SWP 6/98 DOWNSIZING AND SURVIVOR SYNDROME: A STUDY OF HR's PERCEPTION OF SURVIVORS' RESPONSES

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Downsizing and Survivor Syndrome: A Study of HR's Perception of Survivors' Responses

Cranfield School of Management

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Introduction

The last 15-20 years can be described as an era of unprecedented change bringing about a unique form of industrial revolution (Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). Organisations in the Western economies have been facing a significant degree of change due to a multitude of factors such as international de-regularisation, technological advances, competition and a customer driven market. There is constant pressure on organisations to provide high quality goods and services at competitive prices, at the fastest possible speed of manufacturing and delivery. In order to meet this somewhat conflicting range of challenges organisations have had to make radical shifts in how they manage their resources. This has led to a re-evaluation of structures, processes, levels of utilisation, values, practices and resources required to work efficiently and effectively (Rugman & Verbeke, 1991).

The net result of the ever-changing economic scenario is that reduction in size (or downsizing) has become the norm. Prior to this, there was an intrinsic acceptance of the fact that growth is a positive sign indicating stability and good future prospects (Whetten, 1980; Haze & Aiken, 1970). Organisation reduction was not a natural part of organisation theory and research (Wynne, 1983). There were relatively few references to declines, reductions and cutbacks. Therefore, as described by Greenhalgh (1982), "little is known about the dynamics of change in shrinking/declining organisations." However, in the last ten years or so the body of knowledge on organisation reduction has grown and is continually evolving, indicating that it is one form of organisation change. It needs to be addressed as a separate issue taking into account the unique circumstances under which organisations shrink in size.

Downsizing has become a common and established technique to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Adamson & Axsmith, 1983; Kieschel, 1985; Levine, 1984; Lippit & Lippit, 1984). The scale of downsizing in the UK and in the US has been significant; 85% of Fortune 1000 reduced their workforce between 1987-91 affecting more than 5 million jobs. (Cameron, Freeman, Mishra, 1991). For the first time, white collar workers and managerial roles have been affected quite drastically (Hecksher, 1994; O'Neill, 1995). In the UK companies like British Telecommunications (BT), Rolls Royce, and British Petroleum (BP) have gone through dramatic reductions. The statistics indicate that between 1991 and 1995 BT reduced its workforce size by 37.3%, BP by 43.6% and Rolls Royce by 34%. (Kennedy, 1996). There are indications suggesting that downsizing has not ended and that the trend will continue because of mergers, acquisitions and alliances (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1996), and that it is not necessarily related to the recession. (Cascio, 1993).

The Concept of Downsizing

As downsizing is almost a way of life in organisations in the UK and the US, it is critical to arrive at a conceptual clarity of the phenomenon. According to Freeman & Cameron, (1993) downsizing "constitutes a set of activities undertaken on the part of the management of an organisation designed to improve organisation efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. It represents a strategy implemented by managers that affects the size of the firm's workforce and the work processes used." Further, downsizing may be implemented by delayering and cost containment strategies (Cascio, 1993).

Clearly, the key theme that emerges from the above points is that downsizing involves a complete re-appraisal of organisations design, the allocation of roles and responsibilities, and relationships with internal/ external customers. (Cascio, 1993).

It is useful to make a distinction between the concepts of downsizing and decline as there is a tendency to assume that reduction in size is an indication of the non-competitiveness of the organisation (Freeman & Cameron, 1993). An organisation is said to be in decline when it is no longer in a position to respond to the needs of the external markets (Cameron et al 1988). Reasons for decline range from increased competition, reduction in market share (Porter, 1980), stagnation (Whetten, 1980), to an overall fall in performance levels (Hirschman, 1970, Kolarska & Aldrich, 1980). Decline is related to inefficiency as the costs of overheads do not match productivity levels. (Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989).

Downsizing as a technique can be used in companies that are thriving, especially when it is applied as part of a pro-active strategy to improve and enhance corporate effectiveness (Tomasko, 1987; Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989). For example, the five clearing banks in the UK have experienced significant downsizing in some parts and growth in others Downsizing can also be used to revive the decline phenomenon (Levine et al, 1981). Further, Freeman and Cameron (1993) propose that organisation decline can be "measured independently of any managerial action", whereas downsizing cannot be implemented without considering outcomes, aims and "intentionality."

The Rationale for Downsizing

The rationale for using downsizing is to yield economic benefits, as employment costs range from 30% to 80% of the total cost depending upon the industry. Benefits of downsizing encompass an increase in shareholder value, reduction in overhead costs, enhanced communication, greater entrepreneurship and an increase in productivity (Cascio, 1993; Bailey & Sharman 1988; Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1996)

However, literature on downsizing suggests that whilst it is an ideal tool to make companies more competitive and efficient, in reality it is fraught with problems leading to rather negative outcomes. A number of studies conducted to examine the relationship between downsizing and financial improvements clearly send consistent messages, i.e. that the envisaged bottom line improvements do not translate into a reality (Cameron, Freeman, Mishra, 1991; Knox 1992). There is negative correlation between stock price movement and announced layoffs (Warrell, Davidson & Sharman, 1991; Bauhmohl, 1993). Financial measures such as return on assets, return on equity, sales on total assets, ratio of market to

book value equity show that firms that adopted the route of downsizing do not show financial improvements. On the contrary, their performance continues to decline following announcements and at a greater degree than firms which had no layoff announcements. Moreover, the results show that performance was worse two years later. (De Meuse, Vanderheiden, Buzman, 1994).

Downsizing and Survivor Syndrome

There are many explanations as to why downsizing has not been successful. In many instances it seems to be a reactive measure - almost a panic strategy (Cameron, 1994 a & b; Jacobs, 1988) adopted by organisations when it is clear that profits are dwindling and it is clear that no other measure can have an immediate impact on the accounting figures. Organisations tend not to anticipate the negative results that develop subsequently. (Lesley & Light 1992).

As a result of downsizing, employees are asked to take on a range of responsibilities for which they do not have any formal training or practical experience (Hamel & Prahalad 1994). Existing employees in specialist areas are reluctant to train others as their own positions may be under threat. (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994) severely criticise downsizing as it causes "corporate anorexia"- they believe that "downsizing belatedly attempts to correct mistakes of the past; it is not about creating the markets of the future. Downsizing makes the company thinner, it does not necessarily make it healthier". The negative impact of downsizing is overwork and loss of creativity (Kennedy, 1996). In practice it is applied by taking into account head count reductions alone which is both an over-simplified and short-sighted approach. (Kets de Vries, Balazs 1996).

Downsizing generates a "new breed of people", i.e. survivors, who are expected to work in a significantly changed and relatively hostile environment (Noer 1993). It also creates a motivational paradox : organisations downsize in order to work more efficiently and effectively. People are expected to perform a range of new tasks, be more creative, flexible and innovative but at the same time work in an alien organisation with work overload and increased job insecurity (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Keenoy, 1994). Under such circumstances employees are unlikely to sustain high levels of performance and this results in decline in productivity. At the same time, customers are also becoming more demanding about the quality of goods and services. To enhance quality, one basic ingredient is high morale, the very element missing in an organisation that has downsized. (Kettley, 1995).

Noer (1993) has described the survivor syndrome as a "generic term that describes a set of attitudes, feelings and perceptions that occur in employees who remain in organisational systems following involuntary employee reductions. Words commonly used to describe layoff survivor sickness are anger, depression, fear, distrust and hurt."

Downsizing leading to layoffs can have a significant adverse effect on the survivors depending upon how they perceive the layoffs (Brockner, et al 1988). Organisations pay a great deal of attention to the redundant employees (Boroson & Burgess, 1992; Doherty, Bank, Vinnicombe, 1996); survivors on the other hand are the ones who are "lucky to have a job" (Brockner, et al 1992).

Research Approach

Much of the literature on the survivor syndrome is based on studies conducted in the US, and covers survivors' reactions to working in downsized organisations. The employment scenario in the US is much more of a 'hire and fire' one with very little legal protection as compared to the UK. There are relatively few studies addressing the UK situation; previous studies have concentrated on individual survivors' reactions to downsizing in specific sectors e.g. the financial sector (Doherty, Bank & Vinnicombe, 1996). This research study endeavours to examine the impact of downsizing on the survivors in the UK across industry sectors. The paper examines the perception of HR Directors/Managers who are responsible for the implementation of downsizing. Views of HR Managers/Directors will help to develop the existing knowledge and understanding of the issues involved in managing a downsized organisation. Further, as Cameron (1994) has pointed out that HR professionals have very limited information in the form of tools and techniques that would guide them through the process of managing downsizing, this study, it is hoped, will provide a means of increasing the existing knowledge base.

The research was conducted in two stages:

Stage one: informal interviews with 10 HR Managers/Directors of companies that had downsized in the last twelve months.

Stage two: a postal questionnaire to get wider perceptions of HR Directors/Managers across industry sectors.

Interviews with HR Directors/Managers covered a range of companies such as those in Heavy Engineering, Local Government, Utilities, Investment Banks and Building Societies. All companies had gone through a significant wave of downsizing in the last twelve months. The interviews with the HR Directors/Managers covered issues such as organisational performance, reasons for downsizing, their role in downsizing, impact of downsizing on employees, reactions of survivors, attitudes of survivors, support provided to survivors, and their concerns and challenges in the next twelve months. The following points summarise the key issues arising out of the interviews:

- HR Directors/Managers commented that the full 'buy in' from the employees was a challenge; employees felt let down and betrayed by their companies. On the whole, they perceived a 'misalignment' between the organisations' aspirations and those of the individual employee. In some instances, the pace of change was a cause for concern.

- People leaving with significant severance packages left the survivors feeling somewhat cheated of an opportunity to start a new career or pursue other interests.

- Survivors felt that they had lost the old organisation they had joined and hence there was a sense of isolation and low morale; this was accompanied by increase in workload and uncertainty.

- Performance levels of employees in general had gone up soon after downsizing, implying that downsizing could be rated as "not such a bad thing after all".

- Positive and visible leadership in some instances helped employees to manage transitions effectively.

The above points formed the basis of a postal questionnaire to HR Directors/Managers across industry. The questionnaire was designed taking into account the literature on downsizing, the survivor syndrome and the qualitative data from informal interviews conducted with HR Directors/Managers. It incorporated quantitative and qualitative responses. The sample covered approximately 1000 HR Directors/Managers and the database used is the one developed by Cranfield School of Management in marketing its executive development programmes. As such, the sample was generic (i.e., not targeted at downsized organisations) and represents a cross-section of industry in both the public and private sectors. 90 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 9% which is the norm for postal questionnaires. Out of the 90 returned questionnaires, 60 organisations had downsized in the last three years. The sample represents a significant cross-section of the workforce in the UK, taking into account the size of the organisations in terms of number of employees (see table below).

Number of employees	% in the sample
501-1000	8.9%
1001-2500	41.1%
2501-5000	19.6%
5001-10000	7.2%
Over 10000	23.2%

HR Managers/Directors responding to the questionnaire were all from large organisations, i.e. with over 500 employees. The split between private and public sectors was 60.7% and 37.5% respectively. Organisations that responded were spread throughout the UK. However, the majority of the respondents were from the South East (55.4%). Responses received covered a good mix of organisations: 23.2% of the respondents were from the Manufacturing sector, 16.1% from Local Government, 12.5 % Finance and Banking, and 12.5% from the Health Service. Other companies (35.7%) covered a combination of IT, Services, Transportation, Heavy Engineering, Telecommunications and Utilities.

62.7% of the companies reported that downsizing is currently in progress and 23.5% completed it a year ago. 13.8% of the companies had gone through downsizing in the last two years.

Results and Discussion

Background information about downsizing

Reasons for downsizing are summarised in Figure 1

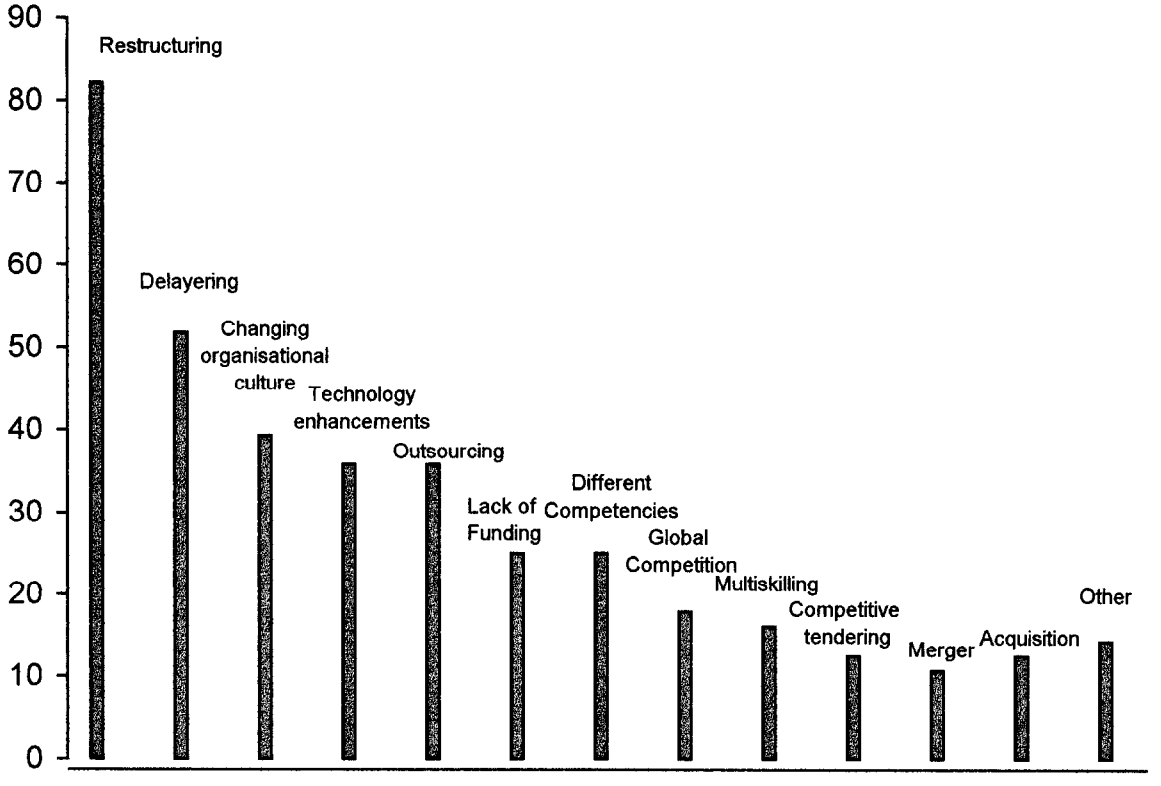


Figure 1.

In many instances, more than one reason was quoted, for example, some companies may have downsized due to restructuring and technological advancement. The data represented in Figure 1 are a total of the relevant responses for each category. However, according to this sample, restructuring, followed by delayering, appears to be the main reasons for downsizing. 'Other' reasons stated were cost control, cost reduction and relocation. An interesting outcome was that 32.5% of the

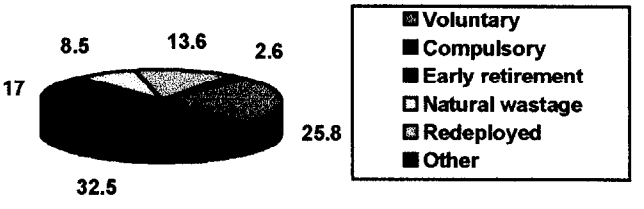
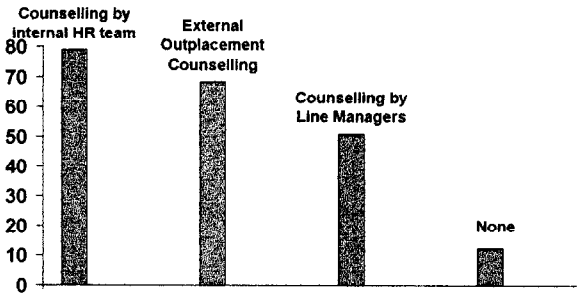


Figure 2 Implementation of Downsizing

companies resorted to compulsory redundancies in implementing downsizing. Other methods used by organisations to achieve reductions in personnel were voluntary redundancies 25.8%, early retirement 17%, redeployment 13.6%, and natural wastage 8.5% (Figure 2).

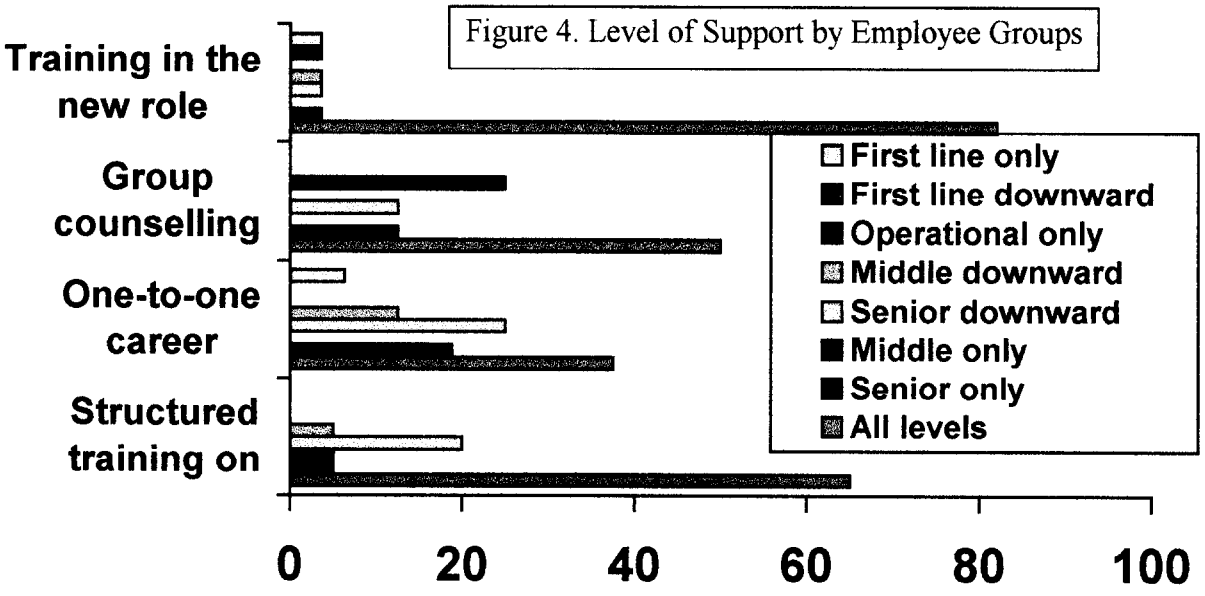
In terms of methods used to avoid downsizing, 48.2% did not use alternatives, and 37.5% used contracting out and redeployments. Part-time and reduced working hours were used by only 16.1% and 10.7% of the organisations respectively. More than one method was used by some companies. Other methods used, as indicated by qualitative data, range from recruitment restrictions, non-renewal of fixed-term contracts, reduction in overtime and termination of temporary contracts. It appears that on the whole, employers made clear-cut reductions in size as opposed to offering interim solutions to protect jobs.

Figure 3 Counselling/Outplacement Scenarios



Organisations provided outplacement and counselling to redundant staff through their HR Managers, Line Managers and external companies (Figure 3). 78.9% of responses indicated that the internal HR team were actively involved in counselling. A significant number also used Line Managers (50.9%) and outplacement companies (68.4%). Some companies clearly used more than one method of provision. In terms of providing support to survivors, 54.4% indicated that help ranged from group counselling to one-to-one support, whereas 46.2% indicated that they did not do anything in this area. Figure 4 summarises the range of support provided to survivors at various levels. Senior and middle managers are provided with least support, yet they are the ones who are responsible for bringing about performance improvements in the workplace.

Figure 4. Level of Support by Employee Groups



Qualitative data indicated that survivors have developed a range of techniques to help them through the transition. Examples include setting up self-help and discussion groups, establishing mentoring associations and developing informal networks both inside and outside the organisations to forge relationships. Other strategies used to cope with the transition related to survivors modifying their behavioural responses. Examples include survivors becoming less open about sharing ideas and initiatives. Comments such as "volunteer for nothing", " go with the flow, but not necessarily with the spirit of change" seem to be other ways of managing transitions. These points could be interpreted as negative outcomes of downsizing, particularly if organisations expect more creativity out of the employees.

Some survivors compensated the loss of career opportunities by focusing more on family/personal interests. Downsizing appeared to have made survivors in some companies realise the importance of maintaining a balance between their personal lives and work. Personal development and training in acquiring new skills were additional techniques used by the survivors to help them become more confident about their new roles and responsibilities.

Reactions of Survivors

This section examined HR Directors'/Managers' perceptions of the survivors' emotional reactions to downsizing. The questionnaire covered a set of emotions such as 'fearful', bitter', 'angry' - emotions that are associated with transitions in the context of downsizing. Respondents could choose from five survivor categories in the range of 'all, most, some, a few and none'.

Figure 5 summarises the mean responses as perceived by HR Directors/Managers. Mean responses ranged from 1.91 to 3.32 ; there were no responses that applied to 'all survivors' or to 'no survivors.'

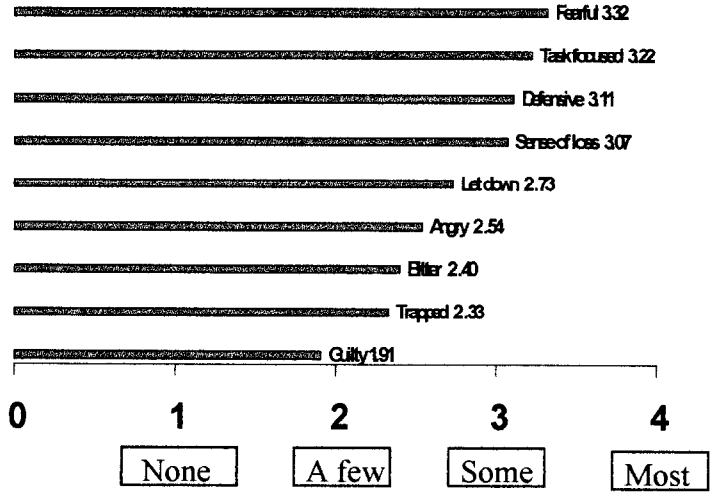


Figure 5. Reactions of Survivors

Reactions such as 'fearful', 'defensive about their roles', 'task-focused' and 'sense of loss of colleagues' were prevalent amongst 'most' or 'some' survivors. The next set of emotions

covering areas such as 'let down by the company', 'angry', 'bitter', 'trapped' was reported by HR Directors/Managers as being applicable to some' or 'few' of the survivors. Interestingly enough, HR Directors/ Managers did not perceive guilt to be a visible emotion as indicated by the mean score of 1.91. Guilt, according to research findings, forms a significant part of the survivors' reactions (Brockner et al 1988, Noer 1993). However, guilt does not always present itself in a straightforward manner, hence the HR professionals may have had difficulty in quantifying this attribute. Many survivors cope with guilt by focusing on the task, and compensating by working much harder than they did in the past. This is confirmed in this sample as the mean response to 'task-focused' is 3.22 and, as demonstrated in the next section on attitudes of survivors, 48 % of HR Directors/Managers perceived that overall performance had actually gone up (Figure 7).

Attitudes of Survivors

This section of the survey focused on issues related to job satisfaction of survivors. Responses received in the various areas are summarised in Figures 6a, b and c.

Figure 6a

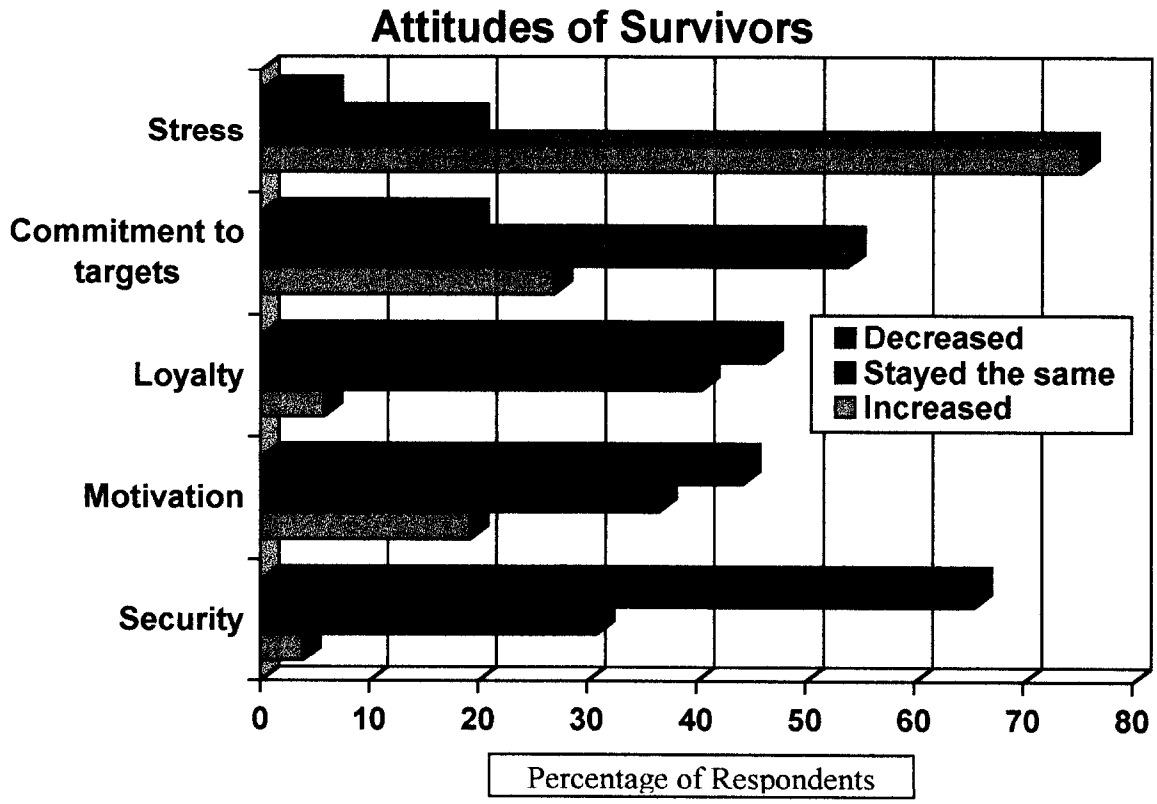


Figure 6b

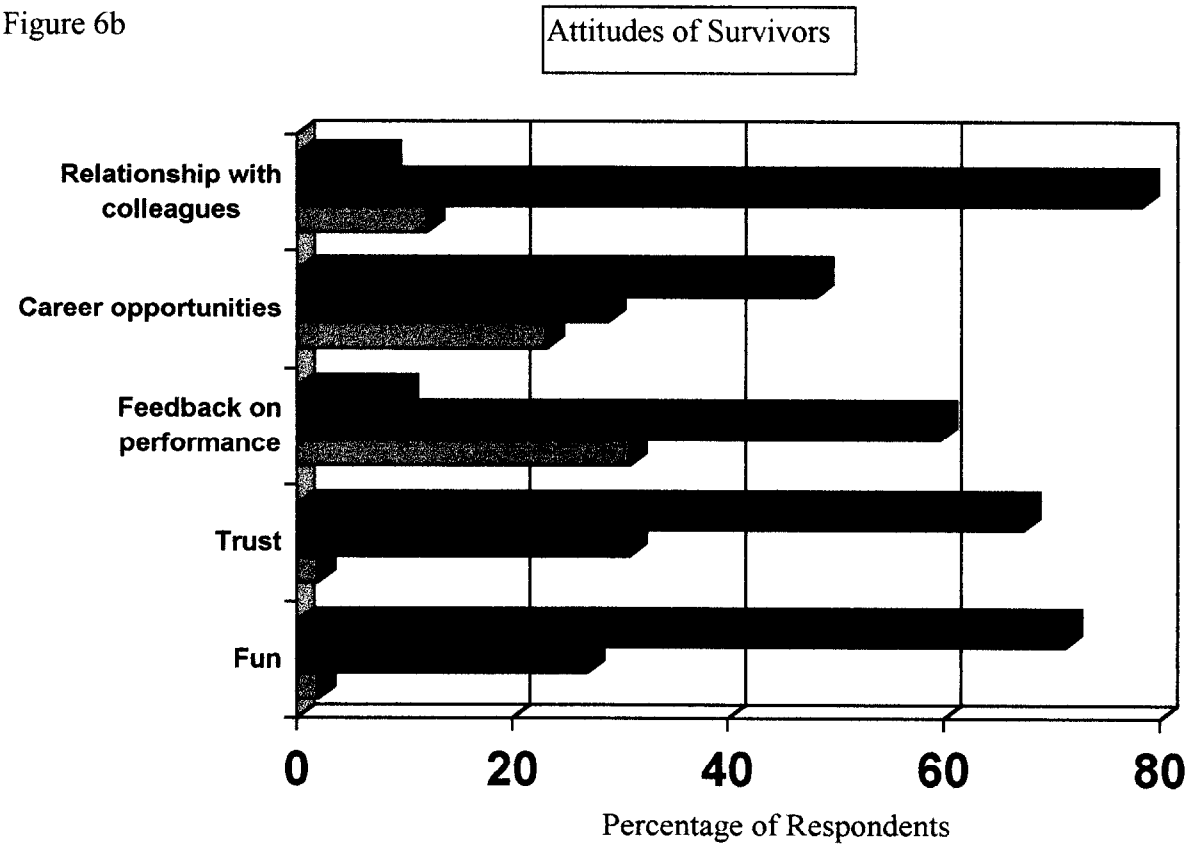
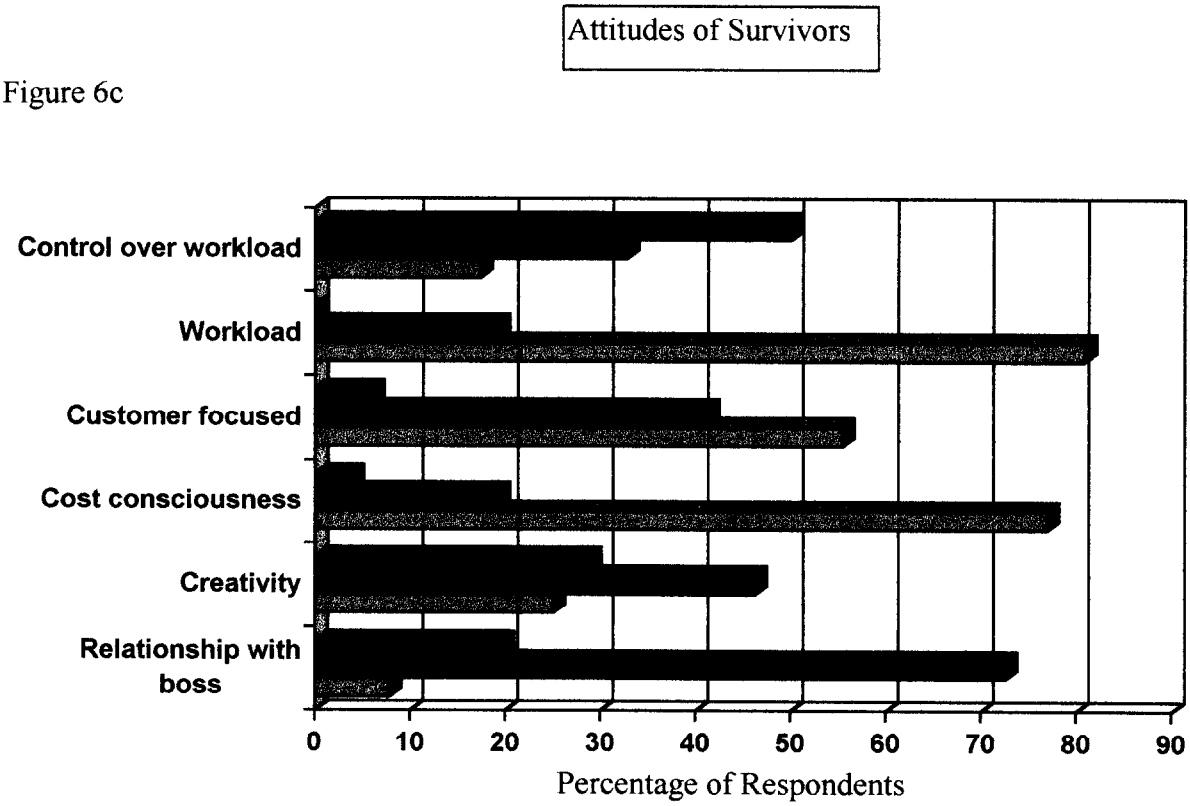


Figure 6c



80.7% of the HR Directors/Managers perceived that survivors felt that the workload had

gone up and at the same time 75.4% felt that stress had increased amongst the survivors. Further, companies reported becoming more cost conscious (77.2%) and customer focused (55.4%). The areas that have been worst affected were security, trust in the company, motivation, loyalty, career opportunities, fun and control over workload.

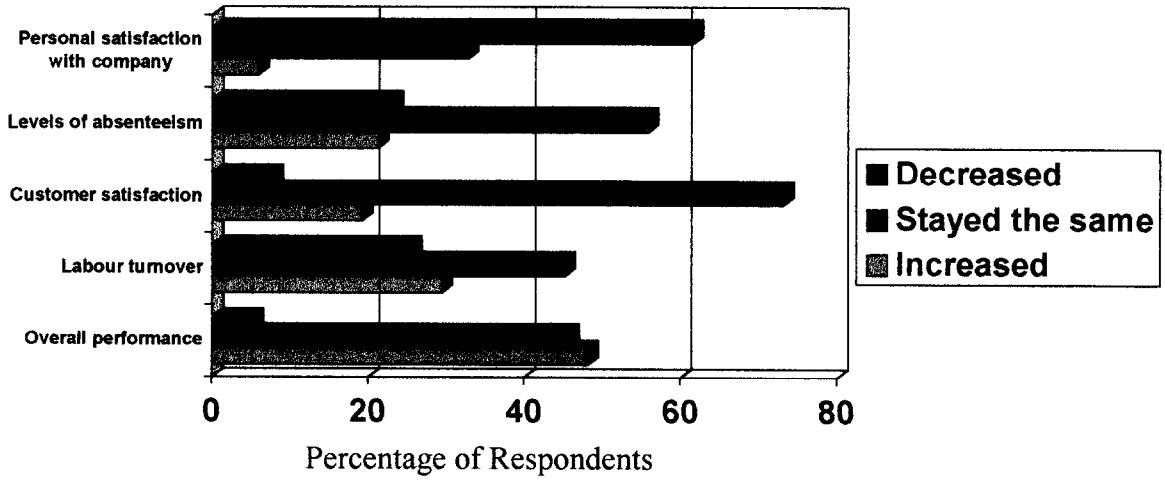
Interestingly enough, 'relationships with colleagues' according to 78.2% and 'relationships with boss' according to 71.4% of the HR Directors/ Managers stayed the same. The results suggest that these factors may compensate for the decrease in other areas such as security, fun and trust, and that loyalty has shifted from the organisation to the local work groups.

An overall picture that emerges from these responses suggests that survivors are having to cope with conflicting demands and expectations from employers operating in customer-driven and competitive environments. The net result is that survivors have had to take on increasing workloads leading to an increase in stress levels. The 'motivational paradox' would seem to be confirmed, in that whilst the external pressures are mounting, survivors' attitudes, according to HR Directors/Managers, show a decrease in security, motivational levels, career opportunities, fun and trust in the company. The level of creativity stayed the same in 45.6%, decreased in 26.3% and increased in 28.1% of the companies. In view of the scale of change, requiring high degrees of innovation and creativity, and as the rationale behind downsizing is to enhance corporate effectiveness and efficiency, these results are not encouraging. One would expect the majority of responses to show an increase in creativity amongst employees. Unless organisations manage the 'motivational paradox' in a structured way, long-term benefits of downsizing are unlikely to emerge.

Performance of Survivors

Five aspects of performance were taken into account as shown in Figure 7 .

Figure 7. Performance of Survivors



Overall performance revealed interesting outcomes as 49.1% of HR Directors/Managers felt that performance had actually gone up, 45.6% felt that downsizing did not make any difference to performance levels and 5.3% felt that it had gone down. This suggests that downsizing in this sample did not have a detrimental impact on the survivors' outputs. Similar outcomes are quoted in other studies (e.g. Brockner, et al 1988) where survivors put in more work and became more 'task focused' to compensate for feelings of loss of colleagues and the accompanying feelings of guilt. This is confirmed in this sample where 77.7% of the HR Managers reported an increase in 'task-focused' approach in 'most' to 'some' survivors.

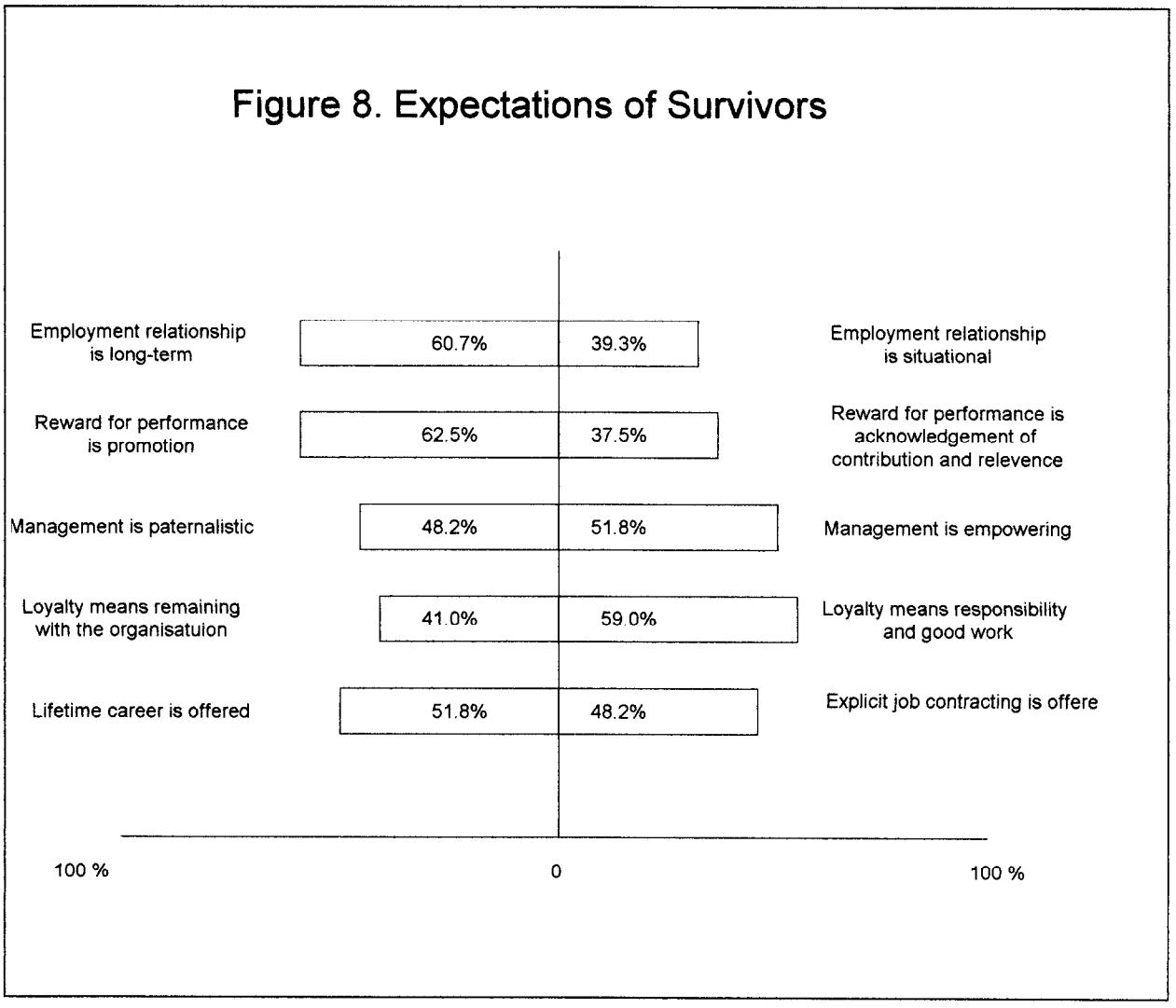
It could be interpreted that in order to become relatively more secure, survivors were putting in more work but that it may not be sustainable in the long run as the stress levels had gone up as reported by 75.4% of HR Directors/Managers. 63.2% of the HR Directors/ Managers reported a decrease in security, and 42.1% said that motivational levels had gone down. Taking the conflicting information together, it appears that whilst performance levels of survivors had gone up, so had the job insecurity and stress; motivational levels, loyalty and fun out of doing the work had gone down in the majority of cases. These results indicate that the performance gains may be short-lived. The challenge for both HR professionals and drivers of downsizing is to win people's commitments in an uncertain working environment.

Personal satisfaction with company: the majority of responses suggest that personal satisfaction with the company had gone down (59.6%), 31.6% indicated that it stayed the same and 8.8% perceived that it had gone up. The interesting outcome in terms of overall performance is that, on the one hand, HR Directors/Managers perceive an increase in the overall performance of the survivors, while on the other hand, the personal satisfaction with the company in the majority of cases has decreased. This could be interpreted as a conflicting message which organisations will need to address in order to maximise the benefits of downsizing.

Other aspects of performance such as turnover, customer complaints and absenteeism were not affected by downsizing. A possible reason for this could be that as downsizing was currently in progress in 62.7% of the companies, the pattern had not emerged yet.

Expectations of Survivors

This section of the survey covered the employer/employee relationship. Literature on the changing employer/employee relationship suggests that one of the reasons for survivor syndrome is the that the psychological contract between the employer and the employee has undergone a significant change (Noer, 1993, Herriot & Pemberton, 1995). Employers, due to external pressures, have had to make radical shifts in structures, processes and working practices. This has had an adverse impact on job security, motivational levels, career opportunities, trust and fun, as highlighted in the previous section.



The survey used five key attributes of the psychological contract to assess HR Directors'/Managers' views of the survivors. The attributes covered the 'old' and 'new' deal as highlighted by Noer, 1993, Herriot & Pemberton 1995). Figure 8, summarises the findings. Key outcomes relating to the 'new' and old 'contract' suggest that the majority of HR Directors/Managers believe that employees have expectations of long-term employment relationship (60.7%), that reward for performance should be promotion (62.5%) and that a life-time career should be an important constituent part of the employment contract (51.8%).

However, in terms of the 'new contract', the majority of HR Directors/Managers (59.0%) already feel that employee loyalty is interpreted as 'responsibility and good work' as opposed to 'remaining' with the organisations (41%). Further, 51.8% of the responses suggested that employees expect their managers to be empowering as opposed to 48.2% who felt that there was a preference to have a paternalistic management style. On the whole, expectations of employees can best be described as 'mixed'. There is a shift in the psychological contract along the dimensions of loyalty and management styles; the other three areas indicate that more work needs to be accomplished if the new deal is to be fully accepted. As there are no previous data on these issues, it is difficult to make comparisons with the state of affairs that existed in the past; the results provide an overview of the present situation.

Role of HR

This section sought to examine more specifically the perceptions of HR Directors/Managers about the HR function itself 'before', 'during' and 'after' downsizing. Recent studies/trends have shown that companies have radically transformed their HR functions. The transformation has taken place in different forms in terms of positioning of HR. In some organisations HR has taken an internal consultancy role, with HR professionals working on a range of organisation development projects. The day-to-day administration is either devolved to line management or a separate team of administrators used to provide such support. The size of many HR departments has shrunk in parallel with downsizing, but the degree of influence has increased.

The results are summarised in the Figures 9a and 9b (Appendix 9).

Figure 9a. Role of HR

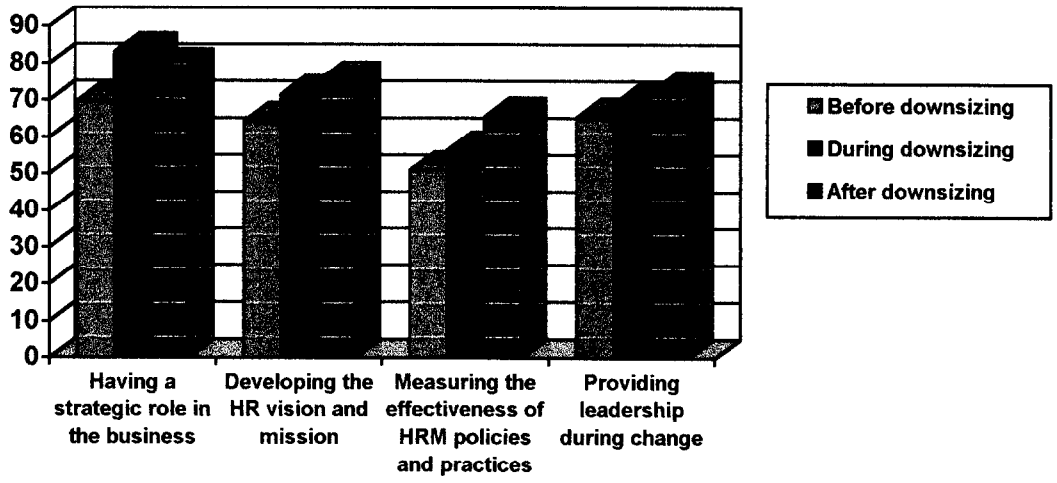
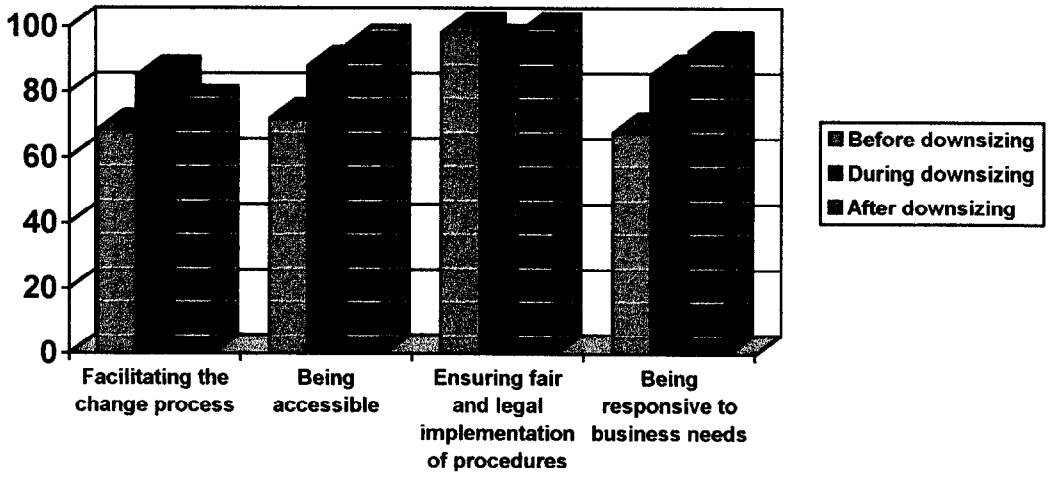


Figure 9b. Role of HR



The most dramatic increase in terms of effectiveness was in the dimension of "being accessible". 72% of the HR Directors/Managers reported that the function was regarded as

accessible before downsizing, during downsizing there was a marked increase with 88.1% of the respondents feeling that accessibility had gone up, and after downsizing the figure went up to 94.5%. These results suggest that almost all respondents felt that downsizing had a positive impact on this dimension. Further, overall responses indicated an increase in HR "being responsive to the business needs" during and after the downsizing process. 67.8% of HR Directors/Managers felt that they were effective before downsizing, during downsizing the figure went up to 85.5% and after downsizing 92.7% felt that they had become more effective in addressing the needs of the business. The HR function has been severely criticised in the past for applying policies and procedures in a mechanistic manner. With diminishing career paths, lack of security and increased levels of stress, innovative HR solutions have become critical to the business. This seems to be reflected in this sample, but the details of the changes and how HR is managing these changes would need to be explored further.

HR's role in facilitating the change process was perceived to be more effective during downsizing. It is interesting to note that even after downsizing HR Directors/ Managers see themselves as having an increasing input in this area. This finding may be somewhat blurred by the fact 62.7% of the companies reported that downsizing was still in progress. The position of HR as providing leadership also increased during and marginally after downsizing as reflected in the responses , i.e. 65.4% said that HR was effective in providing leadership before downsizing had taken place, during downsizing 69% felt that they were effective and after downsizing this increased marginally to 72.2%.

It would appear that after downsizing organisations are seeking to develop a clear picture of how to manage their people more effectively. Before downsizing 64.2% responded that they were effective in articulating the HR vision and mission, whereas, after downsizing 75% felt that this was the case. Measuring HR's effectiveness also seems to be gaining a higher priority in organisations. Before downsizing 51% of the HR managers reported positively as compared to 65.5% after the downsizing. As the role of HR is changing from being solely a provider of services alone to being a close business partner, effectiveness of delivery of service becomes critical.

Fair and legal implementation of procedures is an area that seems to be quite stable in terms of effectiveness. This suggests that HR Directors/Managers perceive themselves as experts in this area as well as recognise the importance of maintaining effectiveness. With decreasing influence of Trade Unions over the last decade in the UK, and an emphasis on the concept of HRM, it is reassuring to note that this aspect is still perceived to be an area of effectiveness.

In addition to the points above the results indicated that HR professionals (78.9%) are having to take a central position in providing counselling to redundant employees. This perhaps has an influence on issues such as accessibility and facilitating the change process; it also indicates that HR professionals are having to adopt conflicting roles such as ensuring fair and legal implementation of procedures, being responsive to the business needs, facilitating the change process as well as counselling the redundant employees. The responses provide indications that the role is undergoing significant changes. It is difficult to gain a full picture from a survey questionnaire. Further studies comparing how organisations are managing the function during and after downsizing would help provide further clarifications.

Taking into account the qualitative data, some HR Managers felt that as a result of downsizing the function had become more overt and "less of a puller of strings behind the scenes". Downsizing had helped to raise the profile of HR; in many instances HR has become more aligned to the business activities incorporating concepts such as benchmarking and "value added". As a result of downsizing, managers have begun to appreciate the value of addressing the "softer" issues and have tended to rely on HR for providing the necessary support.

On a somewhat negative note, some HR Directors/Managers reported that the function has become more "volatile", resulting in high turnover. Some HR Directors/Managers reported that as a result of downsizing survivors are less trusting of HR and perceive them to be the "executioners" consequently damaging their role as counsellors/advisors. In some instances they are seen as "angels of death". Further, in some companies, HR has reverted to the welfare role in the "guise of career development" and lost its representation on the Board.

Conclusion

HR Directors/Managers felt that there was a range of positive outcomes of downsizing. It helped organisations to become more competitive by cost reductions, hence delivering "value for money" services to the customers. In some instances downsizing was the only route to sustain viability. Downsizing helped to create a delayered structure with clearer lines of "accountability" resulting in managers taking personal ownership of results. Further, it helped to break departmental barriers and enhanced cross-functional team-working, providing a sharper focus on "corporate values/mission" and a better understanding of the organisational objectives. Downsizing also enabled greater day-to-day communications within the organisations and had a positive impact on clarifying roles and responsibilities. In some situations, survivors ended up with broader roles with more accountability thus enhancing their future prospects. It also helped clear the "dead wood" and skills that were no longer required by the organisation. The future security of the company improved as a result of downsizing which according to some respondents had a positive impact on the survivors' future security.

HR Directors/Managers expressed a range of perceived failures of the downsizing exercise. In some instances redundancy selection methods resulted in the departure of effective and experienced people and retention of poor performers. Against this backdrop, organisations also had a group of people who wished they could be "released" but were not allowed to go. There is no doubt that survivors have been facing an increase in workload without the necessary resources or commensurate rewards; one HR Manager described it as "more work for higher risk." Downsizing was carried out as a reactive measure with insufficient clarity of strategy and benefits to the organisations. After downsizing, survivors were expected to learn new skills in a relatively short space of time but people with years of experience were no longer there to coach them.

Some HR Directors/Mangers reported that survivors do not see an end to the process, leading to demotivation, low morale, uncertainty and lack of trust in the organisation. Loss of career opportunities appears to be another recurring theme in many companies. Survivors

have been suffering from 'change fatigue' and 'initiative overload' without any tangible results as in many instances the envisaged improvements in business performance did not occur. The expectations of initiators of change were over-optimistic and in some instances over-simplistic; they grossly under-estimated the "post-restructure workloads". The process ended up as one HR Manager commented, as "long and muddled" which was unsettling for all employees. Communication in terms of the reason for downsizing was not clear in many instances

In terms of what could have been done differently, HR Directors/ Managers felt that the downsizing strategy could have been thought through more proactively; there was too much emphasis on "action" without the required degree of "reflection". The "scope" of the exercise could have been finalised before the initiation of the exercise. The objectives of downsizing could have been articulated in a clearer manner. In some cases, HR Directors/Managers felt that the downsizing programme could have been handled with a tighter time-frame, targeting the affected areas, which would have reduced the level of "disquiet" in the workplace. Some HR Directors/Managers also felt that prior to downsizing, a rigorous analysis of a number of factors could have been done leading to better decisions about the outcomes of downsizing. Some HR managers felt that a "more explicit strategy" for managing the transition would have been valuable.

On the whole, HR Directors/Managers felt that the survivors' needs were not met adequately and that there was scope to do much more "immediately, pre- and post-" downsizing to enable them to reposition themselves in their new roles. The support, as identified by some HR Directors/Managers, could have been more tailored to address the individual needs. Further, in some instances the "change agent" could have been more "enlightened" to handle and foresee the needs of survivors. Lack of middle manager involvement was also seen retrospectively as reducing the effectiveness of the outcomes.

Communications could have been quicker and more effective with emphasis on openness about the "real issues". In some instances HR Directors/Managers felt that a formal effort to say "thank you" both to the survivors and leavers would have had positive outcomes. According to one HR Manager, the " commitment given to the quality of communication" was questionable. Other comments included the need for developing improved career management strategies for the survivors, better severance packages for the redundant employees and efforts to build workforce pride, all of which could have been dealt with more effectively and consciously.

This survey is an overview of HR's perceptions of survivors' reactions to downsizing and forms the first part of a more detailed study. The sample covered a range of organisations that have been or are currently going through downsizing, thus providing a snapshot of the scenario in the UK albeit, limited due to the sample size. The results suggest that although survivors' performance levels increased as a consequence of downsizing, it is debatable that this will be sustainable in the long run. Downsizing has resulted in increasing levels of stress, insecurity, lack of trust and decreasing motivation, fun and career opportunities. Behavioural responses suggest that survivors are less prepared to initiate new ideas and participate whole-heartedly for the good of the company as their own futures are uncertain. This suggests a conflicting scenario from the perspective of generating creativity and innovation in the workplace, thus confirming the 'motivational paradox'. In terms of the psychological contract, expectations of survivors in this sample suggested that empowerment and the

interpretation of loyalty are more in line with the 'new deal', i.e. survivors expect more empowerment and taking responsibility for work as opposed to having a paternalistic management style with emphasis on length of service with the company.

The role of HR has undoubtedly changed in almost all organisations that participated in this survey. In some instances, downsizing had a positive impact in terms of raising the profile of the function. A deeper analysis of the changing role of HR in the context of downsizing would help develop a clearer picture; the present study provides indications of the direction of the changes. The study incorporated the views of HR Directors/Managers of their own function; there is no comparison with what the rest of the organisation perceives, i.e., the perceptions of employees, line managers and senior managers. Further studies comparing the scale of differences and similarity of the responses would give a more accurate picture of the role and position of HR before, during and after downsizing. It is clear that the role of HR has changed in many organisations; some have experienced a higher profile whilst others seemed to have slipped more in the background.

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