


2016

# A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Employee Perceptions of the Impact of Layoffs

Linda Carrington  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Linda Carrington

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Review Committee

Dr. Godwin Igein, Committee Chairperson, Management Faculty  
Dr. Diane Stottlemyer, Committee Member, Management Faculty  
Dr. Jean Gordon, University Reviewer, Management Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, PhD

Walden University  
2016

Abstract

A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Employee Perceptions of the

Impact of Layoffs

by

Linda Carrington

MA, California State University, 2002

BS, University of Phoenix, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2016

## Abstract

Millions of Americans were terminated from their employment in massive layoffs in 2013, which not only created outrage among employees, but also opened the door for retaliatory lawsuits. However, profitable companies are still engaged in restructuring and layoffs, which have a negative effect on employees, managers, and survivors. Such actions create mistrust in management and continue to plague the workforce and the economy. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the impacts that layoffs and downsizing have on employees' trust, work performance, behavior, and health. Informed by Sarker's theory on management and employee trust, the research questions explored participants' work attitudes and performances after layoffs had taken place. Twenty participants, both managers and workers who were laid off or who had survived layoffs, took part in semistructured interviews. The data were coded and analyzed using comparative analysis. The results showed (a) most employees do not trust management, (b) stress and low morale were the most common effects from layoffs, and (c) employee productivity was limited during and after the downsizing process. The study can contribute to positive social change by identifying ways for company leaders to manage impacts of layoffs and implement effective organizational communication strategies that may result in reduced stress for laid off employees and a more productive work environment for surviving employees and managers.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God Almighty; without Him, this study would not be possible. I want to thank my family and friends for supporting me during my program studies. I want to give special thanks to my husband, Rory, for all his love and support. He gave me the confidence to continue and to refuse to give up no matter how difficult things were. I want to give special thanks to my daughter, Lakeisha, for her unconditional love and support and the way in which she has continuously encouraged me to further my education. She always said getting a PhD is a great backup plan for my second career. I want to give special thanks to my son, Rory Jr., for always telling me he loves me and how proud he is of my desire to further my education. I would like to thank my mom, Claudine, for also providing her love and support and being my shoulder to lean on when things have been overwhelming. I want to give additional thanks to a wonderful friend and mentor, Susan Gregory. She once said, "Think big and move forward." She never wavered with her support from the very beginning. Without the support from all of my family, friends, and colleagues, moving forward to accomplish my goals would have been very difficult.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Analysis of Layoffs and the Impacts**

Organizations are laying off employees, downsizing, and outsourcing work to remain in business. These measures created havoc within the workforce, generating effects that have continued to reverberate through recent years (Powell & Yawson, 2012). Employees forced out of work have had to re-engineer the trajectory of their career paths. Although research studies conducted in the past have focused on this topic, finding solutions to the problems of layoffs and downsizing have been difficult. Shareholders, executives, and managers remain under pressure to improve organization performance and survival chances (Powell & Yawson, 2012). Research has shown that layoffs may improve an organization's financial health, and may increase its stock in the short term; however, if a layoff is not executed properly, severe repercussions to an organization may occur (Powell & Yawson, 2012). De Meuse and Dai (2013) found that when employees were terminated as a result of layoffs and downsizing within an organization, the organization reported negative operational performances. Therefore, a strong and effective leader is crucial in managing organizational changes.

In any organization, leaders are responsible for operational management during and after layoffs and downsizing as well as how the affected employees are managed (Fragouli & Ibidapo, 2015). It is important for leaders to encourage employees to achieve their goals and support the needs of the employees. According to Heller (2012), leaders do the right things, and effective leaders communicate and coordinate strategies with their people to guide the organization's operations. Effective leadership, employee trust,



and communication are critical elements in the layoff and downsizing process (Vlachos, 2013). Leaders' behaviors promote employees' involvement and trust (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). A trust environment provides organizational development and process improvements (MacManus & Moscas, 2015). In a trust environment, employees work in harmony, take risks, and resolve conflicts (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2012). On the other hand, a distrustful environment may create disruptions in the workplace. Employees tend to become less dedicated to the organization and more focused on themselves (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2012). Previous research has shown that employees' relationships with their managers have major effects on their behaviors, attitudes, and work performance (Neves, 2014). A well-established manager employee relationship is one in which employees believe their managers support them emotionally and trust them (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013).

New technology is another key factor in the layoff and downsizing decision process. According to Boniface et al. (2012), technology is a key element in the expansion of corporate layoffs and displaced workers. Lewis (2011) stated new technological advancements created efficiencies and reduced redundancies; therefore, they eliminated jobs. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, an explosion in investments by telecommunications companies occurred (Figura, 2010). The Internet surge was on the rise and companies were investing in fiber optic cable based on the demand to access information electronically (Figura, 2010). As technology advanced, companies searched for employees with technological experience (Harris, 2014). They conducted employment searches for employees with the ability and skills to thrive in situations in

which speed and experimentations were the necessity (Harris, 2014). Hunter (2010) stated while the technology field was booming, the manufacturing field was decreasing. Hunter furthered argued that the technology advances eliminated additional costs for updating current databases that created cost savings and increased revenues. However, past research studies have shown job losses due to an increase in technology (Settlerstrom, 2013). Hunter presented the argument of considerable cost savings but does not provide an overall assessment of the contributing cost savings in correlation to the cost expenditures for employee unemployment benefits when laid off, rehired, and training individuals due to additional workload requirements.

Traditionally, corporations want to see cost savings, stability, and growth, and the companies that survive the downsizing and layoff process usually undergo proactive measures to avoid drastic downsizing actions (De Meuse & Dai, 2013). The alternative cost-cutting measures typically include organizational restructuring, layoffs, employee outsourcing, reduction in operating costs, and facility closures (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012). Large, global corporations have not been immune from the need to reduce their workforces. In 2014, Microsoft issued 18,000 layoff notices to their professional and manufacturing employees (Derousseau, 2014). In 2013, the Heinz Company implemented cost-cutting measures by terminating 740 employees (Sorensen, 2014). According to the owner of the Heinz-Pittsburg location, the organization was no longer profitable (Sorensen, 2014). Sears, the department store, laid off 800 workers as a cost cutting measure (Sorensen, 2014). In 2013, U.S. Big Lots stores closed all 78 Canadian stores, laying off 1,600 employees (Sorensen, 2014). Cisco Systems sent layoff notices to 4,000

employees in 2013. The Chesapeake Energy Company laid off 2,000 workers in 2013 as part of its reorganization (Jaewon, 2013). Bank of America laid off 2,100 employees, and Wells Fargo Bank terminated 2,913 employees (Jaewon, 2013). The data showed the job losses were not specific to any one sector, so no individual or organization was excluded from the layoffs and downsizing process. Company's lay off employees for various reasons, however, they must be vigilant of the impacts on their organization. Layoffs and downsizing affect all individuals involved in the process. Previous research shows that layoffs cost cutting strategies fails if not implemented correctly creating negative employee perceptions and negative manager-employee relationships among the remaining employees (Buhler, 2014).

The aerospace industry was hit drastically with massive layoffs. In October 2012, President Obama issued a mandate requesting the defense aerospace companies not to issue layoff notices due to the sequestration (Business & Industry News-Aircraft Finance News, 2012). However, many aerospace companies ignored the White House's request (Business & Industry News-Aircraft Finance News, 2012). In 2013, The Boeing Company laid off approximately 2,000 employees (Jaewon, 2013). Lockheed Martin in 2013 issued 4,000 layoff notices in 2013. Northrop Grumman terminated 750 employees in Southern California in 2013 while posting profit operating margins of 12.4% (Anselmo, 2013). While employees understand when company sales and profits are down and experiencing poor organizational performances, there may be layoffs and downsizing. However, employees are angered when company profits are up, and

individuals are being laid off. The employees consider the company's action as an act of disloyalty, dishonesty, and betrayal (Kalleberg, 2011).

Although layoffs in companies are implemented due to cost-cutting measures, some organizations had profit earnings (Aviation Week & Space Technology, 2014). Gandolfi and Littler (2012) identified three phases used by organizations for cost-cutting measures: (a) identify the quantity of jobs being terminated, (b) communicate the layoff and downsizing process to the employees, and (c) strategize and focus on the effects of the capital markets from the layoffs. While organizations implemented the different phases and strategies during the layoff and downsizing process, an in-depth analysis revealed no substantial financial benefits resulted from the execution of the layoffs (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012).

Martins (2012) argued the post effect of an organizational layoff can be damaging to the organization. Some studies have shown that methods such as layoffs, downsizing, and organizational restructuring have created more problems than solutions (Martins, 2012). When layoffs and downsizing takes place, organizations are subject to negative publicity, lawsuits, and a bad brand value (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). An organization's brand can impact future recruiting of new employees and current productivity levels (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). Research studies have concluded that individuals look for a quality brand in an organization when seeking employment (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). In a study conducted on organizational reputation and employment, participants were surveyed and asked if they preferred to work at an organization based on its reputation of being a good place to work or based on the

organization's products and services (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). Lowsky and Lowsky (2014) concluded the participants preferred to gain employment at companies with positive reputations. Authors of another study conducted on the impact of layoffs concluded that layoffs and downsizing do not necessarily make an organization more effective (Galagan, 2010). The authors of the study concluded that businesses rarely meet performance or financial goals after conducting a layoff and the returns on assets and profits often do not improve (Galagan, 2010).

Researchers have also explored the relationship between downsizing and profitability. De Meuse and Dai (2013) determined profitability has provided positive results in organizations. De Meuse and Dai examined the return on assets and profit margin in relation to downsizing and determined that downsizing companies outperformed nondownsized companies over time and showed financial improvements. Their study was conducted over a 5-year period to gather the necessary amount data for efficient results.

Although corporate profits have risen substantially in the last few years, companies are still choosing to downsize and lay off employees (Lewis, 2011). Often the downsizing and layoffs occur due to restructuring and the execution of mergers with other companies, providing opportunities to streamline processes in order to eliminate redundancies (Gandolfi, 2014). Whenever duplication of work is introduced or identified, employees are likely to be laid off. Under those circumstances, the layoff and downsizing process seems to be the most viable way for companies to stay efficient and profitable (Lewis, 2011).

Martins (2012) argued that poor financial performance is a contributor to layoffs. When an organization is performing poorly, some form of downsizing or restructuring take place (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Lewis (2011) pointed out corporate layoffs have both positive and negative perspectives. While a layoff can lead to the loss of highly skilled workers, a layoff can also provide an opportunity for a positive change to an organization if the layoff process is managed properly (Sitlington & Marshall, 2011). According to Lewis, since the collapse of the market in 2008, the finance sector has been on the upswing and has seen a rise in employee earnings.

Birou et al. (2011) defined key performance indicators, such as financial indicators and process indicators, as measuring tools used to monitor progress for cost savings. Birou et al. explained that when the key performance indicators reflect the deterioration of financial stability, more pressure is placed on the shareholders, analysts, and rating agencies to reduce operating costs. The short term strategy is to cut costs; as a result, companies may resort to layoffs (Buhler, 2014). Employees are knowledgeable of the layoffs and downsizing process. This study identified the challenges employees face during this process.

### **Problem Statement**

Layoffs and downsizing have a negative effect on employees and managers as well as those who survive the layoffs and downsizing process. This problem continues to plague organizations as layoffs and downsizing increase due to an unstable economy (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Layoffs and downsizing may produce lack of employee trust, decline in morale, and limited work performance and productivity in the workplace

(Anjum et al., 2013). The loss of productivity creates a major impact to the overall performance of the organization (Pfeffer, 2011). Managers may neglect to maintain or increase employee production and profit maximization after a layoff and downsizing event that may have a negative effect on business performance (Arce & Li, 2011). Inept communication strategies executed by management during and after layoffs and downsizing could create not only lack of trust among remaining employees, but also litigation problems (Martins, 2012).

Critical employee knowledge base, skills, and capabilities could be lost with the layoff and downsizing process, which could force an organization out of business. As a result of layoffs and downsizing, employees might experience health problems including physical and emotional stress, depression, and anxiety (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Layoffs increase the risk of heart disease by 44% and also increase the rate of suicides (Pfeffer, 2011). The emotional and psychological impact of layoffs and downsizing cannot be underestimated. Implementing changes in an organization can create a hostile work environment, and employees are not likely to be fulfilled at work as a result of those emotions (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). The emotional toll may be too challenging and may have a profound impact on their lives (Martin, 2012). According to Papa et al. (2013), a job loss may also include loss of income, financial instability, family and marital problems, inability to cope, and decrease in social status.

Organizational leaders and managers must be prepared when a layoff and downsizing process takes place. Effective leaders are critical in assisting laid off employees cope while providing support and counseling and assisting surviving

employees adjust to their work environment after a layoff and downsizing event have been implemented (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Gandolfi (2012) stated these types of leaders are viewed as transformational, charismatic, team-oriented, humane, and experienced during organizational crisis. Van Dalen and Henkens (2013) examined the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers and the individual's emotions during and after the layoff and downsizing process. They claimed that if employees detect some form of disloyalty from leadership, feel betrayed, or anticipate being laid off, then they will not produce quality work. Van Dalen and Henkens noted that when layoffs take place, employees are less committed than they were before the layoffs and downsizing process. Employees pay close attention to the fairness of the layoff and retaliate only if they are mistreated during the process (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013).

The research problem for this study is that layoffs and downsizing affect employees who are part of the organization during and after a layoff and downsizing event, as well as employees who stay with the organization. The study revealed the challenges employees undergo and the impacts to working relationships with their managers during and after the downsizing and layoff process in an organization.

### **Background of the Study**

Historical data have shown companies have recovered from financial hardships without implementing layoffs and downsizing. During the 1990s, corporations generally experiences growth, profitability, and record levels of job stability (Nicholson, 2011). Manufacturing and technology increased and many jobs were created (Nicholson, 2011). The burgeoning housing market created long periods of real estate price growth (Scanlon,



Lunde, & Whitehead, 2011). The labor workforce found steady employment (Figura, 2010). Major aerospace companies were making record sales and profits (Crumpton, 2011). The computer software industry experienced outstanding growth and opportunities and grew at a rate of 30% (Ndofor, Vanevenhoven, & Barker, 2013). The expansion in the software industry increased the workforce and added a new dimension of generational workers, the millennials. As technology grew, companies hired more millennials to assist in finding ways to improve productivity and efficiencies. Savage (2014) argued companies continue looking for means to reduce cost while maintaining productivity.

In 2008, the finance sector constituted a quarter of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and went from average for the economy to about 60% higher than the rest of the economy (Lewis, 2011). The shifts in the economy presented a transfer between 5.8 and 6.6 trillion dollars that were mostly profits (Lewis, 2011). By 2013, the economy was showing improvement (Feingold, 2013). According to Feingold (2013), the Global Currency-Adjusted GDP growth was at 23%. However, the GDP was estimated to decline by 2030, and other countries, including China, were predicted to take the lead unless their strategy is transitioned to include the global economy (Feingold, 2013).

As society became increasingly global, competition intensified, and then the recession hit (Sharma, Garg, & Sharma 2011). The impact of the recession was felt on a global scale, and negatively affected the world, including the economies of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Australia, China, and New Zealand (Sharma et al., 2011). Entire countries, such as Greece and Iceland, became bankrupt (Sharma et al., 2011). Since the recession, manufacturing companies have been struggling to survive

in this new business environment, in which work is streamlined and labor-intensive work structures are eliminated (Hedden, 2012; Sharma et al., 2011).

Technology has become the powerhouse that is traditionally fueling economic recovery in recent decades (Savage, 2014). The technology sector has been one of the areas of positive employment gains (Setterstrom, 2013). Corporations continue to search for and acquire technical talent with new ideas (Channel Insider Report, 2012). The list of qualified talent categories includes scientific, engineering, and mathematic professionals (Hedden, 2012).

Birou et al. (2011) noted that corporations were forced to make drastic decisions leading to layoffs. The executive leaders and shareholders often believe providing fewer resources can improve internal processes and that will ultimately improve their financial performances (Birou et al., 2011). Due to their interests and monetary ventures, they view the corporation as an investment organization rather than a social organization (Birou et al., 2011). However, when companies go out of business, those investments and future profits are lost (Sharma et al., 2011). Evidence has shown layoffs, and downsizing has a direct effect on employees financially (Papa & Maitoza). Within the larger economy, if individuals are not working, they are unable to make purchases, such as homes, cars, groceries, take vacations, and pay their children's college tuitions.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the impacts that layoffs and downsizing have on employees' trust, work performance, behavior, health, and their relationship with management during and after an event and to

provide recommendations for employee support. Further, the study's results revealed the challenges not only of the individuals who have been laid off, but also the surviving employees. In the study, I identified the manager's roles and responsibilities during and after the layoff and downsizing process as well. My recommendations for employee support during and after layoffs and downsizing include psychological counseling and support information, career training information, and educational assistance for future employment. The recommendations are shared so other organizations may begin to understand the importance of maintaining effective leadership and employee engagement during organizational changes.

The problems caused by layoffs and downsizing can create long-term effects on the employee, manager, and the organization (Sutton, 2010). Employees who remain can suffer from stress and low morale resulting in a drop in employee trust, company loyalty, and potentially, a toll on productivity (Ramlall & Magbool, 2014). Research has shown effective leadership and communication are required to minimize the impacts from layoffs and downsizing (Erkutlu & Chafra). In this study, I examined the employees' experiences and looked for effective ways to reduce the impacts. I conducted face-to-face interviews to gather this information.

### **Research Questions**

In reviewing the literature, there were different interpretations on the complexities of layoff and downsizing strategies provided to assist organizational leaders in reducing the negative effects. The research questions (RQs) I developed were specific and created to address the core of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The RQs were instrumental in

determining how far down the line the layoff and downsizing process affected the employees and their coping strategies. Although little is known regarding the full impacts of layoffs and downsizing on employees during an extended period of time, these questions presented a wide view of circumstances that may have unfolded during and after the process. This study was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What are the employee perceptions of effects on employees as a result of personnel layoffs and downsizing?

RQ2: What individual effects occur as a result of layoffs and downsizing?

RQ3: What are the employee perceptions of the long term implications of layoffs for an organization?

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was that of an exploratory qualitative focus, which explored the employees' trust, behavior, work performance, and their working relationship with their managers during and after the layoff and downsizing process. Effective and functioning leadership behavior encourages positive relationships between leaders and employees and establishes employee trust (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Trust is considered a critical element in effective leadership and aligned with organizational success (Savolainen & Lopez-Fresno, 2013). In contrast, ineffective leadership may create a negative effect on employee's behavior, lower levels of trust, and decrease organizational performance (Torres & Bligh, 2012). Research has shown managers' behavior affect the behavior and performance of their employees (Shunlong & Weiming, 2012).

I used a qualitative research approach for this study. This approach allowed me to explore the lived experiences of the laid off and survivor participants. A qualitative study allows the researcher to interact with the individuals during the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The individuals were selected to participate in this study based on their experiences. I used purposeful sampling in selecting the participants for the interviews. The participants for this study were solicited through job fairs, newspaper advertisements, craigslist, employment offices, career centers, temporary agencies, union halls, and social media.

The phenomenological design allowed me to explore the meaning of the participants' lived experiences during/after a layoff. The interviews gave me an opportunity to identify common themes. Converging on the importance of words and felt senses proposes many of the phenomenological techniques used for the interpretation of an individual's feelings (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). The qualitative method was selected for this study because most implications and issues can only be examined through methods such as interviews and observations (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013).

A phenomenological study provides the researcher answers to questions regarding how the subjects feel, what experiences are similar to their situations, what emotions they are experiencing, and what level of stress they are reporting (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Specifically, this study design allowed me to perform a thorough analysis of participants' behavioral patterns and expressions when asked of their concerns. These emotions and behaviors are directly related to the negative effects the individuals experienced during and after the layoff and downsizing process.

Qualitative research can help reveal organizational phenomena and in this study, that phenomena consisted primarily of layoffs and downsizing activities. Organizations are a collaboration of social groups that survive based on internal and external cultural factors (Anjum et al., 2013). The qualitative approach allows relationship building between the individual and the participants that may not be detected in a quantitative method (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Most importantly, qualitative approaches provide effective methods for researchers to acquire an understanding of the impacts of change programs, processes, and techniques (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). The results of this study can be an effective tool for executives, employees, and communities to understand and identify what steps can be taken to mitigate the emotional stress associated with the layoff process.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks are critical elements in a qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this section, I provided a thorough view of employee trust and work performance in an organizational environment and the theoretical linkage between the two. Sarker's (2011) theory of trust is related to the relationship between management and employee trust, work performance, and communication in the workplace. Sarker's theory provided an effective conceptual framework for studying the effects of layoffs and downsizing on employees, managers, and those who survive the layoffs and downsizing process. Organization success is predicated on employee trust, team effort, effective communication, and stellar leadership and management performances (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013).

Employee trust impacts job satisfaction and team performance, and managers should focus on building relationships based on trust and participation. Managers engage further with their employees and promote relationships and trust within the workplace by recognizing employee performance and accomplishments and listening to their ideas and concerns on a regular basis (Heller, 2012). Employer actions have the potential to create employee disloyalty if they result in a lack of trust in the organization. Sarker (2011) believed managers should focus on the development of trust and ensure all employees are being treated the same. It is up to the company executives and managers to ensure employees are treated fairly and with respect during and after a layoff and downsizing event. McManus and Mosca (2015) claimed that employees who trust their managers and the companies they work for perform better and are more receptive to organizational changes and help prevent the negative effects from downsizing (see Table 1).

Further conceptual insights for this study were focused on effective leadership during organizational layoffs and downsizing. Leadership styles are important and may influence employee's behavior in the workplace. This portion of the study is based on Burns's leadership (2004) theory. Burns believed effective leaders are transformational leaders with the ability to lead and inspire individuals. Burns believed transformational leaders skills develop during crisis and organizational changes including downsizing and layoffs. In order to be an effective leader, a leader must understand the employee's needs and possess the ability to assess those needs (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Therefore, a leader must be able to assess the nature of the situation to decide if transformational leadership is required and to what degree and urgency (Burns, 2004). Transformational leaders are

passionate about their work and their employees; they encourage their employees to commit to the goals and visions of the organization (Caillier, 2014). Transformational leaders are known to demonstrate high levels of hope and confidence to their employees (Gandolfi, 2012). This type of leadership style is needed for the layoff and downsizing process because surviving employee's confidence may have diminished as they became less productive (Gandolfi, 2012).

Landis and Harvey (2014) argued that leadership is considered one of the major components of the success of organizations. Landis et al. stated that when organizational changes take place, a leader's strength plays a major role in the decision-making and implementation process. The major components of various theories are based on leadership qualities. Most of the theories are grounded in three perspectives: (a) leadership as a process, (b) leadership as personality characteristics and traits, (c) and leadership as certain skills (Malos, 2014).



Table 1

*Negative Effects from Organizational Layoffs and Downsizing*

Laid-off Individual	Survivor	Manager	Organization
Lack of trust	Lack of trust	Untrustworthy	Lose Top Performers
Employee Disloyalty	Employee Disloyalty	Ineffective leadership skills	Negative Public Perception
Poor Health	Poor Health	Poor Health	High Attrition
Employee Retaliation	Survivor's Guilt	Less Engaged with employees	Poor Organizational Performance
Financial Impacts	Increased Absenteeism	Stress	Low Employee Morale/ Productivity
Heart Attack Risks	Depression	Anxiety	Financial Impacts
Anxiety	Anxiety	Hostile Work Environment	Decline in Profit/ Market Shares
Panic	Overworked	Unethical Practices	Facility Closures
Depression	Less work participation	Behavioral Changes	Long Term damage to company goals
Lack of Self-esteem	Less motivated	Lack Employee Empathy	Damage Company Reputation/brand
Family/Marital Problems	Fear future layoffs	Poor Judgement/Decisions	Significant Costs negate savings
Humiliation	Hostile Work Environment	Lack Effective Communication Skills	Loss of Customers
Feel betrayed	Weight loss	Negative attitudes	Loss of Innovation
Pain	Sleep Disorder	Lack employee support	Loss of Knowledge and Skills
Social status	Low motivation	Less visible (absent)	Litigation/Legal Problems

*Note.* Adapted from “Could We Manage Not to Damage People's Health?” by J. Pfeffer, 2011, *Harvard Business Review*, 89(11), p. 42.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Downsizing:* An organizational change reduction strategy to improve efficiency and performance (Cascio, 2010).

*Empathy in the workplace:* An in-depth understanding on an emotional level of what an individual is experiencing. Empathy shows concern about other people (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2014).

*Job loss:* Termination to a person's employment, and a life-changing event with major consequences to an individual's financial, emotional, and physical health (Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, & Jolley, 2013).

*Layoffs:* An organization's process to terminate employees. Layoffs are used to reduce organizational labor costs and expand competitiveness (Karkoulian et al., 2013).

*Long-term strategy:* A work plan considered to address problems over a longer period of time to address future organizational changes (Capps, 2014).

*Mass layoffs statistics:* A program that is a federal-state collaborative effort to collect job information on job reductions in the United States (Handwerker & Mason, 2012).

*Restructuring:* The process of realigning an organization's structure. The process also allows executives, shareholders, and leaders to determine root causes for process improvements (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012).

*Short-term strategy:* A work plan considered for a short period of time to address immediate challenges and goals. The plan has detailed actions presenting a timeline of completions within a 12-month time period (Capps, 2014).

*Survivor illness:* A malaise state that remaining employees develop after a layoff has been implemented. The symptoms include stress, guilt, depression, and low motivation (Meinert, 2012).

*Trust:* A belief in others. Immense trust levels allow employees to present organizational loyalty and commitment (Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2012)

*Work stress:* Circumstances that employee face that challenges their mental, physical, and emotional health (Kar et al., 2013).

### **Assumptions**

The key assumption in this study was that participants would be eager to share their emotional and physical experiences during the layoff and downsizing process. In particular, this study was a way for affected employees to express their perspectives on the implementation of layoffs, the ways in which the process was managed, and issues related to the experience. It was also assumed that the employees and managers involved in the study would be honest and straightforward with their answers to the interview questions.

### **Limitations**

This study has the following limitations. First, there were potential design and methodological weaknesses in the study. One particular limitation was the small sample size, which can be explained by the use of the diverse sample of participants from different organizations and industries. Though small, the population effects are important because they open up areas for future theory and research on the influence of layoff agency on participants' attitudes and values. Although managers and employees are

divided on reasons for layoffs, their participation may also have been influenced by their own personal perceptions and attitudes on the process. Their strong attitudes and beliefs may have prevented them from providing adequate responses during the interview questions.

Secondly, organizations implement various forms of downsizing such as layoffs, restructuring, mergers, outsourcing, and offshoring (Mertz et al., 2010). This study was more focused on layoffs and the emotional aspects of employee behavior than on other forms of downsizing. Future research should be conducted to discuss the various forms of downsizing. This research would require additional information on specific downsizing methods and impacts.

Thirdly, there may have been outside factors that contributed to downsizing and layoffs. In this study, I mostly focused on the internal processes, decisions of the organization, and the perceptions of the employees. In this study, I only focused on the experiences of employees regarding the layoff and downsizing process. Due to the small number of participants, this study was generalizable to other populations.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of the participants and their perceptions of their manager's behavior during and after layoffs and downsizing. In this study, I focused on the employees' trust levels, psychological aspects, emotional and mental conditions, stress factors, physical aspects, and the financial challenges they faced and recommended alternatives and improvements to the layoff and downsizing process. The participants included the employees, managers, and survivors of layoffs and

downsizing. The participants were from all demographics, races, ages, and genders and came from various companies.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Ethical concerns for this study may have included biases among the manager and employee participants for various reasons. As part of the study, the participants were willing to detail their circumstances regarding being laid off, which might have been a trauma for some. I provided acknowledgment to the participants that no harm would come to them for participating, but they had the option of ending the interview at any time. If the participants showed any signs of distress, I would stop the interview at that moment and request emergency attention if needed, and ask the participants if they would like to continue at a later time or be released from the study. I refrained from collecting any anecdotal evidence and did not conduct research among employees with whom I had working relationships. Most importantly, I avoided any biases throughout this process through the use of bracketing.

The managers and employees who participated in the study may have realized their responses could be damaging and may have guarded them by being less than truthful. My responsibility was to assure the participants of strict confidentiality in this study. On the other hand, managers may have been tempted to hire employees who have had experiences favoring downsizing and layoff and who believed in the ideology of shareholder wealth and employee self-reliance. Such circumstances may have prompted the managers to strengthen their beliefs in these ideologies among their current employees, hoping the employees' perception of layoffs would shift in directions

conducive to acceptance of the practice. In some cases, CEOs provide their vocal support to policies revealing their influences on the process (Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick, 2014).

Leaders and managers are required to maintain ethical behavior in their roles in the workplace. The layoffs and downsizing process must be ethical to be recognized as socially responsible (Lakshmann et al., 2014). The employee must feel the process was done fairly and equitably. Therefore, leaders must clearly define the layoff criteria for employees to accept the process (Lakshmann et al., 2014). This study can be used to address some ethical concerns regarding the treatment of employees during layoffs. The RQs assisted in highlighting areas that may be unethical.

### **Significance of the Study**

Layoffs and downsizing are important issues that continue to plague the workforce and the economy. The study was significant to the employees directly affected and the survivors who remain at the organization. Waraich et al. (2012) acknowledged there is also a need to assist surviving employees after a layoff. They suggested that programs for survivors should be implemented in addition to employee assistance and outplacement programs provided to laid-off employees. According to Waraich et al., employees are instrumental in an organization's success, and the company's assistance programs provided to laid-off employees and surviving employees are crucial in maintaining their trust and devotion. Waraich et al. argued the behavior of survivors are as paramount as the financial intentions for the organization's future competitiveness, and for an organization to retain a positive reputation, the employees must be satisfied the layoff and downsizing process were conducted fairly.

This study can provide alternatives to the layoff process and recommendations for training support for laid-off individuals and survivors adjusting to their new work environment. When employees are laid off, the surviving employees are tasked to take on additional workloads. Training should be provided for survivors to take on this new work scope. This study can be a reference tool for other organizations to use when implementing layoffs and downsizing while trying to maintain a profitable, productive, and positive work environment. Although many people in organizations have experienced a layoff restructuring process, in this study I focused on individual involvement of employees and managers including the emotional and physical aspects of what they have gone through during and after the process. There should be more emphasis on management and employee interaction when the layoff process takes place. In this study, I emphasized the importance of leadership training so leaders gain experience recognizing, responding to, and managing emotional behaviors within their employees.

Lowsky and Lowsky (2014) posited that the success of layoffs and downsizing are predicated on the treatment of both laid off employees and the surviving employees. The employees will accept the process if properly handled (Sitlington & Marshall (2011). While the economy is far from a full recovery, and layoffs will continue, company executives understand that to establish growth potential, they must implement policies that will assist the affected employees (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). These policies and procedures will provide useful guidelines for a successful layoff and downsizing event.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Establishing a thorough understanding on the impacts of organizational downsizing and employee layoff can be beneficial to business enterprises. This study can contribute to social change by identifying ways to manage the impacts from the layoffs and downsizing. Employers can provide job search assistance to lay off employees who have the necessary skills for available jobs and assist those without necessary skills with career development opportunities or educational training that is relevant to the needs of the job market. This way, they are not only helping them to gain different employment and acquiring the necessary skills, they are also helping others to acquire confidence, motivation, and support while pursuing other career endeavors.

The study can further impact social change by reducing the stress bestowed on employees when layoffs and downsizing are being announced, creating a more compassionate process for layoffs, and creating a better work environment with supportive morale and productivity for surviving employees who remain at the organization after the layoff process has taken place. Establishing stability in the workplace will improve employee trust and productivity which creates a better relationship with their managers. This study can provide areas for improvement and communication factors and promote the concept of companies working with their employees by soliciting their input into the process. When leaders include their employees into the decision-making process, the employees are more productive and satisfied with the outcome (Buhler, 2014).



### **Gap Implications**

An integrated strategy of working with other organizations on different methods of coping with layoff and restructuring is needed for effective policies. These collaborative work teams are instrumental in creating and documenting processes for future organizational changes. This strategy could be initiated by improving effectiveness of communication with employees. A strategy for using advanced technology is also needed, which will help in addressing global competition. This study can create a conceptual map to outline problem areas. This tool can be implemented during the participants' examination process to document the emotional, mental, physical, and financial needs of employees while coping with the layoff process. Although human resources involve treatment of employees, this documented process could capture activities when problems arise.

This study could also provide areas for improvement and communication factors and promote the concept of companies working with their employees by soliciting their input into the process. I explored the views of the managers during this process and what influenced them to make the decisions that were directly related to the process. In particular, the leadership styles of the managers played a major role in their decision-making process. As I gathered and analyzed the interview and observation material, I was able to provide additional information and follow up on topics to better understand the research data.

## Summary and Transition

Organizational leaders are constantly looking for ways to improve efficiencies through cost savings. Most importantly, company leaders are interested in making profits. Organizational downsizing and layoffs have continued to be the most common forms of job reduction strategies (Dencker, 2012). Although layoffs and downsizing are used to streamline organizations for better profits and performances, the treatment of laid off employees may be just as important. Sarker et al. (2011) argued layoffs and downsizing create lack of employee trust. Although employees are suffering emotionally, physically, and financially during these troubling times, they are challenging the layoff process through legal litigations (Lowsky & Lowsky, 2014). They are challenging the fairness of layoff criteria and using social media to communicate negative information about their employers (Blau, 2012).

The remaining employees are affected when they observe the treatment of the laid-off employees. They suffer from emotional stress due to the additional workload assigned to them by management. Survivor behavior in the workplace can generate even more harm to the organization after the layoff process has been completed (Meinert, 2012). Specifically, the surviving employees may be experiencing feelings of insecurity about their job stability and may be unable to trust management. These surviving employees may be consumed with the realization that they too can be laid off in future downsizing (Boswell, Zimmerman, & Swider, 2012)

Organizations and leaders are known for being less engaged with their employees during and after the layoff process (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). Leaders must be able

to work with their employees and to effectively communicate their visions and goals (Carriger, 2013). Most importantly, leaders shoulder the responsibility for tactical discussions regarding profitability and the future of the organization, and they also must accept the duty of competently and fairly delivering negative and potentially detrimental information regarding employment to those who report to them (Bies, 2012). Effective leaders must create a positive work environment for their employees. These leaders must inspire, encourage, and engage with their employees to maintain a successful organization.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive analysis of the literature on layoffs and downsizing and employee perceptions of laid-off employees, managers, and survivors. The chapter also provides a review of the emotional, physical, and financial effects on the individuals doing this process. This section provides specific information on employee trust, effective leadership, communication and layoff alternatives.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the impacts layoffs and downsizing have on employees' trust, work performance, behavior, health, and relationships with management during and after an event. While some studies have focused on layoffs and downsizing impacts, only a few studies have provided an in-depth analysis and examination of an employee's emotional and physical challenges when this process is implemented. What happens to an organization when employee trust begins to erode and disintegrate has not been fully explored. Such consequences include if an organization can regain an employee's trust after a layoff and downsizing process or the survivor's ability to maintain strong work performances and positive work relationships with their managers during and after a layoff and downsizing process.

The information that I will provide in this literature review explores the issues involved within the layoff and downsizing process, show the aftermath within the workplace that remains following layoff activity, and present strategies for managers to use for improvements in the approach to layoffs. Some strategies will focus on rebuilding employee's trust and morale after layoff and downsizing implementation. The data in this study can assist organizations with the complex environment involved with layoff decisions and provide recommendations for support resources for laid-off and surviving employees. In Chapter 2, I will present literature review information related to employee layoffs and downsizing and their personal experiences. In the literature review, I will provide a variety of dimensions including vision, leadership, organizational changes, and

corporate responsibilities to employees, stakeholders, and communities. In addition, in this chapter, I also will provide information on new technology impacts, effective leadership roles and job loss, behavioral patterns of laid-off and surviving employees, and alternatives and support recommendations for surviving employees.

This study is significant because layoffs and downsizing have become common strategic tools as organizations struggle, layoffs and downsizing tools are cost-cutting strategies (McManus & Moscas, 2015). These reduction strategies have been used in various organizations to cope with the unstable economy, globalization, and advances in technology (Boniface et al., 2012). Sitlington and Marshall (2011) claimed that layoffs and downsizing improves organizational knowledge, effectiveness, and performance. On the other hand, Iverson and Zatzick (2011) posited that the impacts of layoffs and downsizing also diminish the power and influence of the leaders and executives. Although companies use both layoffs and downsizing to reduce operating costs, they are considered two separate strategies. An analysis of the literature on layoffs and downsizing reveals the differences and similarities between layoffs and downsizing in this study.

The strategy that I employed to retrieve literature for this study consisted of a systematic approach that established specific keywords related to the topic and validated the information extracted were germane to the study. The keywords used to research this study were (a) layoffs, (b) downsizing, (c) employee trust, (d) job loss, (d) layoffs and employee perceptions, (f) leadership, (g) communication, (h) surviving layoffs, and (i) layoff alternatives. I used different databases to retrieve sources for this study. The

databases were (a) ProQuest Central, (b) SAGE Premier, (c) Business Source Complete, (d) ABI/INFORM Complete, (e) EBSCO, and (f) Science Direct. The remaining literature collected for this study was from scholarly and professional books. The articles used for this study were from peer-reviewed journals.

### **Layoffs**

Layoffs are one of the most common forms of downsizing and have the most impact (Van Dierendonck & Jacob, 2012). The impacts of layoffs are ongoing. Therefore, leaders must be able to begin the healing process by engaging with the surviving employees (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014). Davila and Pina-Ramirez (2014) stated the engagement concept between the manager and the employee relies on an emotional component. Developing a process to move forward after a layoff or downsizing is just as important as the decision to terminate an individual (Barnes, 2013).

Massive numbers of layoffs have taken place over the past decades. Furthermore, layoffs have become a way of life for companies regardless of company performance and the impact of layoffs on employees (Pfeffer, 2011). Evidence from research has shown companies continue to terminate workers even when profits are on the upswing (Lewis, 2011). For example, the auto industry has been laying off employees on a regular basis although the industry has improved (Pfeffer, 2011). There has been an increase in vehicle sales, up 7.5% from 14.4 million units in 2012 to 15.5 million units in 2013 (Carter, 2014).

When the airline industry went into a recession after the 9/11 tragedy, most of the airlines laid-off thousands of employees (Muduli et al., 2011). Southwest Airlines chose

not to lay off their employees during this critical time (Muduli et al., 2011). This organization decided to work through the financial problems maintaining their workforce and low airfares (Muduli et al., 2011). The leadership team executed their contingency plans taking into consideration the concerns of their employees (Pfeffer, 2010). Although the leaders were aware of the financial challenges, they were more concern about the well-being of their employees and did not want to lay off employees. Southwest Airline's successes were predicated on their employee performances and wanted to maintain the talent base of experienced workers (Muduli et al., 2011).

Bell (2013) argued that layoffs and termination create a sense of humiliation and lack of self-esteem within an employee. Pfeffer (2011) stated that layoffs can create more problems than solutions. According to Pfeffer, when employees are laid off, they may develop serious health ailments such as stomach aches and headaches. Karren (2012) argued layoffs and downsizing create anger and anxiety, and in some cases suicide. Boswell et al. (2012) concluded that anger and depression are two of the most common emotions a laid off employee experiences. Subsequently, the angered employees may express their feelings through social media (Blau et al., 2012). This form of communication presents an adverse effect on the employees and the company. Leaders must always maintain a positive relationship with their employees (Lakshmann et al., 2014). When managers and leaders show they are concerned about the workers well-being, employees will see their leaders and managers as fair and trustworthy.

## **Downsizing**

Downsizing is considered the most systematic approach to determine the root causes of the failed organizational performance, and to look for solutions to correct the problems (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Downsizing is considered a form of survival (Luan et al., 2013). It is the executives' and stakeholders' decision to determine if downsizing is appropriate. Downsizing may consist of restructuring, reducing operational facilities, instituting pay cuts, merging with other companies, outsourcing, offshoring, and implementing layoffs (Maertz et al., 2010).

Day et al. (2012) stated downsizing may leave empty positions that may be filled at a later time. Day argued that because these unfilled jobs are not being performed, restructuring is necessary after downsizing. According to Razzaq (2013), downsizing creates several consequences including limited work force, ethical problems, and unemployment. Past research has examined the organization's reasons for layoffs and downsizing (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Some layoff reasons may include financial problems, overstaffing, redundancy and operational shutdowns (Gandolfi, 2014). When layoffs occur, the workers suffer the most (Fraher, 2013). Unfortunately, most employees are the last to know about the layoff and the least prepared financially, emotionally, and physically.

The layoff and downsizing period is a difficult time when the emotional and physical well-being of the employee is being challenged. Collinson (2012) claimed that leaders and managers must exemplify strength to be effective during challenging times. Furthermore, corporate leaders must show they have the ability, influence, and power to



implement successful corporate changes such as layoffs, restructuring, and downsizing (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Lakshmann et al. (2014) stated that an effective leader must be able to take on the challenges and responsibilities of employee layoffs. When leaders accept these responsibilities, they elevate their leadership power and authority behaviors (Barnes, Humphreys, Oyler, Pane Haden, & Novicevic, 2013).

### **Employee Trust**

MacManus and Moscas (2015) stated employee trust and lack of trust can be detrimental to the development and sustainment of workplace engagement. If the manager and organization are considered untrustworthy, the employees of that organization become less productive (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Employees who trust their managers perform better and are less likely to reject organizational changes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Trust requires open and honest communication between all parties involved.

Organizations are beginning to realize the importance of trust (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Previous research has shown employees are more productive when they trust management (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Trust can strengthen knowledge sharing (Robertson, Gockel, & Brauner, 2012). Sarker (2011) argued that trust is the core to development and maintenance of workplace engagement. Agarwal (2013) argued organizational trust is an important construct for employee trust and relations. Sincere, genuine, and honest communication provides the most crucial element in the process of building and retaining trust (Heller, 2012). A good manager and leader engages their

employees and keeps them informed of the latest organizational changes and notifications.

Research has shown the impacts of employee trust and performance during and after layoffs and downsizing. Several studies found that layoffs and downsizing did not help most organizations achieve their economic goals because of poor employee and organizational performances (Fraher, 2013). A study was conducted between September 2010 and July 2011 on 127 airline pilots in the United States to examine the effects of corporate layoff and downsizing on the pilots' trust, morale, performance, and organizational commitment (Fraher, 2013). Participants responded to surveys and were interviewed in semistructured interviews (Fraher, 2013). The participants were asked open-ended questions and encouraged to discuss their stress levels, feelings, emotions, and trust levels with management. The findings revealed an intense impact on the employees of the layoff and downsizing process. Most of the participants condemned their airlines layoffs and downsizing strategies, exhibiting a decline in trust and loyalty to their employers. Of the 127 pilots who participated in the study, 96% were skeptical about the strategy and 36% regarded the decisions as incompetent (Fraher, 2013). The study showed the employee's lack of trust with their managers and their union representatives. In the study, some employees stated they were not able to perform their work duties due to the stress levels, and many pilots described the stress layoffs and downsizing caused for their families. This resulted in major absenteeism from work that ultimately impacted the organization's performances (Fraher, 2013).

Employee behavior may change in the event of layoffs and downsizing. Neves (2014) argued downsizing events create retaliation behaviors from negative thoughts and fears. As a result, employees may become despondent and depressed (Fraher, 2013). Because layoffs and downsizing are stressful and painful, employees resort to various coping strategies such as absenteeism, disloyalty, and quitting the company (Subramony & Holtom, 2012). Moreover, downsizing and layoffs creates uncertainty and anxiety in surviving employees, and their behavior becomes emotional causing health problems or death (Pfeffer, 2011).

In some cases, the surviving employee does not see the downsizing and layoffs as threatening and accept the organization's strategy. Their behavior may demonstrate a sign of relief that they were not laid off and that they are willing to do whatever is necessary to remain at the organization (Aggerholm, 2014). This employee behavior could appear enthusiastic hoping the downsizing and layoff may improve the organization's future performance (Mayton, 2011). Subsequently, the employee positive behavior motivates them to take voluntarily on the additional workload due to the reduction (Aggerholm, 2014).

Employee work performance is critical to the success of an organization. Research studies have shown organizations commonly use layoffs and downsizing to increase efficiencies, reduce cost, and improve overall organizational performance (Subramony & Holtom, 2012). Although evidence has acknowledged the benefits gained by layoffs and downsizing, the benefits may be offset by the remaining employees' poor work performance (Subramony & Holtom, 2012). Employees may exhibit characteristics

of helplessness due to lack of control of the circumstances (Neves, 2014). According to Neves (2014), helplessness creates the loss of productivity in the workplace. Also, layoffs and downsizing can have a detrimental effect on employee ability to perform their regular work tasks (Mayton, 2011). Moreover, downsizing and layoffs may have a devastating effect on survivors. They become worried having lost their friends and coworkers (Aggerholm, 2014). Overall, the effects may be long-term and can impact the company's performance (DeMeuse & Dai, 2013)

During and after a layoff and downsizing event, employee engagement is critical in creating more efficient and productive employees (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Being involved in a positive work environment encourages employees to go above and beyond the call of duty. On the hand, when an employee is stressed and concerned about their job, they become discouraged. Therefore, keeping the employee engaged helps them feel valued and determined to perform their best work (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015).

Employee working relationships are built on trust, loyalty, and a clear understanding of organizational goals and objectives (Agarwal, 2013). When layoffs and downsizing occur, employees become dissatisfied with the organization. The process is not only seen as negative for the laid off employee but for the surviving employee as well (Rai & Lakshman, 2014). The employee becomes disloyal and loses trust in management, and they may voice their concerns to salvage the working relationship (Aggerholm, 2014). Research has shown surviving employees react more diversely to layoffs and downsizing when they believe the process is conducted unfairly, which may create a pessimistic working relationship and a hostile working environment (Rai & Lakshman,

2014). According to Cullen et al. (2014), the uncertainty of organizational changes can have major effects on employees' performances and working relationships. The impacts include lack of management support, untrustworthiness, and coping strategies (Rai & Lakshman, 2014). Positive employee working relationships develop with organizational support.

Effective communication is critical in creating strong relationships. Managers must provide an open and honest relationship with their employees (Hobfeld, 2013). When employees believe they have strong organizational support, they are satisfied and maintain a positive attitude and working relationship with management (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). To the contrary, if employees believe management does not support them, the working relationship becomes negative. The employee perceives the lack of support as inadequate organizational support (Cullen et al., 2014).

### **Organizational Layoffs and Downsizing**

Organizational leaders start the planning phase such as restructuring and downsizing before an actual layoff takes place (Schmitt, Borzillo, & Probst, 2012). These events may create negative reactions from the employees. They may become angry and less committed in doing their jobs. Moreover, due to the job uncertainties of the downsizing process, employees may leave the organization (Schmitt et al., 2012). Research has shown that downsizing percentage rates are correlated to quit rates among the employees (Gustavsson, 2012). Evidence has shown downsizing is related to job related well-being (Hu & Schaufeli, 2011). The employee may suffer more psychological

symptoms and depression. In some cases, the layoffs and downsizing process create hostile work environments for the employees (Gustavsson, 2012).

According to Fraher (2013), downsizing can be more stressful to employees than layoffs. In the event of a layoff, the employee is considered terminated (Mazetti, 2012). Performance problems may exist with a particular employee, and the best approach to resolving the problem may be to lay off or terminate the individual. In the event of downsizing, the employee is actively involved in many types of organizational downsizing events including restructuring, mergers, plant closures, relocations, and layoffs. These downsizing events take place at any given time at an organization with the specific objective of eliminating jobs (Lewer, 2013).

When companies downsize, their leaders look for alternatives to stay profitable. They restructure the organization or conduct layoffs by eliminating employees including managers. Some studies have shown downsizing is utilized to increase operating efficiencies in an organization (Day, Armenakis, Feild, & Norris, 2012). They further argued downsizing may be effective in the short-term. However, downsizing could create long-term damage to the organization's competitive goals (Kostopoulos & Bozionelos, 2010).

Downsizing in an organization has a lasting effect on employees physically and emotionally. They become cynical and show lack of morale and motivation (Pfeffer, 2011). Studies have also shown employees who remain with the organization and go through the process of downsizing in an organization may become psychologically and medically sick, which could possibly lead to death (Pfeffer, 2011). Downsizing takes a

significant toll on managers. Managers become concerned about their jobs and well-being due to the lack of productivity by employees, and understand they are held accountable for the actions and performance of the group (Lakshmann et al., 2014).

Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge, and Campion (2010) conducted a study on different forms of downsizing. They studied participants who had survived a recent downsizing process, and studied participants who had not experienced a downsizing process. They examined variables that reflected the survivors' perceptions of the employment environment and their behavioral characteristics and attitudes toward the organization. The factors included fairness, work satisfaction, job security, performances, and their desire to quit the organization.

Maertz et al. (2010) concluded the survivors of the downsizing process were more likely to have poorer perceptions of their work area, and with more negative behavioral characteristics than the participants who did not experience downsizing. The findings were driven by employee observations of recent layoff activities in their workplace (Maertz et al., 2010). Maertz et al. also concluded the participants viewed the layoff process as the worst of all ways to downsize an organization. There were other findings that concluded management has opportunities to improve perceptions of its ethical responsibilities. Maertz et al.'s research showed the employees felt the management team was trustworthy when it took the time to communicate the reasons for downsizing.

### **Perceptions**

Pfeffer (2011) argued that employee perception is important. If employees perceive dishonesty by the organization's executives and stakeholders, they become

disloyal. In many cases, the executives and shareholders are more concerned with financial performances as well as increasing efficiencies and competitiveness, rather than the well-being of their employees (Pfeffer, 2011). For example, when an organization implements layoffs as cost savings even when layoffs are not necessary, doing so can create employee anger. In December of 2012, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 6,768 companies laid off a combined total of 636,484 U.S. workers, while at the same time CEOs received million dollar salaries and hefty bonuses for cutting costs (Reich, 2012).

Kalleberg (2011) noted that organizations are steadily laying off employees while profits are up, and when they are no longer under pressure by shareholders. The employees consider the action an act of betrayal for the organization. The perception is that the organization is intentionally allowing individuals to suffer just to maximize profits for the shareholder (Kalleberg, 2011). The organizations consider the strategy as short-term fixing that provides a steady cash flow. However, the employees see the strategy as uncaring and lacking compassion (George, 2014).

On the other hand, intentionally concealing poor performance in an organization can create major problems with the shareholders and employees (Rogers, Van Buskirk, & Zechman, 2011). Rogers et al. (2011) stated that executives' optimism about organizational performance and financial earnings opens the flood gates of being sued by the employees and shareholders. Researchers have reviewed historical litigation data and discovered more lawsuits of companies were correlated to optimistic news and announcements than those of non-sued companies. The employee and shareholder



arguments in many of the legal suits filed were based on the optimistic language submitted through announcements, publications, and financial reports (Rogers et al., 2011). When leaders choose to be deceptive by being positive and hiding poor performance information about the organization, severe consequences can occur. The organization's reputation can be severely damaged for many years to come (Rogers et al., 2011).

Perceptions can be deceiving, especially when it comes to layoffs. Company executives want to paint a rosy picture that everything is back to normal, which may not be the case. Organizations should not assume surviving employees are grateful they were spared from layoffs (Waraich & Bhardwaj, 2012). Employees perceive layoffs and downsizing as violations of trust (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2014). The employees may no longer be committed to their work performance (Waraich & Bhardwaj, 2012). Thus, the organization's leaders and executives must respond to employees' psychological and emotional behaviors; they cannot continue as though nothing has happened (Waraich & Bhardwaj, 2012).

Companies and their executives are beginning to do damage control to eliminate the negative perceptions of downsizing and restructuring. According to Buhler (2014), if the downsizing strategy is not met, the process is considered a failure. In many cases, companies are downsizing for the wrong reason. They must look at the long term effects of the strategy before deciding to downsize. There is no specific blueprint for downsizing and its results. Hence, the process should not be based on one size fits all, but on specific criteria. That is, the organization should decide to downsize based on the organization's

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Buhler, 2014). Buhler provided 10 steps in guiding organizations to successful downsizing techniques:

1. Ensure downsizing is the right strategy for the organization.
2. Avoid across the board cuts.
3. Communicate downsizing intentions to the employees as soon as possible.
4. Be honest.
5. Invest in the remaining employees.
6. Treat all employees with respect.
7. Involve employees.
8. Think of the organization's core competencies (knowledge, skills, and abilities).
9. Continue to experiment (use creative solutions).
10. Formulate short-term plans for operational strategies.

### **The Laid Off Employee**

Layoffs can be disruptive in an organization. Gandolfi and Littler (2012) contended that employees are usually the last to know downsizing and layoffs are being implemented. According to Pfeffer (2011), when an employee is terminated, they get angry, stressed, and depressed. Research has shown individuals with no past violent behavior were six times more to act violently after a layoff notification (Pfeffer, 2011). Pfeffer further argued an employee could feel they were mistreated and become disgruntled. Consequently, this could cause them to lose their psychological stability and may retaliate against those who laid them off from their job. Some employees are finding

it difficult to find new jobs after losing their jobs. This can take an emotional toll and may lead to diminished self-esteem and inability to seek other employment. The older and middle-aged laid off workers face the most difficult time finding employment because of employer preference for younger workers.

Papa and Maitoza (2013) conducted a study to examine job loss and the grieving period. The researchers hypothesized that job loss is related to grief symptoms such as depression and anxiety, self-esteem, and coping behaviors (Papa & Maitoza, 2013). The participants were selected from an advertisement placed on Craigslist, newspaper ads, and local radio stations. The participants selected were 18 and over and had recently been laid off from their employment. Papa and Maitoza requested they complete a survey questionnaire on how they coped with losing their job.

Papa and Maitoza (2013) concluded that job loss was related to high levels of mental health challenges due to distress. The findings were based on the high percentile scores for anxiety, depression, and job loss. Questions were based on employee bitterness. The participants provided responses related to feeling overcome by the loss and experiencing some emotional numbness. The study further revealed the problem the participants had with adjusting to losing their job was compounded as their financial situation deteriorated.

Researchers have shown layoff victims who felt they were mistreated at the time of layoffs became bitter and spoke negatively in their communities about the organization that laid them off. Consequently, this type of verbal retaliation can harm the organization's reputation when trying to hire new employees (Blau, 2012). On the other

hand, in some studies, employees who feel they were treated fairly when they were laid off were more likely to recommend their organization to other individuals (Meinert, 2012). Temple University researchers conducted a study on the feelings of laid off employees regarding a return to their former employer if they were provided the opportunity. The study emphasized fairness in the decision-making process. Meinert (2012) concluded that 45% responding to the survey stated they would recommend their former organization to others, and would return to work for their previous organization if provided the opportunity.

### **The Survivor**

When layoffs take place, many individuals are affected. According to Mayton (2011), employees who remain at the organization after a layoff are known as survivors. Meinert (2012) claimed that the treatment of laid off employees affects the survivors. Although the survivors are relieved they were not laid off, they may become angry and expect to be treated the same if they are laid off (Meinert, 2012). Consequently, they may experience some physical and emotional illnesses. Some of the symptoms of this illness include anxiety, stress, guilt, distrust, depression, weight loss, sleep disorder, and low motivation (Meinert, 2012). They show signs of fatigue in addition to a decrease in job satisfaction and job performance (Cotter & Fouad, 2012).

Subsequently, their stress leads to physical damage such as joint pain and muscle aches (Gulli, 2010). According to Gulli (2010), this illness is known as layoff survival syndrome. Most survivor employees continue working through their sickness due to fear of being terminated (Mayton, 2011). A study conducted at the Finnish Institute of

Occupational Health provided evidence showing employees who remained at the organization after a layoff are more likely to die from a stroke or a heart attack (Mayton, 2011).

Researchers have shown the surviving employees of layoffs are mentally and physically affected during and after the process (Cotter & Fouad, 2012). The negative impacts lead to survival burnout. Knani et al. (2013) claimed that employees experience burnout due to various organizational challenges. Therefore, the employee may feel emotionally exhausted with the intent of quitting. For example, if employees are laid off due to downsizing, surviving employees may feel the same can happen to them regardless of their best performance (Mayton, 2011).

Survivor burnout is one of the leading causes of loss related to employment (Reinardy, 2013). Unfortunately, burnout occurs from the lack of organizational support (Mayton, 2011). Reinardy (2013) further argued when layoffs occur, the laid off survivors are tasked to do additional work, and in some cases unfamiliar work. Requesting employees to perform work with which they are not familiar, coupled with increased work load, long hours, major deadlines, and demanding bosses can create physical and mental stress (Reinardy, 2013).

Gulli (2011) developed a survey to allow survivor participants to determine which of 150 symptoms they exhibited after a layoff was implemented. This information was being used to study future medical conditions. According to Gulli, the symptoms fell into three categories including (a) hormonal imbalances, (b) nutrient deficiencies, and (c) immune dysfunctions. Since the study was presented more than 26,000 people have taken

the Q-Gap questionnaire test. The results showed many individuals skipped meals, eliminated exercises, and became overweight, tired, and unhappy. The results also showed the top symptoms by the Q-Gap participants. Sixty percent of the participants were between 26 and 55 and revealed emotional effects. However, psychosocial symptoms were presented in the study for the age groups under 46.

The participants who took the Q-Gap test expressed being unhappy and frustrated. Emotional symptoms, such as sadness and depression occurred in the younger participants. Some younger participants also stated they were sleep-deprived and stressed, and wondered when they were going to be able to start a family. Their stress added to headaches, bloating, and weight problems. Many of the participants stated they were not on diets or practicing healthy routines (Gulli, 2010). One study conducted in 2009-2010 by CareerBuilder in the United States reported that almost half of layoff survivors had been assigned additional work and were completely burnt out (Gulli, 2010). They revealed they were performing additional work due to their coworkers being laid off.

Another study conducted at the Institute Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder concluded laid off survivors were more likely to engage in unhealthy habits, such as drinking and smoking. Survivors were also likely to experience emotional and stress-related behaviors. In the same survey, survivor participants stated they experienced back and neck pain and severe depression, which caused them to utilize more sick time at work (Gulli, 2010).

Reinardy (2013) conducted a study on 2,159 newspaper employees who survived a layoff and examined the survivors and their view of organizational trust, morale, and

job commitment and their impact on job satisfaction. The participants were selected from different newspaper organizations who had recently laid off employees; 139 newspapers from all different regions were included. The participants consisted of news clerks, reporters, news editors, copy editors, photographers, graphic designers, online reporters, online editors, columnists, managing editors, and executive editors who were given a 75-question survey.

An e-mail was sent out to 9,629 participants explaining the study and stated the confidentiality of the study. A Likert-scale was used for the measurements. The study generated a response rate of 24%. The participants averaged 44 years of age, were 61% male, and 89% Caucasian. The findings showed a tremendous difference between the age and gender groups and morale. The study further revealed that journalists with both low levels of morale and low job satisfaction were experiencing high degrees of exhaustion. The women had lower levels of organizational support and higher levels of job demands and were more overloaded in work than the men; therefore, they were experiencing much higher levels of burnout (Reinardy, 2013).

Mayton (2011) claimed that resilience is the key to surviving layoffs and downsizing. Unfortunately, these organizational reduction strategies continue, and survivors are left to perform the additional work. Mayton noted that organizations can develop a positive environment for employees in which to cope before, during, and after downsizing. The following are recommendations for resiliency support:

1. Develop internal systems to address negative emotional contagion like counseling teams to meet with the survivor employees.

2. Design internal processes to foster positive emotions including creative problem techniques.
3. Teach resiliency and positive cognitive coping skills to individuals throughout the organization.
4. Develop leadership development programs inclusive of human emotions and relationship building as integral to the operation of the organization. This includes training and skill development for managers in order to support the programs. (Mayton, 2011)

Based on evidence from research, organizations can ease the tension of survivor trauma by outlining effective policies and practices to create an atmosphere of employment security (Mayton, 2011). Specifically, this can be done by providing more focus on management communication, which, indeed, could have the best impact on the surviving employee's attitude and performance. When employees are well informed by management on the layoff and downsizing process, they are more supportive of the organization's decisions. To facilitate an organized layoff and downsizing event, the management team must communicate to all employees why the layoffs are essential. This effective approach could prevent unsubstantiated rumors from circulating within the organization. Datta et al. (2010) noted other key elements that lessen the negative environment of layoffs and downsizing: (a) open communication, (b) management and work group support, (c) perception of fairness, (d) management trustworthiness, (e) involvement and empowerment, (f) allowed input, (g) expression of views without repercussion, and (h) appeals to decisions.



Concerns about all employees during downsizing and layoffs should be recognized and addressed at an organizational level. Davila and Piña-Ramírez (2014) argued that organizations should be protective of employees who remain working at downsized organizations regarding the psychological damages that may have been occurred by the downsizing event. More optimism should be demonstrated in the work environment after a layoff has occurred. Company support and training should be provided to the survivors. Research has shown more psychological strength on the positive instead of the negative side (Gulli, 2010). For the layoff survivor to overcome adverse impacts from the layoffs, organizations should use positive tools of engagement with the employees, which puts the survivors in a positive state of mind so they can become productive again (Day et al., 2012).

### **The Layoff Manager**

Managers use special criteria when making the decision to lay off an employee. For example, lack of seniority is a common criterion for layoffs, especially with union employees. However, the younger employees cost less to hire. The managers want to document the knowledge of the experienced middle-aged individuals before they leave the organization, so managers are keeping some of the experienced employees around longer to train the younger employees (Tang, 2012).

The lower the employee is on the seniority list, the more likely they can be laid off (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). On the other hand, managers may lay off nonunion employees due to high salaries. They believe such a strategy could save the organization money. Performance evaluations are often used to lay off employees. However, if

employees are meeting or exceeding their work performance, the manager may have to use other criteria including tardiness and irregular attendance problems to lay off employees (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012).

Managers look for employees who have retainable skills that can be transferred to other responsibilities. Consequently, employees who have limited skills are likely to be laid off (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012). A study was conducted in which participants developed an organizational scenario of 25 hypothetical employees for a layoff process. In this study, although the employees were fictional characters for this experiment, the participants were able to read their profiles such as their work performance, experience age, race, and gender. The requirements were to select five employees to lay off based on specific criteria according to guidelines. The findings showed the participants mostly chose to lay off older and minority workers (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012).

Although layoff guidelines were in place, the participants did not lay off based on performance. The study survey questionnaire also revealed that (a) male managers are likely to lay off a female employee before a male employee, (b) younger managers are likely to lay off an older employee instead of a younger employee, and (c) Caucasian managers are likely to lay off a minority employee before a Caucasian employee. This study revealed that qualifications may not be a factor in the decision-making process. Layoffs and downsizing may be affected by the manager's ability to make difficult decisions based on unknown biases (Dwyer & Arbelo, 2012).

Often managers are not permitted to discuss layoffs in meetings with the employees due to company policies and fear the negative publicity (Gandolfi, 2014). De

Meuse and Dai (2013) noted that managers are not as engaged with the employees during the layoffs and downsizing process. De Meuse and Dai argued that, in contradiction with typical current practice, company managers should focus on the emotional aspects of the employee during layoffs and downsizing. Researchers have shown that leaders who are experienced in understanding individual behavior and psychological states communicate with employees on an emotional level, and can inspire feelings of shared beliefs in those around them (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2013). Most importantly, good managers and leaders must show their employees they care (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2013).

Further analysis was done involving scientific discoveries of the mirror neurons and spindle cells in the brain to break down the neurological concepts of emotions that are important to leadership. Researchers have revealed that the spindle cells and mirror neurons within the brain enable individuals to share emotions (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2013). For example, when a manager has informed a worker they have been laid off, he or she experiences negative emotions, such as sadness or worry, and others will join in (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2013).

Delivering bad news can be the hardest job a manager has to do (Bies, 2012). Bies (2012) noted when managers were asked to list their most challenging task, they listed presenting bad news to an employee as the most difficult one. Some managers suffer emotional stress when they lay off an employee. In some cases, they feel responsible for harming the employee. Managers try to shelter their emotions from the employee when meeting with them during the layoff process. In particular, showing emotions may seem

as though the manager is concealing something, or may reflect a behavioral change from a normally calm persona (Bies, 2012).

Researchers have shown that managers who deliver bad news such as layoffs and downsizing understand the importance of preparation before actually discussing the bad news with the employee (Bies, 2012). Furthermore, larger organizations deliver bad news to their employees by computer-mediated communications or e-mail (Bies, 2012), though computer notifications are usually a preparation phase before the actual downsizing or layoff is implemented. Using computer-mediated communication is a strategic process to inform the employees that some organizational changes are about to take place. In addition, this form of communication eases the burden of face-to-face emotional behavior. Once the decision has been made to lay off the individual, the manager discusses the process with them privately (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014).

Bies' (2012) study of company leaders further revealed that after bad news is delivered to the employees, the managers will assist the laid off individual with the appeals process. According to Bies, assisting with the appeals process shows employees the managers acted responsibly and implemented the layoff process with fairness when they made their decisions. Furthermore, this strategy will reduce the blame game by the employees, and they might be more reluctant to blame managers for laying them off. Evidence has shown good interpersonal skills are critical in a manager's approach to layoffs. For example, laid off employees might feel they were treated fairly if managers show some form of empathy (Meinert, 2012).

Bies (2012) discussed the manager's perspective in delivering bad news to their employees. The literature revealed different stages of management techniques for the preparation phase such as (a) providing advance warning, (b) developing a paper trail, (c) adjusting expectations, (d) using disclaimers, (e) providing the opportunity for voice, (f) building coalition, (g) rehearsing for delivery, and (h) deliver the news. This literature review identified the values of managing through challenging times. Bies (2012) argued that leaders must be able to lead in good times and difficult times. Specifically, true leaders emerge and bring the employees through an organizational crisis.

### **Impacts of Layoffs and Downsizing on Employees and Organizations**

When the economy experiences a downturn, or profits suffer during a recession, organizational managers and leaders believe part of the solutions lies in downsizing. They believe downsizing improves organizational efficiencies (Datta et al., 2010). Subsequently, organizations implement strategies such as layoffs, transfers, outplacement, retirement incentives, buyout packages, and attrition that reduce the workforce to increase performance (Schmitt et al., 2012).

Schmitt et al. (2012) claimed that layoffs and downsizing are not as successful as strategically planned tactics for addressing financial and economic crisis in organizations. A critical amount of knowledge is lost when an individual is laid off. In particular, organizations lose crucial skills, capabilities, and the experience needed to continue performing quality work. According to the literature, quality employees produce quality work. Therefore, if quality employees are laid off due to downsizing, the organization does lose their quality workforce and knowledge base.

Thus, not only does downsizing risk eliminating valuable knowledge, but it can dismantle the procedures in place, employee work-related routines, and organizational culture (Schmitt et al., 2012). Moreover, it is imperative that organizational leaders try to maintain as much knowledge as possible when valuable employees leave. Pfeffer (2011), for instance noted that the retailer Circuit City downsized 3,400 of their highest paid sales representatives for cost reductions. Consequently, the store was left with fewer skilled sales representatives. This action allowed Best Buy to capitalize on the market share. Finally, Circuit City filed for bankruptcy in 2008 because they could not come back from the downward turn of sales performance from the loss of clients and revenues.

The impacts of layoffs and downsizing on employees can also be devastating to an employee's health and emotional state, and damaging to a corporation's reputations and overall organizational performance. Leaders should have a strong sense of responsibility when taking drastic actions to lay off employees (Lakshmann et al., 2014). Thus, when a layoff takes place, they should focus on the emotional impact of the employee and show they are concerned (Rosen & Rutigliano, 2014).

Gibson and McDaniel (2010) focused on the cross-cultural perspectives on downsizing, organizational change and restructuring that focus on three domains: teams, leadership, and conflict. They claimed change should not be focused on national cultures, but on multiple subcultures that may exist in an organization. In particular, they provided an in-depth analysis on employee characteristics such as beliefs, values, and personality in the workplace and how a layoff may affect one's emotional state. Gibson and McDaniel noted that employees of different cultures who do not understand

commonalities of work-related events are more likely to respond in different ways, especially when a layoff takes place.

Gibson and McDaniel (2010) identified details to which cross-cultural research in the past has enabled companies to revise their management styles within traditional organizational behavior. A cross cultural approach presents similarities and differences in processes and behavior at work across different cultures (Carrington, 2012). Such an approach is based on the theories on culture behavior patterns including motives, cognitions, and emotions and their organizational impacts (Gibson & McDaniel, 2010). Most importantly, regional cultures, religious cultures, and organizational cultures are good sources of cultural differences and similarities in organizational systems. Culture has a major influence on the success of organizational change efforts.

A study was conducted to test the theory that a relationship exists between the culture of an organization and its impact on organizational productivity and employee's performance during and after layoffs (Anjum et al., 2013). Random sampling was used for the study, and data were collected from 130 permanent employees of a pharmaceutical organization through survey questionnaires. The findings showed 87% of the participants concurred that organizational culture has an impact on its employees, and suggested a relationship exists between the culture of an organization and its impact on productivity and employees' performance during and after layoffs and organizational downsizing (Anjum et al., 2013).

The study also concluded that providing improvements in the workplace could improve employees' performance (Anjum et al., 2013). Anjum et al. (2013) further

discussed employee performance and productivity. They argued organizational culture holds an organization together like glue, and all the pertinent elements are linked together. Employees communicate and work together under the guidance of organizational culture based on mutual understanding, trust and respect. Once that trust is broken, the relationship between the employee and the organization is damaged, and a decline in productivity takes place (Anjum et al., 2013).

### **Impacts of Technology and Information Systems (IT)**

Technology has driven innovative ideas to manage businesses (Channel Insider Report, 2012). New technology helps streamline business processes and reduce costs. Savage (2014) argued technology produces speed and efficiency. Savage further stated organizations want the flexibility of working at a faster pace when processing transactions with their customers. For example, some companies perform analysis on data warehouses by scanning many records. Being able to conduct the same transactions faster eliminates the manpower hours required to do the work (Savage, 2014). Such a protocol allows the organization to produce more, and allow the organization to scan records with less processing hardware, a major cost savings (Savage, 2014). Lewis (2011) suggested that advancements in technology reduce the workforce. Lewis stated employees have been laid off due to the efficiencies of technology because fewer people are needed to do the work.

The Silicon Valley industry has played a major role in the technological field and in layoffs as many high-tech companies are located in Northern California. Silicon Valley is considered the high-tech apex of the world with approximately 20,000 such companies



in the region (Adams, 2011; Schneidermeyer, 2014). According to Adams (2011), some of the technology companies in Silicon Valley were created by young adults out of college with experience and expertise in electronics, computers, semiconductors, and telecommunication. Silicon Valley industries are known for their innovative ideas and technological advances. Furthermore, the talent pool of individuals initially involved in the start-up companies in the Silicon Valley were mostly graduate students from Stanford University and UC Berkley (Adams, 2011).

As technology has advanced, the technical experience of the individual has advanced as well. Individuals with technological experience became the experts in their field and could be hired over nontechnical individuals (Setterstrom, 2013). Companies from other locations sought out these talented individuals from Silicon Valley to improve their organizations' technical performance. Setterstrom (2013) noted most of the technology companies are 70% outsourced and 30% in-house services. Setterstrom argued this process reduced operating costs and increased efficiencies. However, this streamlined process utilized fewer resources and resulted in layoffs and downsizing.

Setterstrom (2013) advocated for the efficiencies of technology in the workplace. Setterstrom argued as organizations acquired more information technology (IT) to manage their communications, IT expanded into a much respected role in the organization. Therefore, as the IT technology roles increased, the nontechnical IT employee's role decreased (Setterstrom, 2013). Consequently, as the amount of IT time required for specific projects rose, the demand increased for more IT technicians to meet the needs of the organization. Setterstrom pointed out that IT software is able to extract

information from data that could not be obtained from a person. That is, the information is generated from raw data accurately and quickly. Savage (2014) noted that speed is what companies want without the added operational costs. Savage further stated some companies have seen major improvements in implementing new IT programs. Bot (2012) reported that IT provided process improvements and efficiency in companies. Projects that used to take hours and minutes can now be completed in seconds (Savage, 2014).

With the demand of IT systems, an increase of power and influence in the IT system has surfaced (Setterstrom, 2013). The IT systems groups realize their knowledge is power, and they are the subject matter experts in their field. Study has shown that power plays an important role in business strategies and decisions and is implemented by IT organizations (Setterstrom, 2013). Although IT personnel may not have formal authority, they may have the influence over executives in major decision-making strategies (Setterstrom, 2013).

IT personnel are aware of perceptions of their knowledge and expertise. Therefore, the organization should go with their technological data because it is accurate and efficient. When it comes to layoffs, in some cases, the decision is made on the preference on an IT individual assisting the organization in business strategies on operating activities and cost analysis (Setterstrom, 2013). In the midst of the massive layoffs that have taken place, organizations are faced with uncertainties, and are looking for strategies and solutions to maintain a productive organization. Savage (2014) argued that IT can produce the data and analysis required to determine strategic solutions. Most

importantly, these operations can be done in a timely manner without the overhead operating expenses.

During a time when companies are downsizing and laying off workers, employees are often left to wonder why they were not a part of the decision-making process or informed of the layoff criteria before the process is implemented. Roth (2010) stated that managers are responsible for ensuring employee engagement. Roth added that employees should have input in the decisions for organizational changes that affect their day-to-day work activities. In this study, Roth revealed that employees on high performance work teams (HPWT) felt they should be a part of the decisions being made affecting their workplace. This study deviated from the traditional teams and focused on the HPWT employees because they were the most qualified, and considered the “go-to” people by management in getting the job done.

Mell, Van Knippenberg, and Van Ginkel (2014) suggested teams with an abundant amount of knowledge are much more effective, and could have better team performance than a non-HPWT. This study on the importance of decision-making involved 372 participants selected from a Dutch University majoring in business or economics. The participants were requested to take on the role of a team consultant, and examine the product that was provided to determine a profitable ranking. They were asked to make five recommendations, deciding multiple categories, for two independent clients. The categories were divided evenly amongst the different teams; therefore, they had to integrate with each other to collect all needed information, which allowed them to make accurate assessments before making final decisions.

The findings revealed that the teams could not make an accurate decision on the recommendations without the knowledge and expertise from the other members (Mell et al., 2014). One of the categories consisted of banning a product; however, elements of information about the product were distributed among the different team members. Therefore, to assess the profitability or banning of the product, the team members had to incorporate all the information gathered individually in order to create a holistic view of each product. The teams wanted further analysis on the impact of banning the product. The teams wanted to find the best solution and wanted input from all the team members before a final decision was made. Finally, the researchers suggested that participants in the connected distribution teams present a conclusion after individually integrating their information. Therefore, more information was shared by the individual member that resulted in higher team information (Mell et al., 2014).

Consequently, after receiving all the information by the additional team members, the team made its choice, completed its survey and was allowed to be dismissed from the study (Mell et al., 2014). The evidence presented in this study showed the criticality of decision-making and having the appropriate team members involved before making a drastic decision that may impact an organization's performance. When key decisions are being made, the individuals affected should be a part of the process. Organizational leadership teams should consider a representative from each group to solicit their inputs about the process and to provide additional alternatives or recommendations before layoffs or downsizing is implemented.

**Layoffs: Implementation Strategies through Effective Leadership**

Barnes et al. (2013) argued that leadership power and influence can manipulate various organizational changes including layoffs and corporate downsizing. Furthermore, most organizations are led by leaders who want to retain the power of influence over their employees (Barnes et al., 2013). Barnes et al. discussed the importance of employee trust, leadership trust, and empathy. They stated that trust must be constructed around leaders. Furthermore, leaders must identify practices and processes to build trust and support an effective work relationship which minimizes a negative work environment (Barnes et al., 2013). According to Barnes, an effective leader must be authentic and transformational to enhance levels of trust. Most importantly, leaders must also provide social support and a strong voice to gain the trust of their employee (Barnes et al., 2013).

Barnes et al. (2013) advocated for effective and shared leadership. Barnes et al. believed using combinations of authentic, transformational leadership and hierarchical leadership create the employee's voice and build trust through emotional stimulations. When leaders are placed in hierarchical positions of authority, and all the elements of leadership characteristics are in place, a positive environment emerges (Barnes et al., 2013).

Barnes et al. (2013) argued that some leaders maintain too much power of influence over their employees. According to Barnes et al., removing some hierarchical powers from a leader down to the group level creates the trust the employees must feel from their leader. Barnes et al. emphasized that trust should be centered on the leader. The leaders should be allowed to present levels of trust to the employees by way of

authentic, transformational, and hierarchical behaviors (Barnes et al., 2013). Barnes et al. proposed the idea that authentic and transformational leaders can create the work environment needed for the purpose of social support and transparency.

Barnes et al. (2013) discussed the Grateful Dead's innovative ideas and effective leadership style of sharing roles and responsibilities in their famous rock group. Barnes et al. examined the Grateful Dead's business techniques to stay successful through their most challenging times. As part of the research, Barnes et al. wanted to conduct a phenomenological study and experience first-hand the band's relationship and leadership roles and responsibilities. Barnes et al. found that the Grateful Dead band members believed in strategic improvisation, making adjustments in response to a crisis and implementing changes routinely. The band's success represented an informal management style (Barnes, 2011).

Barnes (2011) espoused particular views on leadership, and the importance of working together as a team and developing group norms. Coming from the management environment, Barnes was amazed by how the Grateful Dead band managed the group in a horizontal management style and methodically implemented new approaches for associates in the group by providing a learning program. In the literature examined, Barnes discovered the band's organization provided the band members opportunities for creative ideas. The band listened to all the employees in the organization regardless of their structural level. Although the group is no longer together, they remain a successful business enterprise (Barnes, 2011).

Barnes' (2011) study discussed the key concepts of the organization's success, and lessons learned from practicing the strategic principles. Barnes believed the band had the right concept on leadership and challenging times, and could teach Corporate America a variety of ideas. Barnes suggested that effective leadership can be shared leadership. Barnes believed becoming transformational leaders inspire others and build trust. Barnes further stated strategic improvisation techniques were leadership practices that should be implemented in companies everywhere. When crisis occurs, such as layoffs and downsizing, leaders in organizations should be able to implement the same strategies the Grateful Dead implemented to stay profitable and successful (Barnes, 2011).

While Barnes' (2011) study provided a descriptive example of leadership, and valuable information regarding techniques of working through challenging times, these techniques should be practiced with caution. Depending on the crisis, when leaders must be willing to work on engaging with their employees (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014), an employee must be knowledgeable in the specific areas for good organizational performances. On the other hand, using effective and transformational leadership during layoffs and downsizing can be instrumental in the behavior of the employee.

Muethel, Gehrlein, and Hoegl (2012) posited that in practicing effective leadership, the leader and team members must work together and share responsibilities. Furthermore, in shared leadership, team members are more empowered and do not wait on the leader to resolve a problem. They immediately take action to complete tasks that are critical factors during a layoff and downsizing period. There may be advantages and

disadvantages of shared leadership. One should be cautioned that by no means is this study implying this form of leadership is the best, or the only form of leadership practiced in organizations during challenging times. Thus, future research is needed to distinguish the different leadership styles in identifying varied functions and strategies for implementation (Muethel et al., 2012).

In today's environment, companies are regarded as replicas of their leaders' behavior (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014). Leadership is the most credited and trusted source of information in most organizations (Barnes et al., 2013). However, effective leaders must demonstrate they can inspire and influence their followers not only when times are good but also during challenging times. Such actions allow the organizations to build trust collectively that can result in positive outcomes (Barnes et al., 2013). There are different types of leadership styles used during organizational changes including authentic leadership.

Collins (2013) viewed an authentic leader as a positive and enthusiastic leader. Collins stated optimistic personalities are very infectious to their followers and throughout the organization. Collins pointed out that authentic leaders have a way of making others feel good about themselves regardless of the environmental circumstances. This type of leadership is especially important when layoffs occur and a positive moral perspective is needed to stabilize the workforce (Collins, 2013).

Collins (2013) discussed transformational leaders' management styles, arguing that transformational leaders are also effective leaders, and are considered the most influential of all leaders. Literature reviews over the years on transformational leadership



have shown positive results with employee satisfaction and positive job performances (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Bernardo, 2013). Studies over the past several years have focused on understanding the behavior of transformational leaders. According to Bottomley et al. (2014), four categories for these leaders exist: (a) visionary, (b) standard-bearer, (c) integrator, and (d) developer. Cavazotte et al. (2013) emphasized that transformational leaders have the ability to influence their employees to achieve their goals. Within the changing pace of organizational developments, leaders have to be more responsive and flexible than in other circumstances (Bottomley et al., 2014). According to Bottomley et al., transformational leaders are needed to keep the organization operating during layoffs and downsizing by maintaining a sustainable workforce.

Wallace and Rawlings (2013) claimed that charisma is always a favorable attribute and that when times are challenging, employees follow the charismatic leader. They believe charismatic leaders have the ability to accept change and transformative concepts. Furthermore, charismatic leadership exemplifies the perception of comfort and warmth. Significantly, charismatic leaders arouse their followers by providing hope and inspiration (Michel et al., 2013).

During the presidential election of President Barack Obama, participants from Towson University were provided a survey to rate the charismatic behavior of President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden versus their challengers, John McCain and Sarah Palin (Michel et al., 2013). The participants had to rate them in terms of their leadership behavior and their willingness to support the candidates as effective and transformational leaders that could be trusted during challenging economical times. They were also

provided questionnaires to rate them on their own admiration for each presidential candidate. The participants were provided photos of the individuals and survey questions.

Michel et al. (2013) concluded the participants viewed charismatic leaders in a positive manner, including perceived characteristics such as being trustworthy, capable, intelligent, and friendly. Furthermore, the study provided theoretical justifications for why admiration is an important aspect of the charismatic leader (Michel et al., 2013). The findings were also consistent with prior research literature that charismatic leaders influence employees' emotions and their ability to be productive during challenging times (Wallace & Rawlings, 2013).

Although the study did not take into consideration political affiliation, the participants did note their political affiliation. Furthermore, the evidence showed the importance of charismatic leadership. The participants were influenced by charismatic characteristics rather than their beliefs, which demonstrate the influence of a charismatic leader. When a leader inspires individuals and they feel good, they follow the leader. The individual sees the leader as trustworthy and inspirational (Wallace & Rawlings, 2013). The study identified the power of charisma and admiration.

The evidence showed that regardless of the work conditions, employees want to feel good and want someone to look up to (Wallace & Rawlings, 2013). These findings can be important factors during crisis times in an organization, and may be viable solutions to employee performance. Moreover, effective leaders are critical in maintaining an organization during challenging times. Therefore, a charismatic leader can inspire and motivate the employee, and can create a positive environment when things

seem dire and negative. Charismatic leaders' qualities can spill over to their employees allowing them to demonstrate positive behaviors (Vlachos, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2013).

Vlachos et al.'s (2013) study was also effective in showing the importance of charismatic leadership during challenging times such as layoffs, restructuring, financial situations, or uncertain futures of the organization. Although other leadership styles are utilized during critical times, Vlachos et al. were able to link the employee's emotional behavior and impacts influenced by charismatic leaders. The evidence of the study revealed the participants were inspired by charismatic leaders, and were inclined to vote for charismatic leaders although their political party affiliation was different than that of the leader. Thus, the charismatic leadership style of the presidential candidates might have affected the election results. As a result, it is possible a leader's style can impact an employee's emotional and physical state, as well as job performance during challenging times.

Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, and Irmer (2010) explored charismatic leadership styles and relationships. They found a significant relationship between the charismatic and transformational leadership styles and employee satisfaction (Bordia et al., 2010). The results confirmed that charismatic leaders have a positive and important relationship with employee satisfaction (Bordia et al., 2010). The study also concluded leaders agree with the opinions of their followers when they present sound logic and reasonable solutions (Bordia et al., 2010). The study presents an excellent example of the importance of employee involvement in the layoff process. The employee may bring an added

perspective to the management team by providing other alternatives and solutions for cost reductions.

Galvin, Balkundi, and Waldman's (2010) study on leadership skills and follower attitudes of charismatic leadership explores the power and influence of charismatic leadership behavior in organizations. Such influence is based on direct relationships between the leader and the employee (Galvin et al., 2010). Employees, who view their leaders as charismatic, are usually mesmerized with their leader's ideas and visions (Galvin, 2010). Galvin et al.'s study tested an integrated model of charismatic leaders' characteristics, and addressed the limitations of charismatic leadership. The results showed that employees who rated their leaders as charismatic were more receptive and open to changes occurring in their organization than are others (Galvin, 2010). Further research evidence showed employees also had a more positive attitude toward the charismatic leaders (Galvin, 2010). When employees work in a positive environment, morale goes up and creates productivity (Carrington, 2012).

Galvin et al. (2010) uncovered the impacts of distant leadership, charisma, and their relationship with their employees. Galvin et al. claimed that leaders and managers who are who are rarely around their employees may eventually lose their power and influence over them. Leaders who are visible in the workplace to their employees are considered much more trustworthy and reliable (Galvin et al., 2010). Therefore, distant leaders are constantly holding web videos, presenting bios and photos of themselves, and discussing their goals and objectives, thus providing the necessary visibility to stay influential (Galvin et al., 2010). This strategy allows leaders to present themselves in a

positive light, and allows employees to observe their absent leaders' charismatic persona (Galvin, 2010).

Leaders are required to develop effective ways of communicating the organization's overall performance (Meng & Berger, 2013). Although layoffs are usually well-kept secrets, employees always find out. Sutton (2010) suggested leaders should inform the employees as soon as possible when layoffs and downsizing are being considered. Sutton stressed leaders must present the ability and strength to articulate bad news to their employees. Sutton further argued leaders must erase the employees' fears of an unsafe work environment.

Small courtesy attributes can go a long way when communicating with employees (Sutton, 2010). Common courtesy, whether it is smiling at the other employees, showing gratitude for work performed, or admitting mistakes are an effective way to create a healthy psychological work environment (Sutton, 2010). Such courtesy is considered an effective measure in addressing challenges to eliminate problems with employees. Meng and Berger (2013) argued solid internal relations are crucial for leaders to manage a productive work setting, as well as open, engaging, and less authoritarian relationships with their employees. They further stressed that the involvement of relationship building between the leader and the employee creates an excellent communication management method for interacting and collaborating (Meng & Berger, 2013).

### **Layoffs and Variation of Leadership Models**

The leadership models are being used in corporations throughout the world (Bryan, 2012). These models are important because they are identified as tools to assist

organizations to comply with the policies, rules, and regulations during organizational changes including layoffs and restructuring. For many decades, management researchers and theorists have looked for a paradigm shift from the traditional way of doing business that only considers economic factors (Tideman & Arts, 2013). Times have changed and companies are evolving with the changes. The global market has created a major demand for such change. The paradigm shift for business leaders has emerged, and using leadership models are critical in assisting companies to stay competitive (Tideman & Arts, 2013). The success of leadership models depends on a business paradigm at the societal level, and more emphasis placed on business behavior rather than the broader system of interacting agents (Tideman & Arts, 2013).

Cooney (2011) discussed the different business models, the approaches that are used to balance goals aligned with organizational changes. A growing number of organizations are creating social purpose business (SPBs). The SPB models are another systematic tool utilized in organizations for integrating business and social services technologies and organizational strategies for competing in product and service markets (Cooney, 2011). Cooney stated these models serve as a source of additional revenue, and locations for employment and job training. Leaders and managers should always promote these models as part of their processes (Cooney, 2011).

According to McGrath (2013), the key to leadership and management challenge is to maintain an organizational system that manages the complexities of innovation and stability. McGrath noted that leadership models are instrumental in outlining the different leadership measuring tools used in organizations. They lead the way to a new era of

economic advantage. These models include knowledge management (KM), the nine-phase change process model, moral leadership, transactional change leadership, transformational change methodology, charismatic leadership, systems theory, leader-member exchange theory, Lewin's leadership model of change, Levinson's theory, XY model, the three levels of leadership model, situational leadership model, Nadler-Tushman congruence model, and Tichy's TPC internal/external model.

The Deyhle's return on investment (ROI) model is another leadership model used in organizations to examine the efficiencies in management (Lukavic & Speranda, 2015). The ROI model was developed to unite the managerial techniques of leading and encouraging employees' concept with the managerial techniques of planning and controlling concept (Lukavic & Speranda, 2015). The link connecting the two concepts is the managerial behavior. A manager's behavior is critical in establishing a stable work environment during organizational changes and detrimental to maintaining a positive relationship with the employees (McGrath, 2013).

According to Bryan (2012), the activator behavior and consequence (ABC) leadership model is one of the models used to identify change activities in organizations, and to identify leadership skills required. The ABC leadership model was originally applied during an organizational change to a customer network service in the United Kingdom. The organizational change included the closure of 39 offices in the United Kingdom, redeployment of 170 employees, transitioning 100 employees to other facilities, and reclassifying of 270 employees to lower positions (Bryan, 2012). The model was also used to change the leadership style. As the organizational changes were

being implemented, the coaching teams focused on building trust with the employees that resulted in sharing as much information as possible (Bryan, 2012).

The ABC leadership model is specific to change and what actions need to take place to lead change effectively (Bryan, 2012). Bryan (2012) discussed the change model concept and the layoff process, stating the implementation phase consists of building trust with the team, discussing past experiences with individuals, and providing deadlines. This process is critical in building trust to manage change through challenging events (Bryan, 2012).

Although leadership models are used to improving leadership skills and processes, organizations should be able to use the models during critical times such as layoffs and downsizing (Hunter, 2010). Their leaders must be able to lay the groundwork for their followers and communicate an effective message (Hunter, 2010). The leadership models are used as roadmaps that guide leadership and corporations to maintain world-class leadership and good business practices (Hunter, 2010). Hunter further stated that these models can present a detailed analysis of measures for assessing leadership, and determining group successes.

According to Bordia et al. (2011), change models are instrumental in managing change and leadership structure in organizations. Bordia et al. stated that the individual's behavior must be considered a major factor in the process, having observed different models and the effects of poor change management history (PCMH) on the attitudes of employees and their relationship with the manager. Bordia et al.'s study on leadership styles and relationships found there was a significant relationship between the



charismatic and transformational leadership styles and job satisfaction. Bordia et al. also explored job satisfaction and openness to change due to commonalities of change in today's organizations, and the stress associated with the changing work environment due to potential layoffs. The philosophical approach is to clarify the role of change management in shaping employee beliefs and behavior (Bordia et al., 2011).

To influence these beliefs, Bordia et al. (2011) had to review the effects of PCMH. The sociocognitive approach was adopted. This approach emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in discussing reactions and behaviors to layoffs and organizational changes (Bordia et al., 2011). Bordia et al. stressed that when organizations' executive and stakeholders make decisions to lay off employees, their messages must be clear. This information must be shared with the employees (Bordia et al., 2011). In some cases, it is a good idea to involve the employees in the layoff and downsizing decision-making process. The employees assist in creating positive attitudes and perceptions when changes are made.

Other company models used for leadership best practices include the integrated model of charismatic leadership, multilevel systems model of leadership, and leadership competency model (Kinicki, Jacobson, Galvin, & Prussia, 2011). These models establish organizational efficiencies. Leadership must be professional at all times during the implementation and transition phases of these models (Bryan, 2012).

### **Layoff Alternatives**

Organizational layoffs have become a global phenomenon with crippling effects on the economy for white collar and blue collar workers (Basu & Datta, 2010). However,

providing layoff notices and pink slips are not the only solutions for cost savings. There are alternatives organizations may use to ease stressful and financial burdens on the employees such as (a) assigning employees to other jobs and locations, (b) voluntary leaves of absence, (c) voluntary retirement, (d) temporary reductions in work hours, (e) pay cuts, and (f) pay freezes at all levels (Basu & Datta, 2010).

Additional alternatives to layoffs include outsourcing and offshoring, working virtually to eliminate work space, cutting travel budget, reducing or temporarily eliminating pay raises, invoking hiring freezes, extending benefits to employees who voluntarily accept a layoff, and hiring contractors outside the organization to perform specific work functions (Mertz et al., 2010). Mertz et al. (2010) argued outsourcing and offshoring are seen more negatively by employees. Layoffs have more negative responses by employees than any other form of downsizing (Mertz et al., 2010).

Employee furlough is another alternative that could be considered over layoffs. Such furloughs are considered time off with no pay (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2012). Furloughs are not commonly used because of their emotional strain on the employees. Specifically, just the announcement of a furlough creates mental stress and a lack of work performance by the employee (Halbesleben, Wheeler, & Paustian-Underdahl, 2013).

One layoff alternative that is commonly used in the IT field is called benching employees. This reduction strategy is used when workers do not have specific projects assigned or when the volume of work has decreased then the employees are maintained on a standby basis (Basu & Datta, 2010). The manager continues to engage with them to

assure they are part of the team, which may not be the best solution. Consequently, employees may feel the stress of uncertainty and may become less motivated (Basu & Datta, 2010). Implementing training programs in new skill sets for employees to attend when business is slow is another alternative, which ultimately creates a talent pool of well-diversified employees prepared to take on additional duties once the business has returned to normal (Basu & Datta, 2010).

The layoff and downsizing process does not offer a consistent solution across all industries, as it must vary among different companies, cultures and geographical areas. The process varies with different companies. There is an abundance of literature that exist on the benefits of layoffs and organizational performances, and studies have shown evidence to be inclusive related to whether layoffs and downsizing are effective (Datta et al., 2010). The employees are caught in the middle and are uncertain about their future. Organizational executives, leaders, and managers should always review alternatives before laying off employees. When the layoff and downsizing process is implemented, a support team should be in place to work with the employees' job placements in addition to hardship counseling. Most importantly, management engagement with the employees provides a crucial foundation for success during any rocky period of economic uncertainty. Managerial involvement demonstrates to employees that managers are concerned about employee well-being.

### **Summary**

For many decades, management researchers and theorists have looked for a paradigm shift from the traditional way of doing business that only considers economic

factors (Tideman & Arts, 2013). Times have changed and companies are evolving accordingly. The global market has created a major demand for change, which is the only way to stay competitive. Advanced technology has driven new innovative ideas of managing businesses. Reinardy (2013) argued that, due to technological innovations and a reduced workforce, the past cannot be reconstructed in the present.

Organizations are looking for effective ways to reduce operational expenses without impacting performances and are resorting to various forms of downsizing and layoff techniques. The field of management has been unable to shift away from this same style that has been in practice for many years. The success of the shift depends on a business paradigm at the societal level, and more emphasis placed on business behavior limits rather than the broader system of interacting agents. The reason for layoffs is to reduce costs (Dencker, 2012). Companies are in the business of making a profit. If that is not happening, the stakeholders look for alternatives to make it happen.

The layoff process has emotional and psychological implications. When individuals are laid off, they feel shut off from the world of employment. They immediately think about their families and financial situations. The surviving individuals in some cases present the same behavior, thinking they could have been laid off too. The employees trust levels in management and the organization are diminished. Leaders must be strong and present in relaying a psychological resilience (Mayton, 2012). Leaders must engage with their employees by communicating effectively the goals and visions of the organization (Davila & Pina-Ramirez, 2014).

This communication must implement the key factors, employee engagement, culture, communication, and leadership models. Leadership models such as the KM models, ABC leadership models, SPBs models, three levels of leadership models, Lewin's model of change, and the Deyhle ROI models are the tools of the 21st century. Organizations have come to the realization these tools are needed if managers are to be effective. Transformational leadership is an important factor in change models. To establish new ideas, processes, and models, leadership must require the same mindset for implementation. Leaders must be able to manage change, maintain employee trust and its impacts, and provide innovative ways of problem-solving (Lacy et al., 2012).

In reviewing all of the research viewpoints, some clear conclusions stand out, including the relationship between corporate leaders and employees. Trust and distrust within relationships affect the core of a complex relationship when coping with the internal and external factors of a crisis. The underlying dynamics of trust and distrust appear to explain change from one stage to the next. Leaders should be more cognizant when making decisions on change models and in implementing the development of relationships to better control any disruptive effects of a crisis (Reid & Turbide, 2011).

Chapter 3 provides the research methodology that was used to explore the employee's perceptions of layoffs and downsizing. The section provides the protection of the participant's guidelines. Chapter 3 also includes the research method, research design, research procedures and questions, role of the researcher, qualitative research strategy, and ethical guidelines.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the impacts layoffs and downsizing have on employees' trust, work performance, behavior, health, and their relationship with management during and after an event and provide recommendations for employee support. This study's findings revealed the challenges not only of the individuals who have been laid off but also the surviving employees. The research design that I used for this study was phenomenology. In this chapter, I will provide further details on the research design and methods used in this study. In addition, in this chapter I will explain how the emotional behaviors of the individual participants were captured through questionnaires, interviews, and observations. I will also discuss the data collection and analysis process in this chapter as well as the process for preparing and interpreting the results.

The qualitative approach is one of the best methods to use when researchers want to learn the meaning of the participants' issues (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the reality of these issues and personal experiences from the individual's perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this case, my preference was based on the need to interact with the participants. The qualitative research method assisted in understanding human experiences and interactions rather than using a quantitative approach involving numbers (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012).

Braun and Clark (2013) stated that qualitative research is considered "a culture that exists for different research paradigms and methodologies" (p. 35). For instance, the

researcher should understand the norms of the study to realize that the quantitative research approach is not the best method for analyzing the emotions and behavior of individuals. Specifically, using a quantitative approach would require scientific experiments and instruments, hypotheses, objectivity, and statistical significance (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Conversely, the qualitative research approach implements a positivist empiricist concept using the language of revealing, discovering, and uncovering data (Braun & Clare, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested if one has the right tools and searches hard enough, one can uncover the reality of the situation. Furthermore, the qualitative method can be subjective and reflective of the researcher's own experiences, values, and biases (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, the topic chosen, the types of questions selected, and the data examined are a reflection of the researcher. The same analogy can apply for the participants in the study. The participants brought their own experiences and values to the research. Therefore, all individuals involved brought their historic nature to the study (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 36). The participants in this study discussed their perceptions on the layoff and downsizing process and the emotional and physical effects of their experiences. These elements such as individual experiences, reflections, values, and beliefs create the uniqueness of the qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

According to Robson (2011), a qualitative research process is flexible and allows the researcher to navigate between data collection and data analysis while focusing on the issues from the data collected. The research questions are broad and generic, allowing the researcher to provide follow on questions (Robson, 2011). A qualitative researcher does

not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers (Braun & Clare, 2013). The qualitative research method does not have hypotheses to be tested (Robson, 2011, p. 35). The researchers review the data, make sense of it, and organize it for interpretation of the results (Braun & Clarke, 2014). This phase is known as data analysis (Sarker & Beulieu, 2013). Data analysis is considered one of the most critical steps conducted in the research study. The data analysis process validates the integrity of the data collected (Kieft, 2014).

The participants in this study had a direct relationship with the layoff and downsizing process. Their experience in the layoff process was examined and discussed in this study. This study also included not only the laid off individuals and survivors but the manager's experience in the layoff and downsizing process as well. Therefore, it was critical that this study focused on understanding laid off individuals' emotional experiences rather than trying to prove a theory (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 35).

### **Researcher's Role**

The role of a qualitative researcher requires the ability to step outside one's cultural environment into a world of reality to understand the phenomenological effects of a specific group of individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, the researcher becomes the commentator for the individual's viewpoint and beliefs by sharing the participants' values and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this study, I collected data from the participants, analyzed the data, and interpreted the data to establish the findings. However, verbal exchange is critical between the researcher and the participant to establish a good relationship during the study (Hazel & Clark, 2013). Therefore, I



focused on building the relationship and establishing trust with the participants to maintain good responses.

Researchers should position themselves with power and knowledge, which subsequently adds more credibility to the study and influences the participant's decision to be a part of the study (Hazel & Clark, 2013). Effective research requires specific criteria (Hazel & Clark, 2013). According to Braun and Clark (2013), researchers should be orientated on the sensitivity of study in terms of RQs and analyzing data so certain skills are required such as the following:

- Being able to express interest and understand the process and meaning of the phenomenon
- Having a critical and analytical approach to life and knowledge
- Being able to step outside and into another culture of experiences
- Being able to listen and view carefully what is being said
- Reflecting on one's own role as a researcher
- Having good interpersonal skills: the ability to be pleasant, warm, and sincere to establish a trusting relationship with the participant. The goal is to make the participant comfortable and more responsive to the questions
- Having an excellent understanding of the qualitative approaches (p. 10)

The skills that a qualitative researcher develops can be used in different fields. These skills allow the researcher to make sense of the participants' challenges and real-life experiences (Braun & Clark, 2013). I collected information from the participants in the field through online questionnaires, interviews, social media, e-mail, video, tape

recording, and telephone discussions. The objective was to listen, document the narratives, and tell the participants' stories as they lived it (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### **Participants**

The population of this study consisted of participants from job fairs, employment offices, newspaper advertisements, career centers, temporary agencies, union halls, and social media outlets. I requested permission to solicit advertisement flyers for potential participants for the study. My contact information was located on the flyer so individuals could contact me via e-mail or phone. The participants selected were 18 and over and included managers and workers recently involved in a layoff or downsizing event from their employment in the last year. The identified individuals underwent purposeful selection to be a part of a smaller group of 20 participants for the interview and observation process to share their experiences and contribute to the study. By gaining insight into the participants' perspectives, I was able to understand the meaning, similarities, and different views of the participants as they answered the RQs identified in this study (Kieft, de Brouwer, Francke, & Delnoij, 2014).

The study included participants from various types of jobs and industries. The selected participants were from different genders, races, and ethnicities and represented workers and managers affected by the layoff and downsizing process. The participants in the study were individuals who were laid off and employed individuals who survived a layoff.

## **Research Design**

The research design of this study consisted of a qualitative phenomenological research design with purposeful sampling of the participants. Prendergast et al. (2013) stated phenomenology is concentrated on understanding the core of an experience of the individual through examples and reflections. This approach facilitates a better sense of understanding between the researcher and the participant (Prendergast et al., 2013). In this study, I engaged with the participants. Adams (2010) noted that both the researcher and the participant may share some of the same experiences that contribute to the uniqueness of the study. The goal in this study was to understand the employees' lived experiences during and after a layoff and downsizing event, identify strategies to reduce such impacts, explore methods to alleviate anxiety and emotional stress in employees who remain after a reduction in an organization's workforce, restore employee's trust, and explore alternatives to future reductions in the workforce.

The phenomenological approach was the most appropriate for this study and directly paralleled the research purpose. Phenomenological research focuses on the nature of human lives and the understanding that people are attached to their personal experiences (Reiter et al., 2011). This study included the interview and observation process while using open-ended interview questions. The phenomenological research design focused on interactions between the participants and me through lived experiences and allowed me to provide follow-up questions to obtain additional details for the study. The phenomenological approach allowed me to observe and listen carefully to the

participants and reflect upon my own experiences as the study was conducted (Adams, 2010).

The phenomenological approach is also known as lived experience descriptions (LED); this approach allows the researcher to share the experience as it takes place instead of theorizing the process (Adams, 2010). Therefore, the phenomenological approach challenges the researcher to be more receptive and allows the researcher to draw out the undertones and silent language of the participant (Adams, 2010). This study provided a better understanding of what the individuals were going through during the layoff process. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants in their environment of choice. Collecting the data can be an intense and rigorous process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, a phenomenological study that applies the layoff and downsizing process involves investigating the phenomenon of employee treatment during and after the process.

Braun and Clarke (2013) pointed out that research design is the blueprint of a qualitative study. They further stated that the design incorporates the goal of the study, the theoretical framework, the research questions, ethical considerations, and the methodology used to generate and analyze the data (p. 42). The research design is the planning phase and the most critical phase (Braun & Clarke, 2013)). If a study does not have a good plan behind it, the researcher's time and the participant's time may be wasted (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Linares Lopez, Jiménez, and Helmert (2013) noted that research planning focuses on developing the best methods for exploring the research topic. The research design is determined by epistemological commitments (Hays &

Wood, 2011). For example, if the study is predicated on a phenomenological theoretical approach, the questions will focus on the lived experiences of the participants (Hays & Wood, 2011).

In determining research designs, several factors such as skills of researchers and the methods they choose influence their decisions (Hays & Wood, 2011). In addition, the types of questions the researcher will use are considered a factor for research design determination (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) provided a list of questions that follow that are most commonly used to assist in a research design decision:

- What do I want to know? Why do I want to know it?
- What are my theoretical and methodological positions?
- What type of data would best answer the questions?
- What type of data will I use to tell me what I want to know?
- How much data will I need?
- How will I collect and analyze my data? (p. 43)

According to Hays and Wood (2011), various research designs and factors exist. The researcher's design choice is based on what the research already knows. Research paradigm and research traditions are important components to establish qualitative inquiry and design (Hays & Wood, 2011). The research paradigms are beliefs based on the essence of philosophies of science, and the research traditions are the methods being used. Both methods provide the guidance needed for the researcher to pursue a topic of study (Hays & Singh, 2011).

On the other hand, qualitative research traditions include phenomenology, grounded theory, consensual qualitative research, ethnography, narratology, and participatory action research (Hays & Wood, 2011). Although the listed designs are also focused on individual views and experiences as the phenomenology design, I used the phenomenology method for this study. Descriptions of qualitative research designs that focus on individual views, experiences and behaviors are provided by Hays and Wood (2011) are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Qualitative Research Designs and Descriptions*

Design	Description
Phenomenology	Used to detail the meaning of an individual's lived experiences. Seeks to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of those directly involved.
Grounded theory	Grounded views based on a participant's experiences for theory development.
Consensual qualitative research (CQR)	Used to incorporate a combination of methods such as phenomenology and grounded theory to capture in-depth analysis of the individual's views.
Ethnography	Used to examine the participant's social behavior, and describe cultures and collaborative relationships with them.
Narratology	Describe the participant's views and experiences in the form of a story.
Participatory action research (PAR)	Used to generate social models by engaging with the participant's and reflecting on existing theories and learning from their cultures.

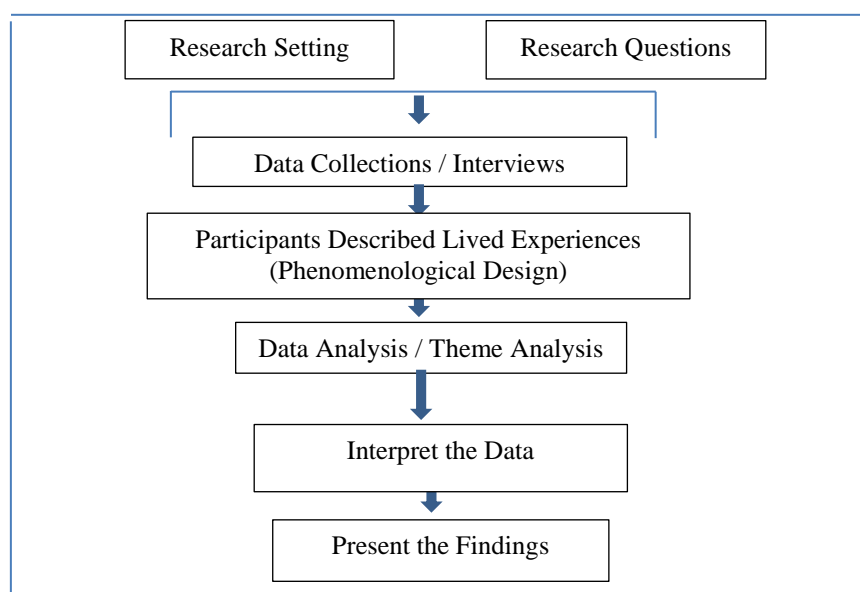
*Note.* Hays and Wood, (2011); Hays and Singh, (2011)

### **Qualitative Research Strategy**

Researchers choose their approach based on methods that can provide the best answers for their study and are based on their own training and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Once the qualitative approach has been identified, the researcher must determine the specific benefits of the approach that is most useful. Two main qualitative research strategies exist: nonexperimental and experimental designs (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Menendez and Whitaker (2012), the nonexperimental approach is used to conduct interviews and examines the individual's experiences and perceptions on the issue. Specifically, these interviews usually take place in the field face-to-face with the participants. Therefore, the qualitative methods of life experience interviews and structured interviews are sufficient in a phenomenological approach to evaluate the effects and treatment of laid off and surviving employees as well as managers.

Additional research strategies are experiential qualitative research, which confirms the views in the data collected and critical qualitative research, which interprets the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). An experiential study focuses on understanding people's own perspectives and meanings in which a researcher seeks to understand how his or her world is viewed. Specifically, the way individuals discuss their experiences provides an insight into their lives (Braun & Clarke, 2011, pp. 21-24). The experiential strategy was also used in the study. Critical research employs the language of the individuals as insights to see their worldviews. This kind of research allows a view into the individual's subculture and how it was impacted (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The research strategy was used to identify and apply the most appropriate approach for data analysis (Reiter et al., 2011). The participant's described their lived experiences during the interview process. I documented the responses to the interview questions, collected, and analyzed the data. The objective was to obtain accurate results from the data collected. Strategies for a qualitative phenomenological research design are provided (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and listed in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Strategies for a qualitative research design (Braun & Clark, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The study was based on the lived experiences employees go through during and after a layoff. A qualitative method was selected for this study, which allowed me to meet the participants and observe their behavior during the interview process. The phenomenological design was selected, allowing me to understand the meaning of each



participant's real world (Hanson, 2012). Bassi (2011) noted there have been many research questions regarding measuring attitudes, psychological constructs, mental states, and the way individuals perceive their work environments.

The participants consisted of laid-off and surviving employees and managers. Qualitative exploration allows the researcher to ask the participants open-ended questions during the interview process, and the participants provide their responses through their experiences and in their own words (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Direct face-to-face conversations and interactions with the participants occurred. Fieldwork was conducted at the employees' preferred sites to observe and record their responses and their behavior during the interview process. All of the interview sessions were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the open and selective coding process. Transcriptions were conducted by the researcher and were created in files using Microsoft Excel and Word (Hanson, 2012). Transcription of the data was conducted by me. The qualitative study focused on the observation of the participants' behavior, emotions, and attitudes.

### **Population and Sampling**

The interviews and observations were conducted in the Southern California area at various locations. Because the problem of the study was related to layoffs and downsizing effects and employee trust, interviewing the individuals locally and collecting the data directly from the actual employees were the most advantageous to everyone involved. To select participants, recruitment advertisements were placed at job fairs, employment facilities, newspaper ads, career centers, temporary agencies, union halls, and social media outlets. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails were conducted to the

interested members for the study verifying their qualifications and experiences with the phenomenon of layoffs and downsizing. From the participants selected, a smaller group of 20 individuals was chosen for the interview process.

In a qualitative phenomenological study, the required number of interviewees can range from 15-25 (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The sample size of 20 participants was small enough to solicit detailed responses during the interview process. An experienced research interviewer, with a concise research topic, and a small number of interviewees (with the experience of the phenomenon) can provide relevant information for the study (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). The participants were from different genders, races, backgrounds, and experiences. These interviews were semistructured with the participants. Koch, Niesz, and McCarthy (2013) noted that participants are selected for their personal experiences, not for representation of a larger population.

The sampling strategy and sample size for this qualitative research plan that was used are purposeful sampling techniques. The data were collected from the participants using purposeful sampling (Raj & Srivastava, 2013). According to Koch, Niesz, and McCarthy (2013), purposeful sampling allows researchers to choose participants who provide detailed descriptions of their experiences and who can choose the research site (Niesz & McCarthy, 2013).

### **Setting and Sample**

The setting was at each participant's public place of choice. The employees in this study had been laid off or survived a layoff in the last year, so I accepted their preference for the location. Sample designs are important parts of a study. The sample consisted of

managers and working level employees in all types of work and business corporations. In a qualitative phenomenological study, a sample size of a minimum of 20 participants is consistent with an effective study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013).

### **Ethical Research**

Ethical research is critical to a qualitative study. Rules have been put in place to protect individuals who participate in studies. These regulations are aimed at achieving acceptable ethical research standards (Watts, 2011). The principles and guidelines for this study will include (a) consent to participate, (b) understanding of the research information and the risks, and (c) ability to withdraw from the study at any time (Watts, 2011).

Currently, researchers use the ethical rules by the Belmont Report to protect the well-being of the participants in a study (Mikesell, Bromley, & Khodyakov, 2013). In addition, the community-based participatory research was also referenced by the researcher to assure the rights and wellbeing of the community are protected (Mikesell et al., 2013). I used both reports for this study. The ethical rules were clear, and both of the reports provided a list of rules to abide by during the study. Both reports promoted trust with the participant and the community. According to Brown (as cited in Mikesell et al., 2013), the rules included the following:

- Treating the participants anonymously and not revealing their identity in the study
- Treating the participants fairly and not taking risks

- Providing information to the participants so they can decide if they want to be a part of the study
- Requiring the researcher to reveal the risks and benefits related with the study across society

Ethics involves the responsibility of assisting researchers in establishing right from wrong and, when incorporated throughout the research activities, shields the reputation of the study (Vanclay, 2013). Researchers must take every precaution in order to avoid exposing participants to harmful situations. The role of the researcher is to maintain the participant's privacy, and assure they are not harmed in any way physically and emotionally (Vanclay, 2013).

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument that used in this qualitative study was the interview. I performed semistructured interviews to solicit detailed responses from the participants.

Semistructured interviews foster an environment for further discussions between the researcher and the participant to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Mojtahed et al., 2014). The semistructured interview empowers the researcher to ask more detailed follow-on questions concerning various elements on the topic (Mojtahed et al., 2014). The interview was a part of the observation phase to capture the body language and facial expressions as the participants respond to the questions.

The semistructured interview questions were tailored to the participants' knowledge and lived experience. These questions investigated the issues related to

impacts of layoffs and downsizing. Therefore, open-ended questions were used to explore solutions to improve management's criteria in the planning and implementation phases of layoff and downsizing (Anjou et al., 2013). Tape recordings of the interviews were used to capture the details of the responses accurately, and only recorded with each participant's permission. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by me, and all personal identification and confidential data were removed from all the transcripts (Hohl, 2014).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process involved a qualitative study that includes questionnaires, observation notes, and documented answers from interview questions, archived files, and tape recordings of interviews. Data are the core of the study and what researchers use to answer the questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, the data collected in a qualitative study are raw, never been used or collected, and useful in understanding the phenomenon. The researcher's role is to determine the validity of the data. The determination factors are (a) the quality of the topic, (b) the context of the data and the ability to see things to say regarding them, and (c) serving the purpose of the research (Braun & Clark, 2013). In addition, recording and transcribing the data are just as important as collecting the data (Sarker & Beulieu, 2013). The researcher must be able to capture the participants' views and document the information for interpretation.

Sarker and Beulieu (2013) claimed that interviews are the most common form of qualitative data collection. Braun and Clark (2013) argued that direct conversations and interactions with the participants are critical in the qualitative approach. The objectives

are to observe, investigate, and understand the participants' issues and concerns. The main concern of data collection is the location of the study and the number of cases to study (Sarker & Beulieu, 2013).

Fieldwork was conducted at the participants' preferred setting to observe and record their behavior during the interview process. This situation was critical because asking questions of the participants in their natural settings, preferably away from their workplace, can help them to be more comfortable, willing to speak, and able to answer the questions accurately. This setup also prevented the setting from having an undue influence on the participant's willingness to speak (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Questions provided to the participants were open-ended, which allow me to pursue more in-depth answers that are beneficial in obtaining accurate results (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### **Initial Contact**

Each participant contacted my name listed on the flyer via e-mail or telephone. I sent a letter to the participant outlining qualifications, the goals of the project, and the topics to be discussed in the interviews (Drew, 2014). The next step in the process was me contacting the participants by telephone or by e-mail (Drew, 2014). During this phase, I followed up to see if the participants received the letter originally sent and to clarify any concerns they might have had. The participants were informed of the nature of the study and the time commitment involved (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). This protocol provided a good first impression and showed professionalism (Drew, 2014).

**Interview Process**

After the approval from the Institutional review board (IRB Approval No. 03-08-16-0198763), I posted flyers about potential participation in the study. The participants contacted me via e-mail or telephone regarding the study. I sent information to the participants and had follow-on discussions before scheduling interviews with the participants. Interviews were conducted over a 3-month period on a one-on-one basis; each participant chose the location at which the interview occurred. I conducted semistructured interviews during which I not only asked the participants to provide in-depth details of their experiences as they related to the topic, but also encouraged the participants to speak as often as they wanted, and took every possible measure to ensure the participants felt comfortable in answering questions (Drew, 2014). Through such encouragement, I identified opportunities to ask follow-on questions. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of the interview process, the participant received an incentive payment for their participation in the study. Transcription is an important process in the qualitative research analysis phase, and can be time-consuming, yet transcription of the data was conducted by me

**Member Checking**

Throughout the interview process, I conducted member checking with the participants being interviewed, which is the most crucial technique in the study. Member checking is designed to allow open communication between the researcher and the participant and improve the validity of the study (Buchbinder, 2011). Member checking can also enhance the ethical aspect pursued by researchers based on mutual respect. In

the phenomenological qualitative study, member checking may seem more appropriate to capture the participant's lived experiences. In this phenomenological study, I summarized the information provided by the participant's responses and then provided the collected information and findings to the participants to evaluate and approve accuracy. If the information is approved by the participant, the study is considered credible (Buchbinder, 2011)

### **Bracketing**

Bracketing is an important technique used in qualitative studies to alleviate the pernicious effects of preconceived views that may defect the study (Tufford, 2012). Preconceptions may arise during the data collection and analysis stage and impact the entire study. As a part of the bracketing process, I documented observational notes and comments to indicate the researcher's feelings and thoughts (Tufford, 2012). Bracketing was implemented as the data were collected in this study. After the data were collected and organized, I broke down the data into events for analysis (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Bracketing can be complex in a study and may prevent the researcher from affecting the participant's understanding of the phenomenon (Tufford, 2012). Bracketing may also help to manage emotional tension between the researcher and participant and increase the researcher's understanding of the participant's experiences and emotions. Maramba and Velasquez (2012) argued it is through bracketing and analysis that shared attributes are discovered. During this time, the researcher reserved judgement about reality or participant perceptions as to the way things should be and focused instead on the analysis experience.



## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process allows the researcher to observe and analyze the data as it is being collected (Sarker & Beulieu, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) claimed that a researcher cannot perform qualitative analysis without documenting the information in writing first (p. 249). They insisted that analyzing the information is the same as writing the information, and includes merging together the analytic narrative that provides the reader a convincing story about the data and its relevance to actual literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The transcribed data were collected from the participants, open-coded, put into categories, and validated (Kieft, 2014). The information included transcripts, lists of codes, and categories as well as analytic synopses (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Measurement levels are the key areas of a study. Qualitative categorical data are considered ordinal levels, and they were used in this study. The ordinal level is considered to be higher, greater, and more desirable. In addition, measurement requests for all the cases were given the same rank. Therefore, a distinction was considered between them because the data analysis approach is different depending on the scale of measurement (Raghavendra & Antony, 2011).

During the analytical process, the interview portions were compared. According to Hazel and Clark (2013), researchers draw comparisons to their own identities and practices during the analysis. The transcribed interview data were reviewed to assure elements of the data were not overlooked (Kieft, 2014). Once the data were analyzed, the information was presented to the participants to verify if data were accurate, and if the

participants wanted to change any parts of their interviews. This procedure helped to assure clarity and assure the information was interpreted correctly from the participants (Kieft, 2014). The analytical process and result information can be discussed among the research team, which helps to improve the quality of the data and to protect the integrity of the data (Kieft, 2014). Finally, throughout the notes and analysis, a complete assessment of qualitative software produced by the researcher provided the meaning of this phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### **Research Coding Scheme**

As part of the data collection process, an Excel spreadsheet was created by me using Microsoft software to collect the data. Microsoft Office Excel was used for data collection, data analysis, and correlations in this study. It is common to use Microsoft Excel database to collect data in a qualitative study because the database assists researchers in analysis technique for any types of research data (Androniceanu, 2014). A coding scheme process was used to code and categorize the participant's responses from the interviews. The coded information was analyzed by the researcher. The coding strategy is one of the most appropriate elements of the study. Braun and Clarke (2013) noted that coding assists in identifying portions of the data (p. 206). They claimed that codes make information intelligible and pull the pieces of data together for clarity.

The research involved coding all the data that pertained to the research question in the dataset, which was considered a preanalytical process. Microsoft software was used to support the coding analysis. Microsoft software has features for sorting columns and types of data. The sort feature also assisted in organizing the data on the matrix. I

reviewed the transcripts from the interview identifying keywords and responses. The captured information was documented in a Microsoft Excel matrix, categorized and coded to determine a pattern. The researcher continued to review the data until it was determined the research questions were thoroughly addressed.

The coding strategy continued to keep me organized and helped to provide meaning to the data. The codes also allowed me the ability to find quickly, retrieve, and cluster the portions related to a specific research question. I analyzed the interview transcripts and observation notes, and was able to provide necessary topics that were categorized for discussion during the study.

### **Validity**

The validity of research outcome is a critical issue for all qualitative research studies (Wang & Lien, 2013). In qualitative research, validity is based on the credibility of the conclusions drawn in a study. It is crucial to the accuracy of the data. Validity presents how well the researcher represents the phenomenon (Morse, 2015). The researcher's objective is to capture the lived experience of the individual and represent them accurately (Ihantola et al., 2011). The researcher's goal is to establish trust and confidence in the conclusions. Because it is the researcher who collected, analyzed, and presented the data, the researcher is responsible for the research outcome (Morse, 2015).

Qualitative researchers aspire to present trustworthiness with four key elements: (a) dependability, (b) credibility, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Guzys et al., 2015). The strategies for maintaining validity are prolonged engagement, continual observation, detailed description of data, clarifying researcher bias, and member checking

(Morse, 2015). Although the search for validity extends the number of steps in a study, it is a vital step in an ethical research project (Wang & Lien, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important element of the study. Fear (2012) argued trustworthiness and expertise are main indicators of credibility. The researcher provides thorough descriptions in the study for a better understanding of details, which can allow those interested to draw their own conclusions from the data provided (Buchbinder, 2011). Prolonged engagement with the participant is also critical to establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study.

I spent sufficient time observing the setting, speaking with the participants, and developing relationships with participants. I continued to build trust with the participants through knowledge of the study, oriented to the circumstances and culture of the participant, and was able to identify any bias or misrepresentation that might alter the data (Qualitative Research Guidelines Project, 2008), I invited participants to comment and provide feedback on their documented interviews. The formality also provided authenticity of the study (Buchbinder, 2011).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is considered the core to assure trustworthiness in research (Farokhzadian et al., 2015). Clarity is important in the conduct and reporting of all research, and articulating methodology when reporting on research influencing credibility. Establishing a cordial relationship with the participant in a similar setting can also reinforce credibility in a study (Farokhzadian et al., 2015), which may require

additional time to present, and require reviewers to be appropriately skilled in methodological assessment (Guzys et al., 2015).

Appelman and Sundar (2015) stated that credibility can be measured by asking the participant to rate the content of the study based on three descriptions: accurate, authentic, and believable. These criteria may insinuate the credibility and knowledge of the researcher, and the data presented. Therefore, accurately capturing the data for analysis and findings can solidify any credibility concerns. Credibility can also be based on the researcher's message. Credibility based on communication is difficult because the source, message, and content are problematic to separate (Appelman & Sundar, 2015).

### **Transferability**

In a qualitative study, the way in which the research findings can be transferred to another context is determined as transferability (Morse, 2015). Transferability can provide opportunities to compare and contrast several studies which provide a better understanding of the phenomenon (Hitchcock & Newman, 2012). Transferability in a qualitative study can also be called external validity (Morse, 2015). In the transferability phase, the analysis can be adjusted to a specific setting. The researcher must provide detailed data so reviewers can understand the study and evaluate the findings. Other researchers might be able to provide additional findings for the study (Morse, 2015).

### **Dependability**

Dependability is a part of the validation process in a qualitative study. As part of the validation process, qualitative researchers are encouraged to provide more in-depth analysis in their study. They are encouraged to expand their reading, broaden their own

thinking, and express this information in their writing (Toma, 2011). Dependability affirms the need to account for change. Therefore, the researcher must describe changes observed during the study and record how the changes influence the research.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability indicates the degree to which the results of the research are confirmable (Highfield & Bisman, 2012). As changes occur in the study, the researcher documents and describes the changes. The researcher validates the changes in the study during the confirmability process, which are reviewed and confirmed by others. The researcher also conducts an audit to review the data collection and data analysis processes. Audits are used to confirm the accuracy of the research (Quality Research Guidelines Project, 2008). As part of this study, a comprehensive audit trail of design information, data, and researcher notes was maintained to capture all steps in the research process from inception to completion (Highfield & Bisman, 2012).

### **Generalizability and Transferability Validity**

Layoffs and downsizing have occurred on a nationwide scale. The results in this study should be applied more widely for different populations (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although transferability is a decision for subsequent users, the researcher must provide specific details to make informed assessments. It is critical the researcher set out the research setting and key characteristics of the participants, so the limitations and boundaries of the study are concise (Highfield & Bisman, 2012). Furthermore, layoff and downsizing processes have been implemented in organizations all over the world. When organizations are no longer profitable or when they want to streamline their

organizations, the leaders will do whatever is necessary to remain in business.

Consequently, a common solution is carrying out layoffs. Researchers question the generalizations of some laws and practices as applying to all individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Layoffs and downsizing are sensitive issues, and they affect all employees who have gone through the process emotionally, mentally, financially, and physically. Therefore, each qualitative study is unique. Although some of the challenges and hardships are the same, different stories and experiences shared by the individuals are revealed through the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Braun and Clarke (2013) noted different versions of generalization: vertical, analytic, and flexible. Another concept, transferability, is more flexible and describes the specific contexts in a qualitative study such as participants, settings, and circumstances, which allows the reader to understand the entire context for applying the results (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 282).

### **Protection of Participants**

Participants received written and verbal information regarding the objective and content of the study. The study participation was voluntary, and they could have withdrawn from the study at any time. Data were analyzed anonymously, and the findings were not traceable to the participants (Hanson, 2012). Assurance was provided to the participants that no harm or retaliation would come to them from participating. If the participants showed any signs of distress, the researcher would stop the interview at that moment and request emergency attention if needed, and ask the participants if they would like to continue at a later time or be released from the study. The information that

was collected from the participants was to be held in strict confidence and kept under lock and key in a private area for 5 years. The information is to be shredded and destroyed by the researcher after that time. Mikesell (2013) claimed the main focus of researchers should be to ensure that they treat research participants fairly. The Belmont Report was the guide for practicing ethics in this study. More importantly, this document served as a guideline to protect the rights of individual participants (Mikesell, 2013).

### **Summary**

This qualitative study revolved around meaning rather than numbers (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In Chapter 3, I provided the meaning of the layoff phenomenon and the effects on the employees. The analysis of the data tells the story and provides meaning. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that quality analysis needs to be plausible, coherent, and grounded in the data collected, analyzed, and presented (p. 21). For example, quantitative researchers remove all biases and beliefs in the study to obtain their results, whereas the qualitative approach is used to understand the importance of experiences and beliefs, and use the information as part of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

In this chapter, I provided the research approach, design, collection process, and analysis process. Information was recorded and validated for accuracy. Once the data analysis was complete, interpretation of the findings was documented and presented. Although other studies on layoffs and downsizing provided results, this study revealed the hardships of all parties involved and provided alternatives for future layoff implementation. This section also discussed social impacts to society.



The layoff and downsizing processes are definitely the most common techniques employers use as cost-cutting measures, but they are not always the best options to address decreases in revenue or downturns in company profits. Both processes have major impacts on the employees' emotional and physical behaviors (Gandolfi & Littler, 2012). This study included participants from various aspects of the workforce to authenticate that a quality sample of employees across a diverse set of industries are represented in this study.

Chapter 4 is comprised of the results of the study. The topics include research setting, demographics, data collections and data analysis. Chapter 4 will also discuss the participant's selection process. This chapter provides the participants responses during the interview process.

## Chapter 4: Data Collection

### **Research Setting**

To reach a significant number of individuals for an effective study, recruitment flyers were posted at various locations in Southern California seeking qualified participants with a layoff and downsizing experience in their background. The individual qualifications for the study consisted of those who had experienced or survived layoffs and downsizing within the last year. I posted the flyers at local job fairs, career centers, employment offices, and union halls. The study was advertised in local newspapers, social media, and Craigslist. In response to the study flyers, there were numerous phone calls and e-mails received from individuals inquiring about participating in the study. As part of the selection criteria, I used purposeful sampling to down select potential candidates. In purposeful sampling, participants are selected based on their detailed descriptions of experiences, practices, and perspectives that are related to the phenomenon of interest (Koch et.al. 2014).

### **Demographics**

In order to obtain the targeted amount of 20 participants, 30 individuals were invited to participate, 25 responded. Three dropped out and two were not selected. As a result, a total of 20 individuals were selected from the population pool of interested candidates to participate in the study through which authentic data were acquired to answer the RQs. The participants selected were laid off employees, survivors, and managers from different backgrounds and with different job skills. They represented different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, ages, and genders (see Appendix B). The

participants' age range was between 18 and 59. Their races tended to vary. In terms of gender, the participant sample consisted of more men (65%) than women (35%).

### **Participant Selection**

Once the required amount of participants were recruited, as outlined in the research plan, and selected for the study, I notified the selected individuals and asked to confirm their participation. Once the confirmations were validated and consent forms were signed by the selected participants, I sent letters to those not selected for the study, explaining that a sufficient number of participants had been selected and expressing appreciation for their interest in the study.

### **Data Collection**

In this qualitative study, I used the phenomenological approach to explore the employees' perceptions of the layoff and downsizing process and obtain a better understanding of its effects. Face-to-face, online, and telephone interviews were conducted with the participants as part of the data collection process. The participants were provided interview questions based on their experiences, behaviors, perceptions, and roles and responsibilities during and after the layoffs and downsizing process. During the interview process, some of the participants' exhibited behavior changes with particular questions, such as pauses before responding to questions or a voice change with emotional overtones in certain instances after a particular question was asked. The participants' behavior was documented as they responded to the interview question. Capturing and documenting this data were instrumental in the interview process, and I used this data in the comparative analysis process. Some of the collected data showed

various levels of emotions from the participants during the interview process that could not have been tape recorded as verbal responses. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was tape recorded, transcribed, and documented. After each participant interview, the recorded and transcribed data were loaded in the Excel spreadsheet with a coded name for privacy purposes. I maintained strict confidentiality in collecting the data from the participants through de-identifying the data by removing all identifying links before anyone else had access to it.

### **Data Analysis**

I used Microsoft Word and Excel software to document, code, and analyze the interview data. The raw data regarding each participant's qualifications and experiences from the recruitment process were combined with each participant's interview responses and transferred into the Excel spreadsheets for qualitative analysis. Once the data were loaded onto the spreadsheet, a coding scheme process was used. This process allowed the data to be coded and categorized for each participant's responses from the interview. The data were sorted by age, race, and other demographics, and then analyzed using the open and selective coding process, which was a process to (a) identify what was sought, (b) determine the boundaries of instances, and (c) compile the data into a single file (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Specific data were selected that were part of the phenomenon and evaluated as relevant data to answer the RQs. Any data that I selected were coded, which allowed complete analysis of every aspect of the results. During this process, the codes were identified and provided a label for a feature of the data. The codes were wrote down on

hard copies for filing and input to an Excel worksheet to document the codes, analyze the data, and provide summary information and file locations. Braun and Clark (2013) claimed that documenting code names and highlighting the text associated with them are critical and the most systematic and thorough approach to analysis.

Once the data were coded, categorized, and summarized, member checking was conducted with the participants. This process permitted the participants to confirm that their collected information was captured accurately. Furthermore, the process allowed the participants to make changes as necessary.

### **Question Analysis**

Once the interview data were collected from the participants and transcribed, I placed the data into categories on Excel spreadsheets for analysis. The data analysis resulted in specific details the participants provided on the impacts of layoffs and downsizing from an employee's perspective who had experienced the process. The three RQs addressed in this study were as follows:

1. What are the employee perceptions of effects on employees as a result of personnel layoffs and downsizing?
2. What individual effects occurred as a result of layoffs and downsizing?
3. What are the employee perceptions of the long term implications of layoffs for an organization?

The responses of the 20 participants interviewed are presented as answers to the preceding interview questions.

### Research Question 1

Data collected from the participants for this research question were from answers to the Interview Questions 1 through 3. In Interview Question 1, the participants were asked, “Do you think employees or managers are treated better or worse during and after the layoff process?” and “Why?” Table 3 summarizes the responses.

Table 3

*Were Employees or Managers Treated Better or Worse During and After the Layoff Process?*

Participants	(A) Manager treated better	(B) Employee treated worse	(C) Treated the same	(D) Why?
Laid off Employee	7	4	0	Managers were held to a higher standard. More valued. Managers were provided better severance packages than were employees. Did not care about the employees. Employees were not provided job assistance. Personnel conflicts.
Surviving Employee	1	2	1	Managers were provided with opportunities to find new work. Employees laid off and released the same day.
Laid off Managers	4	0	1	Managers were in higher classification Managers knew in advance. Attended management meetings. Treated fairly as employees. No preferential treatment; both managers and employees called in and laid off.

Most of the laid off participants were dissatisfied with how they were treated during the layoff process and believed that most of the laid off managers in their organizations were treated better because of the positions they held. The laid off managers knew in advance about the layoff process because they were a part of the layoff and downsizing meetings before the notifications took place. Some of the laid off managers were provided assistance for other employment opportunities, whereas the laid off individuals were not provided such assistance in finding other positions within the company. Most of the laid off managers were given 60-day notices with substantial severance packages, and the laid off employees were provided less benefits in their severance packages, or no severance pay at all.

Some managers did not interface with the laid off employees. Some laid off employees were told they were let go, to pack their belongings, and leave the same day of the notifications. A few laid off employees received their last paycheck when they were laid off, and some employees were told the check was in the mail. Some surviving participants believed the managers were treated better during the layoffs. Some laid off managers stated they were treated the same as the laid off employees during and after the layoff process and did not receive preferential treatment.

In Interview Question 2, the participants were asked, "Describe your thoughts when the manager made the notification announcement and you realized you would be laid off, you heard your coworkers had been laid off, or a downsizing event was being implemented? Table 4 summarizes the responses.

Table 4

*Participant Responses to Realization of Being Laid Off*

Participants	(A) How notified	(B) How implemented	(C) Feelings about the notice
Laid off Employee	Meeting	Layoff notification Provided laid off Severance package Released from work the same day as notification Provided 60-day release	Sadness Fear Felt career was over Worry about finances Not surprised; technology is taking over Shock Betrayal
Surviving Employee	Coworker	Quit, retired	Anger Stress Sadness, depression Fear about being laid off next No stress; could finally sleep at night Gladness they survived
Laid off manager	Meeting	Layoff notice Severance Package 60-Day notice	Used Sadness Fear, depression, relief, perhaps better opportunity

This particular question created behavior changes in some of the participants as they responded to the question. Some of the participants paused before answering the question or presented a difference in tone in their voices. There was some overlap in the responses from the participants. Some common themes in the responses to this question were sadness, depression, anger, fear, worry, stress, and a hope for better opportunities. Most of the laid off participants and the laid off managers were notified through personal



meetings with their managers about the layoff. They were called into the manager's office and informed they were being laid off for various reasons, which varied with each participant during the interviews included company relocation, work performances, organizational changes, downsizing, lack of work, contract loss, and facility closure.

Most of the laid off participants expressed sadness during their responses to the questions and expressed fear their careers were over. The participants were concerned about learning new job skills and being too old to ever find work again. Most of the laid off participants were concerned about their finances, their bills, their rent, and taking care of their families. Some of the participants felt betrayal, anger, being overwhelmed, defeat, and depression. Some of the participants expressed feeling like failures and thought they had done something wrong to upset their managers. A few of the laid off participants in the study demonstrated strength in their answers during the interview, and they stated they were aware the process would take place because of corporate financial problems and upper management and organizational changes.

Some of the participants wanted to move forward with finding new jobs. Others discussed their faith and beliefs, felt things happen for a reason, and thought the layoff was an opportunity for something better. A few of the laid off manager participants felt the layoffs were part of business and decisions had to be made for the good of the company. Other managers believed better opportunities were available for them in the future. Some of the laid off managers were upset and felt the company used them to lay off employees and then laid the managers off.

Some similarities were present in the surviving employee participant responses. They were sad and depressed about the layoff and downsizing event. They were worried they were going to be laid off and if they would be able to pay their bills and take care of their families. The surviving employee participants stated they were burnt out and highly stressed from the added workload. They were overworked due to personnel shortages from the layoffs, and many of them lacked the training and experience to do their new job duties. Many of the surviving employees were concerned about the health of the company. Some of them thought about quitting or retiring. Most of the surviving employees were sad their coworkers were laid off, but were relieved they themselves were not laid off. Many of them feared they would be laid off during the next occurrence.

In Interview Question 3, the participants were asked, “What are your perceptions of employee trust and loyalty as a result of the layoff process?” and “Why?” Table 5 summarizes the responses.

Table 5

*Participant Responses to Employee Trust*

Participants	(A) Perception of trust	(B) Perception of loyalty	(C) Why?
Laid off Employee	Do not trust management	Loyalty has diminished	Executives and Managers do not care about the employees
	Managers do not tell the truth.	Manager was loyal and treated me good	Layoff not manager fault, do what they are told to do
	Will do or say anything to stay in power	Lack of loyalty	Too many management changes
	Trusted management and liked the company	Do not provide adequate information about company performance	Managers only concerned about themselves
	Pretend to be your friend to gain trust	Loyalty to upper management only	Lack communication skills
	Say one thing and do another	Cannot believe what management say	Will do anything to make themselves look good.
	Provide false pretense and do not tell the truth	Disclose employee personal information	
	They do things behind your back Violated trust Felt betrayal		

(table continues)

Participants	(A) Perception of trust	(B) Perception of loyalty	(C) Why?
Survivor Employee	Do not trust management  Cover up the truth.  Believe this is business and the best solution.  Do not communicate a clear message They are not trustworthy	Company have no loyalty to the employee  Will do or say whatever is necessary  Not committed to the employee needs.  They are not loyal, they will retire or quit if problems	The employee is just a number  They do not tell the truth and people will believe them over an employee  Managers lack commitment to see things through  They will take another position of leave the company
Laid off Manager	Do not trust their managers  Trust has diminished  Company's visions and goals are important	Executives have no loyalty to their managers or employees  Feel used and set up to take the blame for the employee layoffs  If can happen to me, it can happen to anybody	Executives and shareholders only concerned about profits  Executives do not care about the employees  Untrustworthy  They will not tell the truth about the company performance

The most common themes expressed in this table from the laid off participants were lack of trust and loyalty with their managers. The participants valued employee trust and believed the managers were untrustworthy. This perception was present consistently by the participants that were interviewed regardless of the age, race or gender. Some of the participants believed the managers were only loyal to the company and were not concerned about the employees. The participants believed the managers viewed them only as a number, and was not concerned about their well-being. Some of the surviving employees believed employee trust and loyalty had diminished, and felt the stability of the company was broken, which prompted other employees to leave the company. The laid off managerial participants lacked trust in their leadership team. Some of the laid off managers believed they were unfairly blamed for the layoffs. They also believed the senior leaders, executives, shareholders, and CEOs of the company were only concerned about profits and not the employees.

To summarize Research Question 1, which focused on employee perceptions of person effects of personnel layoffs and downsizing, managers were treated differently than the employees. Ninety percent of the participants believed the managers were treated better than employees during and after the layoff process. There were differences in the amount of severance pay and benefits offered to both groups. Some of the laid off managers acknowledged they received lucrative severance benefit packages, while the laid off employees stated they received small severance packages, or no severance package at all.

The laid off managers were provided with a 60-day layoff notice, and some of the laid off employees were given 2-weeks' notice, or released the same day of the notification. Most of the laid off managers acknowledged they were aware of the layoff announcement in advance and were able to prepare for the notification. The laid off employees were not informed of the layoff and downsizing process in advance and were not able to plan financially. Most of the laid off participants and some of the surviving employee participants felt betrayed. Eight-five percent of the participants did not trust management. They felt the managers and executives did not tell the truth about the company's performance, which placed them in a disadvantage.

Some of the companies laid employees off due to relocation to other states, went out of business, or had poor company performance. The participants felt this information should have been communicated to them in advance. Most of the laid off participants and the surviving participants were angry, stressed, depressed and dissatisfied with the implications of the layoff process. Although some of the participants trusted their managers and believed the layoff and downsizing process was part of doing business, some feared they would not be able to find jobs again. Most of the participants felt their managers lacked effective leadership and communication skills and were only concerned about themselves. A few of the laid off participants believed the manager's loyalty was to upper management and not to their employees.

**Research Question 2**

Data collected from the participants for this research question were from answers to Interview Questions 4 through 7. In Interview Question 4, the participants were asked, “What are the effects of layoffs on you personally?” Table 6 summarizes the responses.

Mental stress and low morale were common themes in this table, affecting most of the participants during the layoff and downsizing process. Other themes consistent among the participants were marital and family problems, sadness, depression, feeling overwhelmed, and survivor burnout. Some of the laid off individuals, surviving employees, and laid off managers experienced health issues including high blood pressure due to the layoff process. One participant experienced the death of a spouse during the layoff event, and had to move out of town to cope with the loss. Some of the participants lost their families and were unable to take care of their children. The laid off employees had more personal outcomes and were more distraught over the event than the survivors and managers.

Table 6

*Participant Responses to Personal Effects of Layoffs*

Participants	(A)How affected	(B) Personal feelings	(C) Reasons
Laid off Employee	Health, high blood pressure Financial problems Lacked motivation Mental stress Behavioral problems Inability to cope Marital problems Lost custody of kids Did not perform work Relief Got a better job	Sadness Depression Being overwhelmed Shock Exhaustion Fear Trapped Weakness Hope New start Better opportunity Lack of self-worth Betrayal Less stress	Negative Social stigma Never been in this position Too many personal problems Too old Will never get hired again Outdated job skills Will not be able to take care of family May find a better opportunity
Survivor Employee	Mental Stress Overworked Could not concentrate on work Burnout Absent from work Low Morale No longer wanted to work, start looking for new job	Sadness Depressed Overwhelmed Guilt  Afraid of being laid off next Glad was not laid off  Thought about quitting or retirement	Coworkers Laid off Manager not engaged Not sure about the future of the company Worried about the economy
Laid off Manager	Bad Health Mental stress Marital problems Low Morale	Depressed Quit Early retirement Disappointment	Negative work environment Lack of leadership No future direction



One interviewee participant stated, “I was devastated that I no longer had a job.” Another interviewee participant stated, “It was a feeling of inadequacy, so I questioned my abilities.” Another interviewee stated, “I felt like a failure. It is a negative stigma.” Some of the surviving employees experienced emotional and physical hardships during the layoff and downsizing process. The surviving participants experienced health problems including stress related illnesses. Some of the surviving employees considered quitting the job and looking for other opportunities. Many of surviving participants felt some guilt about remaining at the company knowing their coworkers were laid off.

The laid off manager participants’ personal outcomes were similar to the employees and the surviving employees such as high stress and depression. Although some of the participants believed in the company visions and goals, they were dissatisfied with the layoff process and were stressed and upset they were laid off. Financial worries were the greatest anxiety among the participants. The participants were worried how they were going to pay their bills and support their families. One of the participants stated he lost everything, and was in the process of trying to find work so he could find a place to live to get his family back.

In Interview Question 5, the participants were asked, “Did your daily workload change? Please explain.” Table 7 summarizes the responses.

Table 7

*Participant Responses to Changes in Daily Workload*

Participant	(A) Did workload change?	(B) More work	(C) Less work	(D) Why?
Laid off Employee	Yes	3	8	Stop assigning work tasks Wanted work completed Started looking for new job
Surviving Employee	Yes	4	0	Absorbed the workload of the laid off individuals
Laid off Manager	Yes	4	1	Completed work tasks Trained the new person to take over Took new job assignment

Most of the participants' workloads changed during the layoff and downsizing event. The participants were either given more work or less work depending on their notification termination date. Some of the laid off participants were provided with more work by the managers to assure their work tasks were completed before they left the company. A few of the laid off participants stated the managers avoided talking to them; the latter did not provide work assignments so they did not have to interact with the employees. Some of the laid off participants used their time to update their resumes and look for work. The majority of the surviving participants' workload increased without additional training. Many of the surviving participants performed multiple tasks, which created stress related health problems. Some of the laid off managers were assigned additional work duties that provided opportunities for working with other departments. Some of the laid off manager participants were hired in different groups, or were able to prolong their length of time with the company due new work assignments. Other laid off managers transitioned their workers to other groups.

In Interview Question 6, participants were asked, "Describe the relationships with your manager and coworkers as a result of layoffs and downsizing. Please explain."

Table 8 summarizes the responses.

Table 8

*Participant Response to Relationships with Managers and Coworkers After Layoffs*

Participants	(A) Better	(B) Worse	(C) Reason
Laid off Employee	3	8	Managers were distant, did not engage with the employees Employees felt they were ignored, lack of communication Did not want to talk to coworkers, too upset Did not trust management Absenteeism Looking for job Had a good relationship with manager and coworkers
Surviving Employee	2	2	Showed favoritism to other employees Took on the extra assignments Did not trust management Manager did not discuss layoffs or move forward with plans Absenteeism Health issues
Laid off Manager	1	4	Left the department Absenteeism Less engaged with employees Did not trust their managers Ignored Cold shoulder

Most of the laid off participants did not interact with the managers and coworkers after the layoff and downsizing process. One of the most common themes presented were the lack of engagement and lack of leadership during this time. Most of the laid off individual managers were distant, and did not communicate with the employees after the layoff notification. Many of the laid off participants did not trust management so they did

not initiate conversations with the managers and avoided discussing their circumstances with managers or coworkers.

Most of the laid off participants' perceptions were that the managers showed little concern or empathy for them. Some of the laid off participants were told not to discuss the process with their coworkers. Some of the surviving participants were stressed and angry with management about the treatment of the employees. Some surviving employees' managers avoided answering questions about the process, which created fear and anxiety among the employees. Some of the laid off managers left the department or took extra days off to avoid interacting with their employees and coworkers.

In Interview question 7, participants were asked, "Describe how you adjusted to the work environment during and after the layoff and downsizing process." Table 9 summarizes the responses.

Table 9

*Participant Responses to Adjustment to Work Environment During and After Layoffs*

Participants	(A) Positive environment	(B) Negative environment	(C) No change	(D) Why?
Laid off Employee	2	9	0	High stress, shock Frustration Normal activity Lack of productivity
Survivor Employee	1	3	0	Teamwork Do not trust management Maintain loyalty High stress Overworked
Laid off Manager	1	4	0	High stress levels Ineffective leadership Untrustworthy leadership Maintained ethical work behavior

Most of the laid off employees and the surviving employee participants felt the work environment was negative during and after the layoff and downsizing process. Some of the participants believed leadership was ineffective, and that contributed to the negative work environment during and after the layoff and downsizing events. A few of the participants thought the work environment was positive, and believed management

was able to maintain ethical work behavior during the process. The laid off managers blamed the negative work environments on upper management's lack of communication skills to engage effectively with the employees. Sixteen of the twenty participants interviewed stated the work environment during and after the layoff and downsizing process was negative. Many of the participants felt the stress levels among the employees and the managers were high, yet most of them continued to perform their work tasks as assigned.

To summarize Research Question 2, which addresses the individual effects that occur as a result of layoffs and downsizing, the managers did not seem to understand the intensity employee perceptions and personal consequences. The majority of the laid off participants and the surviving participants did not have a good relationship with their managers during and after the event, and the survivors believed the managers were distant and did not communicate unless they had to assign work duties. Eighty percent of the employee participants who were interviewed felt the managers were not engaged or concerned about their well-being, and only cared about themselves. Some of the laid off participants' personal effects included inability to pay their bills, loss of loved ones, major health problems, inability to take care of their children, loss of homes, living in homeless situations, loss of self-worth, and the inability to cope mentally and emotionally.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked, “What are the employee perceptions of long term implications of layoffs for an organization?” Data collected from the participants for this research question were gathered from answers to Interview Question 8 through 11. In Interview Question 8, participants were asked, “Did the management style change during and after the layoff process? How so?” Table 10 summarizes the responses.

The participants’ perceptions varied on the management style during and after the layoff process. Most of the laid off employees stated the manager’s styles changed. Common themes in this table were compassion, positivity, lack of engagement, distance, and communication issues. Most of the participants believed their managers became stricter and avoided interacting with them. A few of the laid off participants stated the managers were positive and showed empathy and compassion for employees’ circumstances.



Table 10

*Participant Responses to Changes in Management Style During and After Layoff Process*

Participant	(A) Changed in a positive way	(B) Changed in a negative way	(C) Stayed the Same	(D) Why?
Laid off employee	2	5	4	Did not engage Believed in manager, not their fault Rude, did not discuss future opportunities Wanted the employees to leave the same day of layoff They were sad, showed concerns, compassion and empathy, Positive Gave time off to look for other jobs
Survivor employee	2	2	0	Better relationship Manager seemed stressed and sad Quiet Took another job More apprehensive Did not engage with survivors Did not want to talk about the layoff process Acted as it did not happen Communicated it may be other layoffs Became stricter
Laid off Manager	0	4	1	Cold Shoulder Distant Left the company

Some of the participants stated the managers allowed them additional time off to look for other jobs. Some of the participants stated that in addition to being provided their work assignments, the managers provided job leads and potential job training opportunities for them to acquire new skills to prepare them for new positions. Some of the surviving participants stated the managers became distant and quiet, and some stated the managers were the same. One surviving participant stated, “After the layoff happened, the manager would not answer questions or discuss the layoff as though they did not happen” (male participant, 27 years old). Some of the laid off manager participants were treated coldly by their managers. Some of the upper managers and executives retired or left the company before and during the layoff and downsizing event.

In Interview Question 9, participants were asked, “Did you observe changes to employee morale or employee work performance as a result of the layoff process?” Table 11 summarizes the responses.

Table 11

*Participant Responses to Changes in Employee Morale as Result of Layoff Process*

Participant	(A) Morale went down	(B) Morale Stayed the same	(C ) Why?
Laid off Employee	7	4	Employees continued to perform work. Took a tank No stability No trust Lack of future goals Started moving employees Worried about bills and finances
Survivor Employee	4	0	Felt relieved the layoff was over Developed poor health Stressed Overworked Fear and anxiety about being laid off next Worried about livelihood, family, finances Guilt coworker was laid off Company started reorganizing Lack of trust in management Did not like job anymore Some coworkers quit the company or relocated Absenteeism
Laid off Manager	5	0	Employee concerned about future Lack of communication from leadership Ineffective leadership Employees knew things were not right Concerned about the company

Although some of the participants stated the morale stayed the same, most of the participants observed a downward trend in employee morale during and after the layoff process. Some common themes in this table were lack of morale, anxiety, and ineffective leadership. Most of the participants felt their company had betrayed them. One of the participants stated, “The morale went way down because everybody knew it was not right” (male participant, 35 years old). Some of the participants stated employees quit, retired, or moved to other locations.

In Interview Question 10, participants were asked, “Did you consider quitting the job or retiring as a result of the layoff and downsizing process?” The results are summarized in Table 12.

Some of the participants thought about quitting, but was concerned about their unemployment and severance pay benefits. The common theme was benefits. Other themes included health, stress, and quitting. The participants were told their benefits could be affected if they quit the job. One participant stated, “The thought of quitting crossed my mind, but I wanted to leave in good standing and hoped my company would call me back” (male participant, 57 years old). A few of the participants did not want to quit because they liked the job and were sad they were being laid off.

Table 12

*Participant Responses to Consideration of Quitting or Retiring*

Participant	(A) Yes, Considered	(B) No, Did not Consider	(C) Why?
Laid off Employee	4	7	Too stressful Concern about unemployment benefits Concerned about severance benefit payout Company shut down Coworker and management negative treatment Hostile work environment Like the job Wanted to leave good impression to get called back to work
Survivor Employee	2	2	Stressful Health deteriorating Others start to leave Like the job
Laid off Manager	3	2	Other managers quit  Felt used Distrusted management Did not want to lose severance pay Concerned about unemployment benefits

In Interview Question 11, participants were asked, “Would you recommend a friend or family member to work at your place of employment as a result of the layoff and downsizing process? The results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13

*Participant Responses to Recommendations to Join Company After Layoff Process*

Participant	(A) Yes, would recommend	(B) No, would not recommend	(C) Why?
Laid off Employee	6	5	Why close the door for someone else? Benefits and pay are good. Do not want other individuals to go through same experience Negative reputation The human thing to do Everyone needs a job Because of the downsizing of the business
Survivor Employee	1	3	Too stressful Managers do not care about the people Benefits are good Poor company performance
Laid off Manager	3	2	There are better opportunities than this job Do not want to stop anyone's chances Stress level too high Good salaries

Some of the participants stated they would recommend that their friends and family work at their company after a layoff and downsizing event. Common themes were employment opportunities and benefits. Some participants expressed concerns about the layoff process but explained they did not want to hold back others from finding good employment with good benefits. One participant stated, “It is the human thing to do” (female participant, 29 years old). Another participant stated, “It was a good company and they treated me well” (female participant, 56 years old). Many of the participants stated they would not recommend a family member or a friend to work at the company. Most of the participants believed the company was going out of business due to poor organizational performance. One survivor manager stated he removed a friend’s resume from a list of applicants to prevent him from being hired. One laid off manager stated he would recommend family members or friends, but warned them about the possibilities of getting laid off.

To summarize Research Question 3, which focused on the employee perceptions of long term implications of layoffs for an organization, the laid off manager participants were better prepared for the downsizing and layoff event because most of them were a part of the management meetings that discussed the company financial performances and layoff decisions. Therefore, they knew of the process in advance. Some of the laid off manager participants were informed by upper management they would have to lay off some of their employees, not knowing they were on the list to be laid off as well. Other laid off manager participants felt used and shocked they were laid off. The employee

participants and the survivor participants were not aware of the layoffs until the company announcements and the layoff notifications took place.

Most of the laid off employees were sad, angry, depressed, and concerned about their family, and how they were going to survive without money and a job. A few of the participants saw the layoff event as a second chance for a better opportunity. Some of the manager's styles changed in how they treated the employees. Some of the managers became stricter. Seventy percent of the employee participants stated the manager's management style changed to a negative one. The participants stated the managers seemed more concerned about themselves than the employees during the layoff and downsizing process. Some of the participants stated a few of the senior managers and executives left the company through retirement or they moved to other positions during and after the layoff process. Fifteen percent stated the management style stayed the same and 15% of the managers were positive and assisted the employees with employee searches. Most of the participants acknowledged during and after the layoffs and downsizing that employee morale and productivity went down. Sixty percent of the participants felt employee morale went down during and after the layoffs and downsizing process. A decline in production could have major implications to the financial stability of a company, and will impact organizational performance and future business.

The majority of the laid off employees who were not aware of the layoff and downsizing event did not have a plan in place. Most of the laid off employees were affected short-term and long-term. Some of the laid off participants received severance pay and unemployment, which was a short-term fix. Sixty-five percent of the participants



considered quitting but were concerned about losing their benefits. The long-term implications were much greater. Most of the laid off employees were not trained to learn new skills that would have assisted them in finding new employment. Some of the laid off participants and surviving employees discussed their work experiences while employed at their company to other individuals and on social media, which created a negative company reputation. The negative branding of a company could damage a company's reputation, creating a less desirable place to work for future applicants who might be interested in future employment. Fifty percent of the participants interviewed stated they would not recommend that family members or friends work at their company. Some of the companies that laid off employees went out of business or moved to other states.

### **Interview Excerpts**

The following are some interview excerpts from the participants in this study that were collected, recorded, and transcribed:

#### **Interviewee P1, ER Biller for Hospital**

Referring to concerns about ageism, the participant was a 51 year old female and stated, "I was afraid that I would never find work in my field again because of my age." P1 had 13 years of experience in the healthcare field. P1 stated she knew there would be layoffs because the managers avoided answering questions and did not dispute the layoff rumors that circulated around the company. P1 stated the manager informed her she was laid off and told her to pack her belongings and leave on the same day. Although P1 was laid off, she continued to have trust in management and blamed the layoffs on innovation

and technology. She stated she would recommend that a family member or friend work at the company.

### **Interviewee P2, Healthcare Supervisor**

P2 was a 27 year old male and expressed, “I felt like this is it, I have never been in this situation before, but wanted to be perceived as professional as possible, and I wanted to give respect to those who were laid off ... My overall feeling is that okay you have to do it. It is nothing else you can do. You feel trapped but you have your orders, so you do it.” P2 was a surviving employee who was involved in the layoff process and who currently remains at the company. He noted that the laid off managers and the employees were treated the same during the layoff process. Although a supervisor, the participant was concerned about being laid off during the process. He stated the layoff process was a part of doing business, and believed it was his duty as a supervisor to maintain an effective work group after the layoff process.

### **Interviewee P3, Cashier**

P3 was a 29 year old female and stated, “I did not have a job anymore, and was torn and had to put myself back together.” When asked about her thoughts on being laid off, P3 paused before responding to the question with a slight emotional change in her voice and stated she was concerned about her finances and stated: “I was sad because I knew I needed the money, and I was losing my career. I was just sad.” P3 stated the effects of the layoffs were upsetting and depressing. She stated she was bitter and felt betrayed by management and the company after being notified of the layoff. Although P3 was laid off, she continued to look for employment and found work as a warehouse

worker. P3 stated she did not trust management and did not put any faith in establishing a relationship with them.

#### **Interviewee P4, Publication Administrator**

P4 was a 37 year old male and expressed, "I was sad, angry, and shocked when I was laid off." P4 stated he was disturbed about being laid off and was in the process of seeking employment. He had worked for the company for 11 years and was uneasy about his unique skills that required special yet what was considered old and outdated equipment. He thought it would be difficult to start all over again at a new company. The company closed down and everybody was laid off because the firm relocated to another state. P4 stated the manager's emotional state changed after the layoff and they struggled to communicate with the employees. P4 noticed the manager's behavior during the layoffs and stated, "The managers did not know how to tell their employees they were sorry about the layoff and relocation process."

#### **Interviewee P5, IT Administrative Specialist**

P5 was a 51 year old male and stated, "My thoughts were how I am going to pay the bills? How am I going to find a job in this economy?" P5 expressed he felt like a failure around people and stated, "It is a negative social stigma you can't get over." P5 stated the layoff affected his finances, self-esteem, and human worth. P5 expressed that he could not trust management again. He also discussed his faith, and believed everything happens for a reason.

**Interviewee P6, Marketing and Sales**

P6 was a 54 year old female who stated, “It was traumatic, very traumatic because I did not see it coming. I used my religious beliefs and prayers to get through this” P6 also stated she felt defeated, stressed and overwhelmed. She further stated the layoff was so stressful that she developed high blood pressure. She also experienced the death of her spouse during the same time.

**Interviewee P7, Construction**

P7 was a 38 year old male, and expressed, “I trusted my manager and thought we were friends... It was frustrating at times during the layoff process, and I thought about quitting, then, I figured things could be better, and a better job that would give me a raise or better benefits.” P7 further stated the work decreased creating more time for him to use the computer to conduct job searches and work on resume. P7 stated due to the financial strain, he got a second job to help pay the bills.

**Interviewee P8, Electrician**

P8 was an Electrician and recalled, “I was sad and bitter when they laid me off. Things were slowing down, and the company was running out of money” (male participant, 45 years old). P8 stated he was concerned how he was going to pay his bills, and knew he had to start over by getting another job.

**Interviewee P9, Journeyman Painter**

P9 was a Painter and remembered, “The initial feeling was frustration, but you don’t want to leave with a bad impression; they might call you back” (male participant, 57 years old). P9 stated he felt anxiety but wanted to prolong his days so he could make

the extra money. He also stated the layoff affected his personal life with his family, and he was unable to provide for his kids when the layoff happened. P9 stated he had a good relationship with his manager and his coworkers.

#### **Interviewee P10, Supervisor, Customer Sales**

P10 worked in Customer Sales and expressed, “I felt used... They used me to lay off the employees, then they laid me off” (male participant, 35 years old). P10 stated the morale went down, the employees knew it was not right, so they just stopped performing their work. He further stated the trust factor was gone. P10 also stated he had to train the new person to replace him.

#### **Interviewee P11, Painter**

P11 remembered the stress level from the experience and recalled, “I lost everything and was worried about living on the streets homeless” (male participant, 51 years old). P11 stated the managers and the coworkers did not care. The manager called him into the office and told him he was laid off and asked to leave the same day.

#### **Interviewee P12, Waiter**

P12 enjoyed his job and stated, “The manager was honest and loyal 100% to me” (male participant, 31 years old). P12 recalled that the managers and coworkers were sad that he was being laid off. He wanted to continue working but business was slow and they had to lay off employees.

#### **Interviewee P13, Healthcare Supervisor**

P13 was upset about the layoff experience and stated, “I felt bad, I thought they lied to me, and I felt for my employees because it was unexpected” (female participant,

47 years old). P13 was given a 60-day layoff notice and the laid off employees were not. They were released from work immediately. P13 stated she was called back to work by the same company.

#### **Interviewee P14, Aerospace Specialist**

P14 survived the layoff process and said, “You see people that you have worked with for years get laid off...That is when you think about your future and start planning in case it happens to you” (male participant, 51 years old). P14 currently remains employed with the company.

#### **Interviewee P15, Chef**

P15 was concerned about the layoff process, and expressed, “I was worried about paying my bills and worried how I was going to take care of my kids and grandkids” (female participant, 41 years old). P15 believes when business is slow, employees will be laid off first.

#### **Interviewee P16, Executive Administrator**

P16 was upset about being laid off and stated, “They treated me really bad. I don’t think I can ever work again” (female participant, 39 years old). P16 stated she lost her car and home when she was laid off. She expressed shock and disbelief about the layoff process.

#### **Interviewee P17, Construction Worker**

P17 was concerned about the other employees and recalled, “The owner and his wife of the company took care of their people, but it was sad.” There was mistrust

because employees were being laid off” (male participant, 39 years old). P17 stated he would return to his place of employment if management called him back to work.

**Interviewee P18, LVN Nurse**

P18 felt she was not treated fairly during the layoff process and stated, “I was laid off while on vacation. My manager called and left a message to come in for a discussion” (female participant, 29 years old). P18 felt there were some racial undertones in the layoff process. She expressed being treated differently than the other employees and provided specific details on the process.

**Interviewee P19, Truck Driver**

P19 believed the layoff process was conducted unfairly and stated, “I was pretty upset; I really did not understand why it happened” (male participant, 32 years old). P19 felt once the manager knew of the layoffs, he should have informed the employees. P19 stated the manager waited until the last day to give out notices, and told the employees that their checks were in the mail.

**Interviewee P20, Health Care Lead**

P20 expressed his loyalty to the company before the layoffs and stated, “I felt betrayed. There was no loyalty and trust from the managers and the company” (male participant, 55 years old). P20 stated he had to train other employees to use the medical equipment. He stated most of the managers avoided him, and when they talked to him, they were constantly apologizing about the layoff.

## **Study Results**

I provided the findings in tables and data collected from the interview transcripts. An analysis of the data provided common themes from the participant interviews. The major findings from this study are as follows.

### **Research Question 1**

What are the employee perceptions of effects on employees as a result of personnel layoffs and downsizing?

#### **The findings for this research question are presented below:**

1. The laid off participants' perceptions were that managers were treated better than the employees during the layoff and downsizing process.
2. The surviving employee participant perceptions were that managers were treated better than the laid off employees during the layoff and downsizing process.
3. Ninety percent of the participants believed the managers were treated better than the employees during and after the layoff and downsizing process.
4. Most of the laid off managers received better severance pay and benefit packages than the laid off employees.
5. Some of the laid off participants were not surprised about the layoff and downsizing process and felt technology played a major role in decisions. They believed technology and computers are replacing workers.
6. Some of the participants felt their managers were trustworthy, loyal, and good leaders.



7. Most of the laid off employees were sad and angry about how they were treated during and after the layoff and downsizing process, and they believed management did not care about their well-being.
8. Some of the surviving employees were sad and angry about the layoff process and thought the laid off employees were treated unfairly.
9. Some of the surviving participants did not believe there was adequate documentation on poor employee performance to justify employee layoffs.
10. An emerging theme was employee trust in management. Most of the employees did not trust their managers.
11. Eighty-five percent of the employee participants did not trust management. The responses were consistent across the board regardless of age, race and gender.
12. Most of the laid off managers did not trust upper management or the executives and felt trust and loyalty had diminished.
13. Additional themes consistent among the participants were marital and family problems, sadness, depression, feeling overwhelmed, and survivor burnout.
14. Most of the laid off employee participants, managers, and survivors were dissatisfied with the lack of communication from upper managers and executives during the layoff process.
15. Another theme was effective leadership. Some of the employee participants felt the managers were not effective leaders who had the ability to guide them

through the layoff and downsizing process. The employees felt the managers were only concerned about themselves and upper management.

### **Research Question 2**

What individual effects occur as a result of layoffs and downsizing?

#### **The findings for this research question are presented below:**

1. Stress and low morale were common themes that affected most of the participants during and after the layoff process.
2. Some of the laid off participants and surviving participants developed physical and emotional health related problems. Some participants developed high blood pressure.
3. Some of the laid off employee participants did not have a relationship with their managers.
4. Eighty-five percent of the participants believed the managers were distant and did not engage with the employees during and after the layoff process.
5. Fifty-five percent of the participants believed the managers leadership style changed in a negative manner. Some of the managers became stricter. Some of the managers ignored the employees, became rude, and did not assist with job searches for new employment. Twenty-five percent of the participants believed the managers' leadership style stayed the same regarding how they treated employees, and 20% of the participants believed the managers maintained a positive relationship with employees.

6. Another common theme among the participants was financial worries and taking care of their families.
7. Seventy percent of the participants did not have a good relationship with their managers.
8. Some of the surviving employee participants experienced feelings of guilt about surviving the layoffs while their coworkers were laid off.
9. A few of the surviving participants felt relieved they did not get laid off and wanted to move forward.
10. Most of the laid off managers were angry and depressed about the layoff and downsizing process.
11. Some of the laid off managers believed in their company goals and values, and they believed the layoff and downsizing process was part of doing business in a competitive global market.

### **Research Question 3**

What are the employee perceptions of long term implications of layoffs for an organization?

#### **The findings for this research question are presented below:**

1. Some of the managers showed empathy and were sad and concerned about the employees' well-being after the layoffs. Some of the managers provided extra time off to the laid off individuals to look for other jobs.
2. Fifty percent of the participants stated they would not recommend a friend or family to work at the company. Some of the participants acknowledged they

provided negative statements to friends and family members about the company. The participants seemed split between recommending friends and family members to work at the company and not giving such a recommendation.

3. Some of the managers, executives and surviving employees left the company or transferred to other positions for better opportunities during and after the layoff and downsizing process. This strategy led to a loss of skilled and experienced workers.
4. Forty-five percent of the participants thought about quitting the company during and after the layoffs but were concerned about their benefits, and 55% did not consider. They were informed they would not receive their benefits if they quit.
5. Most of the laid off participants felt the managers and executives betrayed them.
6. An emerging theme among the participants was financial obligations and future financial benefits including severance pay and benefits.
7. Most of the participants were sad and depressed and concerned about their long term survivorship without a job.
8. Some of the participants blamed management for creating a hostile work environment, low morale, and lack of productivity during and after the layoff and downsizing process.

9. Eighty percent of the participants stated that morale and productivity went down during and after the layoff and downsizing process, and 20% stated the morale stayed the same. They acknowledged they did not perform quality work after they were notified of layoffs. Lack of employee morale results in lower productivity, which impacts a company's overall performance.
10. Some of the laid off managers were not able to find work or maintain the same income levels.
11. Most of the surviving participants' workload increased during and after the layoff and downsizing event, which created emotional stress and major health problems that caused employee absenteeism and medical leave requests.

The research study focused on the perceptions of the employees during and after the layoff process. I followed the research questions, collected data during the interview process, and presented the findings. The latter indicated that in some cases, layoffs and downsizing could improve a company's financial performance in the short-term. However, long-term challenges from layoffs and downsizing may occur. For example, there may be added costs to ramp up replacements, train new employees, and pay unemployment benefits. The impacts from losing experienced and qualified employees may not be reversed, and the damage could already be done. These consequences include low productivity and poor organizational performances, which could cause the company to go out of business (De Meuse & Dai, 2013).

The surviving employee played a critical role in the layoff process. Although these employees were not laid off, they experienced emotional stress, anger, and anxiety

from the process as well as requirements to perform more work. In some ways, surviving employees may be worse off than the laid off employee because they are in constant fear on a regular basis of being laid off. The surviving employees experienced guilt for not being laid off and observed their coworkers being called into the office and released. The psychological, emotional, and physical effects from the process have major implications, and can lead employees to quit the company or develop poor health. These consequences amplified the impacts of layoffs and downsizing on employee morale and commitment that would prevent a company from improving financially (Walker, 2015).

Therefore, companies should not lay off employees when profits and overall financial performances are favorable. Such a policy would eliminate negative employee perceptions and prevent distrust in management. Employee trust and loyalty are important elements in operating a successful company. Employees who trust their organization and managers will perform their work better (McManus & Mosca, 2015). Trust is also important to the development of workplace engagement, and it builds employee and manager relationships. Trust starts with upper leadership. It is up to the leaders to build a culture of trust and commitment. If employees detect any form of dishonesty or deception, the working relationship can be destroyed. The employee may also see the manager as untrustworthy and will reject any message that is being communicated (McManus & Mosca, 2015).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was a very important factor in the study. I was able to gain the trust of the participants by explaining the details of the study at the very beginning of the

interview process. Once the participants contacted me, I was able to provide detailed information about the study, and answered all of their questions. I followed up with the participants by e-mails and phone calls and asked the participants if they had questions. I was actively engaged with the participants throughout the process. I established a relationship with the participants, and assured the participants their discussions were strictly private and their information would be protected. Once the participants trusted me, they were able to speak openly about their experiences. I was able to build trust with the participants through knowledge of the study.

### **Credibility**

I was able to establish credibility with the participants by providing clarity to the participants. My knowledge about the study provided a form of trustworthiness with the participants. I was able to provide detailed responses to each participant's questions. I was able to establish credibility with the participants regarding sharing of information and engaging and listening to experiences. The willingness to meet the participants at their place of choice added a sense of credibility to the study. Farokhzadian et al. (2015) stated that maintaining a cordial relationship with the participant in a similar setting will reinforce credibility in a study. Accuracy is also important in a study and credibility. Allowing the participants to use member checking to review their transcripts also helped to establish credibility.

### **Transferability**

This qualitative study provided me with the ability to compare the data of other studies for a better understanding of the layoff and downsizing experiences as well as to

invite others to associate areas of the research to their own lived experiences. In the transferability phase, the analysis can be moved to results for another setting (Wang & Lien, 2013). I provided specific details so others who may want to review the data can understand the study and evaluate the results (Morse, 2015). Reviewers are allowed the opportunity to provide additional evidence in the study.

### **Dependability**

I engaged in a dependability process to validate the study and establish a need for change in the study. I provided additional analysis in the study. Due to the sensitivity of the study on layoff and downsizing, I wanted to make sure specific elements of the study were captured as part of the data collection process. I established that the changes influenced the study. The changes were documented by incorporating emotional responses from specific questions and providing follow-on questions. The specific information was validated, and it was evident that some of the participants were still angry and upset over the process.

### **Confirmability**

As I worked through the study, some changes developed. When these changes occurred in the study, the researcher documented and validated the changes during the confirmability process. These changes were filed with research notes, which were handwritten so they could capture the different phases of the research process from the start to the conclusion of the study.

Most of the participants that survived the challenges of a layoff and downsizing understood the strategies for a successful transition, and that a company's reputation is



not only based on sales and profits but on trust and how managers treat employees. When employees are laid off, they must be provided support and training for their next job so they can be successful. The employees should be given counseling to assist with coping strategies as well as to address the emotional aspects of the layoff and downsizing process. They should also be provided with additional training in preparation for the additional workload.

Such organizational support can assist in creating a positive work environment and help maintain high morale and productivity in the workplace. When training, support, and encouragement are not provided to the employees, there are consequences as were shown in the findings. The employees became highly stressed and thought about quitting the company, which can lead to major impacts on overall company success.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings, the study limitations, and recommendation for future studies. This section also contains the summary of the study and conclusion for the research questions. Positive social change was discussed in this chapter.

## Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the impacts that layoffs and downsizing have on employee trust, work performance, behavior, health, and relationships with management during and after an event, as well as provide recommendations for employee support. The study revealed the challenges of the surviving employees, and identified the manager's roles and responsibilities during and after the layoff and downsizing process as well. The results of the study showed that companies continued to lay off employees and downsize companies regardless of the financial challenges of the organization.

Previous to these increasing layoffs and company downsizing, industry was booming. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the economy was setting financial records with strong financial growth (Feingold, 2013). The Global Currency-Adjusted GDP growth was 23% (Jorgensen et al., 2014). Accelerated productivity growth occurred as jobs were created. The jobs of the future were expected to be in the auto and aerospace industries, manufacturing, mining, construction, hospitality industries, engineering, technology, banking, and financial services (Charles et al., 2016). The majority of these jobs maintained high paying salaries with generous benefits and retirement packages (Schmitt et al., 2012).

Subsequently, the financial crisis of 2008 hit and millions of jobs were lost. Manufacturing jobs declined, the mining industry weakened, the housing boom deteriorated, and the banking industry collapsed (Charles et al., 2016). Individuals were

laid off in record numbers (Lakshmann et al., 2014). During this time, the stock market declined by 50% and the economy spiraled in a downward trend (Charles et al., 2016). The average family's income declined 40%, wiping out 18% of their savings and investments both in 2007 and 2010 (Riley, 2012). The unemployment rate reached its highest point at 10% in 2009 due to declines in labor demands and economic policies (Charles et al. 2016). Employees with good jobs were not exempt from losing them due to layoffs and downsizing, which threatened the quality of their livelihoods (Smith, 2013). There was a degree of panic from individuals and their families regarding their financial security (Spencer et al. 2014). The impacts were devastating to the global working industry, individuals, and communities.

Union power diminished. As the unions no longer had strong influence on management and were no longer able to protect employees (Smith, 2013). Companies went out of business or moved out of the country or merged with other corporations in different states. Some companies found ways of doing business efficiently and developed cost effectiveness, which led to a globalization economy which entailed moving jobs, layoffs, and downsizing (Cassidy, 2016). The globalization phenomenon extended across the spectrum of economic activity (Walsh, 2013).

In this new business revitalization economy, individuals lost the most. They lost their jobs, their homes, and their financial livelihoods. They were unable to send their kids to college and experienced family and marital relationship disruptions. The emotional and psychological strains created individual health problems and the inability to cope due to the many hardships and challenges created from layoffs and downsizing

(Mayton, 2012). Although the economy has started to rebound slowly, managers of companies have continued to look for effective ways to stay competitive, and the laid off individuals have continued to struggle with their day to day lives while seeking employment (Davila & Pina-Ramire). Boswell et al. (2012) noted three key phases that employees go through upon receiving layoff or downsizing notifications: (a) shock, (b) anger, and (c) grief; all of which have a lasting effect on the individual and the family. Boswell et al. further argued that laid off individuals need time to process what has happened and take time to plan their next step of action.

The literature review in this study emphasized the employees' perceptions and the impacts during and after the layoff and downsizing process. Individuals are struggling with the challenges of layoffs and downsizing, and in some cases perceive their companies, executives, and their managers as untrustworthy (McManus & Mosca, 2015). As revealed in this study, gaining employee trust is critical during and after the layoff and downsizing process along with effective leadership and communication. These key areas are critical in organizational success during and after a layoff and downsizing event, and they could create major problems with employee morale and productivity if not implemented properly. As the study showed, individuals wanted to know why companies continued to lay off employees and engage in downsizing when company profits are up, unemployment is down, and job growth is improving.

As of January 2016, the unemployment rate has been at an all-time low under 5% (DeLisle, 2016). It has been lowest since the early 1990s; however, company stakeholders and executives are continuing to look for effective ways to stay competitive

with the global market and are still downsizing (Tideman & Arts, 2013). Individuals are still losing their jobs in certain job industries (Iscan, 2015) Economists remain puzzled about how corporations are still struggling in an improving economy (Iscan, 2015). The labor workforce has risen to 62.7%, presenting an uptick in new hires for new positions (Appel, 2013). Although the number of company layoffs were down 6.8%, there was an increase of employee quit rates that were up 12.5% from the previous year (DeLisle, 2016). The layoff figures are showing a positive trend in the right direction and should grow as companies expand their operations and hire additional workers (DeLisle, 2016). According to Appel (2013), new sources of efficiency and productivity are required to spur better economic growth. DeLisle (2016) further noted that two things trigger growth: (a) global population growth and (b) productivity increases.

Although more technology is needed, there is a need to train and retrain individuals to improve services and create economic opportunity and not only to rely on technology but also on people (Cassidy, 2016). The people are effective in managing complex matters. Technology creates innovation, and computers are important for specific tasks; however, people are even better for managing computers, and when combined, good opportunities will be present (Cassidy, 2016). Technology is the networking tool of globalization. The Internet and social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram are powerful communication tools and have changed the way companies do business. These networking communication tools provide a more aggressive business approach to long term business relationships (Emerson, 2016). These long-term business relationships will help to maintain job stability and growth.

In this study, my objective was to gain insight from the participants who had experienced layoffs and downsizing and understand their perceptions and the effects of the process through their lived experiences. I used a phenomenological design for this qualitative study. This process provided me the ability to understand the participants' lived experiences that they went through during the layoff and downsizing process. The target sample focused on individuals working in various job fields that had experienced layoffs and downsizing. Some of the job fields of the participants were healthcare administration and nursing, construction, office administration, painters, aerospace, retail and sales, culinary industry, serving in restaurants, IT, customer sales, electricians, plumbers, truck drivers, marketing and sales, and cashiering. The participants consisted of laid off employees, surviving employees, and laid off managers who had experienced layoffs or downsizing. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. This type of sampling was effective in selecting viable participants who provided detailed descriptions of their experiences.

I created interview questions to collect data during the interview process. Flyers were posted to recruit participants for the study at employment offices, career centers, temporary agencies, union halls, and social media. Recruitment ads were also placed in the local newspaper, Facebook, and Craigslist for individuals who had gone through a layoff or downsizing event, and I ended up conducting 20 face-to-face, online, and telephone interviews. The research interviews were semistructured and open-ended with follow-up questions as needed. The information I gathered from participant responses was loaded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and identified in the text for coding and

further analysis. Then I conducted analysis on the collected data, reviewing for common themes and patterns.

I identified themes through the reoccurrences of terms used by the participants during the interview process. The data were then reviewed for deviations. I also used the comparative analysis method to compare and contrast the data with existing data from the different participants. Data collected that were not pertinent to the study were not a part of the analysis. Considering the complexity of the study as it was driven on an emotional level of perceptions from the participants, the transcripts were then reviewed from the interviews to analyze the statements to determine their meaning. This process assured accurate interpretation of the data.

### **Interpretations of Findings**

Several interpretations were acknowledged and documented from the findings of this study. The interpretation presented clarity to the data. They are listed with each RQ

#### **Research Question 1**

**RQ1:** What are the employees' perceptions of effects on employees as a result of personnel layoffs and downsizing? The findings revealed that most of participants understood the layoff and downsizing process and had negative perceptions on the way the process was implemented and the treatment of the employees. The perceptions were based on each participant's detailed account and his or her experience when the event occurred. Some emerging themes were presented in collected data and analysis process. One theme that emerged on a consistent basis was employee trust in management being very important to establishing a positive work environment during and after a layoff and

downsizing process. Some of the employee participants believed the managers and the company were untrustworthy. Trust and loyalty are key components to a company's success, and leaders and managers must work hard to maintain employees' trust. The findings showed when the employee believed and trusted in management and the company, the employee was loyal and productive. However, when the employee did not trust the manager, the employee did not produce quality work or engage with his or her manager. The findings are consistent with the findings of my literature review and the theoretical framework for the study, which was based on Sarker's (2011) theory on management and employee trust. Sarker believed trust is the key to development and maintenance of workplace engagement.

Other themes were effective leadership and communication, lack of engagement, and low morale and productivity. A manager's actions and lack of actions are vital in the company success during and after organizational changes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Effective leaders must lead with greatness and must be open to innovative ideas from their employees (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013). Good leaders must listen to their employees, engage with them, and show that they care (Davila & Piña-Ramírez, 2014). Effective leaders must also be able to inspire their employees to enhance levels of trust (Barnes et al., 2013). The findings showed most of the employees felt leaders were only concerned about themselves and upper management and did not care about employees.

Effective leaders are looked upon as role models by their employees, and the employees will act out the behavior of their leaders that is demonstrated before them (Bottomley, Burgess, & Fox, 2014). Positive leaderships actions along with effective



communication skills eliminate negative work environments and remove the pain and anxiety employees may suffer from layoffs and downsizing (Vlachos, 2013). These actions will create a positive work environment (Meng & Berger, 2013). The evidence from the study showed when employees viewed their leaders as positive and inspiring, they were satisfied and produced quality work. Evidence in this study showed some of the participants admired their managers and did not blame them for the layoffs. Some of the participants felt their managers were concerned about their well-being and tried to help them find jobs.

The study also revealed the laid off participants and surviving participants acknowledged that layoffs and downsizing were major forms of cost reduction strategies used by companies. The findings also showed the consistency of responses from most of the participants regardless of age, gender, and race. Most importantly, the participants understood that when companies go through challenging times and poor financial performances, the company will downsize, restructure, relocate, layoff, or go out of business. The research study findings showed that effective leadership and open communication will prevent negative employee perceptions during and after a layoff and downsizing event. In this study, when the laid off participants and surviving participants perceived trustworthiness and were treated with respect and dignity and if they believed the managers were engaged in the process, they accepted the process as implemented, which allowed a smooth transition as the company moved forward. The evidence showed companies that treated the laid off participants and surviving participants in a negative manner during the layoff and downsizing process had negative employee perceptions.

The study findings concluded that negative perception affected the emotions and physical well-being of the laid off and surviving employee participants and may have affected the company's overall performance due to lack of morale and productivity, which could cause a company's quality of work to suffer, loss of sales and profits, and a negative effect on the recruitment process in obtaining skilled and experienced new hires. When a company is perceived in a negative manner, individuals will not apply for employment at the company with such a bad reputation. Some companies have gone out of business or moved out of state due to downsizing and layoffs (Neves, 2014). A company with a stellar reputation and a positive and productive workforce is the most successful and most profitable (Neves, 2014).

### **Research Question 2**

RQ2: What individual effects occur as a result of layoffs and downsizing? During the study, the findings showed most of the individual effects were predicated on the overall perceptions of the layoff and downsizing implementation process. Throughout the literature it was determined that when employees are not satisfied in their place of work, a company's performance could be impacted. Studies have shown company performance is only as good as employee performance. Emerging themes from the participants presented in this study were high stress, low morale, financial worries, concerns about taking care of families, marital problems, health problems, and job insecurity. The findings in this study showed the laid off participants were highly stressed, sad, and depressed as well as concerned about job opportunities. The findings showed some of the

employees were having health problems, high blood pressure, stomach problems, inability to sleep or eat, and even family deaths.

The research study evidence showed the surviving employees were mostly worried about job security or being the next individual to be laid off. The findings showed a few of the survivors were burnt out from the additional workload, lack of training and education on specific job tasks they were required to perform. They felt some guilt about their coworkers being laid off but were glad they survived the process. The survivors felt overwhelmed and thought about quitting but sensed if they left the company, they would jeopardize their severance pay and benefits. Some of the laid off managers were depressed but financially they were much more prepared for a layoff and downsizing process.

The findings showed that most of the laid off employee participants were the least prepared for a layoff and downsizing event, and were the last to be notified when a layoff and downsizing event took place. The laid off participants were not prepared financially, mentally, or physically for the layoff and downsizing process. They experienced pain and anxiety along with marital and family problems. The findings showed that some laid off participants were shocked and angry, and did not see the process coming. They could not pay their bills. They lost their families and their homes. The research findings also revealed some of the participants accepted the laid off and downsizing process as an opportunity to obtain a better job.

Another theme that emerged was the lack of support by upper management and the company. The findings revealed some of the laid off and surviving participants

believed that upper management and executives did not provide enough resources to assist them in finding new employment, and these leaders did not provide the support needed to adjust to the challenges of the process. Some of the managers provided assistance and job leads to the participants, but the majority of the managers did not provide support nor held discussions about career opportunities or training. The lack of knowledge and lack of support created fear in the employee participants if they would ever find employment again.

### **Research Question 3**

RQ3: What are the employee perceptions of long term implications of layoffs for an organization? During the study, the findings showed the majority of the participant's negative perceptions regarding the manager's behavior created low morale and a negative work environment. The findings also revealed low morale created low work performance from the laid off employees and surviving employees. The findings revealed the participants did not want to perform their work, and some of the participants wanted to quit due to the hostile and stressful work environment. The research findings showed the laid off employee participants were concerned about future financial payments, and they feared they would never find work again. Some of the participants feared their company was going out of business because they wanted to be called back to work.

Some emerging themes were severance pay and benefits. The findings revealed the laid off employee participants did not have adequate financial alternatives in case of a financial crisis such as a layoff. The findings showed some of the laid off manager participants were able to find other jobs. The findings also indicated a few of the laid off

employee participants accepted other jobs that were below their regular pay scales and in other job fields. The findings showed some of the laid off participants were still out of work and utilized other means to support themselves and their families. The evidence showed the surviving participants were concerned about long term organizational financial performance. They believed the company would go under due to the loss of the skilled and experienced workers and the cost to rehire and retrain the new workers.

Some of the laid off participants were hoping to be called back to work but feared the company would shut down or relocate due to poor organizational performance and the negative company image from the layoff announcements. The evidence showed a decline in work performance by the laid off and surviving participants. The findings also showed negative perceptions about the companies and that 50% of the participants stated they would not refer a relative or friend to work at their company. The evidence showed most of the laid off participants were determined to find other jobs. Some of the laid off participants gave up looking for work and continued to live on their benefits and other financial means.

Some of the laid off participants waited to be called back to their previous employers and were still out of work. A few of the laid off participants were called back to work by the company that originally laid them off. Some of the laid off employees were concerned about long-term financial implications of their company due to poor overall performance and did not want to go back for fear of being laid off again. Most of the laid off participants were skilled workers with unique skills and were unable to match their skills to new positions. When companies lay off their skilled and experienced

workers, they lose their talent base. Some of the surviving employees were concerned about the long term survivorship of the company. Some of the surviving employees were asked to do additional tasks because of the remaining work left by the laid off employees.

The evidence showed the added workload from the layoffs did not increase productivity. Some survivors stated they reduced their work performance due to stress and health issues. The findings also revealed low morale created low work performance from the employees, which affected the company's performance, growth, sales, profits, and standings among other competitors. Some of the surviving employees and the laid off participants informed other individuals through social media and word of mouth that their company was not a good place to work due to the layoff and downsizing treatment they received. When there are negative perceptions and a poor reputation about a company, others companies will not do business with that company, which could create long term effects such as loss of business opportunities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had the following limitations. One of the limitations was the small sample size of participants. I was able to use participants from different organizations, industries, backgrounds, and experiences. Although small, the population effects were important because they opened up areas for future theory and research on the influence of layoff agency on participants' attitudes and values. Another limitation was the limited forms of downsizing processes used. There are many different forms of downsizing. However, the study focused on the layoff process, which allowed the researcher to capture a wider range of potential participants during the recruiting process because this

process is the most common form of downsizing. Employees are more personally affected by layoffs than by any other form of downsizing (Karkoulian et al., 2013). The study only focused on the experiences of employees regarding the layoff and downsizing process. Future studies will have to be conducted to discuss the other forms of downsizing.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings, I presented evidence that layoffs and downsizing have a traumatic effect on the individuals who experience the process. Companies must provide solutions by creating processes to ease stress and anxiety during the layoff and downsizing decision making process. Both executives and managers must be honest, treat all the employees with respect and dignity, invest in the surviving employees, and involve employees in the decision making process (Buhler, 2014). When companies, executives, and managers are truthful and loyal to their employees, the employees will be truthful and loyal in return, and will be much more productive in the workplace.

First, the layoff and downsizing process can be a challenging process, and if the company's layoff message to the employees is not communicated effectively and implemented with compassion and empathy for the employees, there could be major problems within an organization. For a layoff and downsizing process to be properly handled, the leaders and managers must be adequately trained to handle the emotional anxieties, suffering, and pain that come with the process. Managers should interface with the employees rather than ignore them. They must walk the aisles, listen to issues and concerns, provide solutions, and show employees they care. Managers should always

engage with their employees, answer their questions to the best of their knowledge, and maintain an employee friendly attitude.

Sometimes a simple smile at an employee will get a smile back or a receptive response. Managers should not avoid eye contact with employees, which may seem to employees that they are being ignored and can thus trigger anger. Training should be provided in advance to managers on how to show empathy and concerns to employees when the latter have been informed they have been laid off. Training must be provided to the leaders and managers on coping anxieties, employee demands, and concerns. Leaders and managers must be trained on how to assist the surviving employees with emotional stress levels, sadness, pain, and guilt, and how to address their fears of being laid off next. Companies must have these processes and training sessions in place. When employees feel they were treated fairly, they will be more satisfied with the process.

Second, when company leaders decide a layoff and downsizing event is to be implemented and who is being laid off, they must work to establish specific types of training that is needed for employees to obtain new skills for new jobs. When announcements of layoffs are effectively communicated to the workforce, they should also include information that training sessions will be a part of the layoff process, and the training sessions will began immediately after the notifications are delivered to the selected employees. The training sessions should be set up internally for the employees to feel comfortable. The training sessions should be scheduled and in place starting the week that follows the layoff notifications.



These training sessions should be focused on advanced job searches, enhanced skills, professional grooming for job interviews, and mock interview sessions for successful job placements. The company should also work with local employment offices and career centers to have training sessions and workshops scheduled for after work hours and on Saturdays if needed. Counseling sessions should also be a part of the sessions to assist the employees in coping with the stress and anxieties that go with the process. Family members should be allowed to participate in the job assistance counseling process. Because some companies provide the laid off employee with 2-week notices, 60-day notices, and same day notices, the training sessions should be scheduled accordingly. Company policies and practices laying off and dismissing employees on the same day are not fair to the employees and do not allow them enough time to prepare an exit strategy. The additional time can also assist the laid off employees financially with the added pay.

Third, the surviving employees are sometimes forgotten because they continue to work throughout the process. Although they are not laid off, they exhibit some of the same emotions and physical illnesses. In some cases, the surviving employees experience more problems. They are faced with the concerns of being the next to be laid off, so the stress level of trying to perform their work to a higher level can create major health problems. Companies must invest in surviving employee well-being. Employee Assistance Programs should be involved in this process and provide an open door policy for employees to come and discuss any concerns they may have if they are not comfortable discussing their issues with management. The training and counseling

sessions should be ongoing starting from the time the layoffs take place. The surviving employees should feel they can attend the sessions as needed without repercussions. All employees should be able to attend the sessions.

Fourth, management should work with other companies to see what type of policies they have in place for employee support during and after downsizing and layoffs. Well established companies that have been through the process or are known for conducting layoffs and downsizing regularly will have processes in place that are successful to their organizations, and they may be willing to share such information.

### **Implications**

Several factors that emerged from the study reflect strong implications of negative employee perceptions. First, is the high percentage of participants who did not trust management. Eighty-five percent of the participants believed management was not trustworthy. For instance, one of the main themes of consistency across the board from most of the participants during the interview process was lack of trust regardless of age, gender and race. Their responses were similar. Even if participants liked the manager, they always felt the managers were not telling the truth about the company performance or they believed the managers lacked transparency. The implications suggest there is work to do to gain the employees trust, which must be done by open communication and effectively engaging with employees (Vlachos, 2013). Employee trust is one of the number one factors for a successful employee and manager relationship (Ramlall & Magbool, 2014).

Although some of the employees were leaving the company from the layoffs, evidence showed the managers' lack of empathy for employees, which was a consistent pattern presented from the managers and commonly discussed by the participants. The majority of employee participants said the managers did not care and did not engage with them in a positive manner. All individuals should be treated with respect and dignity at all times. The implications demonstrate a direct correlation between employee trust and management employee treatment, which must be addressed by upper managers so the managers can be adequately trained to be respectful to their employees. For companies to move forward after a layoff and avoid a replication of the same performance, they must acknowledge the negative treatment of employees must be presented and addressed. Managers have to be accountable for their actions. They have to engage with the employees.

The selection process of the individuals to participate in the study may be a factor in the outcome of the study. People from different demographics represented different views and perceptions. As evident in the study, the participants' demographics varied in race, gender, and age. No findings in this study validated any such influence.

Employee perceptions can be a positive or a negative attribute. The implications of favoritism arose in the study during the investigation. The study showed an overwhelming number of participants believed that managers were treated better than the employees during the layoff and downsizing process. The participants understood the managers were held to a higher standard, and in some cases would receive better opportunities, but were concerned about the treatment of managers versus the treatment

of employees. Participants implied the employees were not as valued as managers, and the managers did not care about employee well-being.

These themes and patterns suggested that the laid off employees harbor much animosity toward the managers during the layoff and downsizing process, which can change depending on the treatment of employees. The patterns suggest the surviving employees experience negative employee perceptions, which may eliminate a positive working relationship with management and coworkers. When employees are disengaged, ignored or treated without compassion, they may resent the treatment and react in a negative manner. If employees are treated with respect and believe in their managers, they will trust them. When employees feel management cares about their well-being and will provide the necessary guidance for them to move forward to be productive, employees will respond in a positive way and give the same treatment back to managers. When management considers treating employees in a positive manner, the results will be positive outcomes and much more positive behaviors.

Research studies have shown that the way managers communicate to the laid off and surviving employees during the layoff and downsizing process has a profound effect on their perceptions of how the employment relationship ended, or how the relationship will continue with surviving employees (Walker, 2015). Managers represent the company, and the way they are perceived will have future implications on the perceptions of the company. Studies have also shown when surviving employees observe their coworkers are treated fairly, respectfully, and in a humane manner when laid off, they will be more committed to their work performance.

The treatment of laid off employees could have psychological and physical effects on employees. For example, some of the participants in the study discussed their lack of self-worth and stated their dignity was taken away. Some of the participants were told to leave the same day they were notified they were laid off. They were told to pack their bags and leave. Some of the employees discussed their physical health and specific illnesses including high stress levels and anxiety, as well as medical conditions such as high blood pressure. These symptoms and illnesses may all be contributing factors to the perceptions of being treated negatively. In fact, Walker (2015) argued the way employees are treated may be the main reason for pain, anxiety and stress and not so much on the actions of the layoff process.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The study can contribute to positive social change by identifying ways to manage the impacts from layoffs and downsizing and presenting effective ways of organizational communication strategies for laid off employees, surviving employees and managers. By examining the perceptions of laid off employees and surviving employees, future researchers can receive a better understanding of the layoff and downsizing process and the impacts to the laid off and surviving employees. Listed below are additional steps to managing the impacts to layoffs and downsizing:

1. Companies should always have an effective communication strategy in place for layoff and downsizing announcements. The decision to conduct layoffs and downsizing should always be communicated to the employees as soon as the decision is made so the employees have time to plan financially, and emotionally.

2. Company leaders and executives can collaborate with community leaders and city officials in establishing work training programs and workshops in communities. They should provide financial resources and assistance to help prepare laid off individuals for career development and career opportunities and to assist laid off individuals to gain the confidence and the motivation needed to pursue job opportunities.
3. Companies can have in house training sessions in place for laid off individuals when a layoff or downsizing takes place. These classes should be in place and centered on their workday schedules, so employees can feel the company is concerned about their well-being and will do what is necessary to help them find work. Scheduled sessions should start as soon as layoffs are implemented to prepare the individuals for their road ahead. These sessions should eliminate some of the anxiety and anger that comes with the process.
4. Companies must provide ways to build trust with employees. They should schedule one on one monthly sessions with employees to set goals for future development and career enhancements. They should create transparency in the layoff process by effectively communicating with employees. They could provide as much information that is available on the process and present it to the employees. They can ascertain questions from the employees and answer all questions truthfully.
5. Companies can establish team building sessions with other departments for process improvement to establish forums for proposed ideas.

6. Companies can provide counseling programs for surviving employees and the laid off employees' psychological and emotional needs due to layoffs and downsizing. This service should also be offered to the family members who may want to attend the sessions.
7. Companies should work with other companies in providing potential candidates with an experienced and quality work history who were laid off from their company. Receiving a reference letter from a laid off company to another company may provide job opportunities for laid off employees, and can be seen as positive gestures from the leaders of the company.
8. Companies can provide more leadership training to managers on employee engagement during stressful and critical times including layoffs and downsizing events.
9. Companies should create a more compassionate process for layoffs. This process can help laid off individuals and surviving employees adjust to the work environment during and after a layoff and downsizing process, which has the potential to improve trust and loyalty.
10. Companies can provide in house sessions for surviving employees to help them cope mentally from the layoff and downsizing activities. The surviving employees will have to take on additional work tasks when layoffs takes place, so training can be in place to assist them with learning new skills for the added workload. These training sessions will help to eliminate the surviving employees' stress and worries of being laid off next.

11. Companies can create collaborative teams to provide areas for organizational improvements and communication factors, and promote the concept of companies working with employees by getting them involved, ascertaining their ideas, and adding them to the decision making process.
12. Companies can provide financial assistance training for all employees, including surviving employees of layoffs and downsizing. Employees should prepare themselves financially for a layoff occurrence so alternatives can be put in place.
13. Companies should always provide severance pay to all laid off employees.
14. Companies can provide an employee with a minimum of two weeks or more with their layoff notices. Companies should not provide layoff notices to employees and walk them out the door on the same day. The leaders should treat all employees with respect and dignity the way the managers would want to be treated themselves.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Although the study has provided research information on the perceptions of layoff and downsizing, further studies should be conducted in the following areas:

1. On the different age groups with the lowest amounts of layoff and downsizing activity.
2. On the impacts of layoffs on middle age women in the workplace.
3. On the impacts on African Americans during the layoff and downsizing process
4. On disparities and race relations during the layoff and downsizing process.
5. On layoff effects on the middle aged white male.



6. On the different job occupations that are most impacted by layoff and downsizing and presented as a comparison to other types of occupations.
7. To determine if companies offer employee counseling and job training to laid off employees and surviving employee after a layoff and downsizing event in comparison to companies that do not provide these services to laid off individuals.
8. On the company's layoff and downsizing notification process for employees and the notification process for managers and the effects.

### **Conclusions**

This study focused on the perceptions of employees and their emotional and physical health concerns during and after a layoff and downsizing process, and captured the common themes of employee concerns by observing these perceptions and concerns through the lens of the individuals who experienced them. The study revealed a perplexed animosity by the participants of distrust in management. Although a few participants believed in their managers and did not blame them for the layoffs, most of the participants did not trust their managers, company goals and visions, and in some cases employees questioned the validity of the layoff criteria selection process. The study focused on employees who were involved in a layoff and downsizing process including individuals who survived a layoff event and laid off managers.

The findings of this study revealed a phenomenological detailed account of layoffs and downsizing activities from the time individuals were notified that they were laid off to being escorted out the doors of their workplaces. The findings revealed the

personal effects they endured during and after the layoffs took place. I presented what the participants experienced in their own words through excerpts from the interview transcripts. Some of the participants claimed their self-worth, their goals, and future plans were eliminated after they were laid off, and some of them experienced marital problems, loss of their families, their children, and their homes. Due to the ominous circumstances of being unemployed, without an income, and no place to live, some of the participants were forced to live in situations they had never experienced before. Some of the participants saw the layoff process as a blessing in disguise, or a second chance. The findings of the study presented a different view from the traditional corporate interpretations of layoffs and downsizing, and focused on individual effects during and after a layoff and downsizing event.

As discussed in the previous chapters, layoff remains one of the most common forms of downsizing methods used by companies large and small (Walker, 2015). Layoffs and downsizing events are a way of corporate life. Although the economy has started to recover, companies have continued to downsize and lay off employees (Emerson, 2016). High technology companies such as IBM, HP, Intel, Microsoft and Cisco laid off thousands of employees despite making billions of dollars in profits and sales (Lazonick, 2016). Although there are good jobs that could put people back to work such as infrastructure jobs including rebuilding roads, bridges, schools, and parks, there are some jobs like manufacturing, mining, and IT technology that may continue to lay off employees (Smith, 2013).

Some jobs in the healthcare field could be saved from layoffs by reorganizing and cutting waste, fraud and abuse, as well as reducing unnecessary spending (Smith, 2013). Business sectors with recent potential job growth are education, construction, and transportation. Clean energy jobs will increase job growth (Klein & Coffey, 2016). A study was conducted in 2016 by the Clean Energy Trust in Wisconsin, which reported that almost 25,000 individuals work in clean energy positions. The researcher estimates Wisconsin will add 1,000 more energy efficient jobs in the next year. Green jobs such as clean fuels and energy efficiencies play an important role in utilizing renewable energy technologies for clean energy services and products (Yi, 2014). Silicon Valley is continuing to hire in the technology and software field and will continue to bring in new products (Hyde, 2015).

The recommendations presented in this study will be shared so other leaders in organizations may begin to understand the importance of maintaining effective leadership and employee engagement during layoffs and downsizing. A critical organizational strategy to a successful layoff is to communicate a clear message to the employees (Carriger, 2013). This approach allows the individual the opportunity to plan ahead and make financial adjustments as required.

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Appendix A: Demographics of Participants

<b>Coded Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Survivor/ Laid off</b>	<b>Employee/ Supervisor</b>	<b>Comments</b>
P1	51	Hispanic	Female	ER Biller Healthcare	Laid off	Employee	Pack and leave on same day
P2	27	Filipino	Male	Admin	Survivor	Supervisor	It is a part of the business
P3	29	African American	Female	Cashier	Laid off	Employee	Do not trust management
P4	37	Asian	Male	Publication Admin	Laid off	Employee	Company relocated to another state
P5	51	Hispanic	Male	IT Specialist	Laid off	Employee	Affected my human work, social stigma
P6	54	African American	Female	Marketing and Sales	Laid off	Employee	Impeccable work, loss of husband, stress
P7	38	Hispanic	Male	Construction	Laid off	Employee	Manager pretended to be friends and laid me off
P8	45	White	Male	Electrician	Laid off	Supervisor	Makes good money. Get layoff pay until next job
P9	57	Hispanic	Male	Journeyman Painter	Laid off	Employee	You don't want to leave with a bad impression
P10	35	White	Male	Customer Sales	Laid off	Supervisor	Stated he felt used to lay off employees

*(table continues)*

<b>Coded Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Survivor/ Laid off</b>	<b>Employee/ Supervisor</b>	<b>Comments</b>
P11	51	African American	Male	Painter	Laid off	Employee	Lost everything. Worried about living homeless
P12	31	Asian	Male	Waiter	Laid off	Employee	Sad and depression
P13	47	African American	Female	Healthcare Admin	Survivor	Supervisor	Given a 60 day notice, employees laid off immediately
P14	52	African American	Male	Aerospace	Survivor	Supervisor	Trust comes into issue sometimes.
P15	41	African American	Female	Chef	Survivor	Employee	I worked the Catering dept. Then they moved me.
P16	39	Mixed	Female	Exec Admin	Laid off	Employee	Upset and worried. Shock and disbelief
P17	39	African American	Male	Construction	Laid off	Employee	Not upset. Was sad for coworkers.
P18	29	African American	Female	Nurse	Laid off	Employee	Stress/anxiety. Developed high blood pressure.
P19	32	White	Male	Truck driver	Laid off	Employee	Manager waited the same day to lay off
P20	55	African American	Male	Healthcare Tech Leader	Laid off	Supervisor	Trained new hires and was laid off

## Appendix B: Research and Interview Questions

## Research and Interview Questions

**RQ 1:****What are the employee perceptions of effects on employees as a result of personnel layoffs and downsizing?**

## Interview questions

Q1: Do you think employees or managers are treated better or worse during and after the layoff process?

Q2: Describe your thoughts when the manager made the notification announcement and you realized you would be laid off, you heard your coworkers had been laid off or a downsizing event was being implemented?

Q3: What are your perceptions of employee trust and loyalty as a result of the layoff process?

**RQ 2:****What individual effects occur as a result of layoffs and downsizing?**

## Interview Questions

Q1: What are the effects of layoffs on you personally?

Q2: Did your daily workload change? Please explain.

Q3: Describe the relationships with your manager and coworkers as a result of layoffs and downsizing? Please explain.

Q4: Describe how you adjusted to the work environment during and after the layoff and downsizing process?

**RQ 3:****What are the employee perceptions of long term implications of layoffs for an organization?**

## Interview Questions:

Q1: Did the management style change during and after the layoff process?

Q2: Did you observe changes to employee morale or employee work performance as a result of the layoff process?

Q3: Did you consider quitting the job or retiring as a result of the layoff and downsizing process?

Q4: Would you recommend a friend or family member to work at your place of employment as a result of the layoff and downsizing process?



## Appendix C: Themes

Theme	# of Participants	% of Participants
Leadership	19	95
Sadness/Depression	19	95
Anxiety	19	95
Stressed	18	90
Low Morale/Productivity	18	90
Employee Trust	17	85
Communication	17	85
Manager not engaged with employee	17	85
Overwhelmed	17	85
Financial Problems	16	80
Mental and emotional stress	16	80
Marital and family problems	14	70
Angry	14	70
Benefits/ Severance Pay	14	70
Medical problems	11	55
Afraid	9	45
Future of Company	8	40
Survivor Burnout	4	20

## Appendix D: Qualitative Data and Comparative Analysis

1) Do you think employees or managers are treated better or worse during and after the layoff process?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who believed managers were treated better	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
More valued	5	25%	P2,P3,P4,P5,P14
More responsibility	4	20%	P1,P9, P10,P17
Have the upper hand	2	10%	P7, P14
Close to the higher ups	2	10%	P6, P8
Provided more severance benefits	2	10%	P3, P13
Make more money	2	10%	P12,P19
More skill level	1	5%	P18

2) Describe your thoughts when the manager made the notification announcement and you realized you would be laid off, you heard your co-workers had been laid off or a downsizing event was being implemented?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered their thoughts & experiences	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants offered this experience
Shocked, Surprised, disbelief	5	25%	P1,P2,P4,P15,P16
Stressed, sad, depressed, anxiety	5	25%	P3,P6,P9,P12,P14
How am I going to pay bills	4	20%	P5,P7,P8,P11
They lied to me	3	15%	P13,17,20
Felt used, disappointed disrespected	2	10%	P10,P19

3) What are your perceptions of employee trust and loyalty as a result of the layoff process?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered experience of trust and loyalty	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants offered this experience
I did not trust management	17	85%	P2,P3,P4,P5, P6,P7,P8,P10 P11,P13,P14 P15,P16,P17 P18,P19,P20
I trusted my manager	3	15%	P1,P9,P12

4) What are the effects of layoffs on you personally?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered personal Layoff effects	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
I had anxiety, panic	19	95%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6, P7,P8,P9,P10,P11 P12,P13,P14,15,P16 P17,P18,P19,P20
I was sad and depressed	19	95%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6, P7,P8,P9,P10,P11 P12,P13,P14,15,P16 P17,P18,P19,P20
I was stressed	18	90%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6, P7,P9,P10,P11,P12, P13,P14, P15,16, P17,P18, P19,P20

It affected my finances	16	80%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P9, P10,P11,P12,P13,P16, P17,P18,P19,P20
Had emotional problems	16	80%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P9, P10,P11,P12,P13,P16, P17,P18,P19,P20
Afraid would not find work	14	70%	P1,P4,P5,P6,P7,P9, P10,P11,P12,,P16, P17,P18,P19,P20
Family problems	14	70%	P1,P3,P4,P5,P6,P9, P10,P11,P13,P16, P17,P18,P19,P20
High blood pressure	3	15%	P6,P8,P11
Death of spouse	1	5%	P6

5) Did your daily workload change? Please explain.

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Invariant Constituents	# of participants who workload changed	% of participants who offered this experienced	Participants who offered this experience
My workload increased	11	55%	P1,P2,P5, P8, P10 P11, P14, P15,P17 P19,P20
My workload decreased	9	45%	P3,P4, P6,P7,P9 P12,P13,P16,P18

6) Describe the relationships with your manager and co-workers as a result of layoffs and downsizing?  
Please explain.

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered this experience	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
No communication	12	60%	P2,P4,P3,P4 P5,P6,P7,P8, P14,P16,P17,P18
There was no relationship	9	45%	P3,P5,P6,P7,P8 P16,P17,P18,P19
Did not engage with employees	9	45%	P3, P4,P5,P6,P7, P8, P16, P17,P18
Showed no empathy	7	35%	P3,P5,P6,P7, P8, P16,P18
They were distant/and ignored employees	7	35%	P2,P3,P7,P8, P14, P11,P17
Better relationship with manager and employees	4	20%	P1,P10,P12,P15
Misled the employees	2	10%	P13,P19
Showed favoritism	1	5%	P9,16

7) Describe how you adjusted to the work environment during and after the layoff and downsizing process?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered this experience	% of participants who offered this experienced	Participants who offered this experience
Continued to work under sadness, stress and anxiety, nervousness	9	45%	P2,P5,P11,P12, P14, P15,P17,P18 P20
Traumatic experience, frustration	5	25%	P3,P9,P6,P8,P16
Difficult due to no trust	2	10%	P7,P10
Quiet environment	2	10%	P13,P19
Lack of productivity	2	10%	P1,P4

8) Did the management style change during and after the layoff process?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered this experience	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
Management style stayed same	5	25%	P3,P7,P8,P9 P12
Manager was positive	4	20%	P1,P15,P17,P18
No communication	3	15%	P14,P16,19
Became distant	2	10%	P2,P13
Stricter	2	10%	P6,P20
Cold Shoulder	2	10%	P10,P11

Quiet and shocked	1	5%	P4
Apprehensive	1	5%	P5

9) Did you observe changes to employee morale or employee work performance as a result of the layoff process?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered this experience	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
The morale went down	11	55%	P2,P6,P8,P10 P11,P14,P15,P17, P18,P19,P20
The morale stayed the same	4	20%	P1, P7,P9,P16
Some were shocked, silent	2	10%	P4,P13
There was sadness	2	10%	P3, P12
Management was untrustworthy	1	5%	P5

10) Did you consider quitting the job or retiring as a result of the layoff and downsizing process?  
Why?

Invariant Constituents	# of participants who offered this experience	% of participants who offered this experience	Participants who offered this experience
Considered quitting	9	45%	P2,P4,P7,P9,P14,P15, P16, P17,P18,
Did not consider	11	55%	P1,P3,P5,P6,P8, P10, P11,P12,P13, P19, P20

**11) Would you recommend a friend or family member to work at your place of employment as a result of the layoff and downsizing process?**

<b>Invariant Constituents</b>	<b># of participants who offered this experience</b>	<b>% of participants who offered this experience</b>	<b>Participants who offered this experience</b>
<b>Would recommend</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>P1, P3, P5,P7,P9, P10, P13,P14,P15, P17</b>
<b>Would not recommend</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>P2,P4,P6,P8,P11 P12,P16, P18,P19, P20</b>



## Appendix E: Notification of Selection Letter

Dear Name:

Congratulations on your selection as a participant in the Layoff and downsizing Research study. Many excellent candidates from all over Southern California were considered. Your selection was based on your background and experience, and meeting the required qualifications for the study. Please reply back to the e-mail to confirm your participation.

A consent form will be provided to you to review and sign for your participation prior to the start of the interview process. At that time, you will be provided a \$10.00 Starbucks Coffee gift certificate.

**If you have questions, you may contact the researcher via telephone at  
XXXXXXXXXX**

Sincerely,

Linda Carrington  
Walden University Doctoral Student

## Appendix F: Not Selected Letter to Potential Participant

Dear Name:

Thank you for your interest to participate in the Layoff and Downsizing Effects and Perceptions Study. Unfortunately you were not selected as a participant.

The task of selecting participants for the study was not an easy decision. However, we have reached a sufficient amount of qualified participants for the study. We appreciate the time and energy that go into reviewing and responding to the recruitment advertisement for the study. Thank you for investing the time.

We wish you success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Linda Carrington  
Walden University Doctoral Student