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Talent Retention in Organizations Facing Staff Reductions via Layoffs

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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2015

Abstract

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by

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MS, Western Governors University, 2009

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

High voluntary attrition threatens the future of downsizing organizations. The purpose of

this phenomenological study was to explore how employee layoff announcements

reduces the perception of organizational commitment to experienced, skilled workers in

central Wisconsin. The conceptual framework integrated stress response theories

including Cannon's cognitive activation theory of stress. Face-to-face interviews were

conducted with 20 journeyman level artisans who had witnessed the layoff process within

50 miles of Wausau Wisconsin. These interviews were analyzed via the modified van

Kaam method to code, cluster, and group the findings into significant themes. Nine

themes emerged from the analyses suggesting layoff implementation strategies might

reduce voluntary employee attrition. Among these 9 themes, job insecurity and mental

and emotional stressors were the most prominent. A third theme, employee entitativity,

defined as when members of a group share similar attributes and seen more readily as a

distinct entity than as individuals, also emerged. These themes may be associated with

employee voluntary attrition. Improving employee understanding of the layoff process

might increase employee trust in leadership decisions, reduce voluntary attrition, increase

knowledge retention, and improve organizational economic success. Employees who are

equipped to endure the layoff process may suffer less stress, conceivably reducing the

likelihood of drug, alcohol, and family abuse and their related social stressors.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to my mother, Lillie Lightfoot. Thanks for instilling in me the

belief that nothing good comes easy and that there is no shame in hard work. I thank my

family, who refuse to take any excuse for me not meeting a deadline, no matter how

many hours I worked. You all have always been my greatest motivation to do the best I

can. To my long time shift partner, Dimitri Grammatikopoulos, thanks for helping me

stay focused. Finally yet importantly, I thank all those, who supported and challenged

me to be more than okay.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The intent of organizations' leaders downsizing through layoffs is to enhance their strategic positions by reducing the cost of doing business while retaining core competencies and desired skill sets of the surviving members of the downsized workgroups (Arce & Li, 2011). In this study, I explored layoff procedures through the lens of employees who were not subject to layoff. The findings may aid in reducing skilled employees' voluntary attrition from downsizing organizations by clarifying how layoff procedures affect employee organizational commitment and identify possible countermeasures.

The global economy demands greater efficiencies in competitive markets than in oligopolistic markets. Subsequently, organizations from all employment sectors may undergo some form of downsizing through layoffs in an attempt to remain viable in competitive markets (Kawai, 2011). Layoffs can reduce the cost of doing business but may yield less than desired results if not properly executed.

Surviving employees are integral to organizational success. If leaders of downsizing organizations are to achieve desired results of layoffs, surviving employees' organizational commitment must remain intact (Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge, & Campion, 2010; Malik & Ahmad, 2011); otherwise, employees whom leaders rely on to drive revitalization may leave, partly because layoffs can negatively affect workers' organizational commitment. Any loss of talent may minimize the expected benefits of layoffs. The intent in this study was to explore stressors that could lower employee

organizational commitment and identify processes that might reduce employee voluntary attrition following layoff procedures.

Background of the Problem

When faced with challenging economic conditions, organizations' leaders may alter operations to remain competitive. Globally, leaders of organizations in almost every industry use downsizing to maximize efficiencies, reduce operating costs and increase profits as part of strategic planning (Arce & Li, 2011; Day, Armenakis, Feild, & Norris, 2012; Mäkelä & Näsi, 2010). This practice of workforce reductions results in the layoff of millions of Americans annually (Hall, 2012), partly because organizational leaders can easily quantify labor costs, which transfer in a predictable and manageable manner to cost savings (Goldstein, 2012). However, the outcomes of implementing layoffs are inconsistent at best (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). Leaders of organizations who rely on layoffs as part of a strategic direction may experience more damaging than beneficial results.

Downsizing efforts may jeopardize relationships between organizations' leaders and employees. Past researchers demonstrated that some organizations' leaders fail to achieve increased efficiencies, production, and profits often associated with downsizing (Mitchell, Schaap, & Groves, 2010; Muñoz-Bullón & Sánchez-Bueno, 2011; Norman, Butler, & Ranft, 2012). The failure to meet organizational expectations after layoffs may stem from a loss of tacit knowledge, including process specifics, compliance requirements, and system efficiencies.

Numerous researchers have dedicated studies to layoff victims and retained survivors (Baruch & Hind, 1999; Reinardy, 2011; van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Using the findings from these studies, business leaders could develop strategies that mitigate the adverse effects of survivor syndrome and maintain organizational commitment (Baruch & Hind, 1999; Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010; van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Some researchers have demonstrated that several companies' earnings and employee productivity declined following layoffs (Iskander & Lowe, 2010; Iverson & Zatzick, 2011; Kong, Chadee, & Raman, 2013). Few researchers focused on layoff survivors who resign voluntarily.

Organizational human resources (HR) professionals can influence employees' reaction to change. Specifically, some HR practices may reduce voluntary resignation rates following organizational change (Batt & Colvin, 2011). Trevor and Nyberg (2008) investigated potential causal relationships among layoffs, voluntary turnover, and the need for appropriate HR practices to mitigate associated adverse behavior of layoff survivors. Leaders of organizations who offer opportunities for career development may suffer fewer voluntary turnovers of employees than organizations' leaders who offer few opportunities for career planning (Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2011). Trevor and Nyberg examined how HR practices influence employees' perceptions of job embeddedness and procedural justice. In their findings, Trevor and Nyberg showed there might be voluntary attrition from organizations following downsizing as survivors analyze the benefits of remaining with their current employer relative to the expected benefits of alternate employment. Trevor and Nyberg also posited that leaders of

organizations should consider how understaffing, inefficiencies, and replacement costs might lead to the failure of downsizing strategies. In their study, Klehe, Zikic, Van Vianen, and De Pater (2011) demonstrated organizations tend to underperform following incidents of voluntary attrition. If HR professionals instituted practices that encouraged employee training, career planning, and advancement opportunities for employees after downsizing, voluntary attrition might decline in frequency (Klehe et al., 2011; Kwon, Chung, Roh, Chadwick, & Lawler, 2012). Findings from the studies of Klehe et al. and Kwon, Chung, Roh, Chadwick, and Lawler (2012) provided insight into the costs to leaders of organizations following voluntary attrition, but did not address in depth the motivating factors for employee voluntary turnover. Trevor and Nyberg provided some assistance in determining if survivors might leave downsizing organizations, but did not address what stressors contributed to survivor voluntary attrition. Researchers must address this gap in current knowledge so organizations' leaders can avoid losing valued employees and knowledge by increasing organizational understanding of the effects of the layoff phenomenon.

The findings of this study might contribute to positive social change and could aid scholars, managers, and HR professionals to better understand and minimize the negative effects layoffs have on survivors. Business leaders might create an environment that reduces employee attrition from downsizing organizations with the use of this new awareness. The focus of this research study was to identify stressors leading to employee voluntary attrition following announcements of layoff initiatives. Understanding the causes of voluntary attrition of employees subsequent to layoff procedures may lead to

changes in the layoff process by business leaders and HR professionals that reduce the likelihood of employees leaving after such announcements.

Global economies, technological advances, and tighter profit margins continue to force leaders and employees of companies to do more with less, making this topic of post layoff worker attrition worthy of research. Layoffs as a business strategy will remain a viable option for businesses but not without some potential ill effects (Datta et al., 2010). Layoffs may increase employees' stress levels, heighten their leave intentions, and subsequently may lead to voluntary attrition (Malik, Ahmad, Saif, & Safwan, 2010). Employees who leave voluntarily after layoff procedures may critically affect future organizational success. Specifically, developing layoff initiatives that do not adversely affect members' organizational commitment may bolster the competitive position of downsizing organizations.

The inability of organizations' leaders to retain employees following layoffs may lead to negative effects, such as increased costs. These costs may consist of attracting and training replacement workers and reduced efficiencies (Sitlington & Marshall, 2011). In this study, I focused on the problem of talent retention after layoff procedures because there is little research available about the causes of survivors' voluntary attrition post layoff initiatives. Through this research, I may contribute to a better understanding by managers, human relations experts, and business school professors of how layoffs affect employee retention; expressly, this study's findings may provide justification to implement layoffs in a manner considerate of layoff survivors. Organizational leaders who successfully reduce the negative effects and stress of layoff initiatives may inspire

employees to remain with the downsizing organization, thus reducing voluntary attrition and minimizing the loss of the associated tacit knowledge of layoff survivors.

Problem Statement

Post layoff organizational success depends on surviving employees (Anis, Ijaz-Ur-Rehman, & Safwan, 2011; Cheese, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2013), the total number of initial layoff claims during the months between June 2009 and May 2013 was more than 7.1 million. The general business problem is that organizational leaders may fail to improve organizational production and profits after downsizing (Norman, Butler, & Ranft, 2012). Retaining some of the more experienced employees and their knowledge about processes may have proven beneficial to the downsizing organizations' bottom-line. Retaining employee commitment subsequent to layoff procedures may prove vital if downsizing organizations are to prosper. The specific business problem is that organizational leaders often have little information about reducing employee voluntary attrition after layoff procedures, but prior to the final reduction in staff.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how organizational leaders may reduce employee voluntary attrition after layoff procedures, but prior to the final reduction in staff. The data for this study consists of participant interviews. Potential benefits of this study may include an evaluation of relationships between management and subordinates, a deeper understanding of which human relations policies mediate survivors' intent to leave, and clarity about factors that negatively affect

organizational commitment. The objective in the current study was to explore the psychological and emotional drivers that might lead to employee attrition.

I obtained information from 20 experienced employees of downsizing unionized industrial organizations within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin. In the current study, a purposeful sampling of former employees explained the issues contributing to their decision to voluntarily sever employment. All severances occurred after layoff procedures commenced, but prior to the attainment of final staff reduction goals. Data collection consisted of digital recordings of all face-to-face interviews and research notes.

Nature of the Study

As part of this study, I employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Investigators use the phenomenological design to capture the essence of human experience regarding a phenomenon from the perspective of participants (Tracy, 2010). Phenomenologists focus on people who share similar experiences or operate in similar environments and attempt to discover commonalities and shared meanings (Simon, 2006). The intent of this study was to extract meaning from the shared lived experiences of participants who voluntarily changed employers after layoff procedures; therefore, a phenomenological design was appropriate for this study.

Researchers often link quantitative studies to logical positivism (Portney & Watkins, 2009); because one cannot numerically measure the lived experience of others and verify its meaning, this approach was not the ideal design to address the research problem. Quantitative scholars strive to be objective and seek to reduce human actions to variables represented by numeric values in an attempt to gain generalizable data (Simon,

2006). The goal of identifying measures that organizational leaders could undertake to reduce voluntary employee attrition following layoff initiatives and prior to the final reduction in staff guided my selection of research method. In an effort to accomplish this goal, I explored the subjective realities of layoff survivors from the employees' perspectives, which are neither quantifiable nor generalizable.

Mixed methods designs are appropriate to collect, analyze, and interpret data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon using both qualitative and quantitative tools (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). In the current study, I explored what stressors contribute to employee attrition following layoff procedures. The desired information did not require any quantitative research to achieve and thus a mixed methods design was not appropriate for this study. A qualitative method was appropriate for this study to determine the optimal approach for understanding the phenomenon from the lived experiences of the participants (Simon, 2006).

In this research study, I identified common characteristics and attributes of employees who lived through layoff procedures and voluntarily sought employment outside the downsizing organizations subsequent to the start of layoff procedures from their perspective of the layoff phenomenon. Qualitative research requires explorers to study a phenomenon in its natural environment gathering facts through extensive time in the field. The phenomenological design selected provided the most appropriate means to gather the desired information. Researchers can produce substantive qualitative studies

by using rigor with thick description, rich detail and establishing credibility through listening rather than telling (Tracy, 2010).

Ethnography, case study, narrative, or grounded theory designs, consisting of data collection on site or requiring long periods reviewing the actions of layoff survivors (Portney & Watkins, 2009), was not appropriate for this study because of limited time and resources available. My goal to explore common threads and trends of the lived experiences directly from the viewpoints of study participants required a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Simon, 2006); thus, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was the ideal means to summarize these perspectives. I used face-to-face interviews and captured the answers via electronic voice recording to depict the lived experiences of employees who have witnessed layoff procedures affecting other employees.

Research Question

The overarching research question that guided the study was: What information do organizational leaders need to reduce employee voluntary attrition after initiating layoff procedures but prior to the final reduction in staff?

Interview Questions

To gain a richer contextual understanding of the lived experience of the survivors, I asked participants to recount their experiences during the period before the announcement of layoffs and after the announcement of layoffs.

1. In as much detail as possible, please recall a typical day at work prior to announcements of a possibility of layoffs.

2. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day of layoff announcements.

3. What thoughts crossed your mind about the organization as management made the announcements, and you realized who would be released?

4. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day at work, after the announcements of layoff, in which you decided to leave.

5. What factors led to your decision to leave?

6. What was the tipping point at which you decided to leave?

7. Based upon your experiences, what, if anything, could management have done to change your decision to resign voluntarily?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is the basis for any qualitative research study. I used seven basic concepts for the structure of this study. The seven concepts are cognitive activation of stress (CATS), expectancy theory, reasoned action theory (RA), psychological contract, organizational culture, entitativity, and survivor syndrome. The framework for this study comprises these seven concepts.

Cognitive Activation Theory of Stress (CATS)

This study included employing CATS as a basis for partial understanding of employee voluntary attrition following the announcement of layoff intentions. As presented by past scholars in the field (Cannon, 1932; Lazarus, 1966; Ursin & Eriksen, 2010), there are numerous theories regarding how humans respond to stress. Humans either may view stress as motivation for increased performance or decreased performance

(Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011). The manner in which people respond to stress may depend on their perception the stressor.

How employees respond to the stress of layoff procedures, may contribute significantly to their organizational performance post layoffs. Based on the transactional model of stress, people categorize stressors as either a threat to their well-being, benign or a challenge (Lazarus, 1991). Humans can withstand stress in small doses, but over prolonged periods of exposure, or in large amounts, there will be a fracture in the psychological makeup (Cannon, 1932; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). This fracture could lead to avoidance of the stressor by those affected (Ursin & Eriksen, 2010). Ursin and Eriksen (2004) found that people receive a threat alarm when something is missing in their perception of the expected reality, and this discrepancy elicits the triggering of some form of coping mechanism. A person could choose to cope by avoiding the negative effects of the stressor. The nature of avoidance employed can come in a myriad of forms, possibly ranging from reduced performance to voluntary attrition depending on the degree of stress realized.

The effect of stress may depend largely on how a person reacts to a particular stressor. People may view stress as a negative response to a bad situation, but this view may not always hold true. Building on previous scholars' work on CATS, Ursin and Eriksen (2004) showed that stress is a necessary part of human development. The stress response is an unspecific alarm that occurs when events are inconsistent with expected events (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). This alarm, which represents discomfort with expectancy discrepancies, drives a person to seek a solution for the expectancy imbalance

with reality (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). In the case of layoffs, the response to expectancy imbalance may contribute to an employee's avoidance of the stressor through either emotional or physical withdrawal from the organization. When an employee elects to withdraw physically from an established employer, it might indicate the person believes there to be no better option available.

During layoffs, employees may believe there is little they can do to secure their continued employment. How people handle stress is dependent on the belief that they can influence the outcome of a stressful situation (Ursin & Eriksen, 2010). According to CATS, if people believe a positive outcome is possible they will cope with the stressor by performing their job in a manner to avoid an unfavorable outcome (Ursin & Eriksen, 2010). This job performance could include assuming additional duties, working longer hours, or forgoing vacations to meet deadlines. A person's perception of control over the situation may influence the amount of effort exerted to change the outcome (Heneman & Schwab, 1972).

As a key element of the conceptual framework for this research study, the expectation was CATS would contribute to an improved understanding about employees' decisions to remain with a downsizing organization subsequent to layoff procedures. Ursin and Eriksen (2010) posited that when people believe there is no chance of influencing the outcome of a stressful event, they will concede to the stressor and wait for the event to take its natural progression without taking action. This act of concession may signal the end of any previously held beliefs and expectations about the organization.

Expectancy Theory

The amount of effort put forth by people may depend on the expectant reward of the effort (Hayibor, 2012; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & De Witte, 2010). When leaders of organizations announce layoff intentions, employees may feel helpless to affect their future with the organization positively, and employees may alter the amount of effort exerted for the employer. This reduction in effort may lead to lower performance by the employee. Expectancy of outcome may provide a basis to predict a person's motivation to perform in a certain manner to a given set of circumstances (Liao, Liu, & Pi, 2011; Ning & Jing, 2012). Understanding the expectations of members of a workgroup may prove beneficial to leaders of a downsizing organization by affording leaders the opportunity to address any perceived discrepancies in expectations prior to issues arising. During times of organizational change, employees may reduce their effort to contribute positively to the organization. Leaders may reduce the likelihood of employees underperforming by offering them hope for the future with the organization.

The expectancy theory provided a fundamental part of the conceptual framework for the study. According to the expectancy theory, a person's motivation to perform a job well might depend on the perceived value of the expected reward (Vroom, 1964). How successfully an organization's employees perform might depend on the proficient execution of job tasks after the announcement of layoffs. The amount of effort people exert towards completing a task may depend on their perception of their role in the process, ability, and motivation to accomplish the task (Hayibor, 2012; Heneman & Schwab, 1972; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & De Witte, 2010). These

elements of action and expected outcome are central to the expectancy theory, which may be a reliable predictor of job performance based on the belief that the person's actions will lead to desired outcomes (Hayibor, 2012; Heneman & Schwab, 1972; Renko, Kroeck, & Bullough, 2012)

The amount of stress experienced during times of downsizing may alter employees' expectations about advancement opportunities and long-term employment. This change in expectations may lead to a reduction in workers' performance. In the case of layoffs, employees who believe their employment to be less than permanent may feel less obligated to perform as compared to committed long-term employees (Silla, Gracia, Mañas, & Peiró, 2010). Expectancy of outcome may provide a basis to predict a person's motivation to perform in a certain manner to a given set of circumstances (Liao et al., 2011). Employees who are unsure of their future with the organization may experience more stress than victims of layoffs. Using CATS as a framework for exploration of employees' behavior, and the expectancy theory as a localized predictor of behavior, might provide insights about a person's motivation for leaving an organization after layoff procedures commence.

Reasoned Action Theory (RA) and Psychological Contracts

In this study, I explored the logic of exiting employees' decisions to leave a downsizing organization. The reasoned action (RA) theory of stress along with psychological contracts provided part of the conceptual framework. The theory of RA as presented by Ajzen and Fishbein (1977) demonstrated behavior predictability.

Understanding basic social behavior is crucial to gaining any useful insight about how these two theories relate to layoffs.

The announcement of major change initiatives can lead to the departure of workers who organizational leaders believed to be career employees. All social behavior is contingent on the actors' intentions and is predictable as long as the intent remains constant (Yousafzai, Foxall, & Pallister, 2010). Employees frequently believe there is an implied psychological contract between employer and employee and layoffs may represent a breach in this contract (Chaudhry, Coyle-Shapiro, & Wayne, 2011). Employees of downsizing organizations, whose intentions are to remain with the organization prior to the announcements of layoffs, may have a change in attitude following layoff procedures. This change in commitment may originate from the belief by employees that announcing layoff intentions is a violation to the implied psychological contract.

Exploring what stressors may cause employees' intentions to shift from staying with a downsizing organization to leaving the organization may provide insight for improving the effectiveness of downsizing policies. According to the RA theory the behavior of a person depends on two factors: attitude toward behavior, which is an internal or personal factor, and a person's perception of social pressures, termed subjective norm (Yousafzai et al., 2010). If the social pressures of a group are severe enough, the group may override the ability of a member to make a decision based on personal desires (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Organizations with strong cultures that

provide employees with a sense of belonging may be less apt to lose members following layoff procedures.

Group Cohesion

The strength of the group may be more dependent on how closely the members relate to each other than how they perform as isolated entities. When other people recognize members of the group, more readily, as part of a group than as individuals, the group has achieved entitativity (Campbell, 1958). Campbell (1958) coined the term entitativity to explain why some groups develop into a tangible group as opposed to an aggregate of beings. This concept of entitativity provided another component for the conceptual framework of the research study.

Entitativity. In this research, study participants were electricians, millwrights, pipefitters, welders, and instrumentation technicians. All of these groups have specialized skills craft designation. There are three factors that determine entitativity and include proximity, similarity, and common fate (Campbell, 1958). Exploring a group of employees who share the same educational background, live in the same geographical location, and work for organizations undergoing layoffs satisfy all of these factors. When groups achieve entitativity, stimuli that affect, any member of the group will have an effect on the behavior of the remaining members. If layoffs affect any member of the group, entitativity may contribute to remaining employees' deciding to leave downsizing organizations.

Determining what level of importance the employee places on either staying or leaving the organization, and then comparing that to social pressure exerted by the group

was essential to understanding the level of group cohesiveness and entitativity. The

amount of group influence may depend on the organizational culture, and the level of

entitativity of the group (Rooney et al., 2010; Yousafzai et al., 2010). Employees may

demonstrate more commitment to an organization with a culture based on trust and

mutual respect than they would demonstrate to an organization whose leaders are less

relationship oriented (Joo, 2012). People who are respectful of each other may exercise a

level of honesty between each other and develop a sense of trust (Colquitt et al., 2013).

The same concept of respect, trust, and honesty might apply between employer and

employees.

Organizational Culture

Organizational success may depend on the level of trust employees have in the

quality of decisions made by management, especially during times of change. The

success of any organization that relies on human capital is dependent on the level of

organizational trust and commitment of its employees (Spangenburg, 2012). Layoffs

erode the trust between employees and employers, but the workgroup functioning as a

cohesive, entitative group might mitigate some of the effects of layoffs (Vakola, 2013).

Organizational leaders who invest in creating and nourishing a culture of trust and respect

may benefit by employees demonstrating strong organizational commitment during times

of change.

The implied contract between employer and employee can act as a major factor in

employee loyalty and organizational commitment. This contract may have a profound

effect on the amount of support and acceptance the group provides for change initiatives

(Chaudhry et al., 2011). During times of economic difficulty, retaining talent can prove challenging if employees believe the implied psychological contract is no longer valid (Olckers & du Plessis, 2012). In an established culture of trust and respect, employees may remain committed to the organization because of their belief that the sacrifices made by them, for the sake of the organization, will earn recompense sometime in the future (Farndale, Van Ruiten, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2011).

Survivor Syndrome

People, who feel guilty because they survived a traumatic experience while others did not, may suffer from *survivor syndrome* (Reinardy, 2011). I used the idea of survivor syndrome as part of the conceptual framework for this study. When employees experience layoffs and fear the possibility of additional layoffs, or feel guilty for surviving layoffs, they are subject to suffering from survivor syndrome (Appelbaum, Delage, Labib, & Gault, 1997). Survivor syndrome may contribute to reduced quality and output from layoff survivors (Smith, 2010; Ye, Cardon, & Rivera, 2012). In this study, my role included focusing on the experience of employees who voluntarily sought different employment after witnessing layoff procedures to understand what thoughts contributed to their decisions to change employers.

<div align="center">**Definition of Terms**</div>

The following terms may enable knowledge transfer and establish uniform understanding of terms within this study.

Entitativity. Entitativity is the degree of having the nature of an entity, of having real existence (Campbell, 1958). The formation of a group whose members are more identified and recognized as a part of the group (entity) than as individuals.

General adaptation syndrome. General adaptation syndrome is a syndrome produced by diverse nocuous agents (Selye, 1936).

Job insecurity. Job insecurity refers to the belief of an unstable future for one's desired employment and the affected employees are powerless to resist the anticipated threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010).

Layoffs. Layoffs are involuntary termination in which the sole reason for the employee's separation is the firm's motivation for a permanent reduction in the size of the workforce (Mitchell et al., 2010).

Organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is the effort, and energy employees expend in benefit to the organization (Spector, 2010).

Organizational (corporate) culture. Organizational culture is the beliefs, expectations, and values learned and shared by organizations' members (Spector, 2010).

Psychological contract. Psychological contract is the perceived reciprocal obligations that characterize a relationship between an employee and organizational entity (Eckerd, Hill, Boyer, Donohue, & Ward, 2013).

Stress response. Stress response is a general alarm triggered by a stressor in a homeostatic system, producing general and unspecific mental and physical reactions from one level of stimulation to a higher level of stimulation (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004).

Survivors. Survivors are the people who remain working at organizations that have recently had layoffs (Cotter & Fouad, 2012). In this study used interchangeably with those employees who possess ample seniority to remain with downsizing organizations, but elect to leave.

Tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the knowledge in a person's head: their experience (Ipe, 2003).

<div align="center">**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**</div>

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that all participants of would answer the interview questions truthfully. A second assumption of this study was that purposeful sampling was an accepted and effective method of selecting interview candidates.

Limitations

Certain research limitations bind the results of the research exploration. The findings of this study covered a limited sector of the workforce consisting of experienced labor participants from downsizing organizations in the industrial sector located within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin. The findings of qualitative studies are not generalizable (Simon, 2006), so the results of this study may not apply to organizations that are outside the industrial sector of the economy or involve a less skilled workforce.

Although the intent in this study was to capture the lived experiences of employees who voluntarily left an employer following announcements of layoff procedures, participants could provide biased responses to research questions in recalling their experiences thus limiting this research study. To validate qualitative studies,

researchers must gather rich detail from the participants of the study (Tracy, 2010).

Participants unable to provide detailed information about the lived experiences because

they cannot adequately remember the event may also limit this study.

In addition, researcher bias could act as a limitation of this study because

experiences can distort the presentation of questions to participants (Chenail, 2011). The

effects of researcher bias may contribute to participants' information distortion. In this

study, the participant interview process prevented the issue of information distortion by

asking questions based on personal experiences, without requesting opinions or leading

the responses of participants in any way.

Delimitations

In this phenomenological study, I conducted interviews of 20 artisans from

unionized industrial facilities located within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin.

Employees who chose to seek employment elsewhere after witnessing implementation of

layoff procedures was a delimiting factor of this study. Only people over the age of 18

and who are not from any protected class or group participated in this study. I excluded

employees not working in the industrial sector and not possessing marketable skills held

by only a small fraction of the overall working population. The participants were

journeyman level electricians, millwrights, pipefitters, welders, and instrumentation

technicians. Criteria for participation included employees who completed a state

indentured apprenticeship, were members of trade unions at the time of the lived

experience, and elected voluntarily to change employers subsequent to the announcement

of layoff procedures. My role included exploring how a skilled workforce responds to

layoff procedures. The focus of this study was to understand why employees voluntarily leave their employers subsequent to the implementation of layoff procedures.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Understanding how layoff procedures affect employees of downsizing organizations may provide some benefit to all business sectors. The findings of this study may lead human resources managers, business executives, and midlevel managers to reevaluate the nature and effects of their organizational downsizing strategies and processes. Findings and recommendations from this research may inspire business leaders to develop and use alternate methods of downsizing during difficult business cycles that may reduce employees' voluntary attrition.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study may provide insight into employees' perspectives following implementation of layoff procedures. Such insight may allow managers, HR professionals, and business executives to view the organizational workforce reduction process from an unbiased and analytical perspective. Obtaining such information about employees' response to layoff procedures may allow organizational leaders and HR professionals to equip their workforce with the requisite skills and knowledge to withstand the effects of layoffs, thus increasing employee retention and performance. Employees equipped to endure the layoff process might suffer less stress, thus reducing the likelihood of drug, alcohol, and family abuse (Keyes, Hatzenbuehler, & Hasin, 2011; Sinha, Shaham, & Heilig, 2011). Reducing various forms of abuse might lessen the

social demands associated with treating behavior stemming from the stress that can accompany the layoff process.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand how voluntarily separated employees perceived the layoff process and how those perceptions might affect employee organizational commitment. The information in this literature review clarifies issues affecting layoff strategies. These issues often negatively affect the layoff process by eroding the relationship between employees, instigating reduced organizational commitment, and damaging the perceived integrity of leaders' behaviors. Reviewing the literature improved understanding of how people respond to change in the workplace and how other scholars and practitioners have regarded organizational layoff and change initiatives. The literature review includes research on layoffs and organizational change in numerous global organizations, significant research regarding organizational commitment, and several studies on employee reaction to change.

The identified possible contributing factors to reduced organizational commitment following the lived experience, based upon the literature review, include (a) communication, (b) trust, (c) survivor's sickness, (d) organizational culture, (d) leadership relationships, and (e) management style. Leaders of organizations who rely heavily on human capital may realize the effects of layoffs including reduced performance, efficiency, and organizational commitment, more readily than leaders of organizations less reliant on human capital. The review indicates that employees'

perceptions and actions could affect the success of layoff initiatives and the future performance of the organization.

Prior to the popular press, business scholars, and HR professionals using the term *layoffs* to describe job loss, Gandolfi (2005), perhaps the most influential scholar in the field of downsizing and layoffs, was developing theories about the cause and effects of this layoff phenomenon. This study builds on the concepts advanced by Gandolfi, specifically in the areas concerning possible causes for layoffs and alternate measures to avoid them. Gandolfi and Oster (2010) demonstrated that management uses layoffs to realize immediate reductions in costs and to increase efficiency, profits, competitiveness, and productivity for more than three decades. Gandolfi examined layoffs from the perspective of victims, survivors, and executors, but not from the perspective of employees who voluntarily severed employment with downsizing organizations.

In this study, I explored the layoff phenomenon from the perspective of those who were capable of surviving layoffs but chose to leave their employer subsequent to the lived experience. My role was to study the concepts of (a) organizational change and stress, (b) layoff causes and avoidance, (c) knowledge retention, (d) leadership roles and relationships with an emphasis on trust and communication between leaders and subordinates, (e) survivor syndrome, (f) organizational commitment and job insecurity, (g) organizational trust and perceived fairness, and (h) knowledge retention and post layoff performance as a basis for this study. Layoffs frequently affect organizational commitment in downsizing businesses and may influence employees' leave intentions (Bayardo, Reche, & Cabada, 2013; Malik, Ahmad, & Hussain, 2010; Parzefall &

Kuppelwieser, 2012). Reviewing the literature provided insight about how researchers, scholars, and human resource practitioners view layoffs and the associated processes.

The keywords for collecting facts for this research study, when combined with the term *layoff*, were (a) *survivor syndrome,* (b) *organizational commitment,* (c) *trust,* (d) *knowledge retention,* (e) *causes,* (f) *leadership,* (g) *change,* and (h) *alternatives*. I used a variety of search engines and databases to retrieve sources for this study. The primary databanks included (a) Academic Search Premier, (b) Business Search Premier, (c) Business Source Complete, (d) ProQuest Central, (e) SAGE Premier, (f) Science Direct, (g) EBSCO host, and (h) ABI/INFORM Complete. All articles included are from peer-reviewed journals, and the remaining literature was from scholarly and professional books; of these sources, a minimum of 85% have publication dates that comply with the 3-5 year requirement for study inclusion. This literature review includes 169 sources, of which 153 are peer-reviewed journal articles (90.5%), and 157 are from 2010 or later (92.89%).

Organizational Change and Stress

One significant theme across literature was how people respond to change. Any change in a person's daily routine may introduce some level of stress into their life. Change in a person's employment situation can cause stress, which may be difficult to overcome (Reisel, Probst, Chia, Maloles, & König, 2010). According to Selye's (1955) general adaptation syndrome, stress evolves from an alarm reaction to the stress situation, to resistance to the stressor, and eventually to exhaustion. Once exhausted, people may choose to cope with the stress, concede to defeat, or remove themselves from the stressor.

How people perceive stress may contribute to the handling of the stressful

situation. Humans frequently equate stress with the inability to meet the demands of a

situation given the available resources (Lazarus, 1966). This inability to resolve a

perceived threat might leave people believing they are vulnerable and endangered

(Lazarus, 1966, 1999). Lazarus's (1991) transactional model of stress, based on the

primacy of cognition, offers two options: coping or cognitive appraisal as means to

arbitrate the response of individuals to environmental stressors. The writings of Lazarus

(1966), specifically the transactional model of stress, continue to influence stress studies

and their scholars (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Nuttman-Shwartz & Gadot, 2012; Ursin

& Eriksen, 2010). Under the transactional model of stress, people categorize stressors as

threating, benign, or challenging to their well-being (Parker, Martin, Colmar, & Liem,

2012). Stress develops as part of a process resulting from some stimuli in the work

environment (Lazarus, 1966). This stimulus triggers the cognitive appraisal process,

which leads to an assessment of the severity of the threat of the stimuli to a person's well-

being (Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). Depending on the outcome of their cognitive appraisal,

humans will determine what options are available to address the presented stressor

(Parker et al., 2012). If a person deems a threat as too formidable to ignore, the

individual will employ a secondary appraisal process to determine what, if anything can

remove or minimize the effects of the threat (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Meurs &

Perrewé, 2011). Past researchers showed that if the situation requires more resources

than the person possesses, this imbalance will cause a strain (Lazarus, 1999; Meurs &

Perrewé, 2011). This transactional model of stress may prove fundamental to

understanding employees who choose to leave organizations after the lived experience. Each person may respond to stress differently depending on variables including confidence, support, and environmental issues.

The adaptive nature of stress is central to understanding why the reaction to a given stressor is unpredictable. The cognitive activation theory of stress (CATS) can help explain how employees may adapt and respond to workplace stressors (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). The concept of CATS provides a reliable means to predict people response to a stressor (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). Some researchers have suggested that, in small doses, humans can withstand stress but over prolonged periods of exposure or in large amounts, there will be a fracture in psychological makeup (Cannon, 1932; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). Understanding why employees perceive the layoff stressor differently over time may provide insight about reducing the negative emotions associated with layoffs.

Based on the 1932 work by Campbell, CATS provides a means for researchers to evaluate a given situation and predict a person's response to stress. This predictability is possible because researchers showed the stress response to be a normal, healthy, and necessary alarm response present in all species around the world (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). Individuals must respond to the stress presented to them (Meurs & Perrewé, 2011; Ursin & Eriksen, 2004). There are three ways to categorize how people respond to stress: positively, negatively, or with uncertainty (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004, 2010). Individuals who respond to stress positively will do whatever it takes to cope with the issues and expect the situation to end in a positive outcome. If people believe the outcome of the

situation is uncertain, regardless of the action taken, they are helpless. However, according to Ursin and Eriksen (2010), the worst situation for individuals is the sense of hopelessness whereby any response to the stressor would result in a negative outcome. This theory of expectations and stress may aid in understanding the effects of downsizing initiatives on surviving workforces.

Layoff Causes and Avoidance

Understanding why organizations' leaders initiate layoffs may aid in exploring the effect such initiatives have on employees. The topic of organizational downsizing, through the process of layoffs, began to gain attention in the 1980s and has continued to build momentum (Datta et al., 2010; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2010; Mellahi & Wilkinson, 2010). Once perceived as an act of desperation by organizational leaders facing economic challenges, layoffs have gained prominence as a legitimate business strategy since the mid-1980s (Gandolfi, 2013; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2010). Increased rates of unemployment inflows may be a distinct feature of severe recessions (Elsby, Hobijn, & Sahin, 2010). The recession of 2008 may have been a contributing factor of the 2009 unemployment inflows, whereby more than 4 million Americans lost their jobs via layoffs (Cascio, 2010), and the trend of layoffs continues as more organizations' leaders seek to remain competitive (Datta et al., 2010). Researchers conducting studies concerning recent downsizing focused on various sectors of the economy including banking, real estate, insurance, and manufacturing (Datta et al., 2010; Iqbal & Shetty, 2011). Leaders of organizations from around the globe may need to develop strategies to cope with a challenging economy.

When business executives consider the potential benefits of implementing layoffs, the promise of reduced costs, higher efficiencies, and greater profits may prove too tempting to ignore. However, researchers demonstrated that downsizing activities may result in damaging consequences such as no financial gains, poor market reaction to layoffs, stock price decline, and loss of stable workforce (Chaudhry et al., 2011; Gandolfi & Littler, 2012; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010). In short, using downsizing as a strategy may prove damaging to organizations' economic performance (Muñoz-Bullón & Sánchez-Bueno, 2011; Parzefall, 2012). The downside of downsizing can outweigh the benefits, yet the practice continues.

Among the views held by researchers, there is no definitive cause for downsizing. Some researchers contended that failures such as incapability to manage, inability to adapt to technology, new equipment and processes provoke layoffs (Kawai, 2011; Megilo & Risberg, 2010; Mellahi & Wilkinson, 2010). Each of these failures contributes to poor organizational performance and consequently layoffs. Others posited that downsizing is largely a product of organizations' leaders attempting to bolster organizational-level financial outcomes (Datta et al., 2010). This outcome occurs either by attempting to improve stock prices or by increasing corporations' earnings per share of stock (Arce & Li, 2011; Day et al., 2012; Iqbal & Shetty, 2011). Regardless of the reasons presented by leadership, there may be little probability that leaders of organizations will eliminate layoffs as a strategic tool.

Layoffs can lead to results that counter their intended outcomes. Perhaps the most frequently used argument for implementing layoffs is lowering the cost of doing business

(Maertz et al., 2010; Mäkelä & Näsi, 2010). However, because of additional costs associated with severances, retraining, and recruiting layoffs may increase the cost of doing business (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012; Makawatsakul & Kleiner, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2010). Ironically, using layoffs may result in consequences that are counter to the argument for implementing them.

Downsizing is one of the most far-reaching and significant management issues of this era (Datta et al., 2010; Gandolfi & Hansson, 2011). Other researchers view layoff as a desperate attempt by management to mask poor strategic leadership and poor management (Kawai, 2011; Vicente-Lorente & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2012; Wolff, 2012). Organizational leaders' motivation can substantially influence layoff initiatives as a management tool and can significantly alter the competitive landscape of an organization. If properly executed, layoffs can reduce operating costs, increase profits, and improve efficiencies of the organization (Iqbal & Shetty, 2011). Proper communication and fair administration of layoff initiatives, along with adequate valuation of employees' tacit knowledge may moderate the loss of organizational performance and competitive advantage following layoff announcements (Flint, Maher, & Wielemaker, 2012).

Leaders of organizations may face technological advances from competitors that are difficult to meet under their existing structure. In these situations, layoffs may represent their only possibility to remain competitive in the short term. The decision to resort to layoffs may lessen the effect of competitors' new technology, but eventually the situation will require a more permanent solution. Failing to respond to technological innovations may force organizational leadership to utilize a fundamental technology that

may be obsolete, provide less output potential, or reduce the options available for future customers (Schmitt, Borzillo, & Probst, 2012). These options may appear unattractive to members of leadership because failing to adapt to the changing competitive landscape may mean failing to survive (Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, & Irmer, 2011; Pfeffer, 2010). Organizations' leaders should view human capital as a vital part of their strategic planning, and should provide training to keep current on technological advances as compared to viewing employees as added weight to discard when market conditions worsen.

Perhaps Gandolfi and Hansson (2011) offered the best explanation for the layoff phenomenon when they stated that downsizing is the manifestation of organizations' leaders attempting to gain instant increases in the areas of profits, efficiencies, competitiveness, and productivity while simultaneously reducing costs. Most managers and scholars may agree with this statement concerning the rationale of organizations' leaders to pursue layoffs, but the results of downsizing are inconsistent at best. The benefits of initiating layoffs may be impossible to achieve under existing HR practices, for example. Some organizations' leadership employs a last in first out method of layoffs, whereby the most senior employees realize a buffering effect from downsizing initiatives (Chen, Kacperczyk, & Ortiz-Molina, 2011). Organizations with unionized workforces that use seniority as the basis for layoffs must release all employees with less seniority prior to eliminating the jobs of employees whom they deem underperformers who have more seniority (Chen et al., 2011). Organizations' leaders who operate under such restrictions enjoy less flexibility in managing the daily operations of their business

(Chen et al., 2011). These inconsistencies may stem from ambiguous means of measuring outcomes of knowledge loss.

The inability of organizations' leaders to measure the value of employees may contribute to the dilemma of inconsistent benefits from downsizing initiatives. The intellectual capital of an organization resides in its employees in the form of tacit knowledge (Flint et al., 2012; Guthrie, Ricceri, & Dumay, 2012). These types of intangible assets are more difficult to represent in the balance sheets than land, cash, and buildings (Flint et al., 2012; Guthrie et al., 2012; Tsai & Yen, 2013). Organizations' leaders may be willing to part with employees more readily than parting with hard assets, but when an organization's workgroup loses employees, the workgroup will also experience a decrease in tacit knowledge. The subsequent depletion of intellectual capital represents a reduction in an organization's competitive position (Day et al., 2012; Dumay & Cuganesan, 2011; Flint et al., 2012; Iskander & Lowe, 2010; Kong et al., 2013). This reduction in a competitive position may be especially true for more knowledge dependent industries than non-knowledge and learning dependent industries (Schmitt et al., 2012). The result of losing years of tacit knowledge might cost more than what organizations could gain by reducing labor costs.

Knowledge Retention

The inability of organizations' leaders to retain employees beyond their post layoff initiatives may contribute to the inability to remain competitive following layoffs, and thereby to the influx of new competitors into the business sector (Pfeffer, 2010). During downsizing, organizations' workgroups lose some competitive advantage when

employees leave with their tacit knowledge (Pfeffer, 2010; Schmitt et al., 2012).

Industries with low barriers to entry may be susceptible to new competitors vying for

market share, especially during economic times that lead to layoffs (Pfeffer, 2010;

Margalit, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2012). This easy access into the market may help explain,

why during the decade between 1997 and 2007, the industrial sector lost about 20% of its

workforce while imports of manufactured goods more than doubled over this same period

(Houseman, Kurz, Lengermann, & Mandel, 2011). Leaders of organizations that undergo

layoffs to remain competitive may weaken their strategic position by allowing new

competitors to gain a foothold in their industry.

The negative effects of losing talent caused by layoffs have inspired

recommendations from past researchers to modify layoff practices (Bacon, Blyton, &

Dastmalchian, 2010; Hallock, Strain, & Webber, 2011). Some researchers demonstrated

that organizations' HR procedures might cause survivors to seek other opportunities

during layoffs (Datta et al., 2010; Hausknecht & Trevor, 2011; Iverson & Zatzick, 2011;

Parzefall, 2012). This loss of commitment by employees might decrease the cumulative

organizational competitiveness. How HR professionals execute a downsizing initiative is

a significant factor in altering employees' organizational commitment, and changing

layoff procedures might reduce employee attrition (Schmitt et al., 2012). If leaders of an

organization must undertake layoffs, doing so in a manner that reduces the negative

effects on employees might improve the organization's long-term performance. Altering

HR practices to mediate the negative effects of layoffs might prove beneficial to retaining

employees subsequent to announcing layoffs.

Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2011) demonstrated that leaders of organizations should commit more time and resources to the study of employee motivation and job satisfaction. HR professionals who increase their understanding about positive psychology influence on employees might develop downsizing methods that mitigate the negative effects of layoffs (Adalsteinsson & Haraldsdottir, 2013; Froman, 2010). Employees might prove less likely to leave an employer if they believe the organization's leaders acted in the best interest of the employees during times of change as compared to organizational leaders who disregard the effect of change on employees.

Layoffs may not be the only option for leaders of organizations experiencing trying market conditions. Organizational leaders can utilize labor initiatives such as wage reductions, job sharing, short-term compensation, shortened work weeks, early retirements, furloughs, and voluntary time off to avoid layoffs (Bacon et al., 2010; Hallock et al., 2011; Kahn, 2012; Kimball, 2012). Reducing wages, furloughs, and shortening the workweek might allow organizations' leaders to show lower operating costs without reducing workforce (Bacon et al., 2010; Hallock et al., 2011). Utilizing these initiatives may lead to increased motivation by the workforce to avoid layoffs, reduced feelings of betrayal by the workforce, and retention of an intact workforce when business conditions improve.

Job sharing and short-term compensation can act as buffers between a lull in labor demand and changes in the industry that might require additional labor (Bacon et al., 2010; Kimball, 2012). These options offer organizations' leaders the opportunity of reducing labor costs without the costs associated with hiring and training additional staff

as conditions improve (Bacon et al., 2010; Kimball, 2012). If employees feel

underutilized or overburdened, job sharing initiatives may lead to poor organizational

performance (Bacon et al., 2010). In such cases, leaders may require strategies such as

early retirement.

Early retirements might be an alternative to layoffs for some organizations

(Hallock et al., 2011; Makawatsakul & Kleiner, 2003). In accordance with HR

restrictions regarding layoffs, leaders may keep the most senior and thereby the oldest

employees during layoff implementations (Chen et al., 2011). If leaders of an

organization can entice more senior employees to leave voluntarily, then younger

employees might remain with the organization. Early retirement frequently removes the

penalties associated with leaving the organization prior to meeting a given set of

predetermined conditions and might prove a viable enticement for older employees who

may not otherwise be able to retire comfortably (Chen et al., 2011). If an employee

retires under agreeable terms with the organization, it may be reasonable to believe the

employee would return to the organization on a temporary basis if conditions warranted

such a decision.

Creative thinking by leaders might provide viable solutions to address a downturn

in the organization's business cycle. Organizational leaders might avoid layoffs by using

creative staffing options such as depleting vacation or reducing wages as opposed to early

retirement (Hallock et al., 2011). Many employees might not be ready to leave the

workforce entirely, but might welcome a chance to take additional vacation at a reduced

wage and return to work as conditions improve (Hallock et al., 2011). Others might work

additional hours at regular pay and take time off when demand is lower; thereby allowing

the organizational leadership to save paying overtime wages (Hallock et al., 2011).

Organizational leaders who find creative means to adjust labor supply to market demands

may be less susceptible to economic downturns than are leaders of organizations that rely

on layoffs to adjust labor costs (Parzefall, 2012). Consequently, there might be better

options than layoffs available to organizations facing difficult economic times.

Utilizing these possible alternatives to layoff initiatives might moderate the

emotional and psychological triggers typically associated with forced workforce

reductions. Managers must consider the skill level of their employees to avoid

overburdening or underutilizing their abilities (Bacon et al., 2010). The success of any

proposal might depend on how leaders implement and communicate new initiatives

(Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Properly managing the organization's human

resources might be the basis of effective layoff initiatives.

Leadership Roles and Relationships

Since the mid-1980s, leaders have used downsizing as a legitimate strategic

management tool (Gandolfi, 2013). Managers are integral to how well employees receive

this strategy. Leadership style can influence organizational performance via the

relationships formed between employees (Searle et al., 2011). How leaders handle

change can often affect employees' behavior (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010; Atilgan &

McCullen, 2011; Van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). If leaders fail to convey confidence

in the organization's direction, other members of the organization might resist the change

initiative because employees might reflect and amplify leadership's lack of confidence in

the initiative (Joo, 2010). Essentially, obtaining the desired results from organizational initiatives might depend on leading by example by those in charge of change.

Management style might influence the success of organizational change initiatives. During times of organizational change and distress, managers' leadership style might substantially affect employee response to change (Atilgan & McCullen, 2011; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Jaros, 2010). The style chosen by a manager can either benefit or hinder the successful implementation of change initiatives. Managers who strongly demonstrate helping skills, which people associate with interpersonal and transformational leadership styles, tend to create trusting and empowered workforces (Joo, 2012). Trusting and empowered workgroups might display confidence in themselves and the organization and be less resistant to change. Managers who display traditional management skills such as controlling, planning, and directing, which are more associated with task oriented and transactional leadership styles, might commit less time developing workplace relationships (Joo, 2010, 2012). These workplace relationships can be critical during organizational change because, employees may exert more effort to the success of organizational change if they perceive value in the relationships between members than if they view their role as just another piece of equipment to complete a task.

Strong workplace relationships might lead to employees having higher levels of commitment to the organization and higher performances (Joo, 2012). Those managers who develop learning cultures based on respect and employee empowerment will maintain higher employment commitment to the changing organization (Grdinovac &

Yancey, 2012; Joo, 2012; Noer, 2010; Whitman, VanRoddy, & Viswesvaran, 2010).

Employees who learn from each other and believe themselves to be responsible for their

fate have higher levels of self-efficacy (Oreg et al., 2011) and are more likely to accept

change than are employees whose leaders are more transactional focused and who

manage via a directive leadership style (Joo, 2010, 2012). Developing a culture where

knowledge passes easily between members who share common goals might prove

essential to organizational success.

      Trust and communication. Trust might be the most fundamental characteristic

of any successful relationship. Leaders who develop relationships with subordinates and

inspire caring and trust among members might realize higher levels of performance from

employees (Joo, 2010, 2012; Joo & Shim, 2010). This supportive leadership style may

prove more effective with high performing work groups than a traditional directive

leadership style.

      During times of downsizing, this culture of caring can moderate the negativity

associated with layoffs and might positively influence an employee's organizational

commitment (Joo, 2010, 2012; Joo & Shim, 2010). Leaders utilizing a supportive

transformative leadership style when leading employees who are competent in their job

and confident in their ability may experience less resistance to change than leaders using

directing transactional leadership styles (Joo, 2010, 2012; Joo & Shim, 2010). During

organizational change, it might prove beneficial if managers and organizational leaders

can determine how to strengthen the trust relationship between members of the

organization.

Open communication between members may provide the shortest route to building trust. Subordinates view leaders who practice transparency through open communication as trustworthy and positively associate these leaders with organizational performance during incidents of change within the organization (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Chong & Wolf, 2010; Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010). The success of an organization during difficult economic conditions might depend on leaders who treat employees as responsible members of the group.

Organizations may suffer because employees might fear the concept of change. Additionally, management can reduce the negative effects of change and improve the possibility of organizational survival by removing employees' negative perceptions of layoffs (Chipunza & Berry, 2010). Positive change might occur by increasing organizational leaders' understanding about the shock of layoffs on surviving employees and addressing these affects through improving HR policies and procedures to minimize damage of employee morale (Battistelli, Montani, Odoardi, Vandenberghe, & Picci, 2014; Oreg et al., 2011; Vakola, 2013). Change that can occur without damaging the commitment of employees may lead to future organizational success.

Successful change might require the use of some basic concepts. Leaders must adequately communicate to their employees the types of changes to expect and why the changes are necessary (Bull & Brown, 2012; Chen, Lai, & Chen, 2012; Losonci et al., 2010; Malik, Ahmad, & Hussain, 2010; Siegel & Simons, 2010). Employees who believe they are contributors in a change process might support the process more than those who believe themselves to be at the mercy of the change. The success of change

initiatives, specifically layoffs, might depend more on management's implementation of change than the change they wish to implement (Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2010; Oreg et al., 2011). As such, close attention to layoff communication as viewed by the affected employees is vital. Homburg, Klarmann, and Statitz, (2012) posited informing customers as well as the employees of any significant changes might prove equally beneficial. Workers, who are up to date on information about upcoming initiatives, might perceive the change more favorably than if the change comes as a surprise or if they learn about it too late.

Leadership style can substantially influence employee performance. Leaders might make decisions based on self-interest as opposed to the best interest of the organization or its employees (Bachmann, Gillespie, & Kramer, 2012; Chen, Lu, & Sougiannis, 2012; Lee & Taylor, 2014). Because leadership is one of the most influential variables in worker performance (Joo, 2012) employees who perceive leaders' decisions to be inconsistent with the stated, desired outcome of the organization might perform poorly. Reduced organizational performance and ultimately downsizing might stem from employees' perception of poor decisions by leadership.

Job performance might suffer if employees do not commit to the change initiative. This possibility of employees not committing enforces the importance of leadership developing a well-defined change strategy (Battilana et al., 2010; Collins, 2010; Mishra & Gupta, 2010). Offering employees a sense of understanding can remove some of the uncertainty of change and lead to open communication about employees' concerns. Leaders can achieve commitment from subordinates and improve the likelihood of

successfully implementing critical change initiatives by addressing employees' concerns (Bordia et al., 2011; Jaros, 2010). Communication and relationship development between leaders and subordinates can mitigate the effect of layoffs for victims and survivors.

Survivor Syndrome

Layoffs might only be the beginning of the stress process for surviving employees. Employees who survive layoffs might harbor negative emotions toward the organization (Maertz et al., 2010; Waraich & Bhardwaj, 2012). These emotions can reduce the employees' affective attachment and subsequently their organizational commitment (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Consequently, people will reason with themselves to understand the emotional aspects concerning if remaining with the downsizing organization benefit them more or less than leaving the organization (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Factors contributing to an employee's decision to leave or stay might include other employment opportunities, moral dilemma of leaving, expectations of others, and the employee's sense of obligation to the organization (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Whether employees leaves or remains with an organization might depend on how they measure these factors (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Maertz et al., 2010). Ultimately, deciding on the appropriate decision regarding their future employment can cause employees a substantial amount of stress.

Survivors' calculative attachment could also decrease because of their perception of the difficulty of achieving future advancement within downsizing organizations (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). People cognitively evaluate these two sets of factors together

to derive a final stay or go decision but unlike affective forces that include current emotion, calculative forces employs rational self-interest with a future orientation (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). Organizational leaders that can implement layoff initiatives in a manner that enforces employee commitment as opposed to damaging it might realize greater success following the layoffs.

Survivors of layoffs could realize more adverse effects than other groups associated with layoffs. Employees who remain with the organization following layoffs might live with the guilt of being survivors (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010). The adverse effects survivors of layoffs encounter including added workload, lower productivity, decreased loyalty, and reduced motivation recurs in the literature as survivor syndrome or survivor sickness (Chipunza & Berry, 2010; Cotter & Fouad, 2012). This syndrome can lead to reduced organizational commitment because feelings of guilt, decreased loyalty, decreased motivation, and fear may be more than employees can withstand (Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011; Hildesheim & Winkelmann, 2010; Malik et al., 2010). The stress of surviving layoffs may cause many of the employees that organizations' leaders may rely on, for future success, to leave the employer prior to the completion of the initiative.

The relationships between employees may be a powerful motivator for employees' decisions to either stay or go during difficult change initiatives. Furthermore, the inability of surviving employees to reconcile their continued employment against the loss of employment for displaced coworkers may prove unhealthy and demoralizing (Ngirande, 2012; Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011; Parks-Yancy, 2011; Reinardy, 2011). The relationships between employees frequently go unnoticed by organizational leadership

and managers (Parks-Yancy, 2011). Such relationships may prove fundamental to job satisfaction and productivity.

Losing a long-time coworker and friend to layoffs may be emotionally damaging to the remaining members of the workgroup. The influence of disrupting the makeup of a workgroup intensifies as group cohesiveness increases (Campbell, 1958). Conceptually, three indicators may determine the strength of the group's cohesiveness or entitativity. According to Campbell's (1958) concept of entitativity, the indicators for review are: proximity (the distance between people in the group), common fate (the extent to which members in the group seem to experience interrelated outcomes), and similarity (the extent to which the individuals display the same behaviors or resemble one another). Groups of employees who share strong bonds with each other may display more negative reactions to losing members of its group than people from a loosely associated workgroup.

The entitativity of journeyman craft groups may prove substantial. If each participant of the research study share similar training and education a bond may exist between participants. This bond may exist regardless of organizational affiliation because these employees share a designation of journeyman status that no other employees can claim. These participants typically worked in proximity to each other, often in functional groups. In accordance with each facet of Campbell's requirements (Campbell, 1958), these types of workgroups are highly entitative

Any disruption of the group will influence the perceptions and behavior of remaining members of the group (Campbell, 1958). The reaction to disruptions in the

group's makeup may increase as the skill set of the group becomes more specialized. However, groups that form over time may respond negatively to losing members regardless of shared specialized skills.

Groups whose members share common traits and characteristics are likely to form strong bonds. Additional research in the area of entitativity showed members' similarity might prove valid identifiers of group entitativity (Ip, Chiu, & Wan, 2006). A group consisting of members who share common goals might be highly entitative. This concept of shared similarities as a basis for entitativity may prove valid regardless of racial or ethnic composition of the group (Ip et al., 2006). These similarities can come in the form of uniforms or clothing, but Ip et al. (2006) demonstrated that race or skin color was a more common indicator of group entitativity than any other factor. This notion of physical characteristics, such as skin color or race, predicting entitativity may hold true in downsizing organizations and workgroups within these organizations. Other people may not readily recognize or understand the objective or goal of the group without closer observation.

Some researchers disagree with the concept of physical similarities being the same as entitativity. The findings of Crump, Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel and Thakkar (2010) refute Ip's et al. assessment of similarities among members being equivalent to entitativity of the group. Without individuals affixing meaning to perceived physical similarities there is no entitativity to perceive (Crump et al., 2010). During times of downsizing, employees may view race or ethnicity as a qualifying variable for dismissal or retention of employment (Bell, Berry, Marquardt, & Green, 2013). Researchers have

shown that groups consisting of members who share common characteristics in appearances and a common cohesive objective are more entitative than groups who do not share these traits (Crump et al., 2010). How employees view the layoff process and how this process affects their social group may contribute to the future success of the group and the organization.

Organizational leaders may benefit from addressing potential issues with survivors prior to the issues becoming problematic. Past researchers showed that surviving employees are critical to organizational success post layoff (Chipunza & Berry, 2010; Iverson & Zatzick, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2012). Leaders of downsizing organizations may suffer a downturn in productivity and organizational commitment if the remaining employees feel betrayed by leadership (Chipunza & Berry, 2010; Joo, 2010; Joo, 2012). Remaining employees whose treatment does not account for the trauma they are enduring may develop reduced organizational commitment often caused by decreased employee morale (Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). Leaders must handle survivors properly because they are perhaps the most influential variable in deciding the future success of downsizing firms (Schmitt et al., 2012). Any voluntary turnover may prove damaging to downsizing organizations (Malik, Saleem, & Ahmad, 2010; Marques, Suárez-González, Cruz, & Ferreira, 2011; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). If employees are vital to the future success of an organization, leaders and managers may prove prudent to treat them in a manner that addresses the hardships of layoffs.

Following layoffs, those employees who were victims of the process may be the lucky ones. Some researchers contend that downsizing decreases job satisfaction and

increases the workload for those who survive (Kurebwa, 2011; Malik et al., 2010; Malik, Hussain, & Mahmood, 2011; Reinardy, 2011; Saif, Malik, & Awan, 2011). The cumulative effects of workload, insecurity, and reduced job satisfaction frequently lead to adverse psychological and physical health effects for survivors (Berchick, Gallo, Maralani, & Kasl, 2012; Deb, Gallo, Ayyagari, Fletcher, & Sindelar, 2011; Malik & Ahmad, 2011; Malik, Saleem, & Ahmad, 2010; Østhus, 2012; Østhus & Mastekaasa, 2010). These effects may lead to a decrease in organizational commitment by the employees.

Organizational Commitment and Job Insecurity

Job insecurity may prove vital to how employees respond to organizational change. Consistent with the work of Greenhalgh (1983), any change in the organization causes a threat to worker's job security even if only slightly, and this job insecurity is a crucial factor between a given situation and how employees respond to the situation behaviorally and attitudinally. In cases involving layoffs, employees may have reason to perceive a sense of job insecurity regardless of effort or ability. The theory of reasoned action (RA) presents a means of gauging the organizational commitment of survivors in downsizing organizations and suggests predictability in employees' behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). This theory of reasoned action dictates that individuals intend to behave in a given manner in specified situations (Ajzen, 2012; Gold, 2011; Yousafzai et al., 2010).

The effects of layoffs can be substantial for survivors following downsizings. Frequently, these effects lead to feelings of decreased job security and reduced

organizational commitment (Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010; Klehe et al., 2011; Lavelle et al., 2009; Parzefall & Kuppelwieser, 2012). How organizations' leaders communicated and implemented layoff initiatives had a significant effect on employees' attitudes. If not properly administered these initiatives could alter employees' desire to remain with the employer (Schmitt et al., 2012; Spangenburg, 2012). Accurately gauging employees' organizational commitment is one of the truest indicators of their projected job performance and leave intentions (Becker, Ullrich & van Dick, 2013; Hausknecht, Sturman, & Roberson, 2011).

Employers and employees develop relationships based on reciprocation. These reciprocal associations, called psychological contracts, may be critical in how well organizations' workgroups perform (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012). Employers entice employees to join and remain with their organization through the use of inducements, such as wages and benefits; in return employees provide a high level of performance (Carraher, 2011; Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011; Restubog, Bordia, & Bordia, 2011). Any change in these implied contracts can lead to employee stress.

Understanding how participants of this study view the layoff process and if they view this process as a breach in the psychological contract may provide insight into the participant's decision to leave downsizing organizations. Survivors often view layoffs as a breach in the psychological contracts between the two sides, thus reducing the organizational commitment of the surviving employees (Chaudhry et al., 2011; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010). Reduced organizational commitment via the breach in

the psychological contract may only be the beginning of the woes facing employees of organizations undertaking layoffs.

Reduced organizational commitment may affect employees beyond their relationship with the downsizing organization. Because remaining employees of a downsizing organization may represent the future of that organization, employee commitment is a decisive variable for HR professionals and business leaders to consider when contemplating downsizing initiatives (Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012; Schmitt et al., 2012). Employee commitment to an organization affects survivors' productivity, absenteeism, and turnover intentions (Ayinnde, 2011; Malik et al., 2010; Neininger, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Kauffeld & Henschel, 2010; Spangenburg, 2012). In part, these actions occur because employees believe the organization's leadership violated the trust relationship. This perception of violated trust may follow employees as they transition to new employers (Bordia et al., 2011; Kim & Choi, 2010) and reduce the level of commitment extended to the new employer. Individuals, who have previously experienced poorly executed change initiatives, may be sensitive to any proposed change.

Organizational leadership may benefit from developing cultures that encourage acceptance among its members. Employees who possess a sense of belonging may prove less susceptible to the effects of organizational layoffs than those employees who experience exclusion and isolation (Lavelle et al., 2009). The concept of belonging in an organization, gauged by employees as believing they hold value and receive appreciation, may mediate the negativity associated with downsizing (Guchait & Cho, 2010). Employees who develop relationships with members of the organization and assimilate as

part of the organization may experience greater commitment to the organization (Lavelle et al., 2009).

During challenging economic times, employees who possess the most marketable skills may prove to be the least affected by downsizing initiatives (Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011; Michael & Michael, 2012). Employees who believe they contribute value to the organization may prove less susceptible to the effects of organizational layoffs than other employees. This confidence in a person's value may mediate the uncertainty associated with layoffs (Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011; Kalleberg, 2012; Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). Employees who elect to pursue other employment opportunities, and are capable of having a substantial influence on the downsizing organization by their departure, are likely to possess substantial tacit knowledge that may be desirable to other organizations (Trevor & Nyberg, 2008). Researchers theorized that possessing marketable skills reduces employees' susceptibility to the negative effects of job insecurity (Kalleberg, 2012; Kalyal, Berntson, Baraldi, Näswall, & Sverke, 2010; Pruijt & Dérogée, 2010). Survivors who are confident in their ability to contribute to the future success of the downsizing organization, but equally confident they can find satisfying alternate employment elsewhere, may opt to remain with the downsizing organization (Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011). This confidence in marketable skills may reduce voluntary attrition from downsizing organizations.

Employees experiencing stress may perform poorly at work. Because work is such a large part of everyday life, any threat to a person's job causes strong behavior and psychological reactions that often conflict with work objectives (Greenhalgh &

Rosenblatt, 2010; Silla et al., 2010). Past researchers provided insight on how stress caused by layoffs may negatively affect productivity and organizational commitment, and positively affect employee turnover (Chipunza & Berry, 2010; Datta et al., 2010). This stress may contribute to health issues, work-life imbalance, and increased leave intentions of employees (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010; Modrek & Cullen, 2013; Muhammad Imran Malik & Usman, 2011; Saif et al., 2011).

Employees who perceive their jobs as secure report higher levels of job satisfaction and more positive job-related attitudes than those who perceive their job as insecure (Chirumbolo & Areni, 2010; Probst & Ekore, 2010; Richter, Näswall & Sverke, 2010). Job insecurity is arguably a greater stressor than losing a job. Researchers showed that job insecurity can affect more than a person's financial future; links exist between the stress of this phenomenon of job insecurity and mental and physical illnesses (Mandal, Ayyagari, & Gallo, 2011; Michael & Michael, 2012; Probst & Strand, 2010; Reisel et al., 2010). Perhaps the level of confidence and trust survivors have in the layoff process may mitigate these illnesses.

Organizational Trust and Perceived Fairness

Historically, employers and employees maintained a relationship built on an unspoken, implicit contract. This labor contract acts as a major factor in employee loyalty and organizational commitment (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010; Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2012; Ng, Feldman, & Lam, 2010). This psychological labor contract can aid the organizational leadership in retaining employees during times of downsizing (Lavelle

et al., 2009). Any perceived breach in this contract, however, may lead to employees leaving the organization (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

Trust is a vital aspect of relationships and should be protected and nurtured. Organizational trust and procedural fairness may contribute to business success during incidents of change (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphry, 2011; Norman et al., 2010; Smollan, 2013). A contributing factor to employees choosing to stay or leave is the trust they place in the decisions made within the organization (Kim, 2009; Lavelle et al., 2009; Shah, 2011). This trust may come from management, coworkers, supervisors, or any combination of the three (Oh & Park, 2011; Smollan, 2013; Smollan & Parry, 2011; Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner, & Bernerth, 2012). Employees undergoing layoffs may find it difficult to focus on job tasks if they do not trust those around them.

Layoffs erode the trust between employees and employers. This erosion occurs in part because the release of some victims may be due to no fault of their own (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). To protect the trust relationship, layoffs must occur in a fair and just manner (Munjuri, 2011; Pfeffer, 2010). Regardless of the process, some trust may be lost during the layoff process. Leaders must take steps to repair a damaged trust relationship (Kramer & Lewicki, 2010). Leaders who do not build strong relationships with their subordinates, built on trust, may find it difficult to direct members during times of organizational change.

The success of a layoff initiative may depend on how members of the organization interact with leaders during the layoff process. Researchers believe that employees may respond more favorably to leaders whom they view as fair compared to

those leaders whom employees view as being less fair (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012; Guo & Giacobbe-Miller, 2012; Isenhour, Stone, & Lien, 2012). Relationships may represent the most direct antecedent to employee attitudes and behaviors, and subsequently the success of the downsizing process (Kim, 2009).

Knowledge Retention and Post layoff Performance

During downsizing, leaders of organizations lose knowledge tacit to employees, and this knowledge may prove critical to the organization's success following layoffs. Researchers posit that a culture that encourages knowledge sharing can minimize knowledge loss (Wang & Noe, 2010). An organization will be more flexible if members freely share knowledge and respond to changes in its competitive landscape (Jaros, 2010). If employees who own critical knowledge elect to leave without passing along their knowledge, the downsizing organization may encounter substantial obstacles to its future success.

In competitive businesses, a person can assume that sharing knowledge will lead to a stronger workforce that may possess the required skills to withstand the negative consequences associated with layoffs. Some of the repercussions associated with layoffs include loss of knowledge, reduced efficiencies, reduction in organizational commitment, and work overload. Knowledge is unlikely to flow freely in an organization after the announcement of layoff intentions unless such a culture was in place prior to layoff procedures (Jaros, 2010). The use of reasoned action theory may aid in understanding why survivors opt to leave organizations rather than attempt to rebuild it following layoff initiatives.

Human resources (survivors) are the only advantage an organization has in competitive markets, but a stable work environment is essential to capitalize on the tacit knowledge of these human assets (Anis et al., 2011; Mellahi & Wilkinson, 2010). Organizational leaders who maintain a culture that encourages open knowledge sharing among its employees may perform better than organizations whose employees hoard knowledge. As such, senior leadership must provide full support for a culture of knowledge sharing by creating a solid knowledge transfer process for organizational knowledge development and retention following layoffs (Cheese, 2010; Hall, 2012; Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne, Liden, & Bravo, 2011). Researchers contended that the performance outcomes of organizations increase as survivors share their knowledge and learn new skills to enhance their marketability (Flint et al., 2012; Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011; Smith, 2010). This same increase in marketability may improve the performance outcomes and organizational commitment of survivors (Gardner, Wright, & Moynihan, 2011; Greenwood & Reinardy, 2011; Schmitt et al., 2012; Sitlington & Marshall, 2011). Focusing on knowledge retention may significantly enhance the performance of organizations' workgroups post layoff initiatives.

Some employees may work harder when challenged with the possibility of layoffs. However, management should not rely on this as an outcome to announcing layoffs because assuming additional workload may lead to employee burnout. Studies indicated that burnout can increase motivation to leave an employer (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Federici, 2013; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Any attrition that follows layoff procedures places the organization in a weakened position, when compared to its condition prior to layoff procedures.

The manner in which organizational leaders execute layoffs will profoundly influence the level of success it will experience following layoffs. After layoffs, survivors may find difficulty in working with the same enthusiasm and concern that they demonstrated prior to the organizational leaders' layoff initiatives. Organizations whose leaders fail in properly communicating upcoming changes to prepare its workforce for life after layoffs may suffer substantial downturns in employees' productivity and organizational commitment (Malik & Ahmad, 2011; Malik et al., 2010). The future of downsizing organizations may depend on how well the remaining workforce commits to the new structure following layoffs.

Transition and Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the possible factors that might lead to employees' voluntary attrition subsequent to layoff procedures. Organizations' leaders may use the findings of this study to increase organizational commitment and reduce survivor attrition. I provided insight about the effectiveness of the explanations given to participants by their employer to justify the need for layoffs. Additionally, I explored the lived experience of the participants in an attempt to identify the factors that negatively contributed to participants' organizational commitment. Developing strategies to reduce attrition of employees following layoff procedures may reduce costs associated with employee turnover and enhance organizational efficiencies.

I provided the problem and focus of this study in Section 1: To explore the lived experience of employees who survive layoffs at their place of employment, subsequently to leave said employer of their own volition in pursuit of other opportunities. My role included identifying the participants of this study, the geographical area of concentration, and the methodology of this study. For this study, survivors are those employees who met the eligibility criteria (see Appendix C). The findings of this study may provide insight to scholars, managers and human resources professionals, in understanding how layoffs contribute to voluntary attrition subsequent to layoff initiatives, and thus aid in survivors' retention.

For this study, I identified potential issues that contributed to survivors' attrition. Exploring how individuals cope with stress was central to the foundation of this study, and builds on the work of seminal researchers in the field (Cannon, 1932; Lazarus, 1966, 1999; Selye, 1955). Understanding how layoffs affect organizational commitment may contribute to initiatives that might mitigate the adverse effects of the layoff process. In addition, understanding the concept of survivor syndrome and its accompanying symptoms provided valuable insight to the layoff phenomenon.

Because this study included seeking understanding about the lived experience of survivors of layoffs, to identify issues that lead to survivors' voluntary attrition, qualitative phenomenological research method was appropriate. When using qualitative exploration, researchers must explore a phenomenon in its natural environment gathering information through extensive time in the field (Simon, 2006). The phenomenological design provided an optimal means to collect facts in this study because phenomenologists

attempt to discover common meanings by focusing on people who function in similar environments or who have shared similar experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

In Section 2 of this study, my role included addressing central parts of the research, such as the (a) purpose statement, (b) role of the researcher, (c) participants, (d) data collection, and (e) ethics of this research study. In this section of the study, I provided a deeper understanding about collecting and analyzing answers to assign meaning to the shared lived experiences of participants. Using additional information in this section concerning data collection, organization, and analysis, provided a foundation to demonstrate the validity, reliability, and rigor of this qualitative study.

Section 3 of the research study included recapping prior sections. This section consists of issues including (a) an overview of the study, (b) the findings of the research study, (c) how this study may contribute to positive social change, and (d) recommendations for future actions. I reflected on the research process and concluded Section 3 with a summation and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

The loss of surviving employees after the lived experience can result in negative impacts to organizations' efficiency, productivity, and profitability (Chipunza & Berry, 2010; Iverson & Zatzick, 2011). How organizational leaders implement layoffs may substantially influence the commitment of remaining employees (Fugate, Prussia, & Kinicki, 2012; Tsai & Yen, 2013). Organizational leaders whose workforces realize voluntary attrition may find their organizations devoid of significant talent, skills, and knowledge required for future success.

My role included exploring why employees of downsizing organizations choose to pursue other employment opportunities. Based on Lazarus' (1966) transactional model of stress, I explored factors that lead to survivor attrition. With more than two-thirds of downsizing initiatives ending in failure (Obilade, 2009), findings of the study might provide insight regarding how leaders may improve their organizations' post layoff performance by enhancing employee retention.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how organizational leaders may reduce employee voluntary attrition after layoff procedures, but prior to the final reduction in staff. The data for this study consists of participant interviews. Potential benefits of this study may include an evaluation of relationships between management and subordinates, a deeper understanding regarding what human relations policies mediate survivors' intent to leave, and clarity about factors that

negatively affect organizational commitment. In the current study, I explored the psychological and emotional drivers that could lead to employee attrition.

I obtained responses from 20 experienced employees of downsizing unionized industrial organizations within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin. In the current study, a purposeful sampling of former employees explained the issues contributing to their decision to voluntarily sever employment. All severances occurred after layoff procedures commenced, but prior to the attainment of final staff reduction goals. Data collection consisted of digital recordings of all face-to-face interviews and research notes.

Role of the Researcher

I conducted a qualitative phenomenological research study. The role of a phenomenological researcher is to act as an impartial data collector, without judging the answers (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). In the current study, interviews were the information gathering technique because the objective was to learn from the lived experiences of the participants. My role was to interview participants, transcribe their responses, and analyze the results for themes that move from the particular to the general (Moustakas, 1994), verify the findings, and report those findings as part of the research study.

Researchers must reveal any personal traits or characteristics that may affect the interpretation of data (Moustakas, 1994) via *bracketing*. The bracketing process is a vital part of the qualitative research process that allows researchers to understand participants' responses, known as *epoche*; this process isolates researchers' biases (Moustakas, 1994). After working in an industrial sector for more than two decades, I am familiar with the

companies that have undertaken significant reductions in the workforce via layoffs in Central Wisconsin. In an attempt to comply with Moustakas' (1994) concept of using reduction, bracketing, and imaginative variation processes to keep researcher biases minimized, I bracketed any personal opinions and biases concerning my experiences as a non-management employee of an organization that announced layoff initiatives, and viewed interview responses from various perspectives. My role included transcribing each interview and extracting common themes. Participants reviewed the transcripts to see if I accurately captured the lived experience. Each person viewed the event from a unique position and may have a different interpretation.

Participants

The population of the research study consisted of members from unionized trade groups. I contacted heads of local unions for lists of names and contact information identifying members who have changed employers since 2006, and their current employers, thus providing a population of potential participants. Narrowing the identified group for purposeful selection included focusing on employees who voluntarily left downsizing organizations subsequent to the lived experience. I contacted each potential participant via telephone and (a) requested their assistance with the research study, (b) asked how long they worked for the downsizing organization, and (c) asked if they left the organization voluntarily. Subsequently, I provided a copy of the informed consent form to those individuals who volunteered to participate in the study (see Appendix A).

Candidates for the study shared characteristics that substantiated the validity of the research. I purposefully selected candidates associated with an unionized industrial facility. The criteria for selection were that each candidate must have gained journey-level status from a state indentured apprenticeship program spanning a minimum of 4 years. All participants were at least 18 years of age and had a minimum of 4 years continuous employment with the downsizing organization. Participants left the downsizing organizations of their choice after layoff procedures but prior to the final reduction in staff. Participants declared their number of years of continuous employment with their former downsizing organization and stated if they left voluntarily prior to signing the informed consent form. These requirements for participants to gain inclusion to the study provided validity that the study meets stated intentions.

Solid working relationships between researcher and participants are essential in qualitative research (Simon, 2006). To establish strong working relationships, I informed the candidates of the intent of this research as part of the informed consent process. My role included assuring candidates of the confidentiality of the study, along with communicating and acting in a respectful and ethical manner.
The research effort included several steps to assure that the study maintained ethical standards (Tracy, 2010). My first step to assuring ethical research of the study was to take the Walden University preferred certification and subsequently petition Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to conduct the study. A minimum sample size of 20 participants was appropriate for this research study and determined large enough to reach data saturation (Morse, 2000) whereby nothing new

emerged from collecting additional information (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). If

interviewing 20 participants had failed to provide saturation, interviews would have

continued. This sample size was also small enough to allow the requisite in-depth

interviews to develop accurate transcriptions of the participants' responses (Tracy, 2010).

Each participant received an informed consent form to sign prior to engaging in any

interviews (see Appendix A). By labeling participants' interview responses with coded

designators, their identities remained private. The consent forms and interview

information of the participants will remain in separate secure locations for a period of 5

years.

Research Method and Design

I employed a qualitative phenomenological research design with purposeful

sampling of participants in this study. Capturing the essence of human experience

concerning a phenomenon from the perspective of participants was the intent of

phenomenological design (Tracy, 2010). The goal in this study was to understand how

layoff initiatives may affect employee turnover intentions and to identify potential

strategies for reducing future voluntary separations and reduced performance. Husserl

started phenomenology as a philosophical movement that focused on the nature of

experience from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon (Connelly,

2010). A descriptive phenomenological approach was best for the current study because

the goal was to explore the lived experiences of participants, without allowing any

presuppositions or biases to affect the study.

The study included conducting interviews using open-ended interview questions that allowed participants to provide considerable detail in their responses. The interview questions covered the lived experiences of employees at three points in their relationship with their past employers. The points of concentration are pre-layoff announcements, time of layoff announcements, and post layoff announcements. Phenomenologists focus on individuals who share similar experiences, and attempt to discover commonalities and shared meanings (Simon, 2006). Phenomenological research was most appropriate for this study because the intent was to learn from the lived experience of these employees. I explored how layoff procedures might contribute to reduced employee organizational commitment and identified potential countermeasures to reduce voluntary employee turnover.

Method

This research study was an exploration of lived experiences of employees of downsizing organizations, who chose voluntarily to exit the downsizing organizations after implementing layoff procedures. I employed a qualitative research method to explore how layoffs affect employees from the participants who lived through this experience. Aligning with the selected phenomenological design approach, I used in-depth personal interviews with the chosen participants to obtain information that frames, identifies, and characterize their experiences during organizational downsizing via layoffs.

The method of study and the design of the study should comply with the intent of the study. Quantitative methods facilitate obtaining generalizable data by seeking to

reduce human actions to variables, represented by numeric values (Simon, 2006) and, therefore, were not ideal for this study. Qualitative exploration brings the reader closer to the phenomenon by gathering contradictory (a) emotions, (b) opinions, (c) beliefs, and (d) behaviors that quantitative designs cannot provide (Bansal & Corley, 2011). When using qualitative designs researchers must explore a phenomenon in its natural environment gathering information through extensive time in the field (Tracy, 2010). When using a mixed methods methodology, the researcher merges the findings of both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a better understanding of the issue than is possible using either method individually (Palinkas, Aarons, Horwitz, Chamberlain, Hurlburt, & Landsverk, 2011). I did not use a mixed methods methodology because the goal was to capture the lived experiences of the participants, and quantitative data are not appropriate for capturing lived experiences. Using a qualitative method satisfied the objectives in this exploration.

Research Design

I matched the design of the study with the qualitative method. Researchers can categorize qualitative exploration as explanatory, interpretive, or critical studies intended to (a) describe the state of conditions, (b) generate hypothesis, (c) formulate theory, or (d) explore association (Portney & Watkins, 2009). In this study, I used a phenomenological design. Other possible qualitative designs include (a) ethnography which is helpful when exploring cultural phenomena, (b) case study which uses data gathered from multiple sources to explore underlying principles of events, individuals, or groups bound by time or space, (c) narrative which consists of participants telling stories about their lived

experiences, and (d) grounded theory which forms a theory to fit the findings (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Toloie-Eshlaghy et al., 2011) and were not suited for this study. Each of these methods involves face-to-face interviews, data collection on site or long periods reviewing the actions of layoff survivors. In this research study, I explored the lived experiences of individuals who lived through a phenomenon as told in their words. Because my role included avoiding any opinions from the participants' retelling of the events as they occurred, the study included using semistructured interviews with open-ended interview questions. Semistructured interviews allowed participants to answer the same questions in as much detail as they wished, and I extracted common themes without attempting to manipulate the participants' words. The phenomenological design offered the most applicable means to gather the desired information of the study.

I employed a phenomenological research design in the study to learn from the lived experiences of employees experiencing layoffs. Savage-Austin and Honeycutt (2011) noted that the purpose of qualitative exploration is to investigate, observe, and understand a social phenomenon. Consistent with Simon (2006), my role as researcher included summarizing the lived experiences of participants to understand the subjective reality surrounding the event under exploration. I collected information from participants of the study using in-depth personal interviews, digital recordings of the interviews, and field notes.

The study included exploring factors that may reduce employee attrition following layoff procedures from the perspective of those who lived through such

announcements. The first-person events known as phenomena are the only objects or events that exist for perceptual participants (Moustakas, 1994). What begins as a quick impression of an event grows in depth and meaning as participants continually reflect on the experience of the event (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological research design followed the general processes of reduction, epoche, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). By developing a phenomenological reduction process that asks the appropriate questions required finding an explanatory structure free of biases; researchers can improve their understanding and interpretation of the world as it relates to human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing forces investigators to develop the proper skills to obtain the correct interpretation of the phenomenon under review by requiring self-reflection on potential prejudices and biases (Moustakas, 1994). To obtain various meanings of a phenomenon, Moustakas (1994) recommended imaginative variation, which uses different vantage points from various participants to alter their frame of reference. This change of perspectives may afford researchers the ability to remain unencumbered by their preconceptions about a phenomenon.

During the late 1950s, van Kaam developed his scientific analysis method to describe and analyze qualitative data (Anderson & Eppard, 1998). I captured information using interviews and open-ended questions designed to gain knowledge and understanding about human experiences. The van Kaam method was appropriate for this study because the purpose of this method was to obtain the essence of the experience under review, with the assumption that all individuals experiencing an event would provide a uniquely personal account (Anderson & Eppard, 1998). My role included

using a modified van Kaam method to explore the meaning of layoff from the perspective of those who lived through layoff procedures, subsequently grouping phrases and themes that recur in participant interviews to create thematic categories. Consistent with the views of Moustakas (1994), my role included reading the transcripts of interviews multiple times and taking notes to reduce the number of categories of themes and move from the specific to the generalizable.

A qualitative phenomenological design was appropriate for the study. In contrast, scholars associate quantitative studies philosophically to the concept that all meaningful statements are either analytic or conclusively verifiable (Portney & Watkins, 2009). According to Simon (2006), quantitative researchers employ experiments and affix numerical values to human actions, but these methods were not appropriate for this study thereby eliminating quantitative methods. The objective of this study was to learn from the lived experiences of participants, and explore an event from the participants' perspectives. Simon additionally stated that a qualitative, phenomenological approach was the best way to capture the perspectives of participants' lived experiences. I obtained information from 20 experienced former employees of downsizing unionized industrial organizations within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin, who experienced layoff procedures to participate in the study. Each of these participants possessed a unique perspective from which to view the layoff phenomenon.

Population and Sampling

I conducted the study within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin and consisted of interviewing 20 journeyman level artisans. My role included asking each

person to volunteer as a member of the study. The study included assuring participants of their right to decline involvement with the research with no questions asked or explanations required. Solicitation occurred by contacting individuals via their telephone number on union records requesting involvement and addressing any preliminary concerns. Participants met the following criteria: attainment of journey-level craftsman status, 4 years of employment with a downsizing organization prior to layoff procedures, at least 18 years of age, and each left the downsizing organization of their own volition subsequent to the initiation of, and prior to the conclusion of, layoff procedures.

There is no clear definition in determining the number of participants to include in a study, to reach saturation. The required number of members depends on factors including (a) quality of data, (b) the scope of the study, (c) the amount of useful information gathered from each interviewee, (d) the number of interviews per person, and (e) the qualitative method and study design used (Francis et al., 2010; Morse, 2000). In the case of phenomenological studies, the required number of interviewees range from 6 to 10 (Morse, 2000) when using open-ended interview questions which lead to obtaining more usable information per participant. I interviewed 20 journey-level artisans from Central Wisconsin in this study. This sample size was appropriate for this phenomenological research because it was large enough for achieving data saturation, wherein interviews continued until no new information emerged. This minimum sample size of 20 members was small enough to allow the requisite in-depth interviews to develop accurate transcriptions of the responses (Tracy, 2010). The sampling process

included selecting workers who voluntarily severed employment from downsizing organizations following announcements of layoff intentions.

Identifying participants through purposeful sampling ensured the requisite experience of the phenomenon regarding employee voluntary attrition subsequent to organizational announcement of layoff intentions was present for the study. Purposeful sampling was the most applicable form of non-probability-based sampling for identifying suitable participants for this study (Turner, 2010). There was little information available concerning the central theme of this study, and purposeful sampling was the best means to capture the desired information. All contributors possessed a predetermined set of traits and characteristics (Suri, 2011). These characteristics included attainment of journey-level status as a craftsman, 4 years of employment with a downsizing organization prior to layoff procedures, at least 18 years of age, and each left the downsizing organization of their own volition subsequent to the initiation, and prior to the conclusion of layoff procedures. Random sampling may not yield a population of employees who voluntarily elected to leave a downsizing organization post layoff announcement and, therefore, was not appropriate for this study.

After contacting heads of local unions for names, employers, and information identifying members who have changed employers since 2006, I contacted potential members requesting their consent to partake in this study. The 20 artisans who agreed to partake in this research study received an informed consent form, assurance of their privacy via the informed consent process, and a briefing detailing the criteria for inclusion in the study. Participants answered the same series of questions that established

their eligibility for inclusion (a) how long they worked at the downsizing organization, (b) if they left the organization voluntarily, and (c) if they were state indentured journeyman level at the time of layoff procedures. Subsequently each contributor received a copy of the informed consent form to sign (see Appendix A). A review of the content of the signed consent form occurred prior to engaging in face-to-face interviews.

After signing the informed consent form, participants received information regarding the need to reserve 90 minutes for the face-to-face interview and approximately 30 minutes for the follow-up member check interview. These interviews occurred over a 2-week time span; the amount of time required for each phase of the data collection process was not exact, but 90 minutes represented an accepted timeframe (Englander, 2012; Roulston, 2010). I discussed the use of a digital voice recorder and hand written notes during interviews and offered assurance that their identity would remain confidential as part of the study. Additional duties included taking steps to establish trust with members during preliminary talks about interviews for this study (Englander, 2012). Conducting interviews at a mutually agreed upon location aided in providing the participants a relaxed and comfortable environment. Whenever possible, I conducted interviews in my home office, free of distractions and possible interruptions. Alternately, the Wausau public library offers meeting rooms by appointment that provided the requisite space for the interview process of this study if preferred. This study included providing contributors a one-page summary of the findings, which was hand delivered within 60 days of finalizing the research.

Ethical Research

The value of any research study may suffer irrevocably if the ethics of the study are questionable. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) noted that researchers are to avoid exposing participants to undue harm, whether physical or psychological. Solicited employees responded to the interview request only if they opted voluntarily to participate. Engagement with contributors occurred after receiving the IRB approval number 06-30-14-0305301. Contributors learned about the purpose, goals, and anticipated audience of the study through the informed consent process. Partakers were free to withdraw from the study with no question or inquiry, nor experience repudiation, simply by contacting me via the information provided in the contact information section of the informed consent form (see Appendix A). To avoid perceptions of influencing participants' responses, this study protocol did not include providing any compensation to contributors. My role incorporated establishing and maintaining participant privacy and security by assigning a coded designator to all members. This designator allowed for identification and retrieval of information collected and is of no use without a code key that I maintain in a locked fireproof safe that is inaccessible to anyone else. Additional safeguards included storing all details pertaining to this study in separate secured fireproof safes in my home for a period of 5 years. Prior to conducting any interviews, all participants received and signed informed consent forms (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

Instruments

I selected a qualitative method because the research methodology must match the intent of the study. In conjunction with this qualitative method, I chose a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of participants. My role included using face-to-face interviews to collect information from participants and conducting these interviews under similar conditions for all participants, in addition to providing a location at my home, for conducting interviews free of distractions. This setting facilitated capturing the essence of the phenomenon from the perspective of non-affected employees (Tracy, 2010). Using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions allowed participants to give in-depth responses. To obtain consistency in the study, each participant answered the same questions (see Appendix B).

The treatment of participants in this research was respectful and dignified throughout the study. Beyond recalling their lived experience, participating in this non-experimental study should not have caused the participants any adverse effects. My role included providing a list of local depression therapists to any participant suffering from recalling their lived experience. In an effort to protect the rights of participants, all information pertaining to this study will remain in a secure location in my home for 5 years.

Data Collection Technique

I used a qualitative phenomenological design that encompassed data collection and interpretation, consistent with the views of Bernard (2013). Qualitative studies are

primarily inductive and derive meaning by categorizing findings and identifying

relationships within a specific social context as perceived by the people involved

(Portney & Watkins, 2009). Unlike quantitative methods, which reduce human actions to

numerical values, this qualitative study did not require hypothesis testing or numerical

justification for the findings (Tracy, 2010). All participants of this study shared a

common lived experience and answered the same interview questions (see Appendix B).

The data collection process for this study consisted of conducting face-to-face

interviews in conjunction with audio captured on a handheld digital recorder. My

experience with the chosen recording device included using it for capturing more than

100 hours of lectures. The use of a modified van Kaam 7 step analysis approach

(Moustakas,1994), in conjunction with NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software aided

in verifying and cross checking the accuracy of coding and analyzing the collection of

findings pertaining to the lived experience of layoffs. Audio recordings alone may not

have captured possible participant anxiety or irritation about a particular question, and

notes provided insight about issues that may have caused stress to contributors and thus

adding rigor to the study (Tracy, 2010). This study also included using field notes to

capture any relevant body language or behaviors during the interviewing process

consistent with Tracy (2010).

Because I conducted a phenomenological study and used semistructured interview

questions, this research did not warrant a pilot study. The participants' responses to the

interview questions demonstrated the adequacy of the questions to capture the desired

information. If the interview questions were ineffective in obtaining the desired lived

experience during the interview process, I would have resubmitted the study to Walden's

IRB to ensure ethical compliance. After gaining approval from the IRB, I made all

required adjustments to the interview protocol (see Appendix C).

Data Organization Techniques

My role included using a filing system based on coded designators, assigning

each participant an identifier for organizing the collection of information, and associating

each identifier with a file that included interview transcripts and notes. After transcribing

the interview responses, a modified van Kaam approach aided in gaining a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. To further identify themes and

allow for proper coding of the information, I entered all findings into NVivo 10

qualitative data analysis software. Additional duties included saving all interview

findings, and other information from this study to an external hard drive and storing it in

a secure fireproof safe at my home, where it will remain for a period of 5 years.

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Data Analysis Technique

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I used the 7 step modified van Kaam approach for data analysis (Moustakas,

1994), with NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. Hutchison, Johnston, and

Breckon (2010) stated this type of software is invaluable to researchers who wish to

analyze and understand qualitative findings. Using the software improves confidence

that the coding of information has consistent results throughout the analytical process

(Hutchison, Johnston, & Breckon, 2010).

Before conducting any interviews, participants granted permission allowing me to

record their lived experience descriptions during the interview process, per the informed

consent form (see Appendix A). My role included interviewing each participant and

capturing the findings via digital voice recordings and research notes. If any questions

had arisen from the responses based upon the recordings and notes, my role would have

included arranging follow-up interviews. Prior to formally coding and analyzing the

findings, each member had the opportunity to review the transcription of their interview

to validate that the transcription accurately captured their lived experience (Mero-Jaffe,

2011). I organized the interview responses and entered the findings into NVivo 10

qualitative software for analysis to aid in understanding how layoffs contributed to

employees leaving downsizing organizations (For themes data, see Appendix D). The

coded thematic findings of this study may aid in extracting subjective meaning of

participants changing employers, after layoff procedures.

The nature of the interview questions could have substantially influenced the

outcome of this research. The interview questions in this study were open-ended, with

the intent of answering the central question of the problem statement. Specifically, the

following interview questions addressed why employees leave in pursuit of other

opportunities subsequent to the announcement of layoff intentions.

1. In as much detail as possible, please recall a typical day at work prior to
   announcements of a possibility of layoffs.

2. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day of layoff announcements.

3. What thoughts crossed your mind about the organization as management
   made the announcements, and you realized who would be released?

4. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day at work, after the announcements of layoff, in which you decided to leave.

5. What factors led to your decision to leave?

6. What was the tipping point at which you decided to leave?

7. Based upon your experiences, what, if anything, could management have done to change your decision to resign voluntarily?

With the use of the modified van Kaam method, I clustered the themes, identified and developed the subsequent theme descriptions for further analysis of the collected information.

NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software compares words and phrases to develop (a) themes, (b) subthemes, (c) categories, and (d) tags through its word recognition ability and auto-coding function (James, 2012). I sorted all identified themes by relevance to this study, with the use of the van Kaam seven-step method and NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. I identified responses that addressed the research questions and problem statement as well as those providing insights for how organizational leaders might retain employees, after layoff procedures. Collecting data that improved the understanding of employee retention subsequent to layoff procedures was the intent of collecting information in this study.

Cannon's (1932) cognitive activation theory of stress is the primary basis for the conceptual framework of this study. Cannon posited that humans can handle stress in small quantities and for short durations, but not as well in large quantities or over long periods. I explored if employees view layoff initiatives as significant enough stressors to

compel them to leave an employer. As such, others may use the findings of this study to counter factors of the layoff process that contribute to the breakdown of employees' organizational commitment.

The findings, related to Cannon's (1932) cognitive activation theory of stress that shows that people experiencing exposure to stress in large doses, or for long periods of time, may suffer physical or psychological challenges. This theory along with previous works on human stress (Lazarus, 1966; Ursin & Eriksen, 2004; Ursin & Eriksen, 2010) provided the conceptual framework for this study. How an employee deals with the stress of layoff, could contribute significantly to a person's desire to remain a part of the downsizing organization.

The expectancy theory postulated that stress acts as an alarm when occurring events are inconsistent with expected events (Ursin & Eriksen, 2004), helped form a key component of the conceptual framework of this study. Researchers have suggested that an individual's expected outcomes of a situation strongly influences the output in a given situation, based on the value affixed to the outcome by the participant (Liao et al., 2011). The findings of this study may show that some level of discomfort between expectation and reality contributed to the attrition of layoff survivors or the employees perceived the outcomes of leaving held greater value than the outcomes of staying.

The theory of psychological contracts between employees and the employer contributed to the conceptual framework of this study. Whenever there is a change in the relationship between employer and employee, it creates an entirely new relationship (Chaudhry, Wayne, & Schalk, 2009). The findings of this study supported the belief that

employees, who chose to leave downsizing organizations subsequent to the

announcements of layoffs, perceived the announcement as a compromise to the implied

psychological contract between them and their employer.

Prior to accepting change, layoff survivors may go into denial about the reality of

their new work situation. How employees react to workplace stressors may depend on

the established organizational culture (Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010; Oreg et al., 2011).

Organizational workforces with an established culture of sharing knowledge tend to be

more ready for change than organizational leaders who fail to promote such practices of

knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010). Based on the writings of Lazarus (1966),

findings from this study may or may not show that some stimuli in the work environment

(for example layoffs) cause stress that leave the employees no choice but to cope, avoid,

or leave the organization.

The more direct ties and personal relationships members of the group develop, the

stronger their commitment to sharing knowledge with others in the group (Wang & Noe,

2010). The level of readiness for change by the collective is contingent on and shaped by

group norms (Vakola, 2013). If these group norms are to provide any insight on

predictable behavior, the individual must identify strongly with the reference group

(Vakola, 2013). If members of a group share common objectives, similar characteristics,

or appearance the group may develop entitativity, then observers see the group as a single

entity as compared to the various members who make up the group (Crump et al., 2010).

How employees may respond to change in the workplace may be an unknown, but

identifying organizational culture and the level of group entitativity may provide

predictability of behavior

The findings of this study may be beneficial in predicting how survivors will

respond if they perceive layoffs as unfair or poorly executed. The theory of reasoned

action (RA) states that, individuals typically respond to situational stimuli in a predictable

manner (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). The themes and codes in this study may demonstrate

a level of support for the conceptual framework.

Reliability and Validity

The value of any research is dependent on the level of confidence others place in

the findings. Quantitative investigators demonstrate reliability and validity, whereas

qualitative scholars demonstrate rigor to establish trust and confidence in the findings of

a study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Guba (1981) suggested that qualitative investigators

seek to achieve *trustworthiness*, which is the equivalent to quantitative validity.

Qualitative researchers strive to achieve trustworthiness through the use of four

constructs: (a) dependability (the qualitative analogue to reliability), (b) credibility (the

qualitative analogue to internal validity), (c), transferability (the qualitative analogue to

external validity/generalizability), and (d) confirmability (the qualitative analogue to

objectivity) (Shenton, 2004). Using these constructs provides qualitative scholars a

means to match the criteria utilized by positivist investigators by addressing similar

concerns (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability/Reliability

Research that others cannot replicate may hold little value in the scientific community. Reliability by definition is the ability of others to replicate a study and derive similar results (Zikmund &Babin, 2012). In qualitative investigation, dependability is analogous to reliability.

Dependability. To increase the integrity of qualitative exploration, investigators develop specific criteria (Sousa, 2014). The differences in terminology between qualitative and quantitative inquiry methods tend to undermine the rigor of qualitative investigation, although many terms are interchangeable (Anderson, 2010). Using a consistent interview protocol (see Appendix C) for each participant and asking the same interview questions (see Appendix A) aided in assuring dependability of this study. Utilizing recordings and field notes allowed verbatim transcription in the contributor's' words thus reducing the likelihood of bias. Consistent with the recommendation of Shenton (2004), I reflected on the effectiveness of the process of inquiry to evaluate possible improvements.

Validity/Trustworthiness

It is imperative that the findings from qualitative exploration be trustworthy if readers are to attain ample confidence to make decisions from the findings of the study (Tracy, 2010). To demonstrate trustworthiness, which is analogous with validity, of the qualitative method and phenomenological research design, I documented all steps and procedures of this study. I structured the interview process to be consistent with the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994), whereby interviews take place in a controlled

environment, at a mutually agreed location. I conducted each interview in a consistent manner (see Appendix C) to provide a common basis for understanding outcomes.

The primary objective for qualitative inquiry is to reduce researcher bias or false interpretations by identifying valid information that supports the design concept (Bernard, 2013). When discussing validity/trustworthiness in qualitative investigation it is essential to distinguish between credibility and transferability, which are the quantitative equivalent to internal and external validity respectively. According to Shenton (2004), when establishing trustworthiness, ensuring credibility is one of the most crucial factors.

Credibility. By conducting purposeful sampling of participants and conducting all interviews in a similar setting (Tracy, 2010), I improved credibility of the interview process. Consistent with the recommendation of O'Reilly and Parker (2013), my role included interviewing participants until no new information arose, thereby establishing saturation. After transcribing the interviews, my role included triangulating the findings via member checking (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011) by asking participants to review the summary of their transcripts for accuracy. I used member checking along with clarifying questions during the interview process to assure the accuracy of the transcriptions. Accurately capturing the essence of the lived experience of the event under review, as affirmed by participants, is indicative of content validity as maintained by Lasch, Marquis, Vigneux, Abetz, Arnould, Bayliss, Crawford, and Rosa (2010). Consistent with the writings of Moustakas (1994), I bracketed any biases or preconceived opinions about the study in field notes.

My role included contacting participants via personal cell phones a few days prior to their scheduled interviews. The purpose of these phone calls was to develop an association with the study participants and confirm the time and place of the actual interviews. In an effort to enhance the trust participants extended to this study, I disclosed any personal experience with the layoff phenomenon as part of the initial conversation to establish strong working relationships (Shenton, 2004). Disclosing all biases and personal issues in the study via bracketing aided in reducing potential problems (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). I purposefully selected all participants of this study to assure that they were all members of a skilled trade and was aware of layoff initiatives by their employer prior to leaving in pursuit of employment elsewhere.

Transferability. In qualitative exploration, the extent to which a person's study findings have applicability in another context defines transferability of the findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Transferability in qualitative inquiry is analogous with *external validity* in quantitative examination (Shenton, 2004). To ensure transferability, part of this research effort included providing in-depth specific details about the type of work groups, the geographic location, and the type of industry that was under review. I documented all steps and procedures of this study. By including this type of information other investigators might be able to develop conclusions about the generalizability of this study to a similar context and might thereby promote what quantitative scholars (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Tracy, 2010) define as external validity.

Confirmability. Consistent with the recommendation of Shenton (2004), my role included ensuring that the findings of this study were the result of the lived experiences of the participants, rather than my preferences and biases. Achieving confirmability required me to disclose possible biases and personal issues in the study. As maintained by Thomas and Magilvy (2011), achieving confirmability is the investigator's responsibility. I complied by recording and transcribing each interview verbatim and using notes to capture opinions about each interaction. I assured the consistency of the use and interpretation of (a) the interview protocol used in the study (see Appendix C), (b) field notes, and (c) the summation review of the transcriptions to strengthen confirmabilty. Adhering to my interview protocol (see Appendix C) and maintaining precise notes concerning the data collection process aided in conformity.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2 of the study, my role included identifying gaps in the literature review pertaining to employee reaction to organizational downsizing. I chose a qualitative method with phenomenological design as the most applicable means to explore the reasons why employees voluntarily leave downsizing organizations following layoff procedures. Conducting face-to-face interviews with employees who voluntarily left downsizing organizations after layoff procedures provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of living through layoffs. The findings of this study could provide an insight and understanding to organizational leaders and human resources professionals about the cause of employee attrition following layoff procedures. This knowledge may lead to a change in how organizational leaders view their layoff strategy, and catalyze

developing a process that focuses on retaining surviving employees. Section 3 includes

conclusions of the research, explanation of the findings, and possibilities for future

exploration. I presented this study's findings of issues that might reduce employee

attrition after announcements of layoff intentions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose for this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of 20 experienced journeyman level artisans of downsizing industrial facilities located within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin. This exploration led to the determination of the significant issues that influenced participants to quit their jobs voluntarily, following announcements of intent to implement layoff procedures. My role included recording, transcribing and analyzing all interviews by themes using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis. The central research question of inquiry was: What information do organizational leaders need to reduce employee voluntary attrition after initiating layoff procedures, prior to the final reduction in staff?

The modified van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) was an appropriate approach for this study. The method allowed me to separate the phenomenological findings into themes after conducting the interviews, based upon participant recollection of the experiences of the layoff process shared during the interviews. The subsequent identification and development of theme clusters allowed me to prepare the findings for further analysis.

The interviews provided substantive responses identifying issues related to the decisions of employees who voluntarily severed employment with downsizing organizations, subsequent to learning about planned implementation of layoff procedures. These identified issues related to voluntary attrition may provide key insights and

practical ways in which management could improve their level of talent retention, subsequent to announcing their intent to implement layoff procedures.

Overview of Study

The purpose for this phenomenological research study was to explore how organizational leaders might avoid losing experienced employees during times of organizational change. More specifically, the purpose was to explore the lived experiences of 20 experienced journeyman level artisans within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin to gain understanding about the issues and experiences that affected employee turnover following the announcement of layoff intentions.

This study included using semistructured interviews to collect data from 20 journeyman level artisans within the geographic area. The interviews consisted of seven questions that correlated with the primary research question (see Appendix B). During face-to-face interviews, I asked each participant to respond to the same seven open-ended questions. Because the study was exploratory and theme building in nature, participants received encouragement to reply to every question with as much detail as they liked. This relaxed approach allowed participants to be as tangential as they wished, and facilitated a deeper, more descriptive exchange concerning the lived experiences of those participants who had first-hand knowledge of the layoff process.

The study design allowed me to explore the lived experiences of experienced artisans, who witnessed layoff announcements and subsequently opted to change employers. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is appropriate for capturing the essence of an experience, with this purpose in mind; a phenomenological

methodology was appropriate for this research study. Phenomenology provided a structured methodology to capture the lived experiences of participants as they witnessed the layoff process and how this phenomenon affected their organizational commitment.

I used a modified van Kaam methodology to evaluate the collected qualitative information. Using the modified van Kaam, resulted in drawing conclusions from the coded transcriptions of the recorded interviews. Consistent with Moustakas (1994), using the modified van Kaam permitted the capturing of the essence of the experience of living through the announcement of layoffs and the issues that contributed to voluntary attrition by members of the downsizing organizations.

After checking each interview with the appropriate participant for accuracy, I typed each interview transcript into NVivo-10 software for coding and theme analysis. To ensure anonymity, each participant received a coded identifier from P1to P20. Reading the interviews several times, reducing, and eliminating redundant themes (Moustakas, 1994) allowed me to derive a manageable number of substantive themes. Using this analysis process, nine themes emerged as a foundation for recommendations for possible social change and professional practice. The findings from this study include the identified themes from the interviews (see Appendix D).

Presentation of the Findings

The intent for this qualitative phenomenological research study was to answer one overarching research question: *What information do organizational leaders need to reduce employee voluntary attrition after initiating layoff procedures, prior to the final reduction in staff*? To answer this question, I developed interview questions (see

Appendix B) that addressed why employees voluntarily elected to leave downsizing organizations. The findings from this research study provided understanding about how layoffs, can affect organizational commitment. This study consisted of interviewing 20 experienced employees of downsizing unionized industrial organizations within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin. The 20 participants signed consent forms to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The data stemmed from the participants' responses to open-ended questions (See Appendix B). My role included recording all interviews and verifying all findings by using member checking.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and prepared them for data analysis. After recording and transcribing the interviews, to develop the findings I analyzed participants' lived experiences using NVivo 10 software. I interpreted results using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis. Moustakas developed the modified van Kaam method.

Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of analysis steps that I followed to develop the findings were:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping.

2. Reduction and elimination.

3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents.

4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application.

5. Construct an individual textural description for each participant.

6. Construct an individual structural description based on each participant's experience.

7. Using the themes and invariant constituents to construct a textural description

for each participant of the meanings and essences of the experience.

I triangulated the findings via member checking (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011) by

asking the participants to review my summary and interpretation of their transcripts for

accuracy. The results in this study addressed the research questions and factors that

contributed to experienced employees choosing to change employers following the

announcement of layoff intentions.

Emergent Themes

The themes collected in the interview process are as follows:

- Job Insecurity

- Entitativity

- Mental and Emotional Stressors

- Communication

- Employee Perception of Management

- Violation of the Implied Psychological Contract

- Trust

- Training and Education

- Organizational Process Issues

The emergent themes from the study influenced employee voluntary attrition

following the announcements of planned layoff initiatives. Participants of this study

discussed the various issues that led to their decision to seek other employment. The

purpose for the study was to understand the common issues that influenced experienced

employees to leave their jobs using lived experiences of the journeyman level employees. The themes presented in the findings provide organizational leaders and HR professionals an opportunity to retain experienced employees during times of organizational change.

Theme 1: Job Insecurity. Consistent with the work of Greenhalgh (1983), the fear of losing their jobs emerged as a significant contributing factor for employees electing to sever employment with the downsizing organizations. Of the 20 interviews conducted, 19 of the participants (95%) suggested that they had some degree of insecurity about their future employability with the downsizing organization. The threat of possible job loss proved to be a pivotal variable, when deciding whether to remain with a downsizing organization.

The threat of job loss was a legitimate stressor to those experiencing it. In this study, 95% of the participants cited job insecurity as a contributing factor in their decision to leave the organization. How participants handled the stress of job insecurity correlated with the CATS (Ursin and Eriksen, 2004), that demonstrated that people will receive a threat alarm when something is missing in their perception of the expected reality, and this discrepancy will elicit the triggering of some form of coping mechanism. The coping mechanism employed by the participants was that of avoidance, whereby they chose to remove themselves from the stressor. Consistent with the findings of Ursin and Eriksen (2010), the decision to leave the downsizing organization signaled the end of any previously held beliefs and expectations about the organization, because the participants believed there was no chance of influencing the outcome of the stressful event. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

I think it was at that point that everyone in the entire place changed their attitude and were asking like who's next, how far is this going, are we going to have any viable machines when this is all said and done? I think it was during this time that I made the decision that I was going to look for something else. (P6)

I thought we could be bought and sold over a martini at lunch because we were that much smaller now. (P1)

I think it impacted me probably more personal, I don't think I was too worried about anybody else when they were getting laid off, I believe I was more concerned about where I was going to end up. (P9)

You could feel the tension; people were not happy, they were moving jobs people were worried about their livelihood I don't know if there was anything exact or specific, but you know there was tension. (P9)

I decided to seek employment elsewhere that may offer a little better longevity. (P3)

That really wasn't much of a decision for me because the uncertainties would still be there no matter what. So I made a choice to leave, just so I would not have to deal with the stress there, there's too much stress in life to be worried about your job from day-to-day. (P18)

I didn't want to have to live with the day-to-day idea that they could be the last day of work fact or reality. (P4)

The stress associated with job insecurity can lead to employee attrition if an individual deems a threat as too formidable to ignore (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). Employees who believe there is no way to minimize the effects of the

threat may leave the organization to avoid the stress (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011). Many of the participants spoke about the effect of job insecurity on their organizational commitment.

   Theme 2: Entitativity. The loss of close friends and coworkers may trigger employees to leave an organization implementing layoffs (Rooney et al., 2010; Yousafzai et al., 2010). In this study, all participants were journeyman level artisans, experienced in their craft. Many of the participants (95%) had formed close relationships and identified themselves as part of a craft group, and not just as another employee. Consistent with the findings of Campbell (1958) these craft groups evolved into more than an aggregate of individuals. The three factors that determine entitativity include proximity, similarity, and common fate (Campbell, 1958). These artisans shared the same educational background, lived in the same geographical location, and worked for organizations whose employees were undergoing layoffs, thus satisfying all of the factors required that determine entitativity. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

They are always talking about family coming first and all that stuff, when you work at a place for a long time that is your family, and then they go and throw you under the bus, they can come to your face and tell you that they're laying you off, that ain't right. (P5)

I think for me, between the mechanics I&E and pipefitters, I think we all had our own little squabbles. (P9)

You still try to work as hard as you can. I did notice some people leaving, leaving rather quickly actually, they found something and decided to go somewhere else, and then that affected the group is as a whole as well, there was kind of a ripple effect. (P12)

We had a good solid workgroup because everyone was happy with the work because we had plenty of things to do after our general work was done. (P3)

People were friendly, you felt like one of the group, you felt like you are part of the organization, they treated you with respect. (P6)

He left because he thought that he was saving a job for an upcoming young millwright who needed to have a good paying job to support his family. It was just sad to see a group of talented people leave en masse. (P6)

We joked and laughed, you know it was good old time. I thoroughly enjoyed it there; in fact I thought that was the place I was meant to be, to be honest with you. (P13)

In this study, many of the participants spoke of the love for their work group and the trade that they practiced. Each craft possesses different talents and members of a group identified closely with other members of their craft. A significant number (50%) of the participants alluded to their training and experience as defining factors that separated them from other employees.

Theme 3: Mental and Emotional Stressors. Expectancy of outcome can provide a basis to predict an individual's motivation to perform in a certain manner to a given set of circumstances (Liao, Liu, & Pi, 2011; Ning & Jing, 2012). Participants consistently mentioned mental and emotional stressors, such the lack of information about the future of the organization and frustration over the entire ordeal as key factors to their decisions to leave. In this study, 90% of the participants stated that the lack of knowledge about the organizational direction contributed to their stress. Participants frequently referred to this lack of knowledge as *unknowing*. According to the expectancy

theory, a person's motivation to perform may depend on the perceived value of the expected reward (Vroom, 1964). Without any expected reward to motivate employees to remain with the downsizing organization, many participants (90%) referenced this issue in their interview. Employees who believe their employment to be less than permanent may feel less obligated to the organization as compared to committed long-term employees (Silla, Gracia, Mañas, & Peiró, 2010). Leaders can reduce the likelihood of employees leaving voluntarily by offering them hope for the future with the organization. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

The other feeling definitely was the uncertainty, the unknowing; you didn't know what was going to happen next you could not plan on anything. (P11)

Didn't think it was going to happen to us. There was a little bit of fear, I would say, fear of the unknown mostly, because nobody had any answers. (P12)

As far as the thought that came to my mind, I was very uncertain about staying there and what the future would hold, and what decisions would be made. (P18)

I didn't want to have to live with the day-to-day idea that this could be the last day of work fact or reality. (P4)

When I decided to leave, I was happy, because the doubt was gone. Granted, my job was not affected by any layoffs, yet but I didn't know the future. (P8)

As demonstrated by the above examples, employees may decide to change employers if they believe there is no future for them with the downsizing organization creating mental and emotional stress.

Theme 4: Communication. The lack of substantive communication was a significant element that played a role in experienced employees quitting their jobs following layoff announcements. During times of organizational change, subordinates view leaders who practice open communication more positively than leaders who are less transparent (Arnold & Staffelbach, 2012; Chong & Wolf, 2010; Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010). In the current study, 80% of the participants referred to communication or the lack of open communication as being a vital factor in their subsequent departure from the downsizing employer.

The culture of an organization can have a substantial effect on management, subordinate interactions. Consistent with the findings of Joo (2012), Employees may demonstrate more commitment to an organization with a culture based on trust and mutual respect than they would demonstrate to an organization whose leaders are less relationship oriented. In this study, participants identified communication as a crucial aspect in gaining employee trust because, during times of organizational change, employees seek answers. The employees look to the leadership group for answers but if management fails to provide answers to the workforce, the rumor mill will provide answers. Organizations with strong cultures, that provide employees with a sense of belonging and that encourage open communication, may be less apt to lose members following layoff procedures. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows: Like any other place, there are always rumors floating around. People still did their work, but it was like anything else it obviously affected them. For the most part, I didn't

see too much decline where I worked as far as production or keeping the machines

running. I would say the rumors were the big things. (P2)

They drove me into the attitude that it wasn't my concern about how they did things; it

wasn't my responsibility because they wouldn't listen to anything any of us said in the

first place. (P1)

They never let us know what they were up to. (P1)

Actually, I heard about it on the news. They didn't say a word to us; I was watching the

6:00 news and they reported that the company was going to layoff close to 1,000 people.

Through voluntary severances and stuff, but I didn't hear it from a supervisor or anything

or at work itself, it was actually on the news. (P5)

I was just sick of hearing what was going to happen next. We had this one guy in our

shop that was pretty negative, every day he would bring something up about the mill

shutting down. A lot of rumors and a lot of negativity. (P9)

I think it was rumored first that there will possibly be some type of layoffs. (P3)

I think there should be more discussion about ahead of an announcement to let people

know what is happening and what to expect, rather than rumors and speculation. When

considering layoffs organizational leadership should evaluate their options as far as

layoffs versus early retirements with reduced penalties. (P3)

I don't think that there was anything specific that they stated, as far as a formal

announcement. (P6)

     If people do not know the facts about a topic that has everyone's attention, they

may feel compelled to make things up, or draw false conclusions. When the participants

of this study spoke about the layoff process, many of them spoke about the circulation of rumors. In reflection of the participants' accounts, 70% of the participants believed the best way to combat false information or exaggerated tales, is to provide open and honest communication.

Theme 5: Employee Perception of Management. How employees perceived their supervisor and the management group contributed to their level of commitment to the organization. If leaders fail to convey confidence in the organization's direction, other members of the organization may resist the change initiative because employees may reflect and amplify leadership's lack of confidence in the initiative (Joo, 2010). Leaders must communicate to their employees the types of changes to expect and why the changes were necessary (Bull & Brown, 2012; Chen, Lai, & Chen, 2012). In the current study, 15 of the 20 participants (75%) commented about management as a factor that stood out in their minds as a problem, during the layoff process. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

I don't believe that it was first-line supervision at all. I believe it was above our plant; it was upper-level management that made this bad decision. (P14)

My supervisor seemed to really ride those employees that were performers, but those who were slackers, he tend to turn a blind eye to their ineffective behavior. (P6)

When considering layoffs organizational leadership should evaluate their options as far as layoffs versus early retirements with reduced penalties. (P3)

Management needs to understand that they cannot just tell people not to worry about it, what do they mean do not worry about it. This is my insurance; this is my livelihood, I am worried about it! (P19)

   Theme 6: Violation of the Implied Psychological Contract. Employers entice employees to join and remain with their organization through the use of inducements, such as wages and benefits; in return employees provide a high level of performance (Carraher, 2011; Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011; Restubog, Bordia, & Bordia, 2011). In addition to these stated inducements, there are other unstated incentives that aid in the establishment of an implied psychological contract between employee and employer (Eckerd, Hill, Boyer, Donohue, & Ward, 2013). Violation of the implied psychological contract between employee and employer was a significant factor that 75% of the participants addressed as a consideration prior to leaving their employer. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

I believe the attitude and the paper Mills at that time, was job security, you're set for life, it was the attitude that was within the management organization and the unions. Once you are in, you are set for life. (P20)

I was kind of letdown, because it was my first job out of school, and I was kind of proud of it. I was actually pretty proud of the company I worked for; I kind of had blinders on and thought no one would stab you in the back like that. I kind of felt betrayed a little bit. (P5)

Originally, everybody thought that the paper Mills would be there forever, and in

hindsight that was probably pretty shortsighted. Nobody thought the paper Mills would

be leaving, but if you look back on it was pretty stupid to think that way. (P10)

You worked a lot of hours, and you knew where your paycheck was coming from. Life

was pretty good, and everything was pretty stable and the wife and I it appeared that I had

found a location where I could retire. (P12)

I just wanted to do my job; I've always enjoyed what I do, and I have always had my soft

spot. If they are paying me, I have always believed that when I hit the job, I should be

doing what I'm getting paid to do. (P17)

It was like a decision that came from somebody else, someplace else who didn't know the

people, who didn't know the mill and the services they provided. (P16)

First of all when you get laid off like that, it leaves a very bad taste in your mouth,

especially when you give a good effort every day and you realize that in the end you were

just a number anyway. (P3)

        Some participants of this study viewed the decision of the organizational

leadership to lay off members of the organization as a betrayal. Whenever there is a

change in the relationship between employer and employee, it creates an entirely new

relationship (Chaudhry, Wayne, & Schalk, 2009). Some participant employees believed

that if they worked hard they would be able to retire from their jobs. In reflection of the

participants' accounts, once the employer broke the implied contract with the employee,

65% of the participants no longer trusted the leadership of the organization.

Theme 7: Trust. A contributing factor to employees choosing to stay or leave is the trust they place in the decisions made within the organization (Kim, 2009; Lavelle et al., 2009; Shah, 2011). The low amount of trust employees had that the organizational leaders and managers were providing open and honest communication about the future direction of the business and its employees was a significant motivator in employees electing to sever employment with downsizing organizations. When employees no longer trust the leaders of the organization, the leaders may find it difficult to make any change without enduring resistance (Spangenburg, 2012). A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

I kind of felt betrayed a little bit. (P5)

All of a sudden this paper market supposedly dried up and then they didn't need us anymore. (P1)

I kind of, I didn't want to believe it to be honest with you. I didn't think things like that would happen to me, or to anyone else. I just thought somewhere in the back my mind that maybe some way shape or form, they were going to do it through attrition, through maybe retirements or buyouts, or something like that I guess, and I didn't want to believe it. It just never really sunk into my head that it was possible. (P13)

I didn't trust them at all after I find out that they're laying people off through the news? That is not how I would want to find out that I'm going to get laid off and will lose my job from a third party. (P5)

You didn't know really who to trust anymore. I guess some of the feelings were at that time, deserted, let down, and I guess betrayed. (P12)

So they were trying to keep me there but not really guaranteeing anything. (P15)

I guess there are no guarantees in life. I don't think they could have put something onto paper that stated that you are guarantee that we are going to keep you; I don't know that I have a level of trust of that even. So I don't know. (P12)

No, I can't come back; I'm at a new job, and you may lay me off in six months anyway, I don't trust you anymore! That really frustrates me more than anything; I love working for that company, I love the guys I work with, I love my union I was committed to doing the best thing I could. Did they make me mad? Absolutely! I really believed in that company, I trusted that company, and they lied to me. (P19)

In reflection of the participants' accounts, perceived betrayal of trust contributed to some employees electing to seek other employment although they sincerely enjoyed their jobs. Some employees attributed the layoff process to corporate greed, whereby stockholders and executives of the organization feasted while the employees suffered. Other employees believed that the leadership group was dishonest and self-serving. In this study, 65% of the participants revealed this loss of trust in the integrity of organizational leadership as a contributing factor in their leave decisions.

Theme 8: Training and Education. The amount of training and education held by each participant in this study was an important factor in determining how quickly an employee elected to leave the downsizing organization. For many of the participants leaving the downsizing organization was a difficult decision to make, with 50% of the participants referring to their training and education as factors in their decision making process. Participants, who believed they had a skill set that was in demand by others,

demonstrated less fear of finding alternate employment. A sampling of the theme within
interviews is as follows:

 I had education; I had two journeyman cards, I had two associate degrees, and I had
substantial work experience. I wasn't too worried about it because I knew I had myself
set in a pretty good place and always did. (P20)

I never had any issues in finding other work. I thought if I got laid off there I would go
back into the pipe trades and go from there. (P2)

I was a journeyman electrician, and as soon as I was able to try to obtain my Masters
electrician license, in the state of Wisconsin, I went to some training courses and
Pewaukee on my own time. (P11)

You also realize, at the same time that you are so much further ahead with a
(journeyman) card in your pocket, compared to a papermaker. (P15)

Some of these individuals are production people with no more than a high school
education, and who have worked on a machine for the past 25 years. These people had
few marketable skills, for the trades it was different. (P19)

In reflection of the participants' accounts, employees with marketable skills are
confident waiting to see how management and organizational leaders handle the layoff
process before deciding to leave.

Theme 9: Organizational Process Issues. The one theme revealed in the
interviews that previously was not accounted for in the literature, was participant concern
for process improvements by the downsizing organization prior to introducing layoffs.
Participants in 25% of the interviews addressed the issue of improving or evaluating the

work processes. In some instances, participants suggested that the process improvement effort added a sense of legitimacy to the layoff process. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

The one thing that the company did right, is that they did everything possible to fix as much of the process as they could using the experience and knowledge of the people out on the floor before they made their cuts. (P19)

I don't believe that it was first-line supervision at all. I believe it was above our plant; it was upper-level management made this bad decision. Talking to senior management that went to other plants, they said in meetings that they had made the wrong decision. (P14)

I think that when it comes down to a company being in trouble, the first thing that they look at is labor, because it is the easiest thing for them to control. It is easy for me to say if I get rid of two people that saves me $200,000 a year, instead of looking at their process, and saying we can streamline this better or we can save money here we can save money there, it's easier to get rid of key personnel. (P10)

In reflection of the participants' accounts, employees may find value in the management evaluating the processes of the organization prior to announcing layoffs.

Voluntary Attrition Mitigation

Participants provided their perspectives on what management could do, if anything, to retain them, following announcements of layoff intentions. With the exception of guaranteeing no layoffs, organizational leaders could do little to keep participants committed to the organization. A sampling of the theme within interviews is as follows:

For a better deal, I don't think they could have said anything, because I wasn't looking at the local management level, I was looking at the bigger picture. (P20)

They would have had to probably guarantee my job for the next 15 years. (P9)

The only action that I feel would have prevented me from resigning would be if they were to say that there were not going to be any layoffs in our group. (P11)

I don't know if they could change my mind because the organization had changed enough that it wasn't the same place that I was working for when I first started. (P12)

In reflection of the participants' accounts, there is little organizational leaders can do to retain employees once the trust is lost, and the implied psychological contract has been broken. Any hope management has of reducing voluntary attrition following layoff announcements, must come during the implementation stage at the latest. Ninety-five percent of participants who felt betrayed could not trust the organizational leaders again.

Applications to Professional Practice

The previous themes provide organizational leaders with information for developing strategies for strengthening employee retention during times of organizational change, specifically following an announcement of layoff intentions. The influences that were most often mentioned as contributing factors that led to voluntary attrition by participants are (a) job insecurity, (b) communication, (c) violation of the implied psychological contract, (d) trust, (e) employee perception of management, (f) mental and emotional stressors, (g) entitativity, (h) training and education, and (i) organizational process issues.

Comprehension of how to mitigate the negative effects of these issues can reduce voluntary attrition. Findings from this study might add to the existing body of knowledge on past research on organizational change and provide organizational leaders with plausible information to improve employee retention during implementation of layoff initiatives. How employees respond to change plays a major role in the success of the organization (Bordia et al., 2011). The level of resistance to change displayed by employees may be a reliable predictor of their leave intentions.

Organizational leaders, HR professionals, and managers can use the study's findings to develop an organizational culture that is receptive to change. A culture based on the belief of mutual respect between leaders and subordinates may be more receptive to change than a culture that is less employee-focused. Implementing layoff initiatives in organizations with cultures based on trust and transparency could produce lower levels of voluntary employee attrition.

Implications for Social Change

Voluntary attrition subsequent to announcements of layoffs have unexpected consequences on the business environment and the employees who remain with the downsizing organization. Some survivors may be appreciative to have remained employed; others may feel abandoned by those who elected to leave. This research topic may be of value in view of the global economy that demands greater efficiencies in competitive markets. Voluntary attrition affects the knowledge base of the downsizing organization, the surviving employees, their families, and communities.

This research may facilitate the development of protocols regarding the training of supervisors and managers about the layoff process and the potential emotional and psychological challenges that may lead to voluntary employee attrition. Organizational leaders and managers must understand how employees view the layoff process. When changes occur, without prior communication of the upcoming changes, employees may feel disregarded and disrespected. These emotional triggers affect employees regardless of their level of involvement in the change. It is important to remember that pride, lifestyles, and long-time friendships bond the people who work for the organization. When layoffs occur, some individuals may perceive their future with the organization to be questionable at best.

Organizational leaders should not underestimate the importance of developing downsizing strategies that considers the organizational commitment of the workforce as the stress of the layoff process can spread to others in the workplace, as they see friends leaving for other jobs. This stress can affect employees' home life and the lives of their love ones who must endure the added uncertainty of the day-to-day existence (Keyes, Hatzenbuehler, & Hasin, 2011).

Recommendations for Action

There are several factors influencing employee voluntary attrition, following the announcement of layoff intentions. These findings could help organizational leaders execute strategic downsizing initiatives that improve employee retention. Lack of organizational culture building strategies may have a significant impact on organizations. Organizational leaders must understand how to implement successful layoff initiatives. I

recommend organizational leaders use the findings of this study to assist with implementing layoff strategies. Leaders should develop layoff strategies that enhance employee retention.

Developing layoff strategies can have a positive effect on the surviving employees and the organization. Organizational leaders should improve communication and enhance the relationship between employees and management. Improving communication can enhance employee management relationships, build trust among work groups, and demonstrate to employees that management believes they are valuable members of the organization.

Organizational leaders should also focus on creating an environment that helps inform members about the daily decisions made in the organization. Creating a transparent working environment can increase employee trust and decrease resistance to change (Kramer & Lewicki, 2010). Organizational leaders should encourage a culture of mutual respect between all employees, thus facilitating sharing knowledge openly.

Trade and industry journals, academic research journals, organizations, and publications can distribute the findings of this study. The findings of the study can aid managers, HR professionals, and business executives to develop a culture that is receptive to organizational change. Any organizational leader who employs a workforce with specialized skill sets may use this study to reduce employee voluntary attrition, following the announcement of layoff intentions.

Recommendations for Further Study

Little research exists about strategies organizational leaders can use to reduce employee voluntary attrition following announcements of layoff intentions, prior to the final reductions in staff. Recommendations for future studies include addressing some of the limitations of this study, specifically, the small population size and the geographical location. There is a significant need to conduct studies in the United States on a larger scale, on strategies that organizational leaders can use to reduce employee voluntary attrition following announcements of layoff intentions. Performing a study of this scale can provide organizational leaders with the requisite knowledge to reduce employee voluntary attrition. Findings from additional studies of this type might enhance the employee management relationship, increase employee satisfaction, reduce voluntary attrition, and improve employee morale, performance, organizational commitment, and the organization's profits.

By conducting research in the form of a mixed-methods study, future researchers could examine the financial implications of companies failing to retain experienced employees during times of organizational change. A future study exploring whether the recommendations of this study can positively influence the perceptions, organizational commitment, and voluntary attrition of highly experienced workforces in other organizations implementing layoffs could provide further support for developing organizational cultures of employees who have a voice in the future of their companies.

Reflections

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of 20 experienced journeyman level artisans located within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin and the contributing factors leading to their decisions to voluntarily change employers following the announcement of layoff intentions. The process provided considerable insight on the issue from diverse perspectives. The information gathering process, consisting of open-ended questions, provided opportunities for me and the participants to communicate openly about the layoff phenomenon. The participants were energetic about participating, and appeared to welcome the chance to speak about their lived experiences. The participants offered open and honest responses to the interview questions, and were considerate and accommodating.

During the course of the interviews, I realized the importance of communication in building any form of sustainable organizational culture. Many participants were concerned about job security, unknowing, and trust. Other areas that participants identified for potential improvement were employee management relationships, organizational entitativity, and process improvement. Some participants believed improvements in communication among all members of the organization would improve these areas of concern, and decrease voluntary attrition by employees of downsizing organizations.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Any loss of talent may reduce the expected benefits of layoffs. If leaders of downsizing organizations are to achieve desired results of layoffs, surviving employees'

organizational commitment must remain intact (Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge, & Campion, 2010; Malik & Ahmad, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore significant contributing factors to voluntary employee attrition following announcements of layoff intentions. In this study, I used the qualitative phenomenological approach with purposeful selection to explore the lived experiences of skilled employees within a 50-mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin.

From the findings of this study, I concluded trust and a violation of the implied psychological contract contributed significantly to voluntary employee turnover. Good communication and transparency could mitigate other factors leading to voluntary employee attrition. Organizational leaders can use the findings of this study to enhance organizational awareness and develop layoff strategies that improve employee retention following layoff announcements.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring factors that may contribute to employee voluntary attrition, following the announcement of layoff intentions by their employers. You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a member of a craft union and had attained journey-level status prior to the announcement of layoffs. You were employed by the organization for a minimum of 4 years prior to layoff procedures, and you severed employment of your own volition. This form is part of the process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named George Lightfoot, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of employees regarding the announcement of layoffs at their places of employment and their subsequent decisions to seek employment outside of their downsizing organizations.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Participate in an individual interview regarding your experience and reflections on the layoff procedures and your subsequent departure from the organization. This interview will take approximately 90 minutes to complete.
2. Permit the interview to be audio taped for analysis by me.
3. Review the transcript of your interview for accuracy.

Voluntary Nature of Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that I will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time. All responses will remain confidential. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. The interview will involve a detailed discussion of your lived experiences during the layoff initiatives and your subsequent decision to change employers. This study could potentially benefit organizational leaders considering layoff procedures by providing an in-depth employee perspective regarding voluntary employee attrition during layoffs that was not previously available.

Compensation:
Although participants in this study will not be compensated, your participation is greatly appreciated.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be entirely confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or any information that could identify you in any reports of the study. Data will be kept secure in a locked safe, maintained at the researcher's residence, for the duration of the research. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by Walden University.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me, the researcher, via telephone at (715-498-2107) or email (george.lightfoot@waldenu.edu).
If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-30-14-0305301** and it expires on **June 29, 2015.**

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Date of consent

Printed Name

Participant's Title

Participant's Signature
Researcher's Signature

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

To gain a richer contextual understanding of the lived experience of the survivors, I will

ask participants to relate their experience during the period before the announcement of

layoffs and after the announcement of layoffs.

1. In as much detail as possible, please recall a typical day at work prior to
   announcements of a possibility of layoffs.

2. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day of layoff announcements.

3. What thoughts crossed your mind about the organization as management
   made the announcements and you realized who would be released?

4. In as much detail as possible, please recall the day at work, after the
   announcements of layoff, in which you decided to leave.

5. What factors led to your decision to leave?

6. What was the tipping point at which you decided to leave?

7. Based upon your experiences, what, if anything, could management have done
   to change your decision to voluntarily resign?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Form

Interview Protocol

Institution: _____

Interviewee (Craft and Name): _____

Interviewer: _____

_____Interview Background

Post Interview Comments or Leads:

_____

Voluntary attrition following layoff procedures Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate note-taking, I would like to audio record our conversations today. This was addressed as part of the informed consent process. Essentially, this document states that: (a) all information will be held confidential, (b) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (c) I do not intend to inflict any harm. For your information, only I will be privy to the recordings which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. Thank you for your agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 90 minutes. During this time, I have a few questions that I would like to cover. You should have ample time to answer all questions in as much detail as you wish without fear of interruption.

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a member of a craft union and had attained journey-level status prior to the announcement of layoffs. You were employed by the organization for a minimum of 4 years prior to layoff procedures, and you severed employment of your own volition. The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experiences of employees regarding the announcement of layoffs at their place of employment and their decision to seek employment outside of the downsizing organization.

Interviewee Background

How long were you …

_____ in a craft position?

_____ at the institution?

Interview Questions:

As if recounting an experience for a listener who must recall and convey the event in full detail for others,

- Please recall a typical day at work prior to announcements of a possibility of layoffs.
- Please recall the day of layoff announcements.
- What thoughts crossed your mind about the organization as management made the announcements and you realized who would be released?
- Please recall the day at work, after the announcements of layoff, in which you decided to leave.
- What factors led to your decision to leave?
- What was the tipping point at which you decided to leave?
- Based upon your experiences, what, if anything, could management have done to change your decision to voluntarily resign?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Appendix D: Themes of Study

Theme	#of Participants	% of Participants
Job Insecurity	19	95
Communication	16	80
Violation of Implied Psychological Contract	15	75
Trust	13	65
Employee Perception of Management	15	75
Mental & Emotional	18	90
Entitativity	19	95
Training & Education	10	50
Organizational process issues	5	25

Appendix E: Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Cooperation from a Community Research Partner

Community Research Partner Name: Local 420
Contact Information: Mike Seeley

Phone: 715 446-3794

Email: seeley 1019 @ gmail.com

Date 06/23/14

Dear George Lightfoot,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the

study entitled Talent Retention in Organizations Facing Staff Reductions via Layoffs
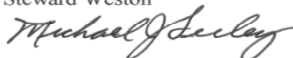
within the membership of Local 420 at the Weston facility. As part of this study, I
authorize you to contact any members who joined the union as a member of a craft group
durig the past ten years. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own
discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Allowing you access to
the speak with union members. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any
time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be
provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden
University IRB.

Sincerely,
Mike Seeley
Chief Steward Weston

Michael J Seeley

Curriculum Vitae

George E. Lightfoot

Doctor of Business Administration 2014

Specialization - Leadership

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Study: *Talent Retention in Organizations Facing Staff Reductions via Layoffs*

IBAM 2014

Lightfoot, G.E. (2014, October). *The IBAM story: A review*. Full presentation paper presented at the annual meeting of the Institute of Behavioral and Applied Management, Orlando, FL.

Master of Business Administration 2010

Specialization - Strategic Management and Leadership

Western Governors University, Salt Lake City UT.

Capstone Project: Threats to *Long-term Viability of Coal Fired Power-Plants*

Bachelor of Science 2004

Concentration - Business Administration

University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, Stevens Point WI,