Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Charlene M. Coleman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Abstract

Managing Employee Morale After Organizational Downsizing

by

Charlene M. Coleman

MS, University of Maryland University College, 2005

BS, SUNY College at Old Westbury, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

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Abstract

Business leaders who lack effective strategies to manage employee morale after downsizing may encounter feelings of distrust, disloyalty, and job insecurity from employees, resulting in decreased productivity. This decrease in productivity can cost an organization millions of dollars. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing. The participants comprised three business leaders in central Maryland who successfully used a strategy to improve employee morale after downsizing within the past 5 years. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a review of public financial reports and company information. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, and three themes emerged: effective communication, team building, and training and support. A key recommendation for business leaders is to open lines of upward communication to understand the emotional state of the employees better. The implications for positive social change include the potential to protect the emotional and physical health of the employees in support of the local communities and families.

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Dedication

I dedicate this first and foremost to my Lord and Savior who created this path in my purview and allowed me this opportunity to complete such a beautiful journey. I accept this doctorate on behalf of my family, who believed in me and pushed me to new limits that allowed this wonderful opportunity to come to fruition. I especially want to thank my two children who graciously excused me from many family events and celebrations due to my obligations to my studies. Your patience has not gone unnoticed. A special thanks to my mother who offered non-stop encouragement and envisioned the day I would receive this honorable award. Mom, you have always pushed me to new limits, and I am so grateful for the hard work ethic that you have instilled in me. To my dad in heaven, I see you smiling down with pride at this wonderful event as I recall how your never-quit determination shaped my perceptions of the world even as a child. It provided the will in me to continue through this long, sometimes stressful journey. May the Lord continue to Bless me and my family.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my Heavenly Father for giving me the willpower to pursue and complete a doctorate degree. Without Him, I would not have had the strength to persevere and reach this milestone. I would like to graciously thank and acknowledge my family for the encouragement and unwavering support during this incredible journey, especially my mother. You persuaded me to keep going and push through and because of your dedication, the mission has been accomplished. I want to thank my sons Erik and Jamel, for motivating me and reminding me of my many lectures to them on commitment and persistence. I am so proud of you both, even more so at this moment, for I am looking forward to seeing your greatness. I would like to thank my all the members of my committee, especially Dr. Black, for all the advice and guidance provided during my doctoral journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Williams for her expertise and direction that helped me to reach the pinnacle of this journey. I am forever grateful.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Organizational leaders downsize to enhance their strategic business performance by reducing business costs with the intention of retaining core competencies and desired talents of the remaining staff members (Wegerer, 2018). Business leaders need to acknowledge that downsizing may reduce the cost of doing business by reducing headcount but may also yield less than desirable results in other areas, if not executed properly. The remaining staff after downsizing are integral to continued organizational success (Son, 2018). Business leaders must develop strategies to manage the morale of the surviving staff to reduce the knowledge loss that results when experienced downsizing occurs (Drucker, 1999). In this study, I analyzed the measures leaders take to increase the sense of (a) belonging, (b) self-awareness, and (c) commitment among the remaining staff after downsizing to minimize the impact on business. Findings from this study may help business leaders to better understand the different strategies for managing morale and to achieve the best possible performance from the remaining staff.

Background of the Problem

Organizations are consistently searching for ways that downsizing may help to maintain company relevance. The popularity of downsizing has evolved into more than a last resort to cut costs and increase profitability (Nègre et al., 2017). Many companies use downsizing as a strategic process to enhance the organization's long-term agility and increase their competitive stance (Agwu et al., 2018; Mahdi et al., 2015). Whatever the reason, downsizing within an organization must be conducted in a manner that is conducive to the health and future growth of the company to be considered effective

(Heathfield, 2018). Since employees are important resources within the organization, the decision to downsize must be carefully analyzed to determine how the decision might impact the staff.

Downsizing is generally a broad term that can be used in various ways for different reasons. Downsizing is mostly defined as the purposeful elimination of headcount in an organization with the main purpose of increasing revenue, lowering costs, and enhancing efficiency (Gandolfi, 2013). Downsizing may also be categorized for other purposes, including but not limited to staff buyouts, job outsourcing, and employee layoffs. The difference between these will depend on the intended outcome. For this study, the definition of downsizing is employee reduction within an organization.

Downsizing causes a major change in the structure of an organization that typically impacts everyone in the company: the removed employees, the remaining employees (also called survivors), and managers of all levels (Hall, 2012). Survivors often experience the strains of being overworked, feelings of anxiety, distrust, and job insecurity resulting in emotional distress and even physical illness, also referred to as survivor syndrome (Fulce, 2018). Business leaders have the responsibility of identifying ways to improve employee morale that will positively increase the survivability of the organization.

Downsizing can stimulate various emotional responses from employees, including a reduction in loyalty and organizational commitment that may impact the future productivity and profitability of the organizations (Muhammed & Soumyaja, 2019). The success of downsizing is measured in part by the reaction of the survivors, who may experience a decrease in morale and other symptoms, including but not limited to, survivor sickness, anger, guilt, and inferiority (Fulce, 2018; Street & Lacey, 2018). According to Alozie (2020), an increase in morale can improve worker performance. Many organizational leaders do not fully understand this and therefore may inadequately address the impact of low morale after downsizing. (Street & Lacey, 2018). The aftermath of downsizing can include emotional complications for employees and generally yield unfavorable consequences for the organization (Gillikin, 2018; Schulz & Johann, 2018). Therefore, the strategy to downsize in an organization should primarily assess the new work environment and remaining employees to be a successful initiative.

Problem and Purpose

The strain of downsizing can have a negative effect on morale for employees that remain with the organization (Elder, 2017), causing a reduction in productivity which can in turn result in a negative effect on business performance (Hossain, 2018; Ray & Maheshwari, 2017). In fact, employees who experience lowered morale are associated with lowered productivity and can cost organizations approximately $50,000 annually per employee (Theodotou, 2018). The general business problem is that remaining staff in organizations that downsize may experience lowered morale. The specific business problem is that some business leaders in organizations lack strategies to manage employee morale after downsizing.

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to successfully manage employee morale within their organization after downsizing. The target population included three leaders at a company in central

Maryland who successfully used strategies to manage employee morale after downsizing resulting in increased productivity and profitability. Lynch (2018) suggested that the fear of becoming unemployed is detrimental to the structure and emotional state of the family. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by identifying strategies business leaders can use to manage this fear and improve employee morale, thereby improving job sustainability, leading to happier families, employees, and communities.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative single case study, the population was a nonprobabilistic purposive sample size of three business leaders in central Maryland who successfully used a strategy to improve employee morale after downsizing within the past 5 years. Qualitative researchers select their sample population of participants using nonprobability sampling methods (Guetterman, 2020). The different types of nonprobabilistic sampling include theoretical, purposive, convenience, criterion, snowball, and volunteer (Guetterman, 2020). I used purposive sampling to permit the selection of the participants based on their association with the study criteria (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected three leaders within an organization to ensure an ample amount of data is collected to answer the research question thoroughly. According to Yin (2018), it is acceptable to use a small population in a case study; I used Yin's assertion to confirm that the sample size of three leaders was appropriate. The sample size for this study was appropriate as it provides sufficient data to understand how business leaders use strategies to improve employee morale after downsizing. A nonprobabilistic purposive sampling is the best technique for a case study because the lived experiences of the participants provide thorough data for analysis (Clarke et al., 2021; Guetterman, 2020).

Nature of the Study

The three types of research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. For this study, I selected the qualitative method. Researchers use the qualitative method to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the individual's motives and thought processes in real-world contexts (Hayashi et al., 2019; Leung, 2015). The qualitative research method was the most appropriate for my study as my intention was to study a phenomenon by asking participants open-ended questions.

Conversely, quantitative researchers use numerical data and experiments to test hypotheses and analyze data using statistics (Guetterman, 2020). Quantitative methodology was not appropriate for this study since I did not seek to test a theory or hypothesis. Moss (2019) stated that the mixed method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, using both number and narrative data in one study. It was not appropriate to use mixed method for this study because gathering quantitative data would not answer my research question.

For this qualitative study, I considered three types of research design: ethnography, phenomenology, and case study. Yin (2018) described ethnography design as a study of subjects and cultural characteristics of a group through interactions with participants and direct observations. An ethnographic design is the study of a culture or ethnic group (Nairn et al., 2020). The ethnography design was not appropriate for this study because I did not seek to study the culture of a group. Phenomenology is the approach used to understand and capture the lived experiences of a common phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology was not appropriate for this study because I did not explore an individual's lived experiences, instead I explored strategies that business leaders use to manage employee morale after downsizing. I used a case study for my research to explore the individuals' personal experiences. A researcher can use multiple data sources such as company documents, interview responses, and personal experiences to gain an understanding of a phenomenon (Renz et al., 2018). The case study design was the most appropriate for my research to understand the impact of downsizing on employee morale, due to the collection of data from various sources within a single facility.

Research Question

What strategies do leaders use to manage employee morale in an organization after downsizing?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to improve employee morale in the organization after downsizing?
2. As a business leader in this organization, how would you describe your role in improving employee morale after downsizing occurred?
3. Based on your experience, what specific elements of the strategies contributed most to improving employee morale after downsizing?
4. What challenges did you face when implementing the strategies?
5. How did you overcome these challenges?

6. What additional information would you like to share regarding strategies used to manage employee morale in the organization after downsizing?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was transformational leadership theory. The transformational leadership theory was originally derived from science and is comprised of history, education, religion, and technology (Göker & Bozkus, 2017). Originally developed by Burns (1978) and later enhanced by Bass (1985), the idea of transformational leadership theory was based on the ideology that leaders could identify the methods to motivate and inspire workers to improve performance and commitment to the organization.

According to Bass (1985), there are four underlying key constructs of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Ghasabeh, 2021). Also called *Bass' transformational leadership theory*, the fundamental concept of transformational leadership is to establish a relationship between leaders and followers by influencing and motivating employees to extend their abilities and reach for higher goals in the organization. Farahnak et al. (2019) denoted that some transformational leadership values could positively influence employees to exhibit positive behaviors and motivation, resulting in higher work ethics.

Transformational leaders also influence the employees to develop higher levels of morale and motivation (Ghasabeh, 2021; Hussein & Yesiltas, 2020). These employees then use the motivation to bring about change throughout the organization. Burns (1978) determined that organizations with transformational leaders' experience decreased employee turnover and more satisfied employees (Zivkovic et al., 2020). By focusing on the needs and perceptions of the employees, transformational leaders encourage self-motivation rather than reward good behaviors with incentives (Sale & Thomas, 2020; Younies & Al-Tawil, 2021). Therefore, the transformational leadership theory was appropriate to use as the conceptual framework for my study to explore strategies that leadership use to manage employee morale after downsizing.

Operational Definitions

Downsizing: Downsizing, a strategic decision made within the leadership ranks of an organization to reduce personnel, usually designed to diminish an organization's cost, and improve overall efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness (Casio, 2010).

Employee morale: Employee morale is an emotional state that affects work engagement, motivation, job implication, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Shuck, 2019).

Job burnout: Job burnout refers to a set of negative psychological experiences that wears out or takes a toll on the health of an employee because of prolonged exposure to the stress of providing services to people (Herschell et al., 2020).

Survivors: Survivors are employees that remain on the job after organizational downsizing or layoff occurs (Elder, 2017).

Survivor syndrome: The strains of overwork, organizational changes, and stress of job insecurity resulting in physical and emotional trauma, and loss of affective commitment resulting from a downsizing event (Fukui et al., 2020).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts believed to be accurate but are not verifiable by the researcher (Blaikie, 2018). I made three assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that all participants in the study were at one time employed in a managerial capacity within the organization. The second assumption was that all participants in the study had substantial knowledge and experience with downsizing. The third assumption was that all participants responded to the interview questions honestly and accurately based on their lived experiences.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as potential weaknesses in a research study over which the researcher has no control (Strandholm et al., 2013). This study was limited since information was only collected from three business leaders of one organization, located in central Maryland, United States. Therefore, generalizability of the study could be an issue and require additional research to verify findings. Another limitation exists as some of the participants may have indulged in biased behaviors that limit their ability to be fair and impartial in their responses to the research questions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that limit the scope and define the boundaries within a study (Karlsen, 2014). There are two delimitations in this study. The first delimitation is the geographical location for this study was only central Maryland. The second delimitation is only interviewing three business leaders who, within the last 5 years, have successfully implemented strategies to improve employee morale after downsizing.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Strategic efforts to assess the emotional state of remaining employees may result in higher productivity and performance after downsizing (Kichuk et al., 2019; Sawaneh & Kamara, 2019). The research of Rajput et al. (2019) confirmed that succession strategizing is necessary to consider later generations of employees. Strategizing helps to prepare leaders for the future transition as well as control the impact the organizational change will have on employees (Kosterlitz & Lewis, 2019). Thus, the need to strategize is critical to the success of an organization after downsizing.

Employees of an organization expect their leaders to practice open communication regarding the organizational climate and the security of their jobs (Zhen, 2020). Cohee (2019) posited that company leaders must provide clear and concise information regarding the plans to downsize. Two-way communication regarding strategic plans that impact employee morale within an organization can contribute to the improvement of business practice by improving sustainability in the organization (Fulce, 2018). The study findings may contribute to the active practice of business by helping organizational leaders become more aware of the need to strategize when planning a downsizing event.

Implications for Social Change

Strategic efforts to assess the emotional implications for social employees that are satisfied with their jobs have higher morale and productivity (Yusuf & Yee, 2020). When downsizing affects the employees adversely, organizations risk lowered employee morale, performance, and productivity, thereby reducing the contributions to society (Norris & Norris, 2019; Saengchai et al., 2019). The focus of an organization is to remain productive, so employees can maintain job security and stability, thereby investing in the well-being of the employees and their communities (Donohue & Tham, 2019). This study may impact social change by helping business leaders to determine which strategies protect their employees and the company from the negative impact of downsizing.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to successfully manage employee morale within their organization after downsizing. The target population included three leaders at a company in central Maryland who successfully used strategies to manage employee morale after downsizing, resulting in increased productivity and profitability. The results of this study may affect social change by identifying strategies leaders can use to manage employee morale, thereby contributing to the sustainability of the organization, and thus creating happier families and communities.

The review of the professional and academic literature contains the literature review opening narrative and the application to the applied business problem sections. The literature review opening narrative also includes a discussion of the various sources retrieved about the research study, a brief explanation of the organization of the review, the strategy used to search the literature, and a list of the sources retrieved. Several peer-reviewed articles supported the assertions in the study, and at least 85% of those sources were published from 2018 to 2022 (see Table 1).

In conducting the literature review, I used the following databases to search for relevant research studies: ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, EBSCO, ProQuest Central, and SAGE Premier. The organization of the review contains four significant topic categories: (a) the literature search strategy, (b) application to the applied business problem, (c) critical analysis and synthesis of Burns' transformational leadership theory, and (d) the analysis of supporting and contrasting theories.

I searched the literature using the following terms: *downsizing*, *downsizing and impact on corporations*, *downsizing and organizational culture*, *employee morale*, *employee motivation*, *employee stress*, *ethical leadership*, *layoffs*, *layoffs and downsizing*, *negative outcomes and corporations*, *strategies and downsizing*, *survivor syndrome and transformational leadership*, *workplace climate*, and *workplace stress*.

Table 1

Literature Review Resources

Literature review content	Total no. of resources	No. of resources 5 years or newer (2018-2022)	% of peer-reviewed resources 5 years or newer (2018-2022)
Peer-reviewed journal articles	108	99	91
Seminal books	14	14	100
Total sources in literature review	122	113	92

Transformational Leadership

Leaders play an important role in influencing the employees in an organization. Leadership is defined as the action of encouraging followers to work toward achieving a common goal (Ivanoska, 2019). Leaders are empowered and expected to instill drive and commitment within the staff and identify gaps within the organizational structure (Krause, 2020). The transformational leadership style is one of the most critical factors when evaluating an employee’s relationship with leaders (Alloubani et al., 2019; Alozie, 2020) and is one of the most captivating leadership styles that exist today (Jones et al., 2019). In this study, I used the transformational leadership theory as a conceptual framework to explore strategies leaders use to manage morale in an organization after downsizing. I also explored other leadership theories to determine the best framework to use for this case study.

Leaders often use another leadership style in managing employees. Transactional leadership, also referred to as managerial leadership, encourages compliance of the employees through both rewards and punishments, and is focused on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance (Li et al., 2019; Younies & Al-Tawil, 2021). Contrary to transformational leadership, transactional leaders are only interested in maintaining the status quo, not looking to make changes to the future (Li et al., 2019).

Transactional leaders thoroughly scrutinize the work of the employees to identify errors and inconsistencies and then issue a reprimand accordingly (Ivanoska, 2019). An example of transactional leadership is the political exchange of promises of more job opportunities for more votes from supporters. Similarly, transactional leaders use the style to reward staff for reaching and exceeding their goals (Boamah et al., 2018). This leadership style is best when guidelines or parameters are required to produce specific outcomes.

Researchers have long sought to understand the various leadership theories and the impact on organizations. The transformational approach to leadership has been the subject of extensive study and discussion since the early 1980s (Carleton et al., 2018). The research of Farahnak et al. (2019) furthered the influence that inspires followers to reach for their highest potential while transformational leaders motivate followers to go above and beyond the norm. Conversely, the transformational leadership theory is a highly sought-after resource used in businesses to inspire behavioral changes within an organization. Leaders find the transformational leadership theory valuable when seeking to impact an organization’s cultural behaviors and practices (Ennis et al., 2018). Leaders who build upon cultural advances may help to build the organization.

Several researchers expressed different concepts on transformational leadership. According to Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017), employees appreciate transformational leaders because they provide an optimistic view of the future and value their employees’ growth and development. Burns (1978) developed transformational leadership during his attempt to connect the roles of leaders and followers and believed that leadership is distinct from power because it cannot exist without the demands of the people it serves. Transformational leadership was not considered credible until Burns theorized it and reintroduced it to leaders as a business strategy to reduce turnover and increase employee retention. Further developing the work of Burns, Bass (1985) developed Bass’ transformational leadership theory and believed that the behavior of the leaders also contributed to how the employees perceived the different leadership styles. In addition, Bass decreed that transformational leadership contributes to a higher level of emotional attachment and personal commitment amongst followers to achieve organizational objectives. Transformational leadership is designed to transform or inspire people to perform at their best by offering a positive environment, thereby encouraging low-performing individuals and groups to work more efficiently (Krisnanda & Surya, 2019). Organizational leaders' decision on which leadership style to use is critical to maintain a satisfied workforce.

The ability to persuade employees is a critical aspect of positive leadership. Transformational leaders tend to positively influence the opinion of employees (Aloysius, 2018) as well as encourage the mutual exchange of high-valued trust and perceptions, thereby inspiring and motivating both leaders and employees (Shapira, 2019). Members of the leadership team that interact with staff regularly, encourage communication flows from both sides and keep the employees abreast of and involved in day-to-day operations of the organization (Shapira, 2019). Leaders can enhance job satisfaction through this form of employee engagement (Al-Ali et al., 2019; Nichols, 2018; Ramli, 2019). Employers should realize that staff involvement in leadership decisions is favorable to the employees' development. Transformational leaders also may inspire positive change among employees for the betterment of the organization by encouraging employees to embrace their individual growth potential (Riggio, 2020). The realization may help employees to develop their strengths and talents resulting in a stronger, more productive work environment (Balhara & Bansal, 2019)..

Burns (1978) noted the four main attributes of the transformational leadership theory: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Carleton et al., 2018). The first attribute, idealized influence, describes the leaders' charisma and strong moral and ethical standards, which influence the followers to trust, aspire to and emulate their practices. The second attribute, inspirational motivation, describes leaders that convey high expectations to followers, motivating them to join the organization's shared vision (Burns, 1978). Ali et al. (2019) discussed that transformational leaders motivate employees to exchange knowledge and ideas, encourage open communication, and stimulate the introduction of adaptive culture to increase motivation and inspiration in the organization. Leaders use symbols and emotional appeals to motivate group members to go beyond their self-interest and can be a boost to the company culture and morale (Osman, 2020). A sales manager who stimulates the sales team to excel by positive words and pep talks about their part in the company's future success is an example of this element. The third attribute is intellectual stimulation. Leaders using this style encourage their followers to develop new ideas and explore new solutions with scrutiny, while analyzing the ideas of the leader as well (Burns, 1978). An example of inspirational motivation would be a hotel manager encouraging staff to develop a potential solution to an issue causing delays to customer service. The fourth attribute, individualized consideration, represents compassionate leaders who are attentive to the follower, providing unique advice to each follower as needed (Sahu et al., 2018).

Transactional Leadership

Bass (1985) also supported another leadership style. Contrary to transformational leaders, the main attributes of transactional leadership are contingent reward and active management by exception (Bass, 1985). The latter style suggests a mutual agreement between leader and follower where performance is offset by predetermined rewards (Moss, 2019). An example of this leadership style is being granted time off after the completion of a phase in a work cycle. The contingent reward is most effective in a relationship that is highly valued by both parties. The final factor in transactional leadership, management by exception, involves a critique process using negative reinforcement in either an active or passive form (Shanafeld & Noseworthy, 2017). Leaders who use the active form of management by exception employ observation tactics followed by abrupt and immediate restorative action to address mistakes. An example of active management is a supermarket leader who immediately reprimands a cashier who failed to produce a receipt at the time of a sale. The manager attempts to provide corrective criticism however, the cashier may likely suffer embarrassment. A passive management by exception leader only provides input after a problem surfaces, without prior feedback allowing for corrective action (Suphattanakul, 2017). This leader may bypass an employee for promotion at year-end, without the benefit of having a midyear performance review. Leaders must consider the best form of leadership to prevent negative impact on employees.

There are other distinctions between these two leadership styles. Transactional leadership is responsive while transformational leadership tends to be more proactive. Transactional style does not strive for change and encourages employees to reach company goals by providing rewards. Conversely, in transformational leadership managers encourage employees to pursue higher limits and reach goals by influencing moral values and developing new ideas. Transactional leaders encourage self-gratification while transformational leaders urge employees to put the best interests of the team first. These two leadership styles offer vastly different cultures in the workplace environment.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

In contrast to transformational and transactional, laissez-faire leadership is a carefree leadership style which does not represent the position of management well. According to Wong and Giessner (2018), laissez-faire leadership is categorized as zero leadership. This leader abdicates responsibility, delays decisions, gives no feedback, and makes little effort to help followers satisfy their needs (Wong & Giessner, 2018). In fact, laissez-faire exists far on the end of the spectrum and represents the absence of any management style at all. The laissez-faire leader makes no attempt to exercise management or control, with limited interest in the behaviors of the followers.

The research of Breevaart and Zacher (2019) revealed that employees can benefit the most from laissez-faire leadership by having the ability to express themselves before attempting difficult tasks, without the interference of a leader. Laissez-faire leadership promotes innovation and enhances decision-making, while providing the freedom to make immediate decisions (Wong & Giessner, 2018). Laissez-faire leaders also tend to be dormant in decision making, allowing the employees the freedom to make their own choices (Wong & Giessner, 2018). There is typically no vested interest in maintaining the leadership role or enforcing action, and often the laissez-faire leader is filling a temporary gap (Burns, 1978). An example of a laissez-faire leader is a substitute teacher. The teacher will have limited interest in partaking in major changes or investments in the classroom since the leadership is temporary and non-binding. The students would be allowed to make decisions on any activity, and the substitute teacher is typically not highly regarded.

Notably, this laissez-faire style would be challenging in a classroom where the students exhibit little self-guidance and no discipline. The result would be an unruly, disruptive classroom with chaos (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). The laissez-faire leader in this example would work best with students that have high reliability and self-control. Recent research suggests that laissez-faire leadership may not only involve the absence of control, but rather a conscious strategic decision to reduce dependency and increase self-competence by requiring the followers to act in a leadership role (Burns,1978; Evans, 2020). Laissez-faire leaders have no interest in establishing a deep connection with their employees.

Other leadership styles share similar sentiments. McGregor’s (1957) Theory X and the transactional leadership style both rule by instilling fear and motivation with reward. Shafagatova and Van Looy (2020) contended that rewards are critical strategies that encourage productivity and influence behavior. Theory Y is like transformational leadership because these leaders focus on their employees and encourage them through self-motivation, respect, and trust (Evans, 2020). These leaders both encourage success by providing resources and tools to achieve higher goals. According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership techniques encourage followers to engage in shallow behavior that usually involves the exchange of some level of gratification. The leadership style used within an organization will identify with each leaders' personal beliefs. The best leadership style can be determined by the goals and desired behaviors relevant to each individual scenario (Agwu et al., 2018). Each style has advantages and disadvantages; however, research shows that the most effective leadership style is a flexible blend of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Ultimately, each leadership style contributes to effective leadership in a unique style that can be used to obtain expected results.

Organizational Downsizing

Organizations downsize for various reasons. Some organizational leaders associate downsizing with a reduction in overhead expenses and operating costs by eliminating employee salaries and benefits to attain a more competitive stance in the industry (Cascio, 2010; Siddiqa, 2017). Employee salaries are a form of recurring expenses, that are controlled by maintaining the proper number of employees (Hossfield, 2013). Businesses in the manufacturing industry may even downsize due to a fluctuating market beyond the control of the organization. Organizations tend to target low-performing areas first, typically those producing lower amounts of revenue. However, firms must carefully make decisions as firms that conduct downsizing improperly can create a substantial adverse impact on the success of the firm.

Manalo et al. (2020) contended that mismanaged downsizing can revert the organization to its predownsizing state or worse, prompting the management team to consider downsizing again in the future. Notably, Gandolfi (2013) denoted that 65% of firms that downsized each year repeated the organizational change the following year. Even when effectively managed, the results of downsizing can negatively impact the organization. Schmitt et al. (2012) contended that there is no evidence that proves downsizing leads to an improved financial status. Also, losing trained staff during a downsizing event could contribute to the loss of years of knowledge, training, and experience, while inadvertently adding little to no value to the financial position of the organization (Clair et al., 2016; Ray & Maheshwari, 2017). Management needs to consider all options and outcomes before deciding to downsize.

The use of downsizing is a widespread occurrence. Throughout the United States, many companies are increasingly turning to downsizing to relieve financial issues and reduce costs (Gandolfi, 2013; Moreno et al., 2020). In October 2021, more than 1.3 million workers were in layoff status (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Organizations are planning to restore the company to the normal prelayoff state and are listing cost reduction as one of the main reasons for downsizing (Cohee, 2019). Downsizing is not a guaranteed solution to organizational problems.

Downsizing can be defined as a staff reduction or the process of terminating employees in hopes of creating a better financial position for the organization. Although leaders believe that a reduction in staff will result in lower operational costs and therefore increase profits, this is not necessarily true (Low et al., 2019; Siddiqa, 2017). Luan et al. (2013) conducted a study in Taiwan to determine the relationship between downsizing strategies, economic position, and firm performance. The study consisted of data from 436 Taiwanese companies that were used to compare how three different downsizing strategies impacted financial position and firm performance: (a) layoffs, (b) pay cuts, and (c) organizational slack reductions. Luan et al. found after conducting their study related to downsizing that a decrease in personnel did not necessarily result in lower costs and increased profits. Instead, they discovered that organizational downsizing with layoffs might leave the firm inappropriately staffed, compromising the performance of the firm. Cohee (2019) explained that there is no guarantee in the connection between reduced staff and increased profits as downsizing proves to serve as only a temporary solution. The results of a diminished staff may be different than the intended purpose.

There are additional consequences of downsizing. According to Lakshman et al. (2019), downsizing may affect the employees physically and emotionally as well. In a study of psychological health and well-being of workers, Anaf et al. (2013) explored the consequences of job loss by examining the relationship between their perceptions of personal power and job loss. Using semistructured interviews, Anaf et al. (2013) sampled 33 out of 1,000 workers who lost their jobs during a downsizing event. During their research, Anaf et al. and Lakshman et al. (2019) both found that common trends of psychological distress associated with job loss included stress, loss of self-esteem and sense of personal control, shame, and loss of status, experiencing a grieving process, and financial strain. The researchers also identified the diverse ways workers employed their agency noting that downsizing victims' sense of value suffered when dealing with job loss consequences. The study findings suggest the need for policies to help workers cope with the structural constraints of job loss that affect human resources.

Downsizing can also lead to critical consequences for displaced employees, surviving employees, and leaders within the organization. Of these, surviving employees generally suffer the most from the strains of being overworked due to additional workload and anxiety from lack of job insecurity. Preventing strain on the surviving employees is critical to restoring productivity to the original state (Cohee, 2019). After downsizing, the success of the event is strengthened in part by the surviving employees' intention to remain with the organization (Lakshman et al., 2019). There is no assurance that survivors will want to stay after friends and cohorts have been terminated. Contrary to prior research, the terminated employees and the survivors had similar postdownsizing layoff perceptions of the organizations (Fulce, 2018). The assumption that remaining employees are more likely to be less impacted by downsizing is not supported by the research.

Job involvement and organizational commitment did not recover in the same manner as approval of leadership and job security. Trust issues between employees and immediate supervisors tend to impact work attitudes and behaviors (Rickwood, 2015). Even when employees maintain positive attitudes toward management and while feelings of job security seem to improve during postdownsizing, employees' feelings about their jobs and obligation to the firm do not (Lakshman, 2019). This evidence may be proof that employees' level of involvement and commitment can cause them to separate and continue to disengage from their jobs and their company based on participation and commitment (Rickwood, 2015). The emotional state, or morale, of surviving employees is critical to the success of the organization after downsizing.

Age may also be a factor in how downsizing is accepted. Abelha et al. (2018) found that the data indicates that young survivors appear to be less vocationally adaptable, more vulnerable to downsizing, and more prone to view downsizing as unfair, perhaps due to unrealistic career trajectory expectations. In contrast, older employees, probably due to increased job and layoff experience or the perception that downsizing was handled more equitably via greater loyalty to the organization, appear to be more resilient in these respects (Ramli, 2019). The findings are relevant to give leaders an advantage to discern possible results in the planning stages of downsizing.

Employee retirement is an alternative to downsizing in an organization; however, it can have a similar impact on the corporation. Ramli (2019) and Rauvola et al. (2019) agreed that employers must monitor the impending impact of their retirement-age workforce and prepare a strategy to replace lost productivity and expertise. Losing older employees to retirement drains knowledge and expertise within an organization and thereby threatens the organization’s stance in a competitive business environment (Migliaccio, 2018). In response, some employers are looking for new ways to retain older workers and protect the invaluable knowledge they possess. Employers are offering lucrative compensation packages, opportunities for career growth, developmental training, and other knowledge-sharing or knowledge transfer initiatives Ramli, 2019).

These strategies help to increase the competitive advantage for the elder staff while protecting the organization from losing critical information.

Eligible employees close to retirement age often have the option to leave voluntarily or retire before a downsizing event occurs. Rauvola et al. (2020) conducted two studies to determine how the relationship with the work environment impacts the employees’ decision to retire. Rauvola et al. conducted studies to examine the age-conditional effects of person-environment (PE) fit types based on the life-span perspective, the socioemotional selectivity theory. The results were expected to reveal the importance of factors that determine the level of satisfaction in employees based on their retirement potential. The study included person-job (PJ), person-group (PG) and person-organization (PO) fit types using hypothetical scenarios and cues. The results of the studies were that younger participants would relate to the PJ fit as the most compelling to establish satisfaction in the workplace, while the relatively older participants would find the PO fit to be the most significant. These researchers also discussed additional opportunities to explore future theories and potential research on the findings. Employees may also consider proactive alternatives to avoid the impact of downsizing.

Closure, a different type of downsizing, has a unique impact on employees and the organization. In a study directed to illustrate the impact of closure, Arman (2014) conducted a case study of the closure of a Swedish branch of an international pharmaceutical corporation. Dissimilar to layoff, closure is a type of downsizing that are compared to death metaphors, using the three primary metaphors (i.e., murder, sacrificial killing, and palliative death) by examining the informants' accounts of the roles they played in the closure (Arman, 2014). Employees have mainly described managers' role deliberate murder, for which the managers were responsible. On the other hand, managers and others have described the decision as strategic and inevitable sacrificial killing. Employees generally described the beginning of the closure process as irresponsible but later used a palliative death metaphor (Arman, 2014). Using the metaphor analysis allowed researchers to understand the closure regarding its context, process, and how different people portrayed agency in themselves and others.

The decision to downsize affects all the members of the organization. The terminated employees, the surviving staff, the first line of supervisory personnel, and the leadership management team involved in making the decisions all experience various levels of impact (Susskind et al., 2018). The survivors are often left to revitalize an organization with a limited workforce and changed social structure and immediately develop feelings of insecurity and distrust, often exploring the idea of leaving and finding work elsewhere (Hart et al., 2016). These survivors may feel mistreated by offensive first-line supervisors, and react by decreasing productivity (Hart et al., 2016). Consequently, many of the remaining staff feel unsure of job security and consider finding other employment opportunities.

In a quantitative study using descriptive statistics, Neves (2014) queried 20 employees at 12 medium and large-sized companies in Portugal. Using a displaced aggression framework, Neves found that employees at companies that had downsized tend to perform less than employees at companies that had not downsized. A possible explanation for that is that employees react to perceived mistreatment from superiors by mentally diminishing the obligation to perform tasks, especially those extra assignments that are not within their responsibility. These employees may exhibit other negative behaviors such as increased absence, higher turnover, and lowered productivity, also referred to as occupational stress, when feelings of vulnerability are present (Chen & Mykletun, 2015; Neves, 2014). Most employees need fair and pleasant conditions to perform well.

Employees remaining in downsized organizations experience higher levels of anxiety resulting in greater leave and absence occurrences. Occupational stress, anxiety and depression are associated with a high employee absentee rate in companies that undergo layoffs worldwide (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019). Occupational stress is a condition that affects an employee’s mental, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical health (Sandhya & Sulphey, 2021; Zhen 2020). Fukui and Salyers (2020) announced a connection between the stress and the employees’ probability of completing tasks without error, obtaining work-related injuries, and sickness in the workplace. Awareness about occupational stress is more prevalent today yet it still occurs in many organizations (Havermans et al., 2018). Consequently, managers need to invest in therapy or counseling sessions to address anxiety and stress to protect the employees.

Organizational leaders should expect a decrease in productivity. Employees become unable to keep the pace at which leaders measure productivity without enduring stress and reluctance (Vaclavik et al., 2018). The front-line supervisors and the corporation leaders then realize the risk of potentially losing company profit, and rapport with remaining personnel (Peng et al., 2021). The effects of doing more work with fewer people as a concern that at some point the effect of stretching the capabilities and work ethics of these employees will have a negative effect ranging from lowered productivity to burnout (Vaclavik et al. 2018; Neves, 2014). Employees that experience burnout feel elevated levels of depersonalization and stress, while simultaneously feeling low levels of accomplishment, trust, morale, and job satisfaction (Parveen & Adeinat, 2019; Ramli, 2019). Organizational leaders must include plans to manage employee stress in their plans to downsize.

Ultimately, the stress factor is manageable and should be controlled since it relates to sickness, which causes absences and lowered productivity (Fukui et al., 2020). Researchers Modrek and Cullen (2013) proclaimed an association with downsizing and four chronic health conditions, which include hypertension, diabetes, asthma or COPD, and depression. Pfeffer (2011) suggested that employees working in a company that has experienced layoffs may develop migraines and gastrointestinal issues. According to Vaclavik et al. (2018), preventing burnout and stress in employees is a method of increasing productivity. Vaclavik et al. also denoted that fear of being disciplined for unexcused absences causes ill employees to come to work, putting other employees at risk. As leaders become aware of these issues and show compromise, the workers will begin to shift their opinions and see their leaders as considerate and trustworthy (Lakshman et al. (2019). Irrespective of the profit margins, business leaders must make employees' health and well-being a priority.

The impact downsizing has on employees may depend on the perception of the workers. Susskind et al. (2018) studied over 700 staff members of a company that had recently downsized and asserted that the downsizing significantly impacted both the survivors and the former employees, with each experiencing depression, although the impact was different for each. While they both suffered depression-like symptoms, their perception either increased or lowered the level of depression. The main observation involved optimistic employees who viewed this setback as an opportunity, experienced less-depressing feelings. Schulz and Johann (2018) explored if and how psycho-social resources that fostered employability contribute to the mental health of workers during a downsizing. Schulz and Johann found that laid-off employees with higher personal employability were less likely to have mental health deterioration. Personal employability has three dimensions: self-efficacy, proactivity, and social capital (Schulz & Johann, 2018). Downsized workers during a layoff with greater personal employability had a greater sense of having job alternatives and will more than likely use outplacement programs. The researchers determined that these workers have greater tranquility during transitions; however, these variables did not have a positive impact on mental health. Perceived layoff justice had a direct positive impact on psychological health; however, it did not correlate with employability. Researchers found that psychological processes can affect the decision to utilize outplacement programs and offered suggestions for developing employability profiling.

Earlier studies reported a direct connection between work-related stress and employee burnout in Taiwan. Researchers studied the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on psychological work stress among 58 financial workers, including analysts and traders, and 180 working lawyers from four securities firms and 26 law firms in Taipei, Taiwan

(Tsai & Chan, 2010). The authors used surveys to measure work stress and personal and work-related burnout, proving that financial workers reported much higher stress from fear of layoffs, increased experiences of undesirable changes and more fear of making mistakes during work. Conversely, lawyers reported significantly higher scores of rewards, fewer psychological demands, and less exhaustion. In addition to high psychological demand and a high effort-reward ratio, high effort, over-commitment, and stress of layoffs also contributed to personal and work-related burnout after the financial crisis (Tsai & Chan, 2010). After the financial crisis, lawyers' burnout decreased with the increase in reward, and their work-related burnout decreased with the decrease in psychological demand.

Some past researchers claim to have identified discrimination within the practice of downsizing. Schulz and Johann (2018) explored how the formalization and legalization of downsizing affect inequalities. According to Parks-Yancy (2011), data from a national sample of 327 downsized establishments between 1971 and 2002 had variables in the study that represent a proportion of (a) White men, (b) White women, (c) Black men and women. According to bureaucracy model and management practitioners, formalization constrains decision-makers' bias, but neo-structural and feminist theories of inequality argue that formalization can itself be gendered and racially biased. On the other hand, civil rights antidiscrimination accountability model notes that organizational and institutional processes motivate executives to minimize inequality. Schulz and Johann concluded that although legal experts manage formal rules, antidiscrimination often means the institutionalization of unequal rather than equal opportunity. Antidiscrimination laws have been enacted to prevent and control discrimination in the workplace.

Workplace Survivor Syndrome

Consideration is often given to the employees that have been removed from the organization. However, the focus of downsizing events shifts from the removed employees to the employees who remained with the organization after downsizing, sometimes referred to as “survivors” (Neves, 2014). Employers that ignore the negative emotions of survivors, such as anger, frustration, betrayal, and demoralization, can risk creating a group of disconnected, isolated employees. Failure to analyze the impact that downsizing can have on the survivors may ultimately have a detrimental effect on the downsized organization (Travaglione & Cross, 2006). These groups both endure the same levels of emotional distress and negativity as the victims of downsizing (Vaclavik et al., 2018).

Organizations typically focus on the needs of the laid-off victims arranging for post-transition support, severance packages, counseling, and other services (Zivkovic et al., 2020). Conversely, downsizing survivors may receive little or no support as they seek to find balance and stability in the new organization (Lee, 2019). Employers often overlook survivors and consider them fortunate to remain employed. Subsequently, when employers ignore the survivors as they undergo an array of emotions, the need for therapeutic counseling may evolve, which can help to introduce mental health policies and other services to the survivors as well. The term survivor syndrome was used to describe the adversity that a surviving employee had to endure (Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Some of the symptoms also include low morale, lack of dedication to the organization, feelings of uncertainty and helplessness, as well as physical, psychological, and social strains (Sandhya & Sulphey, 2021). Employees who survived a downsizing event are more likely to have a lowered level of persistence and emotional commitment and other symptoms (Florah et al., 2013). The strains of overwork, organizational changes, job uncertainty, and the involuntary dismissal of peers, have been contributors to physical disease, emotional trauma and loss of interest and commitment in survivors (Lynch & Mors, 2018). Some managers in organizations expect the survivors to show gratitude for continued employment. Reciprocally, the surviving employees are expected to be more appreciative and productive out of fear of becoming a victim in a subsequent downsizing (Mcdowell et al., 2019). These fears can lead to rebellious thoughts and behaviors potentially resulting in strikes, work stoppage, increased absences, and voluntary resignations (Robbins et al., 2019). Managing downsizing can have an enormous impact on employee morale and subsequent business performance and should be managed effectively.

Some employees may feel betrayed by the way the plans to downsize were communicated. According to Van Dick et al. (2016), disloyalty is considered one of the root causes of survivor syndrome. (Lakshman et al., 2019) explained that most survivors were skeptical of their stability and tenure in the organization and therefore frequently endured lowered morale and considered uprooting from their current positions to seek other employment. Many survivors complained that the organizational leaders conveyed information about the imminent changes to the victims poorly. The complaints varied from little to no advanced notice or sufficient time to intercept job loss, no privacy consideration with the public announcement, and no immediate counseling services available to help the employees cope with the devastating news (Sandhyha & Sulphey, 2020). Employers must create strategies to inflict the least amount of stress on their employees as possible.

Survivors had different perceptions about their jobs and the organization after the downsizing event occurred. A psychological contract (PC) is the agreement between the employers and employees in which the employees define their belief of the terms and responsibilities of each party (Dust et al., 2018; Low et al., 2016). The PC is pertinent to organizational success especially during staffing changes, or downsizing (Low et al., 2019). The findings of Uen et al. (2016) align with Sandhya and Sulphey (2020) and De Ruiter et al. (2017) and denoted that the psychological contract breach (PCB) often occurs when employees feel betrayed by employers' broken promise of continuity of employment, and therefore develop negative attitudes and behaviors.

In a comparable study, Parks-Yancy (2011) explored survivors and their perceptions of how downsizing influenced their access to social capital resources and its effect on their careers. Parks-Yancy asserted that downsizing might negatively affect the composition of the survivors' social ties at work and their access to career-related social capital resources. While survivors feel downsizing may alter their career paths, many opportunities for new careers, decreased availability in sought-after jobs as well as the loss of acquaintances in the social network that may have provided access to those jobs, also had job-altering effects (Paille & Raineri, 2016). The conclusion that the survivors did not have immediate access to additional sources of social capital resources was evident.

Equally, Elder (2017) noted that while out-placed employees receive support and options of outside employment, employers expect survivors to maintain productivity levels despite increased anxiety. Organizational leaders must be cautious not to intensify burnout for the downsizing survivors. Reinardy (2013) conducted a study of layoff survivors in the newspaper industry and claims that journalists with depleted trust, morale, and job satisfaction have experienced significant degrees of burnout, and intended to leave (Abelha et al., 2018). Also, journalists with low perceptions of job quality show signs of burnout. Reinardy used Hobfoll's (1989) theories as an analytic model and notes that workers will create and utilize resources created to alleviate stress in stressful situations, which may lead to burnout and decreased job performance.

Despite suffering psychological damage, some loyal employees will remain with the organization after downsizing. Researchers have argued that some employees develop mental health issues after changes in job structure, such as downsizing (Nathan & Neve, 2009). Survivor syndrome is grouped into four categories of emotional health: (a) fear, insecurity, and uncertainty; (b) frustration, resentment, and anger; (c) sadness, depression, and guilt; and (d) unfairness, betrayal, and distrust (Nathan & Neve, 2009). Contrary to the view that layoffs can cut costs, Hwang & Yi, (2021) concluded that such measures may generate an additional cost minimally to supply counseling and psychological services for affected employees. Although some survivors eventually seek other employment, many of the survivors honor a commitment to remain with the company based on their loyalty and sense of devotion with the employer (Kahya & Sahin, 2018). Some employees' commitment outweighs the negative impacts of downsizing.

Stressful events in the workplace can impact employees' health and well-being. Downsizing is associated with negative effects on the survivors of downsizing (Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Modrek et al., 2015). As surveyed employees respond to stress-related questions, researchers found that of the target population of 30 manufacturing plants, seven were the victims of downsizing. The results confirmed that survivors in severely downsized plants experienced higher levels of stress than those in moderately low downsized plants. Modrek and Cullen (2013) indicated that work stress can be related to potential future health issues in the employees, which serves the purpose of measuring the satisfaction of survivors after a downsizing event. The researchers showed that satisfaction or dissatisfaction may be linked to emotional and physical trauma such as stress, which has a direct impact on their future performance, hence the future success of the company (McDowell et al., 2019; Widyawati, 2020). Stress can affect physical and emotional health and should be monitored closely or managed whenever possible.

Employee Morale

Perhaps the most important obstruction to achieving desired results in downsizing is the surviving employees' lowered morale. Researchers have identified the correlation between downsizing and morale and other work-related stress issues in the remaining staff. Gladisa and Susanty (2018) revealed that the impact on employees may not only result in lowered morale, but loss of loyalty, commitment, and feelings of job security as well. Employees that feel appreciated tend to have higher performance levels and morale. Studies have shown that employees' reactions to downsizing are being scrutinized with greater concern due to the impact on employee morale and organizational success. Abid et al. (2019) and Peng et al. (2021) both contended that managers have a greater opportunity to interpose any negative impact by acknowledging the concerns of the staff. Cohee (2019) denoted that one of the ways of coping with a decline in employee morale and productivity is to acknowledge and address the concerns by using open communicating with the staff (Ocasio et al., 2015; Okurame & Osuzoka, 2014). As Singh et al. (2019) emphasized, effective communication is crucial for maintaining a healthy work environment. Therefore, employees feel entitled to be kept abreast of events that occur in the organization that will affect their livelihoods.

Leaders and managers must thrive in a respectful interpersonal, group, organizational, and intercultural environment. The importance of employee satisfaction and trust in organizations cannot be overstated, especially during climate changes within organizations (Abid et al., 2019; Gupta & Singla, 2016). According to Gupta and Singla (2016), three factors within an organization influence each other: organizational change, job satisfaction, and organizational trust. Organizational change requires employees and leadership to interact and respect one another (Gupta & Singla, 2016). Researchers Zhang and Liu (2018) aligned with Amarneh and Muthuveloo (2020) and attested that organization culture affects employee retention and job satisfaction. Downsizing normally results in some employees losing their jobs, which can be extremely stressful for both employees and leaders. When employees are dissatisfied with their jobs, they may exhibit rebellious behavior patterns, such as strikes, frequent absences, and resignations (Cohee, 2019). Employers can help to reduce this behavior by managing job satisfaction.

Lowered employee commitment can have a detrimental impact on employees and the organization. Tiesman et al. (2015) added that some behaviors resulting from lowered employee morale and stress can result in suicides and cost the U. S. economy approximately $45 billion annually in lost productivity, training, and medical expenses. Stress is also the primary cause of employee absence, turnover, low productivity, depression, and burnout (Hom et al., 2019). Duan and Ho (2018) pointed out that some positive actions can counteract these stressors and help to strengthen trust between management and employees. Strategic management benefits may be used, such as clarity and openness in company goals and expectations, work-life flexibility, and competitive salary and benefits (Duan & Ho, 2018). Other researchers revealed that sharing strategic plans with the staff creates awareness and encourages feelings of usefulness and commitment (Bryson et al., 2017). This approach also influences changes to the culture throughout the organization as more members adapt to the change.

Stress Factors

There exist various types of stress. The focus of Selye's (1974) research was physiological stress - the adaptations or responses a person chooses to make in response to physical demands that are made on the body. Although the researcher originally posited that the body protects itself from various stressors, he later defined stress as the result of demands made on the body that require the body to readjust. Lazarus (2006) aligned his work, based on the transactional model, with the findings of Selye (1974) and classified the reaction to stress as either eustress (positive) or distress (negative). Researchers Vaclavik et al. (2018) found that individuals experience either distress or eustress because of responding to stress.

Psychological stress can have a detrimental impact on the employees in a downsized organization. The findings of Lazarus (2006) divided psychological stress into three parts—harm/loss, threat, and challenge—and explained that each part required a different assessment. In addition, Lazarus (2006) and Vaclavik et al. (2018) found that stress consists of a variety of emotional responses, including anger, shame, guilt, and fear, which are estimated and responded to by individuals differently. When management decides to downsize for organizational change, it can lead to significant workplace stress (Vaclavik et al., 2018). Downsized employees may suffer negative psychological effects due to a strain on their cognitive, affective, and physical resources (Lakshman, 2019).

The survivors face the trauma of an uncertain future and the potential requirement to work harder, unsure if support will be provided in the new environment. Unfortunately, the survivors may experience additional stress as they assess the impact on the lost employees and the extent of the effect. Employees will need to learn to cope with and manage stress to maintain a balanced work-life (Mercurio, 2015). Employee health is important; therefore, organizations should use preventive measures to eliminate or manage stress in employees that remain after downsizing.

Talent Retention

Talent retention is a method of recruiting and retaining exemplary personnel with the company for a duration of time. While it may contradict the main idea of downsizing, managers must take necessary steps to retain talent to maintain a competitive position in the industry (Pearlman & Shaffer, 2013). Leaders may encounter issues with stability while cooperating with a downsizing yet managing the retention of skilled and trained employees is an important strategy (Ferris, 2013). Bryson et al. (2017) synced with Donahue and Tham (2019) and implied that it is critical for strategic leaders to include succession planning and strategic insight in the organization’s strategic downsizing plan. Utilizing a strategic process may help to guide downsizing outcomes closer to projected results.

Retention strategies offer alternatives to downsizing. Some leaders experience higher than usual turnover or other economic changes which could have an impact on the ability to retain talent (Traeger & Alfes, 2019). The stabilization and retention of personnel during downsizing is one of a senior manager's responsibilities (Zivkovic et al., 2020). Poorly planned employment retention strategies can impact motivation and trust for the employees, hence influence job abandonment and turnover (Ahsan, 2018; Nienaber & Martins, 2020). There are several strategies leaders can enact to ease the strain of downsizing, i.e., work schedule adjustments, options for early retirement, retention bonuses, job-sharing, and flextime (Shafagatova & Van Looy, 2020). Managers who use these strategies may positively impact the strength of the remaining workforce, and the future of the organization.

Talent management is used to attract skilled personnel to the company. Ahsan (2018) described talent management as an organization's set of strategies for identifying, attracting, developing, retaining, and promoting talent throughout the employee’s tenure with the organization. Talent management is collection of policies that govern human resources and the manner of acquiring and maintaining skilled personnel (Ahsan, 2018). According to Kichuk et al., (2019), talent management is the administration of an employee's whole work life, from recruiting to retirement. Ahsan (2018) advised that the acknowledgment of talent is the foundation for talent management and talent itself is the foundation. Employer recruiters use talent as a measure of compatibility to organizational requirements.

Losing skilled personnel can be a threat to future business operations. When an organization is unable to identify and develop outstanding workers in the near term, it will struggle to determine whether an employee has the potential to maintain a talent position in the future (Agwu et al., 2018). During a downsizing, leaders may lose the expertise that some employees have which may provide crucial to the stabilization of the company after downsizing. Researcher Theodotou (2018) asserted that a successful organizational culture promotes cross-training and information-sharing which, in turn, may reduce the amount of knowledge leaving the company with the ex-employees. Increased talent retention can positively impact an organization’s success after downsizing.

Some management techniques could assist a company maintain most of the talented staff. Barreiro and Treglown (2020) suggested that investing in talent management efforts would generate positive results such as increased employee happiness, engagement, motivation, and dedication. Ahsan (2018) recommended that an organization create a talent database to fill strategic positions within the organization and satisfy the organization's future requirement for critical expertise. Fuller et al. (2019) concurred with Nienaber and Martins (2020) that business leaders experience anxiety while implementing futuristic strategies and must consider the need to invest in continuation of operation strategies or succession planning as part of their talent retention strategy. Wallenstein et al. (2019) postulated that some corporations' existence relies on strategic planning and management of talented staff that are dedicated to helping reach organizational goals. Agreeably, the authors reasoned that a company's continued survival heavily depends on talent retention.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented an overview of the foundation of the study, background of the problem, problem and purpose, nature of the study, research and interview questions, a review of the conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the significance of the study. I concluded Section 1 with a review of the literature exploring strategies that business leaders use to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing.

In Section 2, I reiterated the purpose of the study, and present further discussions on the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, participants in the study, research method, study design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection, data organization, and data analysis. I included a discussion on how I will ensure reliability and validity of my research. In Section 3, I reintroduced the purpose of the study and presented the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, and make suggestions for additional research. Finally, I reflected on my experience conducting this study within the doctoral program.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 contains a reiteration of the purpose statement, the research method, research design, details of population and sampling, and review of ethical research. It also contains an overview of the data collection instruments and techniques as well as data organization and analysis. Section 2 concludes with information about the study's reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies business leaders use to manage employee morale after downsizing. The target population included three leaders at a company in central Maryland who successfully managed employee morale after downsizing resulting in increased productivity and profitability. The results of this study may contribute to positive social change by identifying strategies business leaders can use to manage this fear and improve employee morale, thereby improving job sustainability, leading to happier families, employees, and communities.

Role of the Researcher

I served as the primary data collection instrument in this study. The role of the researcher in a qualitative single exploratory case study is to act as the data collection instrument and to determine the proper research method, select the appropriate participants, and to collect, analyze, and report the data (Karagiozis, 2018). In my role as the primary data collection instrument, I generated, transcribed, analyzed, and verified the data. I also designed the study and conducted interviews with the participants.

Bias should be minimized in research. Many researchers in qualitative studies strive to minimize bias (Wadams & Park, 2018). To reduce researcher bias, I put aside my personal views and opinions of the organization's leadership team and focused only on the data collected from the participants. Also, I documented the data collection and reporting processes as the researcher reflects on personal views that may affect the study. Plutzer (2019) denoted that documenting the processes while collecting data helps to mitigate personal bias. I conducted the study with complete transparency by using member checking. Member checking is an exhaustion of the validation of the findings until no new data is repeated (Brear, 2019; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, by using member checking, I ensured that none of my own preferences are included in the research analysis.

As a qualitative researcher, I followed ethical processes. The researcher's role is to conduct the research study with the highest standards of ethics by adhering to the Belmont report protocol and Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Ethical Standards (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The Belmont report contains an emphasis on the three principles of ethics to include having respect for your participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I provided an informed consent form for each participant to review and sign. The consent form was written in language easily understood and I made each participant aware that the study is completely voluntary. I then ensured beneficence by minimizing the risks associated with partaking in research by masking each participant's identity. Lastly, I achieved justice by providing the benefit of learning new strategies to manage their employees after downsizing, which may help organizations to become more profitable.

Participants should not be given monetary or other incentives to participate in research. Incentives can be considered motives for participants or considered as coercion to participate (Grady, 2019). The Belmont report contains an emphasis on the need to use consent forms to ensure the participants' full agreement to participate in the voluntary study (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The participants were aware that their participation in the research study was completely voluntary and optional and that they were within their rights to withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason. I verbally advised the participants of this right during email invitation and I requested that the participants return the signed consent forms before I began an interview. A consent form is an agreement between the researcher and the participant designed to ensure the protection of human subjects and data collected, as well as to adhere to ethical principles and guidelines (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Hence, by signing the consent form, the participant demonstrated full acknowledgement of the voluntary nature of the study. After receiving the participants’ consent form via email, agreeing to participate in the study, I conducted the interviews via audio or videoconference. In the semistructured interviews I asked six open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. I triangulated information with a review of public financial statements found on the internet.

Researchers must conduct their studies with the highest integrity to be considered valid (Elo et al., 2014). As the researcher, I ensured that my interviews were conducted ethically. I did not use personal experiences or perceptions to conclude the results of the study to mitigate bias. I used reflexive inquiry as a means of interpreting the data through a personal lens. A reflexive inquiry is a tool used to assess the way choices in communication relate to ethical standards during a study, thereby allowing the reader to recognize potential bias within the study context (Karagiozis, 2018). Researchers are advised to use the technique of reflexivity by acknowledging any preconceived notions regarding the study and the data to be collected that could lead to bias (Fitzpatrick & Olson, 2015; Karagiozis, 2018). I used reflexivity to ensure integrity in my research.

Researchers can use several methods to conduct valid and ethical research. To mitigate bias from this study, I used reflexivity, bracketing, and member checking. When researchers practice reflexivity, they become accountable for the ethical actions performed during research, thereby allowing the reader to recognize potential bias within the study context (Karagiozis, 2018). Bracketing is a process that provides impartiality to nontraditional responses that contribute to the collection of data (Karagiozis, 2018). Member checking is the process of allowing participants to clarify the accuracy of the interpreted responses (Brear, 2019). I conducted each interview session by following the interview protocol (Appendix A) to promote consistency when conducting multiple interviews. Using the interview protocol also promoted consistency and helped to create a relaxed and trusting rapport with the participants. Using a semistructured interview provided the opportunity for each participant to share their perceptions on the same interview questions (see McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Many researchers want to conduct research in a way that will collect rich and in-depth responses from the participants while ensuring the highest ethical standards.

Participants

The participants in this study were three leaders who worked for a corporation located in central Maryland, who successfully experienced a downsizing event within the past 5 years and used strategies to manage employee morale postdownsizing. When conducting a qualitative single case study, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that each participant is familiar with the research phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). I used the company directory to gain access to the participants' contact information.

I used purposive sampling to conduct this research. Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom selection of contributors to participate in a study that enhances research and targets a population with similar backgrounds relative to the research topic (Emerson, 2015). Purposive sampling is used as a valuable research method when resources are scarce (Duan et al., 2015). The participants I selected met the inclusion criteria of being employed as leaders of a company during the time the organization downsized. These leaders had first-hand knowledge of strategizing in such a way that would minimize the negative impact of downsizing.

I requested permission from the Walden University IRB to conduct the interviews and review the organization's employee handbooks before any of the participants were contacted, to ensure that I refrained from violating human rights and followed proper ethical procedures. I sent the consent forms to each of the participants via e-mail. After receiving an acknowledged consent from each participant, I called each participant to inform him or her of the letter of invitation forthcoming. The letter contained details of the purpose of the study and an explanation of the interview process. To conduct a qualitative research study, the researchers should establish a working relationship with the participants (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). I sought to build a working relationship with trust (see Valentine et al., 2014). I introduced myself to comfort the tension of the participants and ensured the protection of their confidentiality throughout the study. I conducted the interviews in a familiar and comfortable setting for the participant and at times suitable for him or her.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The research method of this study was a qualitative single exploratory case study approach. I chose the qualitative method to obtain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the perception and experience of research participants. Qualitative researchers are interested in participants' insight, data collected from interviews, and interpretations of the phenomena (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Researchers use qualitative research as a well-balanced method to conduct phenomenological studies and understand social phenomena and exploration of events (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Gill 2014). The qualitative method was the most appropriate method for my study as it allowed me to use open-ended semistructured, open-ended interview questions and a review of meeting minutes, handbooks, and human resources personnel documents to explore the perceptions and responses of the participants, through their experiences.

Quantitative researchers examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables in a population using scientific experiments and an analysis of numerical data to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). Quantitative research is a statistical analysis of preconceived hypotheses and used for numerical data (Dorrance, 2017). Moreover, the qualitative method focuses on creating generalizations from part of a target population (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The nature of this study did not warrant the need to test a hypothesis or compare variables, therefore, the quantitative method was not appropriate.

A mixed-method researcher uses a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting, and testing numerical data (Palinkas et al., 2015). Researchers use the mixed-method approach to gain a deeper understanding for a specific problem, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). I did not use any statistical data so the mixed method approach was not appropriate for this study.

Research Design

I used a qualitative single exploratory case study as the research design as it was most suitable for my research study. Researchers use the qualitative case study to explore and distinguish specific phenomenon within the real-world context within the study (Yin, 2018). Researchers in a case study ask *how* and *why* questions to gather data (Aladdin, 2017). Furthermore, a case study allows the researcher to explore the interaction between case and content, while contributing to the knowledge of an individual, group, and social phenomena (McLeod, 2019; Yin, 2018). Another purpose of a case study is to provide details on specific constructs (McLeod, 2019). Each corporate leader during a downsizing event represents a separate case. A case study could be either single or multiple about a place or time. Researchers use case studies when there are multiple sources of data to examine (Yin, 2018). There are six data resources: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observation, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). In my study, I reviewed and analyzed documentation and interviews as the data retrieved from the participants. My goal was to explore the participants' experiences with enhancing employee morale after downsizing so the single case study was the most appropriate for my study.

I considered other qualitative research designs such as the ethnography design and phenomenological research design. Researchers use ethnography research design to study people and cultures in their environment when collecting data through observation is the desired focus (Dorrance, 2017; Yin, 2018). Ethnographic research involves cultural phenomena as perceived by the subject of the study (Letourneau, 2015). The researcher using ethnography assumes a dual responsibility by experiencing life within the setting and performing in the role of an impartial observer (Yin, 2018). Ethnographers mostly study groups and communities through long-term engagement within the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The focus of this study did not involve culture; therefore, ethnography research was not suitable.

The phenomenological design was used to study lived experiences and provides the opportunity for participants to provide their perceptions and views regarding these lived experiences (Breevaart & Zacher, 2019). In the phenomenological research design, the focus is on the meaning of participant's lived experiences (Quay, 2015). I did not choose phenomenological research for this study because it does not involve everyday work experiences or the traumatic impact or interpretation of an individual, and as such, phenomenological research was not appropriate.

In qualitative research, data saturation is achieved when no new or relevant data emerges from repeating the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To achieve data saturation, researchers must ensure that replicating the study produces the same themes and results with no new findings (Yin, 2018). Once the researcher determines that the findings are the same and no new data emerges, then data saturation is achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The use of multiple sources of data collection also helps researchers to reach data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I achieved data saturation by interviewing the same participant until no new data was available, or until no new themes arose.

Population and Sampling

In this qualitative single case study, the population was a nonprobabilistic purposive sample size of three business leaders in central Maryland who successfully used a strategy to manage employee morale after downsizing within the past 5 years. Qualitative researchers select their sample population of participants using nonprobability sampling methods (Lanka et al., 2021). The different types of nonprobabilistic sampling include theoretical, purposive, convenience, criterion, snowball, and volunteer

(Guetterman, 2020). I used purposive sampling to permit the selection of the participants based on their association with the study criteria (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I selected three leaders within an organization to ensure an ample amount of data was collected to answer the research question thoroughly. It is acceptable to use a small population in a case study, as stated by Yin (2018), which confirms that the sample size of three leaders is appropriate. The sample size for this study is appropriate as it provides sufficient data to understand how business leaders use strategies to improve employee morale after downsizing. A nonprobabilistic purposive sampling is the best technique for a case study because the lived experiences of the participants provide thorough data for analysis (Lanka et al., 2021).

In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews and compared themes and patterns that emerged from the research until no new pattern or theme developed to achieve data saturation. I interpreted the findings and sent the interpretations to each participant to ensure accuracy (Lanka et al., 2019). To confirm member checking after analyzing the responses obtained during the interview, researchers can share the interpretation of the responses with the participant for validation (Benoot et al., 2016). I repeated these processes until each participant confirmed that my interpretation was correct.

Ethical Research

The process of conducting research on human subjects requires a full understanding of ethical principles that guide the conduct of the researchers (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). I requested permission from Walden University's IRB to conduct my study before initiating any contact with the participants to ensure that I protected the ethical rights of the participants. IRB approval ensures that the participants fully understand that they are participating in research (Bajaj, 2017). The IRB approval process warrants the researcher to adhere to ethical rules and standards to protect human participants in a study (Connelly, 2014; Cross et al., 2014). Upon receiving permission from the IRB, I sent each qualified participant a copy of the consent form by e-mail, which contained specific details about the purpose of the research, data collection process, the participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality for the duration of the study. The final doctoral manuscript included the Walden IRB approval number 2870289.

Informed consent is used to protect research participants from risks associated with unethical research (Ivanoska, 2019). The steps involved in informed consent are (a) provide information to participants, (b) ensure the participants understand the information provided, and (c) ensure the participants' involvement is voluntary and of free will (McLaughlin & Alfaro-Velcamp, 2015; Wessels & Visagie, 2015). I informed each participant of the extent of their participation and ensured they were aware of their roles and rights as participants. To confirm consent, the participant replied "I consent" to my e-mail. I also ensured that the participants had all my contact information in case they had questions or concerns prior to signing the consent form. I informed the participants that their participation in the study is voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from any further involvement with the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. I instructed the participants to officiate their decision in this regard, to contact me, preferably by email, or in any manner that is convenient to them.

Participants that desired to withdraw from initiating or completing the study were able to do so at any time without any consequences. I informed the participants of their right to refuse to commence or cease to participate in the research at any time. Upon learning of the participant’s desire to withdraw, all correspondence with any participant at that time would have ceased and any documents containing data collected during the interview process would have been destroyed. None of the participants in my study withdrew.

I advised the participants they would not receive any incentives to participate in this study. To ensure adequate ethical protection of participants, I followed the Walden University protocol to secure the data collected in this study and, as recommended by Yin (2018) made every effort to avoid compromising confidential information. To ensure confidentiality, I will keep the transcript of the audio, participants' responses, interpretation documents of their responses, notes taken during the interview, and the signed consent form in a locked safe for 5 years. After 5 years, I will destroy all hard copies of written data by shredding any hard copies, and permanently delete any electronic data from my computer hardware and software files. To ensure confidentiality, I did not use the participants’ names; instead, I used codes P1, P2, and P3 for the participants and the interview data. All participants were at least 18 years old and participated under their own free will.

Data Collection Instruments

I was the primary data collection instrument in this study and ensured that the correct protocol was followed for this study. I used open-ended interview questions during a conference call in this qualitative research as well as publicly available company documents as additional sources of evidence. Data collection was the process used to collect information used in research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2018) defined employee records as sources of evidence. The interview protocol (Appendix A) contains the steps to follow to conduct interviews with the participants. The purpose for conducting these interviews was to gather data during telephone conference interviews using the interview protocol (Appendix A) as a guide to ensure the process remains consistent (Hayashi et al., 2019). McGrath et al. (2019) noted that conducting semistructured interviews is a valid method of obtaining the participant's responses to the research questions.

I recorded all participants' responses with the participants' knowledge and approval using an audio recorder to ensure accuracy of documentation and analysis. I used the interview questions to explore strategies some business leaders use to improve employee morale after downsizing. The interview was a primary data source and was a means for leaders to share their phenomenon regarding their experiences with strategies used during downsizing (Brear, 2019).

Reliability and validity are critical elements that warrant accurate and honest results of a study (Moustakas, 1994). To enhance the reliability and validity of the data collection process, member checking was a means for participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the participant's responses (Brear, 2019). Brear also asserted that member checking gives the participants the opportunity to convey their opinions to the research. I used member checking to ensure my interpretations of the participant's responses were correct, and I continued to confirm the accuracy of their responses until there was no new data. When data from all sources (not just the interviews) is repetitive, the data is saturated.

In addition, I further enhanced reliability and validity by using methodological triangulation of multiple data collection methods such as responses to the interview questions in conjunction with meeting minutes, policy handbooks, and human resources personnel records. In addition to reviewing the company documents, I interviewed each of the participants using the interview protocol (Appendix A), to ensure consistency of the interview process. I conducted teleconference interviews with corporate leaders in central Maryland during a time of the participant's choice. Conducting the interviews during a convenient time provides the participant a level of comfort that will support open and honest communication with little to no distractions (McGrath et al., 2019). Following the interview, I provided email transcripts to the participants to review and validate the information I collected.

Data Collection Technique

Researchers can use six possible sources to collect data in a case study: (a) documentation, (b) archival records, (c) interviews, (d) direct observations, (e) participant observation, and (f) physical artifacts (Marion & Mann-Feder, 2020; Yin, 2018). As the primary data collection instrument, I used semistructured interviews in combination with the interview protocol (Appendix A) as well as documentation including (a) meeting minutes, (b) policy handbooks, and (c) human resources personnel records as the data collection techniques. After I received approval from the Walden University's IRB, I sent each potential participant an invitation letter via e-mail containing details of the study that described the purpose of conducting the research. Bajaj (2017) suggested that the IRB process ensures participants realize and consent to their participation in research. The e-mail also indicated that if the participant willingly agrees to participate in the study, he or she must respond by stating in a return email “I consent”. I used the telephone conference technique as part of a qualitative single case study to collect data from the participants that includes audio recording and storing responses to questions. Meurer and Costa (2020) denoted that a study relies on data to resolve the questions in a study. Each interview consisted of six open-ended questions and were a maximum of 60 minutes in length unless the participant chose to prolong it by sharing more information. In the first step of the interview following the interview protocol (Appendix A), I introduced myself and made sure the participant was at ease, attentive and understood the forthcoming process.

The advantage of semistructured interviews and member checking was that the researcher could ask the participants to elaborate on or clarify their answers if needed. Additionally, by conducting an interview, the researcher gains an advantage by listening to verbal cues (i.e., sighs, hesitation). Adu (2019) emphasized the relevance of having a connection with the participants to facilitate an atmosphere conducive to answering questions. Rowley (2012) stated that semistructured interviews help facilitate a clear perception of the processes. A potential disadvantage of a semistructured interview is the extra amount of effort required on the interviewer's behalf to collect and analyze the data (Rowley, 2012). Lin et al (2018) concurred with Yin (2018) and advised that archival records are stable, discreet and provide a broad range of information. The disadvantage of using archival records is that the information may be private, sensitive, and difficult to analyze.

During the interview, the participants revealed some of the strategic options used to manage employee morale in recent downsizing events. To provide anonymity, I assigned codes to each participant such as P1, P2, and P3 instead of actual names to protect their identity. I recorded the date, time, and any other pertinent demographics. Upon completion of the interviews, I interpreted each participant's responses and transcribed them on a Microsoft Word document to confirm my interpretation. I provided the participants with a summary of the interview for concurrence with the validity and accuracy of the content. During this member checking process, each participant had the opportunity to review the answers for correctness, and update, if necessary (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I continued to confirm the correctness of my interpretation of each participant's responses until the participant confirmed accuracy and there was no new information to include. This process of member checking confirmed the accuracy of the information collected during the interview and provided an opportunity to make corrections or clarifications, as well as provide additional information if needed. Data saturation was reached when I did not identify any new themes from the interview and the review of the documents. I thanked the participants for their participation in the study.

Data Organization Technique

Using the appropriate data organization techniques was a critical part of storing and securing data collected. Lanka et al. (2021) recommended researchers record their interviews, so they do not misinterpret the responses. I recorded the interview session using my iPhone 14 to ensure that I reviewed all data. The use of digital recording devices increases accuracy during data collection (Patton, 2015). I tested my phone prior to the meeting to ensure it worked properly. The consent form included information informing the participants that I would be recording the session. McGrath et al., (2019) advised researchers to take notes during the interview of their observations. I will use a pen and a notepad to take descriptive notes and record the day, time, and location of the interview.

At the end of the interview, I reviewed the human resource (HR) documentation including (a) meeting minutes, (b) policy handbooks, and (c) human resources personnel records to compare the responses. I provided each of the participants with an interpretive summary of my notes for their review. Many qualitative researchers used interviews to collect data for studying human phenomena (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017). Member checking ensures that the interpretation is accurate (Yin, 2018). I performed member checking by providing the participants with a summary of the interview allowing an opportunity to review and correct, if necessary, my interpretation of their responses.

If any changes were necessary, either the participant or I edited the information at that time, and once all information was accurate, I then entered the data into the NVivo to code and analyze the data for reporting. Robins and Eisen (2017) concurred with Adu

(2019) that NVivo is a reliable software used by qualitative researchers to analyze data quickly, effectively, and accurately (Adu, 2019; Yin, 2018). The transcribing feature in the NVivo software allowed the researcher to control the playback speed to ensure the researcher captured the words verbatim. This software can be a valuable resource to manage data collected in the research process.

As a qualitative researcher, I discussed my obligation to disclose confidentiality and privacy with each of the participants. I kept all existing versions of the data safe and secured by continuing to use pseudonyms instead of names for 5 years. No one else will have access to this data or the participants' names. After 5 years, I will destroy all media, and documents containing data from these interviews. I will erase my files and permanently delete them as well as shred the hard copies.

Data Analysis

Researchers use several tactics to strengthen the study. Methodological triangulation in qualitative research involves using various types of data collection methods to compare, thereby validating the findings, thereby adding value (Natow, 2020). Methodological triangulation consists of using and comparing data from multiple sources (Denzin, 1979). For this study, I used methodological triangulation. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) noted that the gathering of various types of data collectively in the same study will help to accumulate information that is in-depth and rich (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I created the interview questions to align with the overarching research question. In addition to conducting open-ended, semistructured interview and observations of the participants' body language, I collected human resources documentation including (a) meeting minutes, (b) policy handbooks, and (c) human resources personnel records to ensure methodological triangulation.

I followed the five logical and sequential steps of data analysis as denoted by Yin (2018): (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groupings, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. In the first step, collecting the data, I gathered facts and compiled them in a purposeful manner. Yin (2015) described this step as arranging the data in a significant manner. I transcribed the conversation, read the transcripts, listened to the recordings of each interview, wrote my interpretation in a Microsoft Word document, performed member checking by sharing the document for validation, and revised the interview transcript based on feedback from the participant. I also completed document review by reading the documents and creating a new Microsoft Word document with relevant information related to managing employee morale after downsizing. I then imported the applicable data into NVivo.

In the second step, separating the data into groupings, I used NVivo to generate automatic codes, also called child nodes, using the auto-coding feature. Clarke et al. (2021) claimed that NVivo improves the data organization and coding process during research. The third step was regrouping the data into themes. Researchers develop themes by arranging and rearranging data from the research until themes emerge (Yin, 2015). I used NVivo user interface to produce themes based on the organization of the data, also called father nodes. The fourth step of the data analysis was assessing the information. This is a basic step in the effort of making sense of the data and encompassing the relationships within data (Barbarossa & Sardellitti, 2020). I identified the major themes and established the relation by reflecting on the knowledge acquired from the current literature and the conceptual framework, the transformational leadership theory. The final step in the data analysis process was developing conclusions based on the data (Yin, 2015). This step was critical to understanding the major findings of the study that are derived from patterns and themes relating to the research topic (Yin, 2015). I used the major thematic findings from the study as the main aspects of the findings.

Next, I performed data cleansing. Harvey (2015) described data cleansing as filtering the data to focus only on material relevant to the search criteria. I then used the NVivo software to code and analyze all the remaining interview data. I utilized codes P1, P2, and P3 for the participants and the interview data. NVivo software will detect and identify key themes and word phrases from the data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Yin (2018) defined reliability as the ability to repeat the research process in a case study and obtain similar results each time. Clancy (2019) suggested that valid and reliable results are obtained when there is a full understanding of the data. I demonstrated reliability by documenting the process involved in data collection and data interpretation. In qualitative research, the dependability of the research describes the level of stability and repeatability of the collected data and confirms that readers can rely on the findings (Elo et al., 2015). The level of dependability can be increased by producing consistent results when interpreting the data and by demonstrating transparency with the results (Yin, 2014).

I used member checking to ensure reliability, credibility, and dependability in my study. Member checking was the preferred validation method when conducting qualitative interviews (Clarke et al., 2021). Researchers use member checking to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative results and confirm the accuracy of the transfer of information from the participant to the analysis of the data McGrath et al (2019). Pereira (2012) proposed that standard procedures used to collect data will add credibility and transferability to a study. Finally, I used member checking to gather rich, thick responses from the participants to obtain data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information is revealed during the data collection process (Stake, 2013). I continued to collect data until the information was repetitive and no new patterns emerged.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to selecting the appropriate tools to process the data to enhance the quality of the findings (Leung, 2015). The validity of the study is contingent upon the accuracy of the data results (Gonzalez, et al., 2015). Researchers use creditability, transferability, and confirmability to establish the validity of the data collected (Hayashi et al., 2019; Noble & Smith, 2015). Participants verify and confirm the credibility of the findings depending on how well the researcher interprets the data collected (Kaczynski et al., 2014). Readers of this study must understand that creditability, transferability, and confirmability are necessary to establish the validity of the data collected (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility in a qualitative study is accurately representing participant views (Stewart et al., 2017). Credibility implies that the trustworthiness of a qualitative study aligns with the truthfulness of the data presented (Brear, 2019; Stewart et al., 2017). Credibility was necessary to ensure the accuracy of the data results (Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers can use methodological triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement to confirm the credibility of a study (Black et al., 2013). I also used data saturation to enhance the credibility of the study results, and the quality of the research results. Data saturation occurs when analyzing the data collected from the interviews produces no further information, concluding the interview process (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014).

Methodological triangulation is using multiple data-gathering methods such as interviews, observations, and documents (Denzin, 1979). In addition to conducting open-ended semistructured interviews, I used methodological triangulation by introducing other data collection methods such as meeting minutes, policy handbooks, and human resources personnel records. The confirmation of data saturation through all sources of data occurs when the researcher notices the same patterns repetitively, and concludes that there is no need for additional data collection (Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Merwe, 2014)

Member checking also involves verifying the interview's interpretations of the responses aligned with the intentions of the participants (Brear, 2019). I used member checking to ensure credibility in my study. Prolonged engagement allows researchers to spend sufficient time with the participants to thoroughly understand and review the transcript to establish credibility (Noble & Smith, 2015). I ensure that additional time was allotted to capture feedback from the participants.

Transferability

Transferability is the measurement of how much the research findings in one study can be applied to and replicated in other contexts and environment settings (Noble, 2015). A qualitative study may acquire transferability if a random audience can relate the results to their own experiences (Clarke et al., 2021). To enhance transferability, a researcher must provide detailed rich and thick descriptions of the research to help readers decide if transferability will occur (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ruiz, 2015). I provided detailed descriptions of the participants' interviews to improve transferability. Qualitative researchers achieve data saturation when they explore all parts of a phenomenon until no further information evolves from the collection of data (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability is the researcher's ability to demonstrate that the data results represent the participant's perceptions and not the biased viewpoints of the researcher (Brear, 2019; Cope, 2014). Connelly (2016) suggested that qualitative researchers use rich and thick descriptions of the data to achieve confirmability. The research of Connelly (2016) and Rose and Johnson (2020) established that adapting the other aspects (i.e., creditability and transferability) of validity, also helps to achieve confirmability. Member checking and methodological triangulation are effective strategies used to enhance confirmability in a qualitative study (Fusch et al., 2018). I utilized member checking and methodological triangulation to enhance confirmability. I also collected data until the information was repetitive, thereby reaching data saturation and enhancing confirmability.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 consists of a restatement of the purpose statement, the details of study approach, including the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, techniques, and organization, data analysis and reliability and validity of the study. Section 3 will contain the presentation of findings applicable to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for future research, my reflections, and the conclusion of the study.

Section 3: Applications to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The findings of this research indicated that (a) effective communication, (b) team building, and (c) training and support are strategies to manage morale after organizational downsizing. The three participants in this study agreed that using these strategies increased morale in their recently downsized organizations leading to increased productivity and profitability.

Presentation of the Findings

To answer the research question "What strategies do business leaders use to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing?" I conducted videoconference interviews with three business leaders of three different organizations. The criteria for inclusion were that participants were business leaders located in central Maryland who had, within the past 5 years, successfully used strategies to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing.

The three main themes that emerged from this data collection process regarding strategies that business leaders use to manage employee morale after downsizing were (a) effective communication, (b) team building, and (c) training and support. Table 2 displays the strategies and the frequency of occurrence, which confirms the effectiveness of the strategies for managing employee morale after downsizing.

Table 2

Strategies Used to Manage Employee Morale After Downsizing

Main themes	*n*	Frequency %
Effective communication	3	31
Team building	3	42
Training and support	3	26
Total		100

Theme 1: Effective Communication

The first theme to emerge through an analysis of participant responses was effective communication. Do and Nuth (2019) assessed that communication can benefit the leaders as well as the employees when sharing information in an organization. All the participants alluded to using communication as a strategy to manage employee morale in their responses, thereby increasing productivity. P1 expressed that communication is an integral part of implementing strategies to manage morale. P2 stated, “Communication is important as it provides a baseline to successfully managing morale; since we need to have a baseline by which to measure success.” P2 and P3 both commented that communication was necessary to rebuild trust and loyalty so that the company can rebound. John et al (2019) asserted that successful organizations rely on communication to interact with the employees. The three participants also agreed that the use of emails is a form of communication and an effective way to collect the ideas and opinions of staff. P1 mentioned, “Bottom-up information in the form of emails provides a forum for the employees to send information from the field.” Similarly, P3 said, “Emails empower the staff and encourage idea-sharing.” I observed the emails that P1 and P2 shared and noted that the claims by P3 were accurate as each email used verbiage that encouraged communication and teamwork. P3 also shared past newsletters that announced emails pertaining to great job performance and rewarded hard work. P1 said, “An effective way to reach our employees is letting them know that you recognize and appreciate their efforts, which can help to boost morale.” Each participant expressed in agreement that effective communication was beneficial for the employees as well as the organization.

All the participants acknowledged that surveys were another form of communication that was used to get feedback from their employees and gather bottom-up ideas to regain trust within the organization. P1 also mentioned that “When requesting a response to surveys, I always ask my team how I can help them to be more productive.” I observed samples of the employee surveys from P1, and the feedback showed that responses to the questions asked supported effective communication. I also read the results of a recent survey shared by P2 that supplemented the evidence provided. P1 and P2 agreed that surveys were an integral source of feedback and really allowed the employees to express their perceptions of their daily jobs. P3 said, “Surveys permitted the staff to communicate open and honest opinions by responding to anonymous surveys regularly.”

P2 and P3 conveyed that the use of two-way communication via surveys and suggestion boxes allowed the employees to have a voice and present ideas and concerns regarding company plans. P1 also confirmed “The use of communication to improve the morale warranted the bidirectional flow of information and keeping staff informed of plans for the organization, especially those that impacted the livelihoods of staff.” All participants indicated that communication methods that were used to manage employe morale after downsizing, thereby increasing productivity and profitability.

Theme 2: Team Building

Team building was the second theme to emerge from the data collection process. Each of the three participants believed that team building was used to empower their employees and repair the culture and morale while enhancing working relations amongst the staff. A transformational leader focuses on enhanced knowledge across the organization to increase team building and enhance cohesiveness (Balhara & Bansal, 2019; Mohamed, 2020). P1 and P2 agreed that cohesiveness aligns with team building events and are both significant in reestablishing trust and re-developing groups within the organization. All the participants agreed that team building is an essential part of restoring a team that has morale issues resulting from organizational changes. P1 and P3 concurred that the success of the organization heavily relies on the ability to rebuild the culture and restore trust from the employees through team building. P3 disclosed that,

> We had team building sessions at our last town hall meeting, and it was a huge success. It was suggested through one of our workplace surveys that we started sending out after we downsized to get a pulse check on the front-line team. We wanted to begin to understand what the staff needed to create a new culture of joined efforts and unity to foster better relationships and work ethics.

An essential part of an organization's strategy is achieving success based on the strength of the team. Erkutlu and Chafra (2019) suggested that team building encourages employee relationships and helps to create a bond that ultimately impacts organizational performance. P2 presented a short video excerpt of the most recent team building exercise, revealing the cohesive nature of the activity. After viewing the video and the HR policies for team-building exercises, P2 expressed responses through actions that align with a transformational leadership approach to team building by stating, “My leadership style as a transformational leader helps me to encourage the activities that build trust between leaders and employees.” P1 and P3 had similar responses and expressed how the team building activities inspired trust and openness, resulting in increased morale amongst the employees. The findings aligned with the literature review and concurred with the theme of team building in transformational leadership by inspiring cohesiveness and encouraging trust in the workplace. P1 mentioned:

> Employees usually have great ideas that we in leadership need to hear to influence team building. We just need to know what they are. In our organization, we feel that empowering our staff to participate in developing a new culture and help in decision-making will influence work ethics. I encourage my employees to be open to 2-way communication as implied in transformational leadership. One of the best ways to do this is to collaborate with employees in activities that influence cohesiveness. I make sure that my employees and subordinates are comfortable with reaching out to their supervisors and/or me and others on the leadership team. It’s important for them to feel secure, important for me and important for the organization. If the employees feel good about their jobs, they will usually stick around and work more efficiently.

Leaders that encourage team building may reap bigger benefits within the organization. Do and Nuth (2019) proclaimed that communication is beneficial to employees and all levels of leadership. All the participants agreed that influencing open communication is one of the most effective ways to understand employee morale.

The participants ascribed their success in managing employee morale after organizational downsizing to characteristics linked to the conceptual framework in this study, the transformational leadership theory. The three participants reported that like transformational leaders, effective communication was an important factor in the leadership role to influence independence in the employees. Like transformational leaders, the participants were highly effective and relational, therefore creating a positive impact on morale. In alignment with the literature review, the participants responses aligned with the transformational theory. The literature was linked to the conceptual framework by the consistent theme that employees can collaborate with transformational leaders by providing input and suggestions to resolve issues, thus creating an employee-leader collaborate relationship in which employees develop needed skills (Sajjad et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Training and Support

The final theme to emerge during the data analysis stage was training and support. Participant 1 agreed with Participant 3 and expressed that training and support are mutually important strategies to increase employee morale after downsizing in an organization. Participants 1 and 2 mentioned that training employees for vacated jobs enhanced opportunities for career growth, thereby increasing employee morale. Participant 1 stated,

> My employees are typically trained in specific areas needed to perform their jobs. With so many new vacancies, the opportunity to expand their skills and potentially grow their skillset gave staff reasons to look forward to training and learning more. I found that employees that have a clear career path and are sure of their development within their positions tend to perform more efficiently and stay around longer. With a potential career path in sight, employees tend to have increased job satisfaction which in turn increases their productivity.

Participants 2 and 3 had similar views and mentioned the use of training through mentor coaching to develop training plans, performance plans and set annual goals for themselves. The findings agreed with the research of Sutton (2019), who noted that transformational leaders encourage their employees to promote team perception and enhance feelings of belongingness, thereby strengthening self-perception and motivation to perform. I reviewed a copy of the training handbook and HR policies that P3 shared, as well as training policies that regulated compliance. Participant 3 stated,

> First, we did a training needs assessment. After realizing that we lost a lot of talent in the downsizing, we determined where we needed the most training. We increased our training budget after the organization downsized to provide staff with extra training opportunities to learn different skills that were previously specific to only certain team members. Some of the external training provided opportunities for newly trained employees and some were even promoted. It

> really helped the rapport I had with the teams and team leaders as they realized the potential to grow in this new space. Productivity peaked and employees responded with positive feedback. Training was an essential strategy that helped to enforce my transformational leadership style and increase morale amongst the staff.

P1 and P2 agreed that ongoing investments in employee training events are key strategies to enhance job satisfaction. P1 supported skilled training stating, “We need experienced workers on hand to minimize the negative impact of organizational decisions.” P2 preferred continuing education and stated, “Higher learning will create the foundation needed to keep our staff highly educated and efficient.” P3 encouraged higher education but required commitments for a period of employment in exchange for paid degrees and trade certifications. P3 shared that five employees were currently enrolled in higher education and taking advantage of this opportunity. P1 mentioned that the organization should provide opportunities to develop and retain highly talented and skilled employees.

The responses from the participants linked to transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework for this study. The participants communicated that training and support were effective contributors to diminishing the knowledge gap of the employees after downsizing. The participants also expressed that training and support contributed to the empowerment of their employees while enhancing their ability to gain knowledge and skills, an advantage for the organization (See Lange et al., 2018). The participants, like transformational leaders, contended that training and support increased employee morale and feelings of contribution with enhanced skillsets. Transformational leaders aspire to provide support but also delegate and offer less and less supervision as the employee develops needed skills (Lange et al., 2018). In alignment with the literature review, the participants' responses concurred with Ree and Wiig (2020) who asserted that employee morale and performance are relational and can be improved with new skills. Ree and Wiig also contended that employee morale is enhanced through training and new job responsibilities, allowing employees to contribute confidently to the work environment, which contributes to the enhanced employee morale.

Applications to Professional Practice

According to the findings of this study, effective communication, team building, and training and support are successful strategies that business leaders use to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing. Business leaders who use these findings may experience enhanced levels of morale amongst their staff leading to high performance. Further, business leaders who practice these findings may attain desired results such as higher emotional commitment, employee loyalty, higher productivity, and company profitability. Noor and Ampornstira (2019) contended that employees with higher morale tend to be more productive and motivated. This study is vital to business leaders because the findings demonstrate the relevance of effective communication, team building, and training and support and how these strategies can manage morale to increase productivity and motivation, creating sustainability in the organization.

The findings in this study revealed that effective communication is critical in building a rapport with employees to achieve productivity and profitability. Stater and

Stater (2018) posited that effective communication can positively influence job satisfaction and strengthen the relationship between leadership and employees within the workplace. Communication can precede the development of strategies that will enhance employee morale after downsizing. Business leaders that encourage effective communication flow provide a sense of assurance to the employees, helping them to feel a strong connection to the organization. Business leaders who focus on developing strategies to enhance morale after downsizing tend to care about their employees as well as the profitability of the organization.

The findings from this research study also revealed team building as a valuable tool to help engage employees and repair cohesiveness and working relationships after organizational downsizing. Engaged employees that form close working relationships are motivated, enthusiastic, and more productive in the workplace (Hidayah Ibrahim et al., 2019). Business leaders who strive to increase team building across the organization understand the importance of cohesiveness in peer relationships and the impact on personal growth and development. Team building exercises encourage trust and reliance between cohorts, supporting the ability to collaborate toward goals. Business leaders also engage their employees by encouraging relationships through activities that leverage the formation of new relationships to replace feelings of lost trust and integrity. The findings show the benefits of team building fosters higher morale and a team environment in the workplace.

The findings of this study also disclosed that training and support can be strategic methods used to align the values of the employee with those of the organization, positively impacting the workplace (Bin Ahmad & Jasimuddin, 2021g). Business leaders should ensure employees are cross-functional trained to stretch an employee's skillset by providing on-the-job or other options that create promotional opportunities (Setiawan, 2020). Training can influence morale in employees who in return exhibit positive behaviors such as enhanced commitment, higher productivity, and enhanced job satisfaction.

The study findings could lead to a sustained morale level and improved cohesiveness amongst the employees, which could positively affect productivity. Henderson (2020) noted that employees are vital assets to the organization and are more productive when in a positive state of mind. By completing this study and publishing the findings, business leaders may use this information to manage motivation, job satisfaction, and the emotional state of their staff to help to encourage productivity and profitability for the organization.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include tangible strategies that future business leaders can use to manage morale in downsized companies to strengthen the emotional health of the impacted employees leading to higher self-esteem and better performance for the benefit of maintaining organizational productivity and profitability. The findings in this study may contribute to the professional practice of business by improving the mental and emotional health of the workers and creating job stability in the community. Noor and Ampornstira (2019) contended that employees with higher morale tend to be more productive and motivated. This study is vital to business leaders because the findings demonstrate the relevance of effective communication, team building, and training and support to increased job stability by creating more emotionally healthy workers. Without the strategies needed to manage morale, we may lack healthy relationships with employees that remain after downsizing, preventing the rebuilding of a work culture needed to secure the profitability of the organization. By rebuilding the organization, we help the economy by creating jobs, influencing incoming growth, and improving the quality of life of the people in the community. The findings are significant to positive social change because business leaders who manage employee morale after organizational downsizing may maintain the company’s productivity and profitability, thereby increasing employee stability and emotional state (Maccagnan et al., 2018). Emotionally healthy employees can create a better livelihood and enhanced well-being in the community.

Business leaders that represent organizations that exemplify concern and compassion for their employees can improve trust in relationships amongst cohorts leading to high morale, loyalty, pride, and a positive reputation within the community (Vega-Zamora et al., 2019). Employees with high morale generally seek employment longevity, which increases employee retention and organizational success, leading to corporate profitability and potential job creation and economic growth within the local community. This study contributed to the body of knowledge regarding the strategies business leaders use to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing.

Recommendations for Action

Business leaders in organizations that have downsized can utilize these strategies to monitor changes in employee behavior and work ethics to understand the impact on the organization. Alozie (2020) revealed that managing employee morale can improve productivity and profitability. I recommend that employers ensure a healthy emotional state for their employees to minimize the negative impact of downsizing, and ensure an atmosphere of loyalty, trust, and motivation to benefit the employees as well as the organization.

Effective communication, team building and training and support may lead to shared ideas, goals, and resolutions. Managing morale in employees, especially after downsizing, can be beneficial in the rebuilding of the organization and reparation of trust, loyalty, and employee relationships. I recommend that leaders encourage two-way communication and team building amongst the employees to gain a better assessment of their level of happiness, which may increase retention. I recommend that employers implement a method for workers to present their feedback and ideas with some anonymity, if necessary, to ensure honesty. Workers should be able to provide communication without the worry of reprimand. I also recommend training programs and support groups be always available to employees. Support groups may help employees who are left with emotional trauma from the organizational changes. Also called counseling sessions, the groups should be free of charge and available to every employee. Employees may perceive this as compassion and empathy and respond with care and return increased productivity.

This study identified the transformational leadership theory as a method to align the organization with the emotional state and sensitivity levels of the employees. A transformational leader displays a desire to develop an effective team that is knowledgeable, competent, and hard-working (Waglay, 2020). Leaders that engage employees tend to motivate the workers, and build trust and commitment (Islam & Khan, 2020). The findings suggested that leaders could benefit from structuring their organizations to introduce team building and training and support as a normal business function.

The findings in this study are relevant to business leaders in downsized organizations. The focus of this study is to help organizations manage employee morale after downsizing to motivate remaining staff, regain employee trust and loyalty, and improve productivity and profitability. I will submit the findings in this study in part or in whole for publication through the ProQuest/UMI dissertations database for future researchers to consult.

Recommendation for Further Research

This study had limitations that future researchers can address. The sample of this study consisted of three business leaders in central Maryland, who successfully used strategies to manage employee morale in organizations after downsizing. The study was limited to three leaders in one organization, and at one location. I recommend that future researchers expand the study to a larger sample size in multiple organizations, at various locations, which could yield richer data resulting in additional strategies to manage morale. I also recommend that future researchers consider exploring the effectiveness of the strategies found in this study: effective communication, team building, and training and support. My research had limitations on the breadth and depth of the usefulness of these strategies due to limited research at one company and one location.

Reflections

The doctoral program has been one of the most challenging feats I have attempted in my life. I started this program during a time when I had a few other priorities in my life, and I did not see a feasible way to accomplish my goal. After a few pauses, I registered with a new determination to complete this course and not quit. I kept pushing and with the support of my family I am finally able to achieve my personal goal of becoming a doctor. During this journey, I learned so much patience, perseverance, writing, comprehending, and composition. I learned the importance of reading comprehension and critical thinking. I learned to be selective in my studies and to write everything down.

In my research, I interviewed experienced leaders who have successfully managed employee morale after organizational downsizing. I collected an array of important information during the interviews with the participants. At the beginning of my research, I may have had preconceived ideas about the findings, however, I kept an open mind and learned a lot about leadership, morale, and profitability. This allowed me to put aside any of my biased opinions I may have had about downsized organizations, transformational leaders, business leaders, and employee morale. I am grateful to the participants who participated in the interviews despite their busy schedules. The interviews may play a vital role in helping someone during their search for strategies to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing. This process has been long and stressful at times; however, I am so thankful to the professors, librarians, my fellow classmates, and the doctoral program for this remarkable opportunity. I have expanded my knowledge of the importance of strategies to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing.

Conclusion

The lack of strategic planning after organizational downsizing can negatively impact the business process and can lead to lowered morale resulting in decreased motivation, profitability, and productivity. Therefore, business leaders may benefit from developing and implementing successful workplace strategies to manage employee morale after organizational downsizing. Sustaining an atmosphere with high morale is required to create motivated and productive employees in a positive working environment (Muhammed & Soumyaja, 2019). The finding of this research study suggested that business leaders may successfully manage employee morale in downsized organizations by utilizing strategic measures of (a) effective communication, (b) team building, and (c) training and support. Finally, I concluded that organizational success after downsizing relies heavily on business leaders’ ability to plan, develop, and implement strategies to manage employee morale.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Greet the participant(s) and explain the purpose of my study and the interview.
2. Present the consent form, review the contents, and answer any questions or concerns the participant(s) may have.
3. Provide a copy of the consent form to the participant(s).
4. Remind each participant that the interview will be audio-recorded and announce the start of the recording session.
5. Turn on the recording device.
6. Match each participant(s) to the pseudonym code and denote the day, date, and time.
7. Start the interview beginning with question 1 and ending with question 6.
8. Conduct member-checking with the participant(s).
9. Thank the participant(s) for partaking in the study and reiterate my contact information for future questions.
10. End protocol.