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Strategies to Support Survivors of Corporate Downsizing

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Joseph Linton, Jr

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Strategies to Support Survivors of Corporate Downsizing

by

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MSM, Troy University, 2006

BS, Southern Illinois University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2017

Abstract

Between 2003 and 2011, 1.2 million U.S. workers were laid off every year. Some organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations lack strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing events. The strains of overwork, organizational changes, anxiety over job insecurity, and lack of choice often result in physical illness, emotional trauma, and extreme disengagement termed survivor syndrome. The purpose of this single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders in the Midwest United States in information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. The conceptual framework was Herzberg's 2-factor theory. Data were collected via semistructured interviews, retention records, and organizational documents specific to postdownsizing activities. Data were compiled, disassembled, and reassembled into patterns and themes. The data revealed 4 themes: internal communications, organizational support, training, and employee manager relationships. The findings suggested establishing a formalized strategy to support survivors of corporate downsizing is needed to ensure consistency throughout the company. This research might contribute to social change within the organization by identifying and providing strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event, which might lead to better individual and organizational performance and decrease residual employee turnover. This research could also contribute to social change by stabilizing the emotional state of the employee and removing a source of family instability.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. They motivated me in ways I did not fully understand or realize as a younger man. Although both have passed away, they are with me each and every day.

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I would like to thank Dr. Cheryl McMahan for patiently guiding me through the dissertation path. I would also like to thank the other committee members, Dr. James Glenn and Dr. James Savard, for their invaluable input. It truly took a team of professionals to get this dissertation completed. I will forever be grateful.

I would like to thank my family, friends, and coworkers who provided support and inspiration during this journey. I would like to give a special thanks to my son, L. J. Linton, who truly understands the importance of pursuing one's goals. He inspires and motivates me more than he will ever know.

Certainly, I thank God for carrying me every day. Without his grace and mercy, I would not have completed this program. Without faith, I would not be the person I am today.

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Section 1: Foundation of the study

Since the first significant layoffs in corporate America began in the late 1970s, workforce downsizing has become a strategy of choice for companies worldwide (Gandolfi, 2013; Mayton, 2011). Promised financial results of employee downsizing were marginal at best and lackluster results were understandable when considering the impact of downsizing on employees who remained after the downsizing event (Flewellen, 2013; Mayton, 2011). The strains of overwork, organizational changes, anxiety over job insecurity, and lack of choice often resulted in physical illness, emotional trauma, and extreme disengagement termed *survivor syndrome* (Flewellen, 2013; Mayton, 2011). Because survivor syndrome may have impeded employee performance and motivation after a downsizing event, it was necessary to handle these outcomes properly (Flewellen, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to provide strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after a corporate downsizing event.

Background of the Problem

Organizational change involving a strategy of eliminating positions or jobs became a defining characteristic of modern corporate organizational life (Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge, & Campion, 2010). Organizations often downsized to decrease labor costs, increase shareholder value, and achieve a greater competitive advantage in the marketplace (Maertz et al., 2010). In 2011, U.S. employers initiated 6,597 extended mass layoff events that resulted in the separation of 1.1 million workers (U.S. Bureau Labor Statistics, 2012). Between 2003 and 2011, 1.2 million U.S. workers were laid off every year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

Survivors were employees of an organization who did not lose their jobs during the implementation of the downsizing strategy. The survivors considered the downsizing event a breach of the psychological contract (Katarina, 2015). Therefore, survived employees behaved differently towards their jobs and organization after the downsizing event (Saeed et al., 2013). The surviving employees were expected to be highly committed and productive even if the organization did not assure future job security (Jenkins, 2012).

Gandolfi (2014) offered a conceptual framework on the causes of downsizing. However, a gap in research existed on strategies to increase *affective commitment* to the organization after a downsizing event. Understanding strategies to increase affective commitment to the organization may have contributed towards stabilizing the organization after the downsizing event. The background to the business problem has been established. The focus of this study has shifted to the problem statement.

Problem Statement

The lack of organizational support and occurrence of subsequent residual employee turnover after a downsizing event led to increases in work disruptions, loss of organizational memory, and loss of productivity (Hart, Thomson, & Huning, 2016). The associated costs of employee turnover exceeded 100% of the annual salary of the vacated position because it took a typical employee a year and a half to reach full productivity (Roberts, 2015). The general business problem was some organizations within the information technology/telecommunications industry were negatively affected by the effects of layoffs on the surviving employees from diminished affective commitment to

the current organization (Razzaq, Ayu, Arzu, & Aslam 2013). The specific business problem was some organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations lacked strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing.

Purpose Statement

The goal of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. The targeted population consisted of five departmental leaders at a global information technology/telecommunications company who had successful experience in improving affective commitment to their organizations after a downsizing event. Participants of this study were located in the Midwest United States and led organizations which experienced a downsizing event within the past 4 years.

According to Lindner (2014), families became less stable when one parent lost a job. The implication for positive social change was to stabilize the emotional state of the surviving employee, thus enabling more stable families and local communities.

Nature of the Study

According to Flewellen (2013), using a qualitative design allowed the researcher an opportunity to interact with participants who experienced the phenomenon and to focus on obtaining a deeper understanding of a problem or issue. Qualitative approaches involved exploration and interpretation of events that did not readily lend themselves to

consistent measurement and statistical analysis (Leung, 2015). Based on the nature of the research problem, I selected a qualitative research method.

Based on the desire for a deep contextual analysis of the events, I selected a qualitative single case study. A single case study was appropriate for use in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2014). Using a single case study enabled intensity, depth, interaction between *case* and context, and a holistic and real-world perspective (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014).

Other designs, such as ethnographic and grounded theory were not appropriate for this study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), ethnographers typically studied human groups through long-term immersion and sought to understand how they collectively formed and maintained a culture. I did not intend to use ethnography as a design because I did not immerse myself in the setting. Grounded theory researchers sought to build explanations of social phenomena and involved an overall approach with a primary focus of generating theories that explained the interactions or settings of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not use grounded theory because grounded theory is not used in applied research.

Research Question

What strategies did organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations use to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing?

Interview Questions

One of the most important sources of case study evidence was the interview (Yin, 2014). To gain an understanding strategies used to increase affective commitment, I asked the following questions:

1. How does the company improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing?
2. How does the company support remaining employees after a downsizing event?
3. How did you implement the strategies?
4. How did you address the implementation barriers?
5. How do you measure the success of your existing strategies?
6. How would you share any additional information about the strategies you used to improve affective commitment to the organization?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Herzberg's two-factor theory developed in the 1950s. Herzberg (1965) proposed a theory that focused on two essential factors: workplace characteristics that created job satisfaction and workplace characteristics that created job dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg, people had two types of essential concerns: motivation factors and hygiene factors. Motivation factors involved satisfaction and psychological growth, and included outcomes such as achievement, growth, and interest in the job (Herzberg, 1965). Addressing hygiene factors was necessary to avoid discouraging employees and reflected such issues as pleasant and comfortable working conditions, pay, job security, and effective supervision

(Herzberg, 1965). During research, Herzberg determined employees named different types of conditions that produced good and bad feelings (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). Herzberg's two-factor theory was the conceptual framework I applied to this study.

Operational Definitions

Affective commitment (AC): AC was a core component of organizational commitment (OC) and referred to the emotional attachment workers felt toward an organization and was reflected through identification and involvement with the organization and happiness to be a part of the organization (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015; Xiong, Lin, Li, & Wang, 2016).

Downsizing: Downsizing was a strategic organizational decision aimed to reduce an organization's cost, improve overall efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness (Abejdid, 2012).

Dyadic: Dyadic referred to the relationship between a leader and each follower in a work unit (Lussier & Achua, 2004).

Organizational commitment (OC): Organizational commitment was the degree to which an employee identified with the organization and influenced whether a person stays on the job (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011; Newstrom & Davis, 2002).

Psychological contract (PC): Psychological contract described the employees' beliefs about the mutual obligations or the terms of the reciprocal exchange agreement between themselves and their organizations (Arshad, 2016; De Ruiter, Schalk, & Blomme, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2014).

Psychological contract breach (PCB): Employees' perceptions of unfairness and inequity that took place when employees recognized that their organization did not fulfill one or more of the promises made to them (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015; De Ruiter et al., 2016; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014; Seto, 2013).

Survivor: Survivor referred to the employees who remained employed after a corporate downsizing event (Abejdid, 2012).

Survivor syndrome: Survivor syndrome described symptoms experienced by employees who were left behind after the downsizing event and were affected, creating a psycho-social problem characterized by low morale and commitment to the organization (Mayton, 2011).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

As listed in the Walden University DBA Rubric (2016), assumptions were facts considered to be true but unverifiable by the researcher. Simon and Goes (2013) identified assumptions as a necessary element in proposals required to enable and conduct the study. All research projects have assumptions. Therefore, none is perfectly designed. In my pursuit to understand the phenomena of downsizing from a surviving leader's perspective, I assumed the following:

- The participants were employed in a leadership capacity within the organization before, during, and after the downsizing event.
- The participants provided accurate and honest information based on their lived experiences.

- The participants possessed a sincere desire to improve affective commitment to the organization within the employee population that survived the downsizing event.
- The participants may have experienced a different reality before, during, and after the downsizing event.

Limitations

Simon and Goes (2013) defined limitations as potential weaknesses in a study that were largely beyond the control of the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated limitations derived from the conceptual framework and the design of the study. As listed in the Walden University DBA Rubric (2016), limitations referred to the potential weaknesses of the study that could not be addressed by the researcher. Limitations in this study included time, geographic location, and industry. The interviews involved leaders in the Midwest United States within an information technology/telecommunications company.

Delimitations

The goal of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. Simon and Goes (2013) defined delimitations as those characteristics that limited the scope, defined the boundaries of a study, and resulted from specific choices made by the researcher. As listed in the Walden University DBA Rubric (2016), delimitations referred to the bounds or scope of the study. I focused on leaders with specific experience within one

information technology/telecommunications company. Delimitations within this study included only interviewing leaders, who had successfully increased affective commitment within their organizations after a downsizing event. Delimitations of this study also included time constraints of a dissertation and availability of interviewees.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Organizational leaders could benefit by understanding strategies to support and motivate surviving employees. Organizational leaders could use results of the study to increase surviving employees' affective commitment after downsizing events.

Specifically, leaders can use results of this research to develop a plan to stabilize the surviving workforce by reducing the effects of survivor syndrome, increasing survivor morale, and improving affective commitment to the organization. According to MaManus and Mosca (2015), increasing survivor morale led to better organizational performance and higher retention rates after downsizing events.

Implications for Social Change

During and after downsizing events, employees worried about job security and felt unsatisfied with their jobs (Saeed, Arshad, Fareed, Shahzad & Lodhi, 2013). Saeed et al. (2013) also concluded surviving employees behaved differently toward their jobs and organization after the downsizing event. Surviving a downsizing event has been positively associated with job-related stress and negatively associated with organizational support, which translated into surviving employees' low level of continuance and affective commitment (Florah, Nyagol, & Oluoch, 2013). This research could contribute

to positive social change within the organization by identifying and providing strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after the downsizing event, which might lead to better individual and organizational performance and decrease residual employee turnover. Additionally, this research could contribute to positive social change by stabilizing the emotional state of the employee and removing a source of family instability. Ramlall, Al-Sabaan, and Magbool (2014) argued the effects of downsizing were long in duration and negatively affected the whole family unit. Family stability was crucial for children's health development (Lindner, 2014).

The results of this single case qualitative study could influence social change by creating awareness to the negative effects of downsizing to the employees, employees' families, and the organization. Ramlall et al. (2014) provided examples such as family disintegration and a collapse of social networks as adverse side effects of downsizing. Schiro and Baker (2009) argued the losers in corporate downsizing events were the survivors who felt detached from the company due to the absence of a feeling of community. Survivors of organizational change and their families experienced negative financial, emotional, and psychological effects after downsizing events (Schiro & Baker, 2009).

In addition to the chaos and adverse effects to the families' financial stability, the downsizing process created an emotional and mental toll on the survivors (Schiro & Baker, 2009). The instability created by the organizational change triggered a reaction in each employee and affected how the survivor felt about his or her job (Schiro & Baker, 2009). It was the intent that through this study, organizational leaders may gain a better

understanding of the unfavorable consequences of layoffs and more effectively manage organizations to prevent or minimize future downsizing events.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Since the first significant layoffs in corporate American began in the late 1970s, workforce downsizing became a strategy of choice for companies worldwide (Gandolfi, 2013; Mayton, 2011). Gandolfi (2013) argued that downsizing literature was extensive. However, a research gap exists.

Surviving a downsizing event had been positively associated with job-related stress and negatively related to organizational support, which translated into surviving employees' low level of continuance and affective commitment (Florah, Nyagol, & Oluoch, 2013). The strains of overwork, organizational changes, anxiety over job insecurity, and lack of choice often resulted in physical illness, emotional trauma, and extreme disengagement termed survivor syndrome (Flewellen, 2013; Mayton, 2011; Norman, Butler, & Ranft, 2013). Survivor syndrome described the strains of overwork, organizational changes, anxiety over job insecurity, and lack of choice; and often resulted in physical illness, emotional trauma, and extreme disengagement for the surviving employees (Flewellen, 2013; Mayton, 2011). Because survivor syndrome may have impeded employee performance and motivation after a downsizing event, it was necessary to handle these outcomes correctly (Flewellen, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. In this study, I

explored how leaders within a global information technology/telecommunications company mitigated the symptoms such as negative job attitudes and behaviors associated with psychological contract breach, and improved affective commitment to the organization. I also explored the concept of motivating employees with Herzberg's two-factor theory.

The literature review began with the exploration of peer reviewed journals, professional and academic databases, dissertations, textbooks and seminal books specific to qualitative research and case study research, and government websites. This study included information from databases such as SAGE Premier, Emerald Management, Business Source Complete, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM, Google Scholar and PsycINFO. Relevant search terms included: *downsizing, psychological contract, psychological contract breach, two factor theory, survivor syndrome, layoffs, rightsizing, organizational change and survivor*. This study included 122 references. In accordance with the requirements of Walden University, 87.70% of the references were peer-reviewed, and 86.07% of the references were within 5 years of my expected graduation date in calendar year 2017.

In this literature review, the starting point and conceptual model were Herzberg's two-factor theory, which was also known as Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. I compared and contrasted Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, and Dansereau, Graen, and Haga's (1975) leader-member exchange theory. I also completed an exhaustive search of existing research on

downsizing, psychological contract, psychological contract breach, survivor syndrome, organizational commitment, and affective commitment.

The goal of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. The research question central to this study was: What strategies did organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations use to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing? I also presented a review of existing literature pertaining to supporting survivors of corporate downsizing.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework of this study drew upon Herzberg's two-factor theory developed in the 1950s. The two-factor theory suggested job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction represented two separate and distinct experiences (Herzberg, 1965). Herzberg (1965) argued job dissatisfaction is determined by aspects of work including the environment or surroundings in which one performs work. Familiar environmental factors which were common sources of dissatisfaction were company policies, administrative practices, working conditions, status, and interpersonal relationships with supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Herzberg, 1965). Conversely, Herzberg argued factors, which described the relationship of the worker to the duties performed, such as job satisfaction, determined satisfaction and included achievement, recognition, engaging work, responsibility, and opportunities for professional growth and advancement. The dissatisfiers prevented job satisfaction and had minimal effect on the happiness of the

worker and were termed hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1965). The positive factors were termed *motivators*, and they recognized the factors commonly associated with work motivation (Herzberg, 1965).

Herzberg combined lower level needs into one classification he called hygiene or maintenance and higher level needs into one classification he called motivators (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Herzberg (1965) proposed a theory focused on two essential factors; workplace characteristics that created job satisfaction, and workplace characteristics that created job dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, people had two types of essential concerns: motivation factors and hygiene factors (Lussier & Achua, 2004).

The motivation factors related to meeting higher level needs (Lussier & Achua, 2004). According to Lussier and Achua (2004), motivation factors were intrinsic and involved satisfaction and psychological growth, and included outcomes such as achievement, growth, and interest in the job. Intrinsic motivators were internal rewards an employee felt when performing a job that provided a direct connection between work and rewards at the moment of task completion (Newstrom & Davis, 2002).

The maintenance or hygiene factors related to meeting the lower level needs (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Addressing hygiene factors were necessary to avoid demotivating employees and reflected such extrinsic issues as pleasant and comfortable working conditions, pay, job security, and adequate supervision (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). Extrinsic motivators were external rewards that existed aside from the actual work, which provided no direct satisfaction at the time of task completion (Newstrom &

Davis, 2002). As noted by Newstrom and Davis (2002), these factors were not strongly motivating but were necessary for building a foundation on which to maintain a reasonable level of motivation in employees.

During research, Herzberg determined employees named distinct types of conditions that produced good and bad feelings (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). Under the old management model, money and other extrinsic motivators were considered the best forms of motivation (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Under the new leadership model, income was important, but was not the best motivator; intrinsic motivators (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Herzberg's theory fit the new paradigm. As noted by Lussier and Achua (2004), once an employer met the lower level needs, the employees could be motivated through their jobs. Herzberg's two-factor theory was the conceptual framework I applied to this study.

The dyadic theory was an approach to leadership that attempts to explain why leaders managed individual employees in different manners (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Vertical dyadic linkage theory (VDL) examined the manner in which leaders formulated individual relationships with followers, and created insiders and outsiders within the functional organization (Lussier & Achua, 2004). Central to the VDL theory was the belief that leaders quickly formulated these dyadic relationships, which tended to remain intact for several years (Lussier & Achua, 2004).

Introduced in 1975 by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga, leadership member exchange (LMX) flowed from the literature on transformational leadership and assumed the leader established high quality relationships with a limited number of subordinates, referred to

as insiders (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). The insiders had strong social ties characterized by high mutual trust, respect, loyalty, and influence on the leader (Lussier & Achua, 2004). In contrast, some employees would have low quality relationships with the leader. These employees are considered outsiders and included subordinates with few or no social ties to the organizational leader in a task centered relationship characterized by low exchange and top down influence (Lussier & Achua, 2004). The outsiders were more likely to become dissatisfied, less motivated, and prone to quit (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011).

The LMX theory was the next evolutionary in the dyadic approach (Lussier & Achua). The distinguishing factor in LMX theory was the quality of the leader and follower relationship as opposed to the behavior or traits of the managers or subordinates (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). LMX suggested leaders developed different relationships with each subordinate through multiple work-related transactions (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). According to Hellriegel and Slocum (2011), each relationship between a manager and subordinate fell on a continuum and ranged from low quality to high quality. Only transactional requirements defined the low quality relationship between the leader and employee (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). In high quality relationships; mutual liking, trust, respect, and a sense of loyalty to each other defined the relationship (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011).

Sinha and Trivedi (2014) argued lack of supervisor support negatively affected employee engagement. Because a high quality LMX relationship began with an initial interaction, highly engaged employees had better relationships with their immediate

leaders (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). According to Sinha and Trivedi, rationally engaged employees were perceived as more reliable, aware of business needs, worked more cooperatively with others for the benefit of the organization, assumed responsibility for completing tasks, understood the organizational goals, and understood how individual efforts contributed to the goals of the entire company.

In the 1940s, Maslow developed the hierarchy of needs theory. According to Lussier and Achua (2004), Maslow's theory was based on four major assumptions:

- Only unmet needs motivated.
- People's needs were arranged in order of importance going from basic to complex needs.
- People would not be motivated to satisfy the higher level needs until the lower level needs were satisfied.
- People had 5 classifications of needs.

According to Lussier and Achua (2004), the five classifications of needs were:

- Physiological needs: These were primary needs such as air, food, and shelter.
- Safety needs: Once the physiological needs were met, the person was concerned with safety and security.
- Belongingness needs: After establishing safety, people sought love, friendship, acceptance, and affection.
- Esteem needs: After the social needs were met, people focused on ego, status, self-respect, and accomplishment.

- Self-Actualization needs: This was the highest level. People sought to develop one's full potential and desired growth, achievement, and advancement.

LMX assumed the leader established different relationships with employees through a series of work related transactions creating an in group and out group, which led to high and low performing employees (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). Two-factor theory suggested two sets of factors were primary causes of job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). The needs hierarchy model suggested people had a complex set of needs that could be arranged in a hierarchy (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011).

While employee engagement was key to building a sustainable high performance organization, the organization had a responsibility to create conditions which engaged employees (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). Several factors addressed in the LMX, needs hierarchy, and two-factor theories such as interpersonal relations determined the level of engagement of an employee. In contrast, the two-factor and needs hierarchy theories pertained to internal and external needs while the focus of LMX was the relationship between the leader and follower. Individual differences played a role in engagement, but ultimately the relationship with the leader was the greatest influence on employee engagement (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014).

The work relationships described in the LMX, needs hierarchy, and two-factor theories played a significant role in increasing affective commitment after a corporate downsizing event. However, intrinsic motivators would best serve the employee as he or

she sought a long-term relationship with the organization. Sinha and Trivedi (2014) posited that if an organization concentrated on providing internal and external motivators to the employee base and if there was a fair work relationship between a leader and subordinates, the organization would retain highly engaged human resources.

Downsizing

Organizational restructuring was a significant aspect of our continuously changing business world. Corporate restructuring encompassed multiple forms of modification in any corporation (Gandolfi, 2014). These kinds of change fell into three distinct categories; portfolio, financial, and organizational restructuring. Portfolio restructuring referred to the expansion of an organization through mergers and acquisitions (Gandolfi, 2014). Financial restructuring referred to leveraged buyouts, recapitalizations, share purchases, equity splits, and employee stock option plans (Gandolfi, 2014). The most common form of organizational restructuring was downsizing, which caused internal changes within the structure of the company (Gandolfi, 2014).

During the 1980s, downsizing was an indicator of organizational decline, but became a powerful strategy to gain and catch sustainability (Ramesha, 2014). Brauer and Laamanen (2014) recommended leaders consider alternatives before resorting to a downsizing event. However, corporations used employee reduction initiatives as a cost containment strategy. Organizations implemented layoffs to streamline activities and increase organizational inefficiencies (Gandolfi, 2014; Hansson, 2015). Firms reduced headcount for multiple reasons including responses to mergers and acquisitions, to delay

closure or bankruptcy, to preparation for privatization, or to lessen costs to remain competitive in an increasingly global market (Gandolfi, 2014). Additional reasons included increased competition and efficiency, a declining need for middle managers, and improved quality and reliability of products requiring fewer resources for maintenance (Gandolfi, 2014).

Gandolfi (2014) referred to downsizing as reactive versus proactive strategy asserting downsizing programs of many North American corporations were poorly planned, ineptly managed, and did not generate the expected financial or operational improvements. Gandolfi (2014) argued downsizing was no longer a product of immediate market conditions but a product of key strategic factors. Therefore, downsizing was an employment strategy (Gandolfi, 2014).

Reductions in force as a change management strategy was a decades old common practice (Gandolfi, 2013; Mayton, 2011). Day, Armenakis, Field, and Norris (2012) indicated 85% of the Fortune 500 companies downsized during the 1990s. According to Gandolfi (2014), 65% of firms that downsized in a given year did so the following year. According to Long (2013), since the recession began in December 2007 more than 6.5 million U.S. workers were laid off including 4 million (Day et al., 2012) in 2009 alone. Seto (2013) referred to downsizing as a systematic reduction of employee headcount utilized to increase organizational productivity, efficiency, profitability, and competitiveness. As a strategy of choice for companies around the globe, workforce downsizing produced financial, organizational, and social consequences (Gandolfi, 2013).

During the 1980s and early 1990s, downsizing was implemented primarily by firms experiencing economic challenges (Gandolfi, 2013). However, since the middle of the 1990s, downsizing became a strategy of choice for companies with a desire to reduce operational costs and increase efficiency, productivity, profitability, and competitiveness (Gandolfi, 2013; van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Well organized and financially successful companies also used layoffs as part of their strategic business plan to remain competitive (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Gandolfi (2014) argued downsizing became the remedy that solved all problems and suggested firms implement downsizing in a hostile manner without considering the outcomes. Although downsizing benefited the company, this strategy directly affected the relationship between the employee and employer and resulted in negative attitudes and costly workplace outcomes (Seto, 2013).

Corporations used downsizing as a reactive strategy to remain competitive (Gandolfi, 2014). Gandolfi (2014) also concluded downsizing was employed not only as a strategy to cut labor costs, but also to apply downward pressure on wage demands from the remaining employees. Gandolfi (2014) argued other motivational factors compelled firms and governmental bodies to implement downsizing as a change strategy. Such drivers included economic downturns, poor management, increased global competition, takeovers, mergers, divestments, deregulation, introduction to new technology, lost market share, higher operating costs, lowered profit margins, privatization, global benchmarking, shareholder demands, regulatory requirements, previous overspending, and the after effects of the merger and acquisition mania (Gandolfi, 2014).

Luan, Tien, and Chi (2013) suggested downsizing strategies through reductions in the workforce did not guarantee better firm profitability. Despite its widespread usage, there was little evidence for the effectiveness of downsizing (van Dick, Drzensky, & Heinz, 2016), that led to improved financial or operational performance for a firm (van Dick et al., 2016; van Dierendock & Jacobs, 2012). While downsizing, the behavior of the survivors was as important as the financial implications for the organization's future competitiveness (Jenkins, 2012). Lowered commitment levels by the employees after downsizing was a significant reason why downsizing did not show the intended results (van Dierenonck & Jacobs, 2012).

Psychological Contract

Psychological contracts were instrumental in understanding and effectively managing attitudes and behaviors of the employee base (Hartmann & Rutherford, 2015). Psychological contracts were significant because fulfillment or breach influenced organizational outcomes (Payne, Culbertson, Lopez, Boswell & Barger, 2015). Psychological contract (PC) referred to employees' beliefs about the mutual obligations or the terms of the reciprocal exchange agreement between themselves and their employers (Arshad, 2016; Katarina, 2015; De Ruiters, Schalk, & Blomme, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2014). Low, Bordia, and Bordia (2016) explained psychological agreements comprised their beliefs about employees' contributions to the corporation and the inducements they expected in return. The employees considered these obligations implicit or explicit and dependent upon one another (Seto, 2013). The PC went beyond a formal contract and referred to the belief of the employee concerning the existence of an

unwritten contract of mutual obligation in the relationship with the employer that involved elements of trust and future benefits including job security (Arshad, 2016).

Based on these beliefs, employees made inferences about promises made by employers as organizational inducements and the exchange for the workplace expectation of the employee (Low et al., 2016). Wang and Hsieh (2014) and Arshad (2016) explained the psychological contract was one form of the social exchange relationship that developed between employees and their organizations. A core element of the psychological contract was the employees' beliefs that their corporations would fulfill their commitments if the employees met their obligations (Arshad, 2016; Wang & Hsieh, 2014). When employees perceived their organizations had failed to satisfy their obligations, the employees would then experience psychological contract breach (Wang & Hsieh, 2014).

Psychological Contract Breach

Employees had negative perceptions of layoffs. During change initiatives, communication to employees was often limited and lacked quality (De Ruiter, Schalk, Schaveling, & van Gelder, 2017) at a time when employees most needed information. As a result, employees felt as if the organization was not fulfilling obligations related to clear and open communication (De Ruiter et al., 2017). The negative psychological impact on remaining employees led to decreases in cooperation and motivation in the workplace (Jenkins, 2012). If employees did not feel organizational support or sensed a violation of trust in leadership, Cassell (2014) argued, they quickly lost interest and engagement. Downsizing disrupted the complementary nature of the employment relationship, which

resulted in unfulfilled obligations in the employees' psychological contracts (Arshad, 2016; van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

Psychological contract breach (PCB) occurred when employees felt their organization did not fulfill one or more of the promises made and the employees developed negative attitudes and behavioral intentions to maintain balance (Katarina, 2015; Paille & Raneri, 2016; Seto, 2013; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). Biswas (2015) argued PCB was associated with employees' feelings of anger, frustration, and helplessness. The PCB affected the employee outcomes in ways including deviant workplace behaviors (Hart, Thomson & Huning, 2016; Ishaq & Shamsheer, 2016). Hussain (2016) argued employees tended to show negative behaviors and attitudes when PCB occurred. PCB was also related to perceptions of unfairness and inequity and could trigger employee dissent (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2015; De Ruyter et al., 2016; Tompru, Rousseau & Hansen, 2015). Gupta, Agarwal, and Khatri (2016) also found an adverse relationship between PCB and support work outcome. Individual differences or situational influences could factor into the survivors' feelings of unfairness (Walker & Karau, 2016).

The way an organization managed its downsizing event impacted the survivors' perception of fairness, organizational commitment and intent to seek employment elsewhere (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). The perceived breach caused an affective reaction leading to diminished effort and behavioral engagement (Arshad, 2016). This violation of expectations was most painful when the employee perceived the process and outcomes were unfair (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012).

According to Wang and Hsieh (2014), the feeling of violation often resulted in a variety of negative attitudes and behaviors, such as reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors and workplace deviance (Wang & Hsieh, 2014). According to Cassell (2014) and Mai, Ellis, Christian, and Porter (2016), a high turnover rate by survivors was also a consequence of layoffs. These effects were harmful to employees and the performance of the organization. In addition to a high turnover rate, the costs associated with recruiting and staffing also decreased the intended positive financial and operational effects of downsizing.

PCB was negatively related to employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Wang & Hsieh, 2014). Employees who experienced organizational change were more likely to seek employment elsewhere and leave their current organization (Arshad, 2016). Arshad (2016) further argued employees departed the organization after downsizing events due to a PCB, which included uncertainty concerning the future role of a survivor within the organization and anxiety stemming from the fear of further downsizing and job insecurity. Empirical investigations linked undesirable consequences such as decreased motivation, lower employee satisfaction, lower levels of trust between employees and the top management team, reduced coworker support, lowered productivity, decreased creativity, and reduced organizational commitment (Day et al., 2012).

A positive relationship existed between PCB and employees' efforts to find other employment (Clinton & Guest, 2013; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). Boyd (2013) argued a higher turnover rate resulted from downsizing. Dissent triggering agents such as PCB,

were associated with a decrease in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee performance as well as an increase in turnover intentions (De Ruiter et al., 2016). Rayton and Yalabik (2014) also argued PCB reflected employees' feelings of resource loss, and those feelings impacted work engagement through their impact on job satisfaction. A study by Piccoli and De Witte (2015) also showed a positive correlation among job insecurity, PCB, distributive injustice, and emotional exhaustion. Davis, Trevor, and Jie (2015) argued a history of layoffs by an organization increased the associated likelihood of voluntary turnover.

Paille and Raineri (2016) posited a lessened negative effect of PCB existed when an organization supported its employees and provided trustworthy leadership. Trust was a key variable that contributed to shaping effective relationships between employees and leadership. According to Paille and Raineri (2016), trust in the organization helped overcome frustration by avoiding the emergence of any form of disturbance or discomfort that affected contributions to the organization when a perceived PCB occurred. Paille and Raineri (2016) asserted a manager who was trustworthy helped his or her subordinated avoid feelings of vulnerability, overcame related frustrations, and reduced their tendency to display undesirable work-related outcomes resulting from perceptions of PCB. Development of trust resulted from a general feeling that the manager demonstrated availability, competence, coherence, discretion, equity, integrity, loyalty, transparency, the fulfillment of promises, and receptivity (Paille & Raineri, 2016). Proper information about the change enhanced trust and created a sense of urgency among the employee base and served as an emotional buffer, which prevented a breach of

the psychological contract as a primary and impulsive response to an organizational change (van den Heuvel, Schalk & van Assen, 2015).

Survivor Syndrome

During the past 10 years, research shifted from the employees who left the company because of downsizing, to the employees who remained with the company after corporate downsizing (Abejdid, 2012). Boyd, Tuckey, and Winefield (2014) argued downsizing had injurious effects on the wellbeing and motivation of retained employees. Abejdid (2012) advanced the notion that survivors of corporate downsizing experience changes in emotions and attitudes to the same degree of negativity as the victims of downsizing. Corporate downsizing was common in the business world. Brenner, Andreeva, Theorell, Hanson, and Westerlund (2014) highlighted the need for mental health policies to address survivors of corporate downsizing. Brenner et al. also suggested employers and health professionals should be cognizant of health conditions among employees during layoffs because of a higher prevalence of depression associated with the exposure to the downsizing event.

Organizations no longer used downsizing as a singular event to reduce expenses and remain competitive (Gandolfi, 2014). According to Gandolfi (2014), 65% of firms that downsized in a given year did so the following year. Lewis (2013) indicated no significant difference in the level of job satisfaction reported by employees who survived downsizing more than one time versus those who survived downsizing only one time. However, surviving multiple layoff events caused the similar emotional stress multiple times for the employees.

Organizational leaders believed survivors of layoff events would be grateful, worked harder, and became more productive in hopes of maintaining employment rather than becoming a casualty in future downsizing events (Jenkins, 2012). These organizational leaders did not realize survivors were subject to emotional stress associated with job uncertainty and an inability to develop needed coping skills (Jenkins, 2012). Managers within these organizations also failed to account for the stress related to increased workload, loss of relationships with impacted employees, organizational change in general, and multiple downsizing events (Jenkins, 2012).

Downsizing had negative effects on the survivors' organizational commitment, work motivation, and innovative behavior (Marques, Galended, Cruz, & Ferreira, 2012; Razzaq, Ayu, Arzu, & Aslam 2013) and aligned with the results of the Jamal and Khan (2013) study that revealed negative impact to the survivors' psychological welfare. Survivor syndrome referred to conditions experienced by the surviving employee (Cassell, 2014). Survivor syndrome was a psycho-social problem characterized by low morale and weak commitment to the organization (Cassell, 2014).

Survivor syndrome occurred because organizations neglected and were not prepared to provide adequate support to the survivors (Jenkins, 2012). Besides experiencing increased job insecurity and powerlessness, the remaining staff was faced with greater role stressors and responsibilities, which placed pressure on their physical, psychological, and social resources (Boyd et al., 2014; van Dick et al., 2016). Modrek, Hamad, and Cullen (2015) argued increased job security, feelings of powerlessness, increased workload, changes in job scope, and sympathy for laid off workers also

affected the survivors' mental health. Smollan (2014) argued links existed among stress, lack of control, and negative emotions. Modrek et al., (2015) posited organizational stress affected employee turnover, productivity, and firm performance. The resulting resource depletion led to deteriorations in health and positive work attitudes (Boyd et al., 2014).

Van Dick et al., (2016) suggested reduced organizational identification was an explanation for survivor syndrome. Boyd (2013) argued many of the survivors remained suspicious of top management and questioned their stability and longevity within the organization. Fraher (2013) argued that employees working in a downsized environment reported greater levels of stress, distraction, suspicion of management, lack of trust, morale, and organizational commitment. Reinardy (2013) indicated that layoff survivors had depleted trust, morale, and job satisfaction, and experienced various degrees of burnout and intended to leave their current organization. Rumbles and Rees (2013) suggested despite having policies and procedures in place, organizational leaders communicated change badly, did very little to protect employee wellbeing in times of stress, and did little to nothing to alleviate employee stress when they were aware of the stress.

Organizational Commitment

According to Saha (2016), the three components of organizational commitment included affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The purpose of this study was relevant to increasing affective commitment. I further addressed affective commitment as a component of organizational commitment in this study.

Employee engagement was the key success driver for any organization (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). Sinha and Trivedi (2014) also noted high levels of employee engagement led to higher retention rates, improved performance, enhanced customer loyalty, and increased stakeholder satisfaction. Organizational success depended upon maximizing the talents of its workforce (Rai & Lakshman, 2014). An organization could not sustain long term success with a focus only towards good technology, training and development programs; it need to focus on the relationship between the employer and employee (Katarina, 2015).

Organizational commitment (OC) referred to the bond employees experienced with their organization and influenced whether a person remained on the job (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011), and willingness to remain with the firm in the future (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). OC, or employee loyalty, was the degree to which an employee identified with the organization, accepted organizational goals, and wanted to continue actively participating in that organization (Newstrom & Davis, 2002; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). Newstrom and Davis (2002) posited OC often reflected the employees' belief in the mission and goals of the firm, willingness to expend effort towards personal or organizational accomplishment, and intentions to continue working at the current place of employment.

Fairness was a crucial factor that influenced the commitment of employees toward their employers and fairly treated employees were more committed (van Dierendonck & Jacobs, 2012). Newstrom and Davis (2002) noted commitment was usually stronger among employees with long tenures, and these employees did not take

the thought of leaving organizations lightly. According to Hellriegel and Slocum (2011), strong organizational commitment was characterized by:

- A support of and acceptance of the organization's goals and values
- A willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization
- A desire to remain with the organization

According to Saha (2016), job satisfaction, leadership style, and organizational climate were significant factors of organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment applied to the entire corporation and went beyond loyalty and represented a broader work-related attitude that was greater than job satisfaction (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011). If the employee could not expect the organization to provide returns on his or her contributions to the organization, the individual responded by lowering investments, including one's commitment to the organization (Solinger, Hoffmans, Bal, & Jansen, 2015). As noted by Jamal and Khan (2013), committed workers contributed to the organization in a more positive way than less committed workers.

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was a core component of organizational commitment (Mercurio, 2015). As a core component of organizational commitment, affective commitment (AC) referred to the emotional attachment workers felt toward an organization and reflected through identification with and involvement in the organization (Xiong, Lin, Li, & Wang, 2016). AC referred to the feelings of belonging and a sense of attachment to the corporation (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2015). AC related

to how much employees desired to remain with the current employer and was critical because a positive relationship existed among AC, employee turnover, absenteeism, organization citizenship behavior, and job performance (Cassell, 2014; Kim, & Park, 2015). Employees with a healthy sense of affective commitment felt valued, acted as ambassadors for their organization and were great assets to the company (van der Werf, 2014). Uen, Chen, Chen, and Lin, (2016) argued PCB by the employer was negatively related to the survivors' affective commitment.

A decrease in survivors' affective commitment in work environments existed after a reduction in force (Davis, Trevor, & Jie, 2015; Jamal & Khan, 2013). The challenge for organizational leaders and this study is to identify strategies that increase affective commitment to the organization after a disruptive change event such as downsizing. Guo and Giacobbe-Miller (2012) revealed practices that enhanced justice aligned with survivors' evaluations of their outcomes after the layoff event and related to survivors' positive attitudes and behavior reactions. Thus, a strategy that aligned the needs of the employees and the needs of the organization provided mutual benefit.

Strategies to Support Survivors

Business leaders had a greater understanding of the business side of downsizing than the emotional side of downsizing (Jenkins, 2012). Business schools prepared leaders to analyze data and make business decisions but did not teach leaders to deal with employee emotions (Jenkins, 2012). As argued by Jenkins (2012), organizations must recognize the significance of the human factor in the success of any change initiative and make a concentrated effort to address any issues that may arise.

Because of competitive markets, organizations needed to find ways to reduce labor costs while mitigating the adverse impacts of downsizing (Ko & Yeh, 2013). Organizational changes, such as a reduction in force evoked emotional responses from the employee base (Mehta, 2016). Because employees were integral to the success of any organization, it was equally important to identify and understand the strategies needed to increase affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event.

Organizations needed to manage their human resources effectively to sustain success during challenging global fluctuations (Behery, Abdallah, Parakand, & Kukuluru, 2016).

The survivor's commitment to remain employed by the organization was guided by an emotional bond with the leader (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Jenkins (2012) revealed organizational leaders had a significant role in minimizing survivors' emotional stress. Therefore, according to Jenkins (2012), surviving employees needed specific leadership behaviors about inspiration and encouragement after a reduction in force.

Understanding methods to integrate the needs of the survivors with new and leaner organizational imperative happened if the organization was aware of attitudinal and behavioral needs of its employees, and implemented strategies acceptable to all stakeholders with the intent to produce minimal organizational disorder (Jamal & Khan, 2013). Middle managers played a valuable role in implementing positive changes after a downsizing event (Norman, Butler, & Ranft, 2013). The way a manager responded to the surviving employees set the stage for future interactions between the manager and employee. Employees were more likely to turn to an organizational leader in response to the PCB (De Ruyter et al., 2016). De Ruyter et al. (2016) suggested the way the manager

responded to an employee's initial dissent about PCB influenced subsequent interactions between the manager and employee, which in turn influenced whether employees reduced their commitment and discretionary efforts or engaged in counterproductive behaviors. Morgan and Harris (2015) suggested managers needed to develop interventions that reduced the negative effects and improved employee mental health after layoffs.

Conceptually, organizational commitment was one of the first phenomena to consider when dynamic improvement of the employee organization bond came to mind (Klein et al., 2012; Solinger et al., 2015). Considering the high prevalence of PCB associated with downsizing and its negative ramifications, it was important to understand how it influenced the survivors. In alignment with Herzberg's two-factor theory, Bratton (2013) agreed a bad work environment was a demotivator for employees. Abejdid (2012) suggested achieving organizational specific work objectives depended on the support and welfare of the employees.

In addition to a greater sense of job insecurity, downsizing was likely to include an increased workload for the survivors (Modrek & Cullen, 2013). After downsizing events, a new organizational structure existed, existing routines changed, and employees needed to create different ways of working (Long, 2013). Low et al. (2016) recommended creating psychological contracts that allowed employees to contribute in desirable ways and received attractive inducements. Organizational leaders who presented employees with an opportunity to contribute in desirable ways and provided attractive inducements did better in retaining talented employees (Low et al., 2016).

Chen and Mykletun (2015) encouraged organizations to consider the importance of organizational culture and alignment of that culture with communications to the employees.

Training was an important source of employee motivation that allowed them to achieve sustainability in the work setting (Paille & Raineri, 2016). However, the training needed to meet the professional needs of the employee. Training enhanced employees' capabilities and fostered employees' concerns for the organization (Paille & Raineri, 2016), showed commitment from the organization, and gave the employees a stronger feeling of structure (Collins, 2015).

Solinger et al., (2015) ascertained many individuals bounced back from a PCB. However, Solinger et al., (2015) indicated each employee's affective commitment, which could be impacted by various personal and organizational factors, would return at an individual rate. This was excellent news for organizational leaders who had a need to increase affective commitment.

In times of crisis, organizations depended heavily on the efforts of employees. Managers often felt unprepared to assist the organization after a downsizing event. However, Jenkins (2012) argued specific leadership behaviors positively influenced the level of stress experienced by surviving employees. Leaders must be competent in practicing the leadership behaviors that were most conducive to helping employees prevent or minimize survivor syndrome (Jenkins, 2012).

Literature Review Summary

A review of the professional and academic literature on strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing indicated considerable research on the construct of downsizing. Quantitative and qualitative research existed on downsizing, reasons for downsizing, and the employees who did not survive the downsizing event. I could locate a scant amount of literature pertaining to the survivors of corporate downsizing events. However, I did not uncover any research specific to increasing affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event referencing Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory. In addition to presenting information on downsizing, I also presented information related to downsizing. The related information in the literature review included areas on psychological contract, psychological contract breach, survivor syndrome, organizational commitment, and affective commitment.

Herzberg's two-factor theory addressed hygiene factors such as job security, personal life, working conditions, supervision, and interpersonal relations. These hygiene factors were adversely affected during a downsizing event. Hygiene factors had little motivational value when presented, but tended to act as *demotivators* when not presented. During the literature review, I did not uncover any research specific to increasing affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event referencing Herzberg's motivation hygiene theory. The inability to find information specific to increasing affective commitment after downsizing supported the need for research and the research question. One of the purposes of this study and all scholarly research was to

add to existing literature. This study added to existing literature relevant to supporting survivors after a corporate downsizing event.

Transition

Section 1 of the qualitative single case study included the foundation of the study, the background of the problem, and the problem and purpose statements. Section 1 also included conceptual framework, the significance of the study, and a review of existing literature. Discussion included material on downsizing, organizational commitment, affective commitment, and the effects of survivor syndrome. Section 1 also included subsections pertaining to psychological contract and psychological contract breach. Section 1 ended with a discussion of the need to identify strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing. I used this study to identify the strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing. Section 2 included the project and associated elements to complete the study. The study concluded with Section 3, which included my findings and conclusions from the qualitative single case study.

Section 2: The Project

This section includes the purpose of the study, the role of the researcher, and the participants. Section 2 also included research method and research design. Section 2 continued with emphasis on data collection instruments and techniques, data organization, and data analysis. Section 2 concluded with methods to ensure reliability.

Purpose Statement

The goal of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. The targeted population consisted of departmental leaders at a global information technology/telecommunications company who had successful experience in improving affective commitment to their organizations after a downsizing event. Participants of this study were located in the Midwest United States and experienced a downsizing event within the past 4 years.

According to Lindner (2014), results presented by the Urban Institute suggested families became less stable when one parent lost a job. The implication for positive social change was to stabilize the emotional state of the surviving employee, thus enabling more stable families and local communities.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was the primary instrument in qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher's presence in the lives of the invited participants was fundamental to the methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). An excellent case study

researcher, like any other social scientist, strived for the highest ethical standards while conducting research (Yin, 2014). Qualitative researchers relied heavily on thorough interviewing and sound interview techniques (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To ensure the protection of the human subjects involved in this study, I adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines presented in the Belmont Report.

I, as the researcher, used a strategy to keep myself disciplined about reflection when gathering data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this study, an interview protocol or guide was used to ensure a structured approach. The detailed interview was the typical type of interview used in qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, I used comprehensive interviews for this study.

Qualitative researchers used rigor in the design of qualitative studies and emulated the scientific method by striving for empirical groundedness, transferability, member checking, and minimization of bias (Thyer, Franklin, Cody, & Ballan, 2009). I brought a unique perspective to this study and fully acknowledged my biases based on previous and current leadership roles and experiences within the information technology/telecommunications industry. In my current role, I delivered more than 85 severance packages in two states (Florida and Kansas) for the same company within the previous two years. I have also delivered more than 150 severance packages during the past 9 years within the same industry. During each downsizing event, the human resources department provided a prepared script for use during the conversations with the impacted employees. Human resources also provided transitional services including counseling to the impacted employees. However, human resources did not provide any

guidance or support material for the surviving individual contributors or leaders of the impacted organizations. Past downsizing experiences were a driver for this study. Additionally, I acknowledged my perceptions on organizational downsizing may have negatively or positively affected the results of this qualitative single case study.

It was impossible to remove all bias. However, member checking, data triangulation, and an interview protocol were used to mitigate bias in this study. In member checking, the researcher recapitulated the information received during the interview before finalizing the study and requested reactions, corrections, or further insights from the participants of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The strategy of revealing research material to the informants ensured the researcher accurately captured and translated the informants' viewpoints into data (Krefting, 1991). Triangulation was based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data (Krefting, 1991). An interview protocol ensured a structured approach to each interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The protocol increased reliability of case study research and was intended to guide the researcher in data collection (Yin, 2014).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), strategies for limiting bias included:

- Conducting an audit trail of the data collection and analytic strategies.
- Building in time for cross checking, member checking, and time sampling.
- Describing how analysis used previous literature and included checking and rechecking the data for possible alternative explanations.

Participants

Organizational changes caused by a reduction in force produced complex and often mixed results that may have lowered morale and long duration affective commitment to the organization (Dessaussure-DeCoster, 2013). The targeted population consisted of organizational leaders at a global information technology/telecommunications company. Participants were directors, who had successfully experienced improving affective commitment to their organizations after a downsizing event. Participants of this study were located in the Midwest United States, and led organizations impacted by a downsizing event within the past 4 years.

Gaining access to the participants to collect data often required approaching the organization's gatekeepers via email, phone call, or letter (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yin (2014) suggested use of a case study protocol including a letter to leaders of the organization providing an overview of the case study, data collection procedures, and a request for access to the participants. Cone and Foster (2006) suggested using family, friends, or a dissertation chairperson, who were well connected to gain access to participants. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), large corporations had review boards that required legal reviews of a researcher's request.

A collaborative effort with my human resources business partner assisted in identifying leaders with adequate strategies to support the survivors of downsizing events. Appropriate organizational authorities granted formal approval for access to the organizational leaders. Building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms of reciprocity, and sensitively considering ethical issues should be of concern to the

qualitative researcher (Mashall & Rossman, 2016). Professional relationships with the participants already existed because I am a management employee of the company examined in this research. Since I am native to the setting and familiar with the informants, I was aware of the concerns cited by Marshall and Rossman (2016) about transitioning to the researcher role and uncovering corporate ethical and political dilemmas. Marshall and Rossman also noted closeness to the people and phenomenon provided a subjective understanding that greatly increased the quality of the data. I established myself as a researcher and followed qualitative research protocol, by following the recommendation of Yin (2014) to send a letter of introduction to all departments and interviewees. Once established as a researcher, Cone and Foster (2006) recommended providing an informed consent agreement informing the participants outlining the purpose of the study and the roles of the participant and researcher. For the protection of human subjects and in accordance with the Walden University Doctoral Study Rubric, Cone and Foster recommended Institutional Review Board approval.

As recommended by Yin (2014), I ensured confidentiality by using an alphanumeric sequencing rather than legal names of the participants. As an example, I used *P001* to identify the first participant. I ensured the participants of the study did not feel pressured by my current position and I selected participants at a higher grade level within the company.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Research methods included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Cone & Foster, 2006). According to Flewellen (2013), using a qualitative design allowed the researcher an opportunity to interact with participants who experienced the phenomenon and to focus on obtaining a deeper understanding of a problem or issue. Qualitative approaches involved exploration and interpretation of events that did not readily lend themselves to consistent measurement and statistical analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Based on the nature of the research problem, I selected a qualitative research method.

In contrast, quantitative researcher tested theories and addressed hypotheses using statistical analysis addressing closed-ended questions (Cone & Foster, 2006). According to Yin (2014), mixed method researchers combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques and methods. Based on the desire for a deep contextual analysis of the events, I selected a qualitative single case study. Due to time constraints of a doctoral study and level of effort to complete a qualitative and quantitative study, the mixed method approach did not fit the purpose of this study.

Research Design

I chose a single case study design for this study because the design was appropriate. A case study was appropriate for use in this situation to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2014). Using a case study enabled intensity and depth and facilitated me, as the

researcher, to explore the interaction between *case* and context, and to obtain a holistic and real-world perspective while studying phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). Using a case study placed emphasis on a full contextual analysis of fewer events or conditions and their interrelations (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). According to Cooper and Schindler (2003), using a case study enabled an emphasis on details, which provided valuable insights into problem solving, evaluation, and understanding strategies. Other designs, such as ethnographic and grounded theory were not appropriate for this study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), ethnographers studied human groups and sought to understand how they collectively formed and maintained a culture. Ethnographers typically studied groups, communities, organizations, or social movements through long-term immersion in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not intend to use ethnography as a design because I did not immerse myself in the setting. Grounded theory research is a design that was not appropriate for applied research and involved an overall approach with a primary focus of generating theories that explained the interactions or settings of interest (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Grounded theory researchers sought to build explanations of social phenomena by inductively progressing from data into theory (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I did not use grounded theory because I did not intend to develop a theory. The purpose of this study was to explore what strategies organizational leaders used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing; thus, grounded theory and ethnography were not appropriate.

According to Yin (2014), a case study enabled researchers to focus on a *case* and retained a holistic, real-world perspective. Case study contributed to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2014). According to Yin, the need for case study research arose from the desire to understand complex social phenomena. Qualitative researchers used case studies because of explicit focus on context and dynamic interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), case studies enabled intensity and depth, as well as exploring the interaction between *case* and content. In this study, the primary objective was to explore organizational downsizing from the perspective of a leader with the task of improving affective commitment to the organization.

Population and Sampling

Population

Organizational changes caused by a reduction in force produced complex and often mixed results that may lower morale and long duration affective commitment to the organization (Dessausure-DeCoster, 2013). The targeted population consisted of departmental leaders at a global information technology/telecommunications company who had successful experience in improving affective commitment to their organizations after a downsizing event. Participants of this study were located in the Midwest United States and experienced a downsizing event within the past 4 years.

Sampling

Developed sampling decisions are crucial for any study's soundness (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Castro (2013), a nonprobabilistic, purposive sampling

technique best fit a case study because the knowledge and lived experiences of participants would help in gathering in-depth information. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lay in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study (Suri, 2011). Suri (2011) posited information-rich cases were those from which one learned much about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling proved effective when limited numbers of primary data sources were utilized due to the nature of research (Dudovskiy, 2016). This case study involved specific criteria. Therefore, criterion sampling was the selected method of purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling was very strong in quality assurance (Patton, 1990).

Data Saturation

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the sample size in qualitative research depended on many complex factors. A guiding principle in qualitative research was the concept of saturation (Mason, 2010). Failure to reach data saturation may negatively impact content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). That was not the case with this study as data saturation was reached. Case studies may consist of a single person or organization (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This study was completed with one organization. Qualitative case studies averaged one to five informants and should provide ample opportunity to identify themes of a case (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

I followed the guiding principle in qualitative research and interviewed a minimum of 5 participants and reached data saturation. Data saturation occurred when there was enough information to replicate the study, the researcher noticed repetitive

patterns and sensed that further data collection not longer benefited the study, and further coding was no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Walker, 2012). As recommended by Fusch and Ness (2012), I ensured data saturation by conducting interviews with a minimum of 5 participants. According to O'Reilly and Parker (2013), this point demonstrated adequate and quality data existed for a study.

Ethical Research

Developing a sound proposal entailed building an argument that was cogent and persuasive, and demonstrated the research had an exquisite sensitivity to both the procedural and the everyday ethical issues inherent in research with human beings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Specific ethical considerations arose for all research involving human subjects. According to Yin (2014), the researcher needed to show a plan to protect the human subjects in the case study. Yin posited, as part of the protections, that the researcher was responsible for conducting the case study with special care and sensitivity. According to Yin, the care usually involved:

- Gaining informed consent from all persons who may be part of the case study, by alerting them to the nature of the case study and formally soliciting their volunteerism in participating in the study.
- Protecting those who participated in the study from any harm, including avoiding the use of any deception in your study.
- Protecting the confidentiality and privacy of the informants so that as a position, even such as being on a roster to receive requests to participate in some future study, whether conducted by the researcher or anyone else.

- Taking special precautions that might be needed to protect especially vulnerable groups.
- Selecting participants equitably, without unfairly including or excluding groups of people from the research.

Before interviews began, I informed the participants they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason by contacting me via phone call or email. Upon receipt of a phone call or email, participation by the informant would end immediately. The informant would receive a written confirmation to terminate participation in the study.

Informed Consent

Most case studies were about human subjects (Yin, 2014). Therefore, there was a need to protect the participants. As recommended by Yin (2014), I was responsible for conducting the case study with particular care and sensitivity. Successful navigation of the human subject approval process in research required an understanding of ethical principles guiding the conduct of research involving human beings (Cugini, 2015). Researchers must ensure protection of the human subjects and adhere to ethical principles and guidelines (Murray, 2014; Musoba, Jacob, & Robinson, 2014). As presented by the representatives of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979), I followed the guidelines presented in the Belmont Report. Marshall and Rossman (2016) recommended the researcher respect the privacy, anonymity and the right to participate or not to participate with the subjects' free consent.

As recommended by Yin (2014), I maintained confidentiality by using alphanumeric sequencing rather than legal names of the participants. As an example, I used *P001* to identify the first participant. Prior to each interview, participants reviewed and signed an informed consent form.

Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative research methodologies were well established important modes of inquiry of the social sciences and applied fields including management (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Primary methods of data collection used in qualitative inquiry included intensive interviewing, observation, participant observation, and analyzing artifacts and material cultures, including documents (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2014). In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The researcher's presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study was fundamental to the methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As the researcher and primary data collection instrument, I created an interview protocol (Appendix A) consisting of six questions (Appendix B) for use during the interview process. Yin (2014) defined interview as the mode of data collection involving verbal information from a case study participant and referred to it as one of the most important sources of case study evidence.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) recommended semistructured interviews for multisite case studies. The semistructured interviews consisted of the six questions located in Appendix B. As Yin (2014) suggested, I catered to the interviewees' schedules

and availabilities. Each participant had an opportunity to schedule an interview within a two-week window at her or his convenience after permission was been granted by the appropriate authorities. I conducted all interviews via telephone conversation. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman, my approach conveyed an attitude that the participant's views were valuable and insightful. I used a semistructured interview technique and an interview protocol (Appendix A) that provided specific instructions for me serving as the researcher, and six questions (Appendix B) for the participants during semistructured interviews with all informants. All interviews followed guidance provided by Alsaawi (2014) and included five phases: introduction, warm-up, main body, cool off, and closure.

An excellent case study researcher, like any other social scientist, strived for the highest ethical standards while conducting research (Yin, 2014). Qualitative data analysis was a search for general statements and themes and involved reducing data into a manageable size including themes (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Marshall & Rossman 2016). In alignment with Yin (2014), I searched for patterns, insights, and concepts. The conceptual plan for coding and identifying themes during the analysis phase included a manual approach based on the collected data. I followed the typical analytic procedures presented by Marshall and Rossman (2016):

- Organized the data
- Immersed in the data
- Generated case summaries and possible categories and themes
- Coded the data

- Offered interpretations through analytic memos
- Searched for alternative understandings
- Wrote the report to present the data

It is important that qualitative researchers used rigor in the design of qualitative studies and emulate the scientific method by striving for empirical groundedness, transferability, member checking, and minimization of bias (Thyer et al., 2009). As a means of quality control during this process, I used data triangulation and member checking. Data triangulation was a strategy to enhance the quality of research and was appropriate for case study research (Krefting, 1991). Data triangulation was based on the idea of using multiple perspectives to ensure a thorough investigation of the phenomenon (Krefting, 1991). Member checking involved sharing data and interpretations with participants before writing the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking involved continually testing the data, categories, interpretations, and conclusions (Krefting, 1991). As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2016), I provided summaries to participants and requested reactions, corrections, and further insights into the study. To ensure qualitative validity, the i checked for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures. Using research methods that ensured data recordings were accurate, and the interpretations of data were empirical, logical, and replicable were essential to increased reliability and validity in qualitative studies (Thyer et al., 2009). The Walden University IRB approved my study before data collection commenced.

Data Collection Technique

Prior to me collecting data, the Walden University IRB granted approval. My assigned IRB approval number is 06-20-17-0540460. After IRB approval, the data collection technique for this single case study commenced with contact to the appropriate leadership authority within my current employer. After approval was granted, I sought assistance from my human resources business partner (HRBP) in identifying organizational leaders within the company who had successfully increased affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event. We used turnover rate pre and postdownsizing as a determining factor to determine increased affective commitment. Upon approval from my current employer and in alignment with Marshall and Rossman (2016), I used a semistructured interview technique via telephone conversation and interviews with the management level participants. As recommended by Yin (2014), I maintained confidentiality by using alphanumeric sequencing (e.g., *P001*, *P002*) rather than legal names of the participants. I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) that provided specific instructions, and the same six questions (Appendix B) for all the participants. Use of a protocol was a way of increasing the reliability of case study and guided me, as the researcher in carrying out data collection (Yin, 2014). Although I employed a semistructured interview technique, according to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the interview protocol offered more structure to the interview process.

I executed data collection and interviews in full compliance with the existing regulations and ethical standards set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. To minimize the perception of coercion in participation in the study, the

participants of the study were assured there were no monetary incentives or risks in participating in the study. Before the interview, participants were made aware they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason by contacting me via phone call or email. Upon receipt of a phone call or email, participation by the participant would have ended immediately. The participant would have received a written confirmation to terminate her or his participation in the study. Had a participant elected to withdraw from the study, I would have recruited additional participants. The data collected from the withdrawn participant would have been removed from the study and stored for 5 years from the completion of my doctoral program. I eliminated the possibility of data corruption and protected the rights of participants by storing all data collected in a safe for a minimum of 5 years from completion of my doctoral program. All data will be destroyed after 5 years from completion of my doctoral study. All study participants signed a consent form that documented each participant's permission to conduct and electronically record the interviews.

Interviews had particular benefits. The interviews yielded data in an expedited manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Interviews allowed me, as the researcher, to understand the lived experiences of the participants. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), interviews also had limitations. Interviews were often intimate encounters that depended on building trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Marshall and Rossman also noted, in some cases, participants could be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing all details of the lived experiences. Yin (2014) cited response bias, reflexivity,

and inaccuracies due to poor recall as weaknesses of interviews as a data collection method.

After Walden IRB approval, the data collection technique for this single case study commenced with contact with my current employer. I sought assistance from my human resources business partner (HRBP) in identifying, contacting, and assuring confidentiality of organizational leaders within the company who had successfully increased affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event. Upon approval from my current employer and in alignment with Marshall and Rossman, using a semistructured interview technique, I conducted the interviews via telephone conversation with the participants. I recorded all interviews with a voice recorder. Audiotapes provided a more accurate rendition of any interview than taking notes (Yin, 2014). I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) that provided specific instructions for me, as the researcher, and six interview questions (Appendix B) that were used for all the participants.

Member Checking

Trustworthiness was essential in qualitative research (Connelly, 2016). Member checking involved sharing data and interpretations with participants before writing the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Member checking was a form of participant validation and is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Krefting, 1991). To ensure qualitative validity, I, serving as the researcher, checked for the accuracy of the findings by employing member checking. Using research methods that ensured that the data recordings were accurate, and the interpretations of data were empirical, logical, and

replicable were essential to increased reliability and validity in qualitative studies (Thyer et al., 2009).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), the researcher needed to devise a way to ask the participant if the information recorded during the interview was correct. Baillie (2015) listed member checking as an example of a technique that promoted rigor in qualitative research. In member checking, the transcribed data were checked and verified by the participants of the study (Widodo, 2014). After collecting and evaluating data from all participants, I completed member checking by meeting with the interviewees individually and confirmed the interpretations and findings of the data.

Data Organization Technique

I executed data collection and interviews in full compliance with the existing regulations and ethical standards set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University. As recommended by Marshall and Rossman (2016) and Yin (2014), I transcribed and coded the data gathered during the interviews.

As recommended by Cone and Foster (2006), I stored all raw data collected during interviews including all handwritten notes, electronic files, and audio tape recordings in a safe at my home. I will shred all hand notes, destroy all voice recorded tapes, and permanently erase all software files associated with the study after 5-years from the completion date of my doctoral program.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data analysis usually included

reducing accumulated data to a manageable size, developing summaries, and looking for patterns (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). In alignment with Yin (2014), during the analysis phase, I searched for patterns, insights, or concepts that offered promise. In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis were congruent as the researcher built a consistent interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), each phase of data analysis entailed data reduction and interpretation. Data reduction involved breaking down the collected data into manageable chunks of data (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Data interpretation involved bringing meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

In case study analysis, one technique was to use a logic that involves pattern matching (Yin, 2014). As a part of this study, I followed the typical analytic procedures presented by Marshall and Rossman (2016), which fell into seven phases:

1. Organized the data
2. Immersed in the data
3. Generated case summaries and possible categories and themes
4. Coded the data
5. Offered interpretations through analytic memos
6. Searched for alternative understandings
7. Wrote the report to present the study

As noted by Yin (2014), qualitative data analysis computer assisted tools such as HyperRESEARCH or NVivo® helped code and categorize large amounts of data. Based

on a relatively small amount of data gathered through semistructured interviews, I manually coded and classified the data. As noted by Yin (2014), I was the main analyst and I analyzed the data as appropriate for this case study research.

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Herzberg's two factor theory developed in the 1950s. Therefore, I analyzed data from a perspective of Herzberg's two factor theory. Herzberg (1965) proposed a theory that focused on two essential factors; workplace characteristics that create job satisfaction, and workplace characteristics that created job dissatisfaction.

Most qualitative researchers studying human phenomena collected data via interviews (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso & Blythe, 2014). Conducting interviews, transcribing the data gathered, and analyzing the information required time and effort (Carter et al., 2014). The application of triangulation enhanced reliability of results and attainment of data saturation (Carter et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data triangulation involved time, space and persons (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data source triangulation involved data collection from people, groups, families, and communities to gain multiple perspectives and validation (Carter et al., 2014). Data triangulation was appropriate for this study. Data triangulation resulted in a broader understanding of the phenomena (Carter et al., 2014).

Reliability and Validity

Historically, concerns existed about the trustworthiness or goodness of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). To ensure findings in qualitative study were valid, researches must ensure the trustworthiness of the research (Urhuogo, Addo,

& Williams, 2014). Yin (2014) recommended utilizing reliability and validity in qualitative case study research. Yin (2014) defined reliability as the consistency and repeatability of research processes in a case study. According to Yin (2014), reliability demonstrated operations of a study are repeatable with similar results.

According to Kihn and Ihantola (2015), validity referred to the extent to which drawn conclusions provided an accurate description of the research, and measured what it was intended to measure. Researchers determined validity by asking a series of questions, and often looked for the answers in the research of others (Krefting, 1991). The essential criterion for any instrument, whether in the physical or behavioral sciences, was that it produced data that were reliable (Cone & Foster, 2006). Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested a qualitative researcher needed to address certain key issues and considerations to demonstrate that the study was well thought out, responded to criteria or canons for good research practice, and was likely to be implemented with an ethical mindfulness. To address the concerns of trustworthiness, Marshall and Rossman (2016) put forward alternative constructs to capture these concerns; creditability, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. I discussed these alternative constructs further in this paper.

To ensure reliability and validity in this study, I used member checking and data triangulation. Member checking involved continually testing the researcher's data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions (Krefting, 1991). The member checking strategy involved revealing research material to the participants to ensure that I had accurately translated the participants' perspectives into data (Krefting 1991). Data

triangulation was a strategy that enhanced the quality of research and was based on the idea of utilizing multiple perspectives that ensured a thorough investigation of the phenomenon (Krefting, 1991).

Reliability

It was important that qualitative researchers used rigor in the design of qualitative studies and emulated the scientific method by striving for empirical groundedness, transferability, member checking, and minimization of bias (Thyer et al., 2009). Yin (2014) suggested qualitative researchers needed to document the procedures for their case studies and to document as many of the steps of the procedures as possible. Yin (2014) also recommended using a detailed case study protocol and database.

Member checking was a technique that involved continually testing the research data with informants (Krefting, 1991). Krefting (1991) indicated a method of member checking involved interweaving the contact hours of the participants so that information gathered from one participant checked with another participant before a subsequent interview with the first participant. Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested providing summaries to participants and requesting reactions, corrections, and further insights before writing the study.

Validity

Establishing validity in qualitative research was necessary. Validity in qualitative research was about the appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015). Validity meant a researcher affirmed propositions made during the analysis phase of the study (Urhuogo, Addo, & Williams, 2014). Enhancing validity of a

qualitative study involved triangulation, member checking, and conducting an audit trail. Triangulation was based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data (Krefting, 1991). Member checking involved sharing data and interpretations with participants before writing the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Audit trails provided a transparent way to show how data was collected and managed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

In research, validity involved two essential parts: internal and external. Internal validity encompassed the legitimacy of the results of the study due to the way the groups were selected, data recorded, or analysis performed (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). External validity involved transferability of the results (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013). To ensure qualitative validity, I as the researcher, checked for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Using research methods that ensured that the data recording was accurate, and the interpretations of data were empirical, logical, and replicable was essential to increase reliability and validity in qualitative studies (Thyer et al., 2009). Use of proven procedures ensured the rigor of the study included triangulation, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail.

Creditability

Creditability involved establishing the results of the research were believable (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Creditability depended on the use of rigorous methods of fieldwork, on the creditability of the researcher, and on the fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Polit and Beck (2014) argued ensuring

credibility was one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Member checking was a technique used to establish credibility (Connelly, 2016). Establishing structural coherence enhanced creditability (Krefting, 1991). As recommended by Krefting (1991), I ensured no unexplained inconsistencies existed between the data and recorded interpretations.

Dependability

Dependability related to the consistency of the findings (Krefting, 1991). Because qualitative methods were tailored to the research situation, the exact method of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation must be described (Krefting, 1991). According to Krefting (1991), dependability was enhanced through triangulation and a code-recode procedure. As recommended by Thyer et al. (2009), I addressed dependability through the use of member checking.

Confirmability

Confirmability questions how the collected data supports the findings (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability showed the ways qualitative researchers paralleled the traditional concept of objectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). According to Connelly (2016), confirmability was the degree to which findings were consistent and repeatable. Connelly (2016) asserted qualitative researchers kept detailed notes of all decisions and analysis. As suggested by Krefting (1991), I audited my research to enhance dependability and confirmability of the study.

Data saturation occurred when the researcher noticed the same patterns repetitively, and sensed that little more no need for further data collection (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). While not the case in this study, failure to reach data saturation had an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampered content validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation occurred when there was sufficient data to duplicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information no longer existed, and when further coding was no longer feasible. Data saturation was the point at which no new information or themes existed in the data from the completion of additional interviews (Boddy, 2016). I interviewed 5 participants and continued until I reached a point of repetitive information or data saturation.

Transferability

Transferability referred to the degree to which the research transferred to other contexts (Connelly, 2016). Transferability referred to ways the study's findings were useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). External validity was concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study applied to other situations of a wider population (Polit & Beck, 2014). Krefling (1991) suggested the researcher considered the data rather than the subjects to enhance transferability. Connelly (2016) posited qualitative researchers used rich, detailed data, and were transparent in relation to analysis and trustworthiness. As recommended by Krefling (1991), I determined if the content of the interviews and the behaviors were typical or atypical of the lives of the participants.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, and participants. Section 2 emphasized areas for research methods, research design, data

collection instruments, data collection technique, data organization technique, data analysis, reliability, and validity. Section 3 included the presentation of collected data, implications for social change, and applications for professional practice. Additionally, my findings, recommendations, areas for future research, reflections, and the conclusion completed this research study.

Section 3: Application for Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations used to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing. The central research question was: What strategies did organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations use to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing? The conceptual framework of this study was based on Herzberg's two-factor theory.

The targeted population were directors, who experienced downsizing events within the past 4 years. The data were collected via semistructured telephone interviews. Interviewed participants provided their lived experiences before, during, and after a downsizing event. Absent a formal policy, the participants of the study employed multiple strategies that encompassed focus on the employee-manager relationship, organizational support, internal communications, and training to support survivors of corporate downsizing. The findings were presented in themes to ensure alignment with the research question and ensured the research question was addressed.

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies used by organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations to improve affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event. Between 2003 and 2011, 1.2 million U.S. workers were laid off every year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The survivors considered the downsizing event a breach of the

psychological contract (Katarina, 2015). Therefore, survived employees behaved differently towards their jobs and organization after the downsizing event (Saeed et al., 2013). The overarching research question in this study was: What strategies did organizational leaders of information technology/telecommunications organizations use to improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing?

To discover themes that might provide clarity about strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization, I conducted semistructured interviews with five directors of an international information technology/telecommunications company. Each of these directors experienced downsizing events within the past 4 years. I ensured confidentiality of the participants by not using their names in the study. In addition to conducting semistructured interviews, I used triangulation by reviewing company documentation that was specific to downsizing, employee retention records, and participants' observations. I identified themes related to the central research question of this study. The following themes were identified: employee-manager relationship, organizational support, internal communications, and training.

Theme 1: Employee-Manager Relationship

Trust. The first emergent theme related to the employee-manager relationship. There was a need for trust in the employee manager relationship. According to Paille and Raineri (2015), the development of trust was the result of a general feeling that the manager was available, competent, coherent, discrete, receptive, exhibited equity, integrity, loyalty, transparency, and fulfilled promises. Trust was a significant component of the relationship that contributed to shaping healthy, long-term relationships

between employees and employers (Paille & Raineri, 2015). Under stressful conditions, such as a downsizing event, it was imperative to have trust among members of an organization. P002 argued leadership visibility was key after a downsizing event.

Trust relationships, especially between employees and immediate supervisors had significance in determining work attitudes and behaviors (Xiong et al., 2016). Xiong et al. (2016) also argued a positive relationship existed between an employee's trust and organizational commitment. Xiong et al. (2016) also argued trust emotionally connected leaders and their subordinates. A trustworthy manager decreased the negative experience of a psychological contract breach on work related outcomes (Paille & Raineri, 2015). P005 indicated it was critical that leaders displayed the utmost dignity and respect for those who were leaving the company because the surviving employees were watching how the company representatives treated those employees who left. P003 advised because the survivors had relationships with the impacted employees, the company representatives reassured the survivors the company representatives were supporting the impacted employees the best the company representative could through available programs.

According to P001, a culture of trust and transparency had to be built before the downsizing event. According to P002, being truthful and transparent were important, and it was important to discuss individualized concerns. According to P004, the company representatives had to be as open, honest, and frank with employees as possible. P005 argued leaders had to be forthcoming and tell the employees all you can tell them. Trust and respect were reciprocal.

Employee engagement. Employee engagement was the key success driver for any organization (McManus & Mosca, 2015). Therefore, measuring employee engagement was a crucial aspect of any organization (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). High levels of employee engagement led to higher employee retention rates, improved organizational performance, increased customer satisfaction and loyalty, and increased stakeholder value (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014). Employees became engaged when they felt a return on their personal investment, and also found personal meaning and motivation in their daily work tasks (Sinha & Trivedi, 2014).

As a part of a company initiative, all participants of this study received annual results of the employee engagement survey. Additionally, P001 employed a strategy to build organizational commitment throughout the year and conducted informal surveys periodically to ensure commitment to the organization. According to P001, the informal survey allowed an understanding of the varying levels of commitment within the organization. P002 monitored the service results every day and utilized that information to determine performance. P003 monitored the productivity rate of the department to ensure employee engagement.

According to P004, a timely way to measure employee engagement and the success of strategies to improve commitment involved walking around and talking to people to monitor their emotional state. P004 noted the importance of allowing the employees to know representatives of the company cared about them as employees and as human beings. P005 posited customer satisfaction scores were an indication of the mental state of the employees. P002 indicated the most important indicator of success

after a downsizing event was determined by whether or not your top performers remained with the company. P002 also believed when the top 10% to 15% of the skill set stayed, other members of the organization tended to view that as stability and tended to stay as well.

Theme 2: Organizational Support

The second emergent theme related to operational support. The employees' perceptions of organizational support involved feelings that the organization valued their contributions and cared about their welfare had been linked to their emotional attachment and bond to the organization (Kim, Eisenberger, & Baik, 2016). Leader initiated structure and consideration facilitated perceived organizational commitment and the interactive effects (Kim et al., 2016). P001 argued leaders needed to quickly pivot the employees to focus on things that moved the company forward and ensured the survivors had career paths, deliverables, milestones, and projects. P005 argued the leader had to shift back to the task at hand and refocus the surviving employees on the daily operations of the business.

Perceived organizational support moderated the relationship among work engagement, turnover intentions, and deviant behaviors towards the organization (Shantz, Alfes, & Latham, 2016). High levels of turnover after the downsizing event were detrimental to the organization causing increased hiring and training costs (El Akremi, Colaianni, Portoghese, Galletta, & Battistelli, 2014). To counteract the desire for the top performers to leave the organization, P002 personally mentored selected employees.

P002 talked to the survivors, initiated monthly meetings with the survivors, identified their career interests and assisted with their career paths.

Theme 3: Internal Communications

The third emergent theme related to internal communications. Increasingly, organizations have recognized the importance of internal communication with employees (Mishra, Boynton, & Mishra, 2014). Mishra et al. (2014) argued internal communication was important for building a culture of transparency between management and the employees. Honest and transparent communication was best received when it came from the direct manager (McManus & Mosca, 2015). P001 argued transparency in communication was very important. P001, P004, and P005 argued communication was the best way to improve affective commitment and must start before the downsizing event.

Executives employed a variety of communication methods, including face-to-face communication, to communicate with employees (Mishra et al., 2014). The chosen communication strategy aimed to build trust and engagement with the employee base (Mishra et al., 2014). Positive work environments were characterized by open communication (Mishra et al., 2014). Mishra et al. (2014) further argued employees trusted their manager to the extent the manager demonstrated honesty, transparency, genuine caring, support, and a willingness to listen. P002 removed the formalized meetings and initiated informal face-to-face meetings after a downsizing event. P003 noted team and individual communications had to be handled appropriately.

Theme 4: Training

The fourth emergent theme related to training and development. Training and development benefitted employees, organizations, and acted as an insurance policy because training enhanced performance, efficiency and was positively connected with empowerment and participation (Ramesha, 2014). Trained employees were more likely to successfully cope with major change initiatives (Ramesha, 2014). P002 indicated training had been very helpful in retaining top performing employees. P003 indicated training should take place before and after the downsizing event.

Saha (2016) argued offering training and development opportunities to employees led to responsibility, organizational commitment, and influenced job satisfaction. Providing employees the opportunity to develop their knowledge base and skill generated meaningfulness to the survivors (McManus & Mosca, 2015). Providing training to the employee base assured the employees that organizational leaders desired to facilitate a path for all to reach their full potential (McManus & Mosca, 2015).

Barriers to Implementation

Middle managers were the key actors to organizational change, which was a multilevel phenomenon involving everyone in the organization (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013). However, barriers to implementing strategies to support the survivors existed for these middle managers after the organizational change event. As reported by the participants of the study, barriers to implementing the strategies to support the survivors included cost, geography, and daily workload. P001 concluded all leaders were in a cost reduction mode as a result of the downsizing event. Cost reduction impacted the ability

to travel to employee locations remote of the leader. Video conferences were held in lieu of face-to-face meetings when the leader was unable to travel due to costly travel arrangements.

All participants of this study had employees in remote locations. Thus, geography was a barrier to face-to-face meetings. Video conferences and audio conference calls were held to ensure communication with all employees. P002 used Telepresence when unable to travel for face-to-face meetings.

Daily workload was cited as a barrier to implementation. P002 cited the task of getting away from the day-to-day operation and spending face-to-face time with the employees as a barrier. P002 addressed the barrier by spending more time with the employees during core business hours and spending additionally time after hours doing the administrative work that had to be done.

The findings and themes in this study related directly to the conceptual framework of this study. Specifically addressed in the findings of this study and Herzberg's two factor theory were satisfiers and dissatisfiers for employees. Listed within the findings of this study and Herzberg's two factor theory were hygiene factors including interpersonal relations, status, company policies, and job security. Listed within the findings of this study and Herzberg's two factor theory were motivational theories including growth through training, responsibility, and meaningfulness of the work.

The findings of this study also tied directly to existing literature on effective business practices related to strategies to build trust and improve employee engagement. McManus and Mosca (2015) listed work engagement, a culture of trust, fairness, and

training as factors to build trust and improve employee engagement. Solinger et al. (2015) cited organizational support as a means to increase organizational commitment in a postbreached psychological contract environment. The finding of this study confirmed knowledge in this discipline.

Application to Professional Practice

Employee commitment and engagement were important for every organizational manager (Pangarkar & Kirkwood, 2013). Employee engagement occurred when employees were emotionally, mentally, and physically invested to meet the organization's objectives (Pangarkar & Kirkwood, 2013). Understanding and earning employees' affections and subsequent, exhibited commitment was a significant concern of leaders in corporate America (Mercurio, 2015). Findings in this study may be used to increase affective commitment to the organization after an organizational change in any industry.

According to MaManus and Mosca (2015), increasing survivor morale led to better organizational performance and higher retention rates after downsizing events. Specifically, leaders can use results of this research to develop a plan to stabilize the surviving workforce by reducing the effects of survivor syndrome, increasing survivor morale, and improving affective commitment to the organization. Risher (2014) argued poor morale could be a disease that slowly spread within an organization and negated the commitment of even those who were model employees.

The participants of this study indicated focus on the employee-manager relationship was a significant factor in improving affective commitment. McManus and

Mosca (2015) posited trust was critical between employees and managers. The leadership team needed to communicate the reasons for the downsizing event and ensured the survivors the existing leaders were competent and capable of leading the new organization through the existing challenges (McManus & Mosca, 2015). Paille and Raineri (2016) also posited trust in the immediate supervisor contributed to lessening the effects of a psychological contract breach.

The participants of this study suggested internal communications played a major role in increasing affective commitment. McManus and Mosca (2015) suggested leaders facilitated effective communication by hosting open forums that allow employees to ask questions and receive feedback. Open forums were a means to demonstrate to the employee base that management cared and valued the views of the employees (McManus & Mosca, 2015).

The participants of this study suggested organizational support was significant. Kim et al. (2016) argued organizational support was the work experience that had been most strongly linked to affective commitment. Conversely, lack of organizational support in the workplace after a downsizing event deterred the employee from exhibiting behaviors that allowed mediation of the psychological contract breach (Tomprou, Rousseau, & Hansen, 2015).

Finally, the participants suggested training was a key factor. McManus and Mosca (2015) argued organizational leaders should provide employees with training opportunities to develop additional knowledge, promote new skills, build confidence, and reduce concerns of job insecurity as a strategy to build trust and improve employee

engagement. McManus and Mosca further argued training motivated the employees and provided assurance management desired all employees to reach full potential and was creating an environment where talented employees prospered.

The findings in this study were relevant to improving affective commitment to the organization. The relationship between Herzberg's two-factor theory and improved affective commitment to the organization after a downsizing event may offer a path to creating job satisfaction within the survivors. Following this path may produce an environment rich in increased job security, satisfaction, morale, motivation, and productivity.

Implication for Social Change

It is the intent that through this study, organizational leaders may gain a better understanding of the unfavorable consequences of layoffs and more effectively manage organizations to prevent or minimize future downsizing events. Organizational leaders, employees, families, communities, and industrialized societies may benefit from this study. This research could contribute to positive social change within the organization by identifying and providing strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after the downsizing event, which might lead to better individual and organizational performance and decrease residual employee turnover.

Organizational leaders may benefit from this research and contribute to positive social change by stabilizing the emotional state of the employee and removing a source of family instability. Ramlall, Al-Sabaan, and Magbool (2014) argued the effects of downsizing were long in duration and negatively affected the whole family unit.

Survivors of organizational change and their families experienced negative financial, emotional, and psychological effects after downsizing events (Schiro & Baker, 2009). Family stability was crucial for children's health development (Lindner, 2014). Ramlall et al. provided examples such as family disintegration and a collapse of social networks as adverse side effects of downsizing.

Schiro and Baker (2009) argued the losers in corporate downsizing events were the survivors who felt detached from the company due to the absence of a feeling of community. Surviving a downsizing event had been positively associated with job-related stress and negatively associated with organizational support, which translated into surviving employees' low levels of continuance and affective commitment (Florah, Nyagol, & Oluoch, 2013). During and after downsizing events, employees worried about job security and felt unsatisfied with their jobs (Saeed, Arshad, Fareed, Shahzad & Lodhi, 2013). Saeed et al. (2013) also concluded surviving employees behaved differently towards their jobs and organization after the downsizing event.

In addition to the chaos and adverse effects to the families' financial stabilities, the downsizing process created an extremely emotional and mental toll on the survivors (Schiro & Baker, 2009). The instability created by the organizational change triggered a reaction in each employee and affected how the survivor felt about his or her job (Schiro & Baker, 2009). The results of this single case qualitative study could influence social change by creating awareness to the negative effects of downsizing to the employees, employees' families, and the organization.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this study are beneficial for leaders in all industries. Organizational leaders could use these results to develop formal strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing events. In alignment with Herzberg's two factor theory, Saha (2016) argued working environment, working conditions, promotion opportunity, job security, relationship with manager, relationship with coworkers and employee-manager relationship were the core factors influencing job satisfaction.

In alignment with the findings of this study, strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing events should become available to all leaders in a formalized process. I would recommend including the following in the process:

- internal communications (before and after the event),
- organizational support,
- training, and
- employee-manager relationship

To ensure consistency within the company, the formalized process should be disseminated to all organizational leaders via literature in formal training sessions.

Recommendation for Further Research

Limitations in this study included time, geographic location, and industry. The interviews conducted in this study involved leaders in the Midwest United States within one information technology/telecommunications company. I recommend further study on the effects of downsizing on surviving employees and increasing employee commitment after a downsizing event in different location and industries. I also

recommend further studies on fostering an emotional bond between the employee and the organization in the absence of organizational change.

Mercurio (2015) listed demographic variables, individual differences, work place experience, and investments as antecedents of affective commitment. Mercurio also noted affective commitment was a predictor of significant organizational consequences such as turnover, absenteeism, and organizational citizenship behaviors. Mercurio further argued there was a need to expand studies on the consequences of downsizing on the survivors and the implications to individuals, families, organizations, and societies.

Reflections

My journey through the DBA process at Walden University has been the most laborious, frustrating, and challenging experience I have ever lived. I often questioned my need and desire to achieve this degree. However, this process has been rewarding and has taught new ways to persevere in the face of obstacles. Additionally, this process provided the opportunity to learn more about strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing and has made me a better leader.

Prior to this study, my preconceived idea was that organizational leaders within the studied information technology/telecommunications entity did not have strategies to support survivors of corporate downsizing. As a leader within this company, I have provided layoff notices to impacted employees on several occasions. To date, I am still unaware of any formalized strategies to support surviving employees. Nevertheless, I was able to be objective throughout the interview process and remove my biases and

opinions. The use of an interview protocol assisted in removing my biases. The goal was to gather and present data from the participants' perspectives and lived experiences.

The participants of this study displayed candor and authenticity while answering the interview questions. Absent a formal strategy to support survivors of corporate downsizing, collected data indicated the inclination for the participants to lead in accordance with the manner in which the participants wanted to be treated. Each participant revealed the impacted and surviving employees were treated in a fair manner. Each participant touched on the importance of timely communication, transparency, respect, and the need to refocus the survivors to ensure objectives of the daily operation were met. Additionally, as a result of this study, the human resources department may create a formal process to support the survivors of corporate downsizing.

A personal reflection on the findings of this research revealed the importance of the employee-employer relationship and the need to establish a trust based relationship before a significant event takes place. Because it is difficult to guarantee employment in a shrinking industry, the efforts of participants align with existing research pertaining to increasing affective commitment to the organization. Due to many internal or external factors, effective leaders may not be able to prevent a downsizing event but are able to lessen the negative effects of the downsizing event.

Conclusion

A qualitative single case study was used to explore the strategies used to support survivors of corporate downsizing. The survivors consider the downsizing event a breach of the psychological contract and behave differently towards their jobs and organization

after the downsizing event. Employee engagement is the key success driver for any organization. This study is significant because survivor syndrome may impede employee performance and motivation after a downsizing event. It is necessary to provide strategies to improve affective commitment to the organization after a corporate downsizing event to ensure the viability of the organization.

In this study, themes of organizational support, training, internal communications, and employee-manager relationship were identified. These themes align with the conceptual framework of the study and have implications for social change and professional practice. Triangulation, through the use of semistructure interviews, retention records, and company documents specific to post-downsizing activities were also employed to enhance the quality of the research.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Introduction: I will introduce myself to the participant, provide administrative forms for signature, and discuss the focus and intent of the study and interview. I will also provide a copy of the signed forms to the participant.
2. Initial Questions: I will ask questions to confirm the role and experience of the participant.
3. Interview Questions: I will provide a copy of the questions to each participant and ask each question in a specific order ensuring I ask the questions in the same order with each participant.
4. Additional Questions: I will note and ask clarifying questions as needed.
5. Wind Down: I will provide an opportunity for the participant to listen to the recorded interview and provide further clarification if so desired.
6. Closing: I will thank the interviewee for his/her time and contribution to the study. I will record my reflections of the individual interview and ensure the recorded voice conversation has been saved and stored properly.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How does the company improve affective commitment to the organization after downsizing?
2. How does the company support remaining employees after a downsizing event?
3. How did you implement the strategies?
4. How did you address the implementation barriers?
5. How do you measure the success of your existing strategies?
6. How would you share any additional information about the strategies you used to improve affective commitment to the organization?