

**CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING: A STUDY OF CRITERIA AND  
IMPLICATIONS FROM THE VIEWPOINTS OF HR MANAGERS, VICTIMS  
AND SURVIVORS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Organizational restructuring and downsizing is inevitable for any organization that is focused on dealing with competition and business survival on a daily basis, due to the different organizational challenges, globalization and changes in economic conditions. In the different economic climates, it is critical that organizations evaluate the need of restructuring carefully, if they intend to survive. The researcher has reviewed a broad literature base on restructuring, clearly examining the different models, theories and perceptions related to the process. Through a conceptual framework, the study aims to analyse the gap between the right practices and perceptions of employees on restructuring and downsizing. The study adopted a descriptive survey since it was seeking to ascertain respondent's perceptions and experiences on organization restructuring in a structured manner. Data transcription was collected from 50 individuals. The group comprises 10 HR practitioners, 20 victims, and 20 survivors. The data collected from interviews with significant person will form the primary source of information while articles from newspapers, magazines and internet research papers will be the secondary source of information to support our discussion and analysis. The study found consistencies on rationalization as the strategic platform to turnaround the organization during economic downturns, however proper communication need to have an effective downsizing program. The after effects of the exercise should be managed in a more systematic and fair ways, especially to the survivors that was retained in the process. The framework towards facilitating adaptation to transition was well received, which positively exerts different forces at emotional and intellectual level to weaken the position of old ways of doing business and strengthening the penetration of new culture into organization. It is also seen that the elements of communication and leadership plays an important and pivotal role in determining the success of downsizing.*

**Keywords:** corporate restructuring, downsizing, rationalization, employee, adaptation

## INTRODUCTION

Nina and Iztok (2016) define the restructuring of an organization as transforming the structure of the company and the relationship between structure, business structure, business processes and employees and other stakeholders who participate in these relations. The reasons to the company to carry out the restructuring process are including change of ownership structure, demerger, or a strategy in response to a crisis affecting the business such as bankruptcy, re-positioning or a buyout. Sousa (2014), however, indicates the main reasons these organizational restructuring initiatives fail to deliver the expected results are related with only one thing – people. He (2014) believes people and their brains are naturally adverse to change, and also because the main approach has been to use a method usually known as “the carrot and the stick”. An organization that is restructured effectively will, in theory be a much leaner and a more efficient in its operations, better organized and more focused on its core business, within the scopes of the revised strategic and financial plan. The adaptations of the restructuring exercise by different organization comes with a strategic intent to seek a more streamlined cost base, increase productivity and revenues for the organization, enhance efficiency and improve performance, while improving employees’ welfare shareholders interest and wealth. Restructuring is also needed to meet new, current or expected operational requirements, when accountability for results are not clearly communicated, and when the results measurement become subjective and biased, which results in increased turnover, stagnant workforce productivity or deteriorating morale. The economic rationale for downsizing is very much a straightforward one, whereby the only two ways to make money in business is either to cut costs or increase revenues. As future costs is far more predictable than future revenues, it only makes more sense to cut cost through such avenues.

The aims of the study were to research a downsizing model which is effective as one of the options of strategic intervention to bail the organization out during the difficult time of the economic downturn. The study target to uncover the effective approach an organization may take during downsizing and to know initiator that management chooses to downsize. Data, through interview is gathered from HR practitioners, survivors and victims of the restructuring process, to build a framework on their opinion of downsizing. This study is useful for upper level managers to understand the factors to consider when deciding on restructuring plans and processes, its handling and management issues. For the HR personnel, it allows a better understanding towards executing an effective strategy of a corporate restructuring process for the organizations in order to enhance the company’s performance strategically. The study also important the entire employee of the organization as it impacts everyone, directly and indirectly.

The objectives of this research is to uncover some of the realities that may lead to the answer for the following Research Questions, as follows:

1. What are the key strategic determinant factors that lead to a downsizing plan?
2. Determinant facilitation factors towards a good downsizing exercise?
3. Major important elements in determining the success of downsizing?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Restructuring is a management of change program**

Restructuring of companies is the process of adaptation of the company to changed external or internal conditions (Nina & Iztok, 2016). They (2016) indicated that such an adjustment may be necessary due to the change in business environment, such as economic crisis, the entry of new competitors on the market, the increase in purchasing prices of raw materials, technical progress, departure of key personnel from the company, and due to many other reasons.

Organizational restructuring is a very delicate phase in an organization's life, as it will affect many people, processes, systems, technologies, business areas, departments, etc (Sousa, 2014). Besides, Beagrie (2004) believes the restructuring process can be a challenging task as it involves the management of change. Inevitably, organizational resistance to change is always present. It is important to visualize that final result before finalizing the restructuring program and plans to change. Through a creative and positive management of the restructuring strategy, it could result to substantial benefits of an increased productivity through the simplification of work processes, enhancement of customer and stakeholder visibility and rationalization of the product portfolio. It also provides significant cost savings, competitiveness and enhance organizational sustainability.

### **Downsizing as a strategic intervention**

Employment downsizing has become a fact of working life as companies struggle to cut costs and adapt to changing market demands (Cascio, 2013). It often implemented during economic downturns as a reactive, tactical action (Cascio, 2013). According to Appelbaum (2001), downsizing is also seen as a business strategy which is designed to improve the financial performance of a company, through the reduction and changes in the structure of the workforce so that efficiency and operational results can be improved. Downsizing is defined as a systematic reduction of the workforce through an intentionally instituted set of activities, which aims at enhancing efficiency and performance (Appelbaum et al, 1987; Cameron, 1993; Cascio, 1993). Cameron (1994) mentioned that downsizing is not only adopted by organization that are experiencing problems, but also taken up by organizations that are growing. This strategy is adopted as strategic change management program in challenging economic times as survival strategy. In the conditions of economic recoveries, downsizing is adopted to induce efficiency, profitability and flexibility. Kurebwa (2011) considers that downsizing is a deliberate organisational decision aimed at systematically reducing employees through an intentionally instituted set of activities with the direct purpose of improving organisational efficiency and performance.

### **Management commitment to make strategic changes and protect psychological contracts**

According to Hopkins and Mallette (2001), roles and commitment of the management is important as it determines a successful corporate restructuring process. They (2001) defined the establishment of psychological contracts between the employee and the organization in a broader manner; where psychological contracts possess two dimensions namely rational contracts and general contracts. Rational contracts are the commitments of employee to the organization's value and the capabilities of the employee to match the job requirement and their endeavor to meet the objectives of the organization. General contracts refer to the extent of employee believes or perceives the organization fulfilled the initial implicit promise made when the contract was initially established. In order to accomplish the mission of downsizing and protect psychological contracts of employee, manager is compelled to walk on the thin fine line of the contradictory roles, such as balancing human and economic values, harmonizing organizational and personal interest, motivating people during tough time and managing relationship between employer and employee (Lamsa & Savolainen, 2000).

### **Downsizing and financial performance**

Downsizing is seen as a short term rescue plan for the company in achieving a short term cost saving of wages. While effective in the short term, further analysis and evaluation should be conducted on its medium to long term impacts. The justification and evaluation of downsizing process should include initial cost of downsizing, short term cost saving and comparing the potential of long term savings or losses. The cost and benefit analysis could be a good guide especially on financial implications for the management to evaluate the feasibility of executing the downsizing strategy.

However, it could be noted that most companies that execute downsizing strategy emphasized on headcount reductions, and overlooked the importance of overall company strategic direction, eventually, sacrificed the long term sustainability growth for short term financial gain. Lowe (1998) made a hypothetical comment that the contributing factor is the breakdown of trust and loyalty relationship between employee and employer.

### **Results and after-effects of downsizing**

Downsizing generates both positive and negative effects. This statement was supported by Dr. Naveed et al. (2015) believing that downsizing can have both positive as well as negative effects on the commitment of employees. Many case studies and articles from practitioners recognize both the impact and the arguments (De Meuse et al, 1994). However, most studies have found that the downsize efforts actually do more harm than good to the organization's performance. Chadwick et al (2004) agrees that downsizing provides negative impacts. However, it is found to be beneficial in relation to managing resources in an optimum level. Implementing a downsize effort allows organizations to reduce any excess needed and to reduce labour costs (Gyu-Chang Yu et al, 2006). The negative effects are mainly on employee behaviour, which is usually demotivated. The

sense of loss and unmotivated staffs would translates into poor performance (Gombola & Tsetsekos, 1992).

### **Models of downsizing**

The strategy of downsizing, is viewed as failure to solve organizational problems especially related to cost and financial distress.

#### *Sadri Model*

According to Sadri (1996), management needs to go through five steps to minimize the negative impact towards employees in general. The first step is to ensure the execution of a fair process when it comes to laying off workers. The next step is to raise the level of motivation when things are seen to be done in a fair and just manner. In other words, management needs to put plans into action. The third step is to have more communication with workers who have been affected emotionally and mentally. The fourth step is to provide the necessary support for the dismissed workers. This can be in the form of financial assistance, provides relocation or retraining program and also to help them find alternative employment. The final step is to create employee assistance program. The program is to enable workers who feel unsecured and anxious to go for counselling sessions at the company's expense.

#### *Burke and Nelson Model*

Burke and Nelson (1997) suggested an approach that revitalizes efforts within a comprehensive framework. This framework is separated into 3 stages namely initiation, implementation and institutionalization. In the initiation stage, organizations have to begin with a goal and this strategy should be a long term measure to address any immediate shortfall. For implementation stage, Mark (1994) suggested that managements should involve employees in managing downsizing and continue to have open and frank discussions in order to lead them to achieve the target that has been in place. The final stage is institutionalization which managements must allocate time for unhappiness and interruptions in efficiency and productivity faced by the survivors.

#### *Cummings and Worley Model*

Cummings and Worley (2001) introduced a strategic intervention model for successful downsizing implementation. This model consists of 5 stages of application as follows:

1. Goals and objectives to clarify the organizational strategies;
2. Relevant choices and key decisions during assessment stage;
3. Reduction in workforce under implementation stage;
4. Behavioural implications of remaining workforce to address survivor syndrome;
- and
5. New or modified strategies for organizational renewal and growth.

### **Facilitating adaptation to organizational transition**

The element of empathy puts up a firm commitment to communicate the correct message to employees that the management and leadership team recognizes the difficulties and hardships that employee has to go through in adapting to the new changes. The leaders who show empathy are able to gain understanding and knowledge of employee, in order to win the necessary support of the employee on the new organizational directions and objective (Marks, 2007). The visible leadership of managers that shows new strategies and ways of working in the restructured organization may encourage employees to rethink their responsibilities to work together with the company towards the new intended strategic positions (Ross & Staw, 1993).

Engagement seeks to weaken the forces against transition at the intellectual level of the employees. The managers would engage employee to appreciating the importance and need to adapt to the newly restructured organization, and shows the urgency to end the old practices of working which could be harmful to the organization, if continued. It is the process which is undertaken to enable managers and employees to come together in identifying roadblocks of adaptation, and develop different action plan to eliminate all the roadblocks. A good relationship and partnership between managers and employees is important in identifying and inhibiting the resistance towards the adaptation process. The joint cooperation in developing action plans, between leaders and employees, to overcome barriers of adaptation are deemed as effective and generally acceptable by the employees (Marks, 2007).

According to Marks (2007), energy is the process to excite employees, where there is light at the end of the tunnel. It provides the necessary positive motivations on post transition and provide the necessary support to employee in materializing their goals. In this process, the clear vision of better restructured organization is articulated to employees, then secondly, encourage public reflections and short term wins, and thirdly, provide morale supports to employees.

The process of enforcement is aimed at strengthening the attitudes and behaviors to continue to be in line with desired objectives of the restructure organization. It involves, firstly, to ensure involvement of employees to visibly live the vision and behaviors of new organization, secondly, aligning operating standards and system towards the new direction of restructured organization. Thirdly, there should be some execution on plans to monitor the development and performance of the new organization and providing the measures to mitigate any arising matters and problem in a timely manner.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In structuring the framework of qualitative approach, considerations have been given to the models that was advocated by Sadri (1996), Burke and Nelson (1997) and Cummings and Worley (2001). Taking all the models taken into consideration, we have adopted Cummings and Worley (2001) model and enlarged further to include rationalization and

transition of downsizing, the latter is initiated by Marks (2007) which is known as “4E” model. The combination of these two models will cover the area of analysis in this research.

The theory of Cummings and Worley (2001), “Five Application Stage Using Downsizing as a Strategic Intervention”, is chosen as the foundation of the research to analyze the gap between the right practices and perceptions of employees on downsizing. This model is also chosen due to its ease of understanding and well defined in each step of application as a strategic intervention model. Based on the literature review, all relevant theories about rationalization and downsizing are integrated into the framework and an expanded version of model is developed which includes three stages of recommended practices of downsizing as shown in the Figure 1 which are **Stage 1: Planning and setting objectives**, **Stage 2: Execute downsizing process** and **Stage 3: Facilitating transition process**.

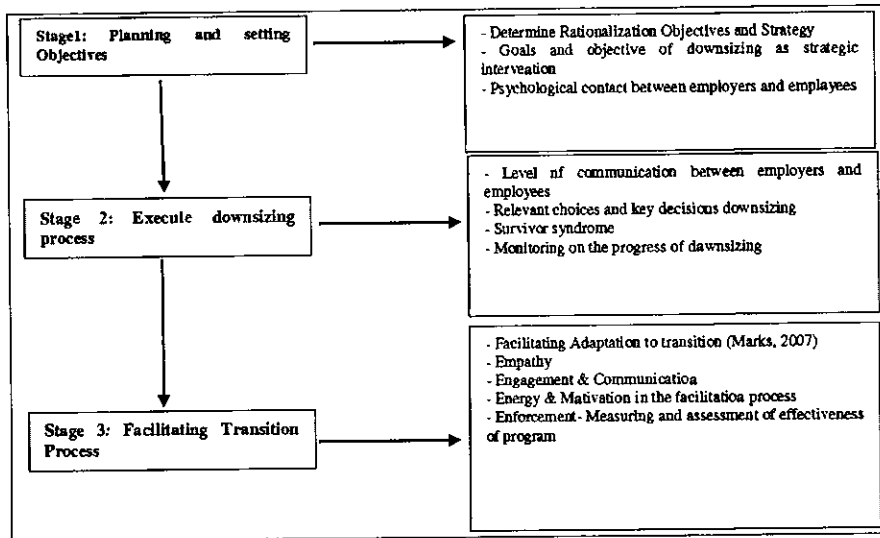


Figure 1  
Framework on downsizing process theme

The data transcription indicates the relevant downsizing practice is adopted intensely in the organization of the respondent and also indicates downsizing practice is not adopted or not preferred by the respondents.

As our interviewed respondents have consisted of three groups of people, namely the HR practitioners, victims, and survivors. The result of these groups will be compared against each other to identify the gaps between them through qualitative approach. The results from the interview plus the insights and knowledge shared by the significant persons will form the core of the analysis and discussion in our research.

The data collected from interviews with significant person will form the primary source of information while articles from newspapers, magazines and internet research papers will be the secondary source of information to support our discussion and analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Stage 1: Planning and setting objectives**

***Rationalization and downsizing goals and objectives.*** Downsizing is not solely focused on reducing the number of employees, but it is a process that needs to be done to align our policies with the objectives of rationalization. All target groups collectively agreed that the process of downsizing should be implemented in line with the objective of rationalizing. However, victims strongly disagreed that the rationalization process could automatically leads to downsizing process. The strong denial of victims is due to availability of options along the path of rationalization.

Effective ways of rationalization are through automation, adopting advance technology in manufacturing, and centralizing the control of business process. All these initiatives would improve efficiency and avoid downsizing.

Generally, HR practitioners are well-briefed by the senior management team on the approach and reasons of downsizing before it is executed. Hence, they are well prepared and compromise higher degree of acceptance towards downsizing.

The victims and survivors have very different view compared to HR practitioners on the objectives of rationalization. Generally, HR practitioners who are senior or middle management executives are well-communicated by the top management the reasons and approaches of downsizing. Typically, the employees choose to believe the objective of rationalization is to increase market share and sustain current size of organization.

Employees, in general, have very minimal participation in rationalization and downsizing process. Management need to execute downsizing with clear objectives in mind. It is fundamentally important to realize and understand the desire results with the correct provision of an effective solution for the organizations to move forward. One suggestion is that HR is able to play a major role as business partner in supporting the different head of departments to set the objectives as well as to deploy or rearrange human resources in the different department.

It is an opinion of some respondents that downsizing should be implemented with an eye for long term cost savings and sustainability, while being executed properly to avoid losing competent and productive employees. Through this, the cost saving is able to bring about the desired benefits and established a sustainable cost structure in relation to human resources.



Effectiveness of downsizing through headcount reduction depends on the overall strategy of the organizations and market conditions. Such strategy should be able to sustain over a period of time. Some respondents are in agreement but argued that long term improvement should be the objective. According to Nelson (1997), less than 50% of the organizations have actually met the cost reduction objective.

***Respect the existence of psychological contracts between employers and employees.*** The results from interview session revealed an adverse effect, whereby the organizations may suffer lower return on capital investment. Response collectively agreed that smaller may not be better. Being lean and efficient organization is important to bring.

Cummings and Worley (2001) states that merger & acquisition and corporate restructuring are two major reorganization processes, which resulted in job redundancy and leads towards downsizing. This is well accepted by HR practitioners and survivors, but victims conveyed a strong denial against the factors. The negative behavior of victim against factors of downsizing could be caused by the perceived violation of psychological contracts between employer and employee (Hopkins et al., 2001). Survivors and victims have given strong endorsement on the existence of psychological contracts between employer and employee. Hopkins (2001) emphasized that the establishment of psychological contract lays a strong foundation of employees' loyalty and dedication to strive towards the best interest of organization. It represents the commitment of employee to fulfill organizational requirement. In return, employer should be able to offer job security and opportunity of advancement.

All interviewees collectively agreed that the managers or executors of downsizing play very important role in the process of downsizing. Respondents acknowledge the challenges and difficulties of managers who execute downsizing process. There should be a balance between employees' welfare and the interest of the organizations. Higher level management team should provide support and guidance to managers from time to time, on how to deal with such situations.

## **Stage 2: Execute downsizing process**

***Level of communication between employers and employees.*** Cummings and Worley points out the importance to strategic the organizations in preparation of downsizing. Understanding the goal and objectives is the core communication that should be established between the employees and the organization so that everyone commits and stay focused during process. Organization needs to emphasize on communication to ensure all employees to have common understanding of the goals and objectives. Goals and objectives which can be translated into vision and mission of the organizations, should be easily accessible in the form of handbooks, posters and signage placed in common areas.

***Relevant choices and key decisions on downsizing.*** HR practitioners mostly agreed that reducing headcount could provide some financial savings due to their knowledge on the salaries and remunerations of the employees in their organizations. One response states

that the reduction in headcount is inevitable if the organization is difficulties. Such move will lead to adverse impact such as demoralization and low motivation among employees which the managements need to deal with.

As part of downsizing and change process, all employees are bound to prepare for changes as organizations are reorganizing resources to provide the best possible results from all functional departments. Provision of training is also one of the most important among the methods suggested and should be followed by implementing continuous improvement efforts and innovation to its products and services.

*Survivor syndrome.* HR practitioners and survivors agreed to the willingness to take on additional responsibilities and will carry on to be part of the post-downsizing organizations. However, some employees may prefer to leave the organizations once offered a Voluntary Separation Scheme (“VSS”), and they may not want even stay on for the handover period. This is especially true if the employees have secured jobs elsewhere. Many do consider to stay on and be part of the organizational change if their positions are not affected. Survivors agreed to it and HR practitioners scored between victims and survivors.

*Monitoring on the progress of downsizing.* Respondent similarly agreed on the lack of discussion on the changes in their responsibilities and takes their opinion before making any decisions. Again, this is similar to the argument earlier where some of the survivors have no choice but to accept the decisions made by their supervisors due to reasons like their incompetency or the age barrier scouting for new jobs. However, these survivors need to be respected as they are the group of employees to steer the organizations in moving forward to face the post-downsizing era.

Management needs to share and discuss about the past and present growth of the organizations. There could be a communication gap during the sharing and discussion. Most of the time, it is appeared as one-way communication instead of the two-way communication. Management should always collect feedback from the subordinates as these are the working level employees that could provide great ideas in improving the organizations.

### **Stage 3: Facilitate transition process**

Overall, all 3 target groups agreed to the 4Es Transition advocated by Marks (2007). The model is essential and definitely a useful framework and guidance for the organization to facilitate the adaption of transition. The most challenging task is the managerial commitment of the organization to allocate resources and efforts to adopt the practical and effective framework that guide along employees to work through the challenging emotion journey.

“*Empathy*” and communication strategy must be worked out to assure the facilitation process is a successful one after the painful downsizing process. The leaders who empathically express the acknowledgment and understanding of difficulties that

employees may have gone through are capable to build trust with employees and boost up the morale of the organizations.

Through a well-planned “*engagement and communication process*”, the management should educate the employees about the knowledge in business that associates with downsizing. A good engagement process would help employees to eliminate psychological barrier and be more open to face realities and to adapt change. In no exception, communication plays a vital role in achieving this objective.

***Motivation throughout the facilitation process.*** Theoretically, it makes sense to energize and excite the employees for newly changed or in another description, a downsized, better and stronger organization. However, the post-downsized employees may suffer the survivor syndrome where the employees may tend to behave in distrust, low morale, self-centered and risk adverse. Besides carving a new vision and mission to excite employees to go for the best; providing the emotional support and avenue for employees to make public reflection could be a better way to create positive energy in employees. Cunnliffe (2002) suggested the most effective way to energize employees is to create an environment in which employees can reflect upon, experiment with and be rewarded for every successful approach in achieving organizational goals and objectives.

***Enforcement, measuring and assessment.*** Enforcement the simplest module to be accomplished within the model. The keywords in enforcement are participation, alignment and tracking performance. The enforcement becomes meaningful if the employees are provided with the opportunity to participate in bringing the new organization to life. Burke (2003) emphasized the importance to involved employees and encourages innovations of employees to embrace the newly changed organizations. This is the process to build employees’ sense of ownership within organizations. Alignment standards and operating system are crucial to realize the real value of new change. Setting up milestones and tracking the progress of enforcement would assure the organization always advances on the right track. Once the transition progress runs away from the original path, corrective actions must be taken immediately.

## CONCLUSION

Mutual agreement is attained form the 3 grouping of respondents on the proposed model of Cummings and Worley’s (2001) five applications stages of downsizing process. It suggests proposing rationalization as the strategic foundation of downsizing and aligning the downsizing execution plan to the objectives of the rationalization. The Cummings and Worley (2001) downsizing model can be well-executed, beginning with a clear objectives and goal, then conducting a thorough assessment on options and decisions. Then the execution of the downsizing plan should be implemented to transform the organization to be learner and more efficient, with the after effect of downsizing addressed, especially the survivor syndrome. Lastly, employees will need to be facilitated through the transition to embrace the newly formed organization. Marks (2007) model on facilitating adaptation to transition further enhances Cummings and Worley’s model in facilitating

employees to abandon the old ways of working and embrace the new ways of collaboration in the new organizational culture.

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