, any hard copies of interview transcripts, reflections or notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. This will be achieved by deleting the data and audio files from the computer. Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by participants, is assured at all times and pseudonyms will be used to ensure participants’ anonymity. The data will be used for this project, and may be used in any extended or future research with explicit written consent from you.

**Is the research approved?**

The research has been approved by the Faculty of Business and Law Human Research Ethics Sub Committee at Edith Cowan University.

**Where can I seek help if I feel that I am being affected by my work?**

Please contact your HR representatives for counselling services that are available to support you if you feel that you may have been affected by your work. They may be able to advise and help you with counselling, information and referral to services.

**Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?**

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please don’t hesitate to contact me via email bgirak@our.ecu.edu.au or you may wish to contact my supervisors

Dr Denise Gengatharen (email: d.gengatharen@ecu.edu.au)

Dr Yuliani Suseno (email: y.suseno@ecu.edu.au).

Should you wish to speak to an independent person regarding any concerns
or complaints about the project, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170
Fax: (08) 6304 2661
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

**How do I become involved?**

Please ensure that you:

1. Understand what it means to take part in the project before you make a decision; and
2. Take up my invitation to ask any questions you may have about the project.

Once all questions have been answered to your satisfaction, and you are willing to become involved, please complete the attached *Consent Form*.

This project information letter is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely,

Bridget Girak
Research student
Edith Cowan University
Appendix III

Participant Consent Form

Consent Form
(Please return to the researcher)

Title of project: An exploratory investigation into the impact of downsizing on occupational stress and organisational commitment

- I have read the information letter about participation in the project and I understand the aims and procedures, as described within it.
- I have taken up the invitation to ask any questions I may have had and am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
- I know that I will be giving my opinions about my perceptions of stress and how this may impact on my organisational commitment.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw that participation at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher or supervisors.
- I understand that I can request a summary of findings after the research has been completed.

I agree to the information being used in future related projects:

YES   NO

Name (printed):
_________________________

Signature:                       Date: (day/month/year):
_________________________      ________________________
**Appendix IV**

**An Example of Colour Coding**

This excerpt from one interview transcript shows how colour coding was used to identify common patterns that emerged within the data, some of which included Symptoms of Survivor Syndrome (orange), Sources of Stress (pink) and Emotions and Concerns (green).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Bridget</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11:39</td>
<td>So can you tell me how, if any, the downsizing process has affected your stress levels at work?</td>
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<td>11:45</td>
<td>Um... I think after it initially happened it was quite stressful, seeing all the changes happen, losing a lot of good people, and you over time it’s become a thing of you’ve got to focus on yourself, and so we’ve got to move forward and move upon your own, so you’ve just got to look after yourself now, I think that’s the mentality a lot of people are starting to have is you know less of that collaboration and yet it just look after ourselves and move our way forward</td>
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<td>12:13</td>
<td>Why do you think that might be?</td>
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<td>12:15</td>
<td>Because you’re just a number (haha). Lack of recognition (haha).</td>
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<td>12:20</td>
<td>A few people have said that, where now they’re focusing on themselves</td>
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<td>12:30</td>
<td>Yeah that’s why I reckon a lot aren’t in here as well. I think a lot of them are just focusing on themselves, they’re at home and you know, there’s the perception that they’re at home and now working, but a lot of them are working. I think they’re just working on research, they’re focused on themselves, they’re not doing over and above, you know, like why come and have drinks if it’s not going to give you an A start journal. Cause you’re not accountable on the fact that you were sociable and so that human aspect has gone. Whether or not you come into work, whether or not you spend time with your colleagues, all of that is of no relevance now, so people are now becoming really independent and I suppose selfish in a way, but selfish in a good way. So I think that’s what’s really happened.</td>
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<td>13:17</td>
<td>So which areas from the list do you believe you’re more stressed about following the downsizing?</td>
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<td>13:25</td>
<td>I think work demands would be number one.</td>
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<td>13:27</td>
<td>And that’s just an increase in workload?</td>
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<td>13:20</td>
<td>Yeah workload, doing things that you didn’t have to do before, which is now expected, doing stuff out of your job role, so doing things above when you shouldn’t be.</td>
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<td>Is that expected of you, even though you’re not held accountable and acknowledged?</td>
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<td>13:55</td>
<td>Yeah it’s kind of well someone had to do it so yeah. Whether or not it will be appreciated is questionable, cause really it comes down to you are just a number and they look at you on paper and have you done so many journal articles, what are your UTI’s like and that’s it. There’s no personal approach at all</td>
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