An Exploration of Survivors' Experience

of Organizational Downsizing:

A Sensemaking Perspective

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A thesis submitted to

The University of Gloucestershire

in accordance with the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Faculty of Business, Education and Professional Studies

August 2016

Abstract

This research explores the experiences of downsizing survivors from the UK and from Germany and Switzerland. It makes a unique contribution to organizational studies theory by applying the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995) as a theoretical lens for the study of survivors' experiences. Since this concept was never previously operationalized in this way, this research adds value to the theoretical debate about the sensemaking processes of organizational members in times of change. This work also contributes to the body of knowledge in this field by proposing a theoretical model about survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing. Unlike previous research that mainly addressed causes and effects of organizational downsizing (e.g. Brockner, 1988), the present model depicts survivors' sensemaking as an iterative process and thereby provides a more holistic view and a new dimension about how survivors respond to the situation post-downsizing. Further theoretical contributions relate to the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors. As it was found that survivors' attitudes were still negatively affected up to 18 months post-downsizing, this study provides more evidence that the effects of downsizing are not only felt in the short term but are long-lasting. Moreover, this research revealed that repeated exposure to downsizing led to an accumulation of stress and thereby impacted survivors' well-being over time. Thus, it contradicts several studies, mainly from North America (e.g. Chreim, 2006), which had indicated that surviving repeated waves of downsizing has a favourable effect on survivors and makes them more resilient over time. The present study also has implications for business practices with its recommendation that organizations need to have a clear concept in place to facilitate survivors' change processes, as well as with its suggestion that organizations provide their line managers with more training opportunities with regard to how downsizing survivors should be supported.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed   Date   29.08.2016

Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to write this PhD thesis without the help and support I received from many people. First of all I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr John Laurence and Dr Lynn Nichol for their continuous guidance and the incredible support throughout the entire research process. Their expertise and valuable feedback have enabled me to make this thesis successful.

I would also like to thank the 30 downsizing survivors who participated into this research project and shared their experience with me. The willingness and kindness to tell me their story of downsizing survival provided the foundation to conduct this study and to gain a better understanding about this under-researched topic.

I also gratefully acknowledge the support from Dr Philippa Ward and the faculty administrator team from the University of Gloucestershire. They have always been on hand with help and advice from the beginning until the end of my research project. Thank you also to the examiners Dr Valerie Anderson (Portsmouth) and Dr Jan Myers (Northumbria) for their valuable comments. Special thanks go also to all my friends and colleagues at the University of Gloucestershire for their great support and the enjoyable conversations which we had over the last years. Moreover, thanks to my friends from the Cheltenham Table Tennis Club. I enjoyed playing against you.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank my family who provided me tireless, unconditional and loving support during this PhD journey. Without their help I would not be where I am today.

Table of contents

List of figures

List of tables

1 Introduction

This study aims to explore the experiences of downsizing survivors from the UK and from Germany and Switzerland. Through a qualitative approach the present work seeks to gain in-depth knowledge about how survivors experienced the aftermath of downsizing and how this affected their reactions. The present chapter will provide an introduction to this topic by stating the main problem and the gaps in the literature, which led to the study. Subsequently the purpose of this research, the areas of anticipated knowledge contribution and the research questions are formulated. In the final section of this chapter an overview about how the study is structured is provided.

1.1 Problem statement

The increasing globalization and the opening up of new markets have provided organizations worldwide with more business opportunities and increased their chance for further growth and gains. At the same time however, this international interconnection has led to an increased competition with regard to production or service provisions and has challenged many entrepreneurs in remaining profitable and made it harder to stay in business (Mirabal and DeYoung, 2005). In order to counteract escalating issues such as a loss of market share or cost increase, many organizations have resorted to organizational downsizing as a measure to save costs and to survive in the market (Bhattacharyya and Chatterjee, 2005).

Cameron (1994, p.192) described organizational downsizing as "a set of activities, undertaken on the part of the management of an organization and designed to improve organizational efficiency, productivity, and/or competitiveness". Although other students of organizational downsizing (e.g. Gandolfi, 2008) made an attempt to define different approaches to organizational downsizing (e.g. retrenchment, downscaling or

downscoping) the most accurate distinction is still that of Cameron (1994) who classified organizational downsizing into three different strategies. The first of these strategies is considered as a workforce reduction strategy mainly aimed to reduce the number of employees in the organization. This includes measures such as layoffs, early retirements or attrition. The second strategy is labelled as work redesign strategy and is focused to reduce the work (e.g. tasks or products) in addition to reducing the number of employees. The third downsizing strategy is systematic strategies. These strategies are different than to work reduction or redesign strategies, since they are focused to change an organization's culture and the values of those working in the organization, rather than just cutting the headcount. Systematic strategies are aimed to achieve continuous improvement in terms of cost reduction, process efficiency or customer satisfaction (Cameron, 1994).

Although it seems quite obvious that work redesign and systematic strategies are more sustainable in the long term, previous research (e.g. Weiss, 2004; Nair, 2008) provided convincing arguments that, in times where organizations are facing serious financial difficulties, they tend to adopt a workforce reduction strategy as a first choice. This happens mainly because such an approach leads to an immediate shrinkage of the staff and thereby to a reduction of the payroll (Mirabal and DeYoung, 2005). In particular, during the recent financial crisis many individuals have lost their job as part of workforce downsizing. According to a current report from the World Bank approximately 30 million people worldwide were made redundant since 2007 due to the ongoing crisis (Otker-Robe and Podpiera, 2013). For instance, in the United States in 2012 organizations conducted 6,500 mass layoffs which led to a separation of more than 1.25 million employees (Bls reports, 2013). Companies such as General Motors, American Airlines and Hewlett-Packard made together more than 150,000 people

redundant and who thus felt the pain of the crisis to the full extent (Platt, 2012).

However, not only the United States but also Europe has been seriously impacted by the economic downturn caused by this crisis. In the UK almost 2.7 million lost their job in the past four years where the manufacturing and construction industry has been hit particularly hard (CIPD, 2012). Moreover, the German automotive sector experienced the global recession first-hand and thousands of people lost their job (Statista, 2014). Although it has been reported that the economic downward trend has come to an end in most of the European countries (Lynn, 2014), organizations still struggle and announced the decision to further downsize their workforce in the near future. The British-Swedish multinational drug maker AstraZeneca for instance plans to make 5,000 employees redundant in the next year. Moreover, the Swiss company Novartis announced its attention to cut 4,000 jobs in the near term (Randall, 2014). Also the German companies Vattenfall GmbH, Commerzbank and Thyssen-Krupp intend to further reduce their headcount by making approximately 2,000 people redundant in each case (Statista, 2014). On top of that Siemens wants to lay off 15,000 people in an attempt to achieve a six billion Euro savings (Hack, 2013).

Although not all organizations apply workforce reduction strategies, and for instance workers at Toyota and Jaguar Land Rover agreed to work reduced hours and accepted a pay cut in order to contribute to saving costs (Ellis, 2010), the figures from above indicate that mass layoffs have become a popular business practice to downsize the organization during the financial crisis. Thus, making people redundant seems no longer a measure of last resort, but rather more a normal option aimed to reduce costs and improve efficiency (Mirabal and DeYoung, 2005). In this context, it is remarkable to mention that even organizations which seem to be profitable and financially sound

(e.g. Deutsche Telekom or Siemens) resort to downsizing (Statista, 2014). This suggests that it may not only be an external market force (e.g. more competition) which is threatening them, but rather more their desire to increase their shareholder value by making more and more money (Klein, 2009).

Previous research also revealed that the scope of organizational downsizing expanded with regard to the target group. While blue collar workers have been predominately threatened in times of economic downturn, white-collar employees become more and more affected by downsizing too, since the size of this occupational group is continuously increasing and making up a substantial portion of the overall labour costs (Cameron, Freeman and Mishra, 1991; Klein, 2009). Thus organizational downsizing has become a measure which hits organizational members regardless of their hierarchy level and even when the business seems to be intact.

However, even though many organizations may be convinced that their strategy to downsize the workforce is an efficient measure to save costs and increase performance, findings from previous and contemporary research did not agree on the positive outcomes of downsizing. Obilade (2009) for instance reported that more than two thirds of the organizations conducting downsizing failed to meet their business targets in terms of achieving cost savings or higher productivity. Moreover, De Meuse, Vanderheiden and Bergmann (1994) and Munoz-Bullon and Sanchez-Bueno (2010) reported that performance even worsened rather than improved post-downsizing and many organizations were required to conduct another initiative again one year later since their downsizing effort did not bear fruits (De Vries and Balazs, 1997).

The fact that so many organizations were not successful might be caused by different reasons. It seems, for instance, as if many organizations have practised "dumbsizing" (Cameron, 1994, p.191) instead of downsizing, since they have not only reduced the payroll, but rather more cut the knowledge base and thereby damaged the organization seriously (Sitlington and Marshall, 2011). However, a second reason for under performance may stem from the fact that attitudes and behaviours of those remaining in the organizations have changed for the worse since they perceived a psychological contract violation caused by downsizing. This in turn had an impact on their performance and productivity level (Mirabal and DeYoung, 2005).

Earlier studies (e.g. Brockner, Spreitzer, Mishra, Hochwarter, Pepper and Weinberg, 2004; Armstrong-Stassen, 2005) provide evidence that the remaining employees, the so called survivors, often suffer from the negative effects of downsizing. It was found that downsizing exposure caused various negative reactions among the survivors and led to mistrust (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1997), job dissatisfaction and diminished the organizational commitment (Amundson, Borgen, Jordan and Erlebach, 2004). Moreover, it influenced survivors' health in an unfavourable way and caused physical and psychological complaints (Hughes, 2000). Since the constellation of these symptoms was found to be so common among survivors, Cascio (1993) coined the term survivors' syndrome to explain the impact of downsizing on those ones who escaped from it. Moreover, Noer (2009) defined the negative feelings experienced by downsizing survivors as survivor sickness, since the negative effects of downsizing were so toxic and long-lasting.

It was found that the biggest misconception held by many organizations is that survivors should be grateful that they have kept their job whilst others, the so called

5

victims, were made redundant (Levitt, Wilson and Gilligan, 2008). As a result of this belief almost no attention is paid to the survivors and their individual needs in the period post-downsizing. While organizations have learned to provide support to the victims in order to soften their leaving (Devine, Reay, Stainton and Collins-Nakai, 2003), organizations worldwide have failed to realize the importance of renegotiating the psychological contract with their survivors (Bhattacharyya and Chatterjee, 2005). This failure, as well as the neglect of their feelings, consequently increased the survivors' perception that the organization does not care about them and it might be not worth working hard for it any longer (Knudsen, Johnson, Martin and Roman, 2003). It might be a mixture of high levels of frustration (Malik, Ahmad and Hussain, 2010a), a low morale (Reinardy, 2010) and missing motivation (Chipunza and Berry, 2010) which hinder the survivors to perform in the way they did prior to downsizing exposure. Subsequently, the organization's target to heighten productivity fails and cost savings cannot be achieved.

Unfortunately however, it seems as if organizational leaders have not fully understood the relation between survivor support and downsizing outcomes (e.g. Levitt et al., 2008). Although it is indispensable for an organization to have a motivated and committed workforce in order to recover soon from a crisis (Weiss, 2004), management action remains often poor with regard to help and assistance for the survivors. Moreover, organizations underestimate the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors and in particular the mental problems with which survivors may struggle even several years later (Moore, Grunberg and Greenberg, 2006). The present study is aimed to shed more light on these issues by exploring survivors' experience of organizational downsizing and how this has impacted their reactions. As this topic is still under-researched with regard to several aspects, it is anticipated that the outcomes

of this work will close these gaps and thereby contribute to knowledge. In the following section the gaps in the literature will be discussed in more detail.

1.2   Gaps in the literature

The first gap in the knowledge base relates to the geographical region in which downsizing survivors have been examined. Survivors of downsizing were investigated for the first time in the United States and Canada in the 1980's. Joel Brockner from Columbia Business School and his colleagues (e.g. Brockner, Greenberg, Brockner, Bortz, Davy and Carter, 1986 or Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt and O'Malley, 1987) were among the first who realized the need to pay more attention to downsizing survivors and carried out research in this direction. In particular, due to the tremendous mass layoffs caused by economic downturns and crises during that time, Brockner et al. (e.g. 1986) started to examine survivors, either in organizational, or in laboratory settings in order to shed more light on this phenomenon.

Although the body of literature on downsizing survivors continuously increased in the North American context and more students of organizational behaviour (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen and Latack, 1992; Noer, 1995) started to investigate downsizing survivors, this issue remained mainly unknown in Europe until the end of the 1990's. It was only in 1999 when Samuel Berner (1999) in Switzerland and Fiona Campbell (1999) in the UK conducted two extensive research projects about survivors in Europe and published their findings in the form of PhD theses. These two studies which can be considered as a kind of pioneering work within Europe formed the basis for a couple of further research projects (e.g. Doherty, 2000; Weiss, 2004; Klein, 2009 and Chen, 2009) which were aimed to achieve a better understanding of the impact of organizational downsizing on survivors in the European context.

However, whilst the United States and other countries produced together dozens of research articles, dissertations or book chapters concerned with downsizing survivors within the last 10-15 years, this topic has still remained under researched in Europe with only a very limited amount of studies available (see examples above for the most influential work). One reason for this may result from the fact that European organizations were not faced with conditions as difficult as other countries (e.g. United States) with organizational downsizing and mass layoff in the past years (Dietrich, 2013), so that management scholars in Europe did not deem it necessary to pay more attention to survivors and intensify their efforts to carry out more research in this area.

Although the studies conducted in North America and outside Europe have, without doubt, created a lot of knowledge by investigating survivors through various perspectives (e.g. Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002), it is questionable whether their outcomes can be simply transferred to the European context. This is mainly due to the fact that cultural aspects and procedures with regard to how downsizing is handled may differ between these countries and Europe (Gerlach, Levine, Stephan and Struck, 2005) and hence survivors' perception of downsizing may be different as well. Therefore, and also under consideration that the recent financial crisis has led to a lot of downsizing survivors in Europe (see detailed discussion in the previous section), more research is required to achieve a better understanding about this phenomenon in the European context and thereby close a gap in the knowledge base.

A further gap in the literature results from the type of methods which were employed to collect information from downsizing survivors. The majority of previous research (e.g. Virick, Lilly and Casper, 2007; Malik et al., 2010a) examined downsizing survivors through a quantitative approach, mainly focused to identify correlations

between certain variables (e.g. between job satisfaction and commitment) in order to achieve statistically supported results. This has produced a large amount of data but it seldom provided sufficient insight into survivors' experience as a whole and the context in which particular reactions appeared. It seems as if these studies neglected that human behaviour is a very complex construct (Warr, 2002; Huczynski and Buchanan, 2007) and can hardly be understood by examining only certain parts of it in an isolated way. Thus, previous research missed exploring the overall sensemaking process of survivors and how they attached meaning to their experience (Weick, 1995). For this reason and in order to gain a fuller picture of survivors' experiences further studies should adopt a more holistic approach to research. Such methods should enable the researcher to deal with the complexity of the survivors' story and thereby cover all relevant aspects of their experience. This may include attitudinal, behavioural and emotional reactions and the consideration of the diverse interdependencies which may exist between these facets of experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Another literature gap was found in relation to the design of the studies. The vast majority of previous research investigated survivors' reactions based on a cross-sectional approach at a single point in time (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004) but they did not study extensively the longitudinal effects of organizational downsizing on survivors. Moreover, the few studies available did not provide sufficient information about how survivors' reactions were changing post-downsizing. Whilst one group of management scholars (e.g. Kernan and Hanges, 2002; Arshad and Sparrow, 2010) found that the negative impact of downsizing on survivors was still visible over a long period of time, another group of researchers (e.g. Nicholson and West, 1988; Allen, Freeman, Russell, Reizenstein and Rentz, 2001) concluded that survivors' attitudes returned back to their original state, suggesting that downsizing exposure has only a

short-term effect on survivors.

Furthermore, the findings from the existing (primarily North American) literature are not consistent with regard to how survivors' previous experiences with downsizing affect their perception of, and responses to, later ones. On the one hand a significant number of North American researchers (e.g. Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Chreim, 2006) argued that survivors may benefit from earlier experiences with downsizing, as they will enhance survivors' ability to deal with futures ones and thereby make them more resilient over time. On the other hand, however, a small group of North American management scholars including Moore and her colleagues (e.g. Moore, Grunberg and Greenberg, 2004; Moore et al., 2006) found that experiencing multiple occurrences of downsizing makes survivors more vulnerable over time and intensifies feelings of stress.

Although all of these studies provided evidence that survivors' reactions have changed in some way in the time post-downsizing, it is not entirely clear how this happened and what influenced this change. To gain a better understanding about how survivors' reactions are changing, further research is required. Moreover, it may be important to study survivors at different stages post-downsizing, since the effects of downsizing may only become obvious at a later stage when the downsizing is long over and management assumes that they have successfully managed their change programme (Noer, 2009). It may also be beneficial to examine survivors with multiple downsizing experiences in order to gain a better understanding of how earlier experiences with downsizing influence the way survivors make sense of, and deal with, more recent ones.

In addition, there exists a gap in the recent literature with regard to management action. As mentioned above in this work, it may be less obvious for organizations and their leaders that the survivors also need support post-downsizing and that management action is a crucial factor influencing survivors' reactions. Students of organizational change (e.g. Cascio and Wynn, 2004) found that many survivors suffered from missing support and an inappropriate leadership style, where the organization made no attempt to assist the survivors with regard to their physical or mental needs. Moreover, it was reported that more than 50% of the organizations surveyed were not equipped with plans or procedures about how to support downsizing survivors (Gandolfi, 2009).

Although management scholars highlighted the importance of a positive and visible leadership (Sahdev and Vinnicombe, 1998), open and honest communication (Weiss, 2004) or workshops (Amundson et al., 2004) as measures to support survivors' transition, it has been poorly researched how management action affects survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing. In particular, previous research rarely examined how certain actions facilitate or hinder a change in survivors' attitudes and behaviour post-downsizing. However, such awareness is important, because organizations can only improve their actions, after they have understood what they have done wrong in treating their survivors (Klein, 2009). Therefore, and to close this gap more research is required towards the exploration of management action and its impact on survivors over time.

1.3 Research purpose, contributions and questions

The overall purpose of this study is to explore survivors' experience post organizational downsizing. As indicated above, survivors are often suffering from their downsizing experience and only little attention is paid to their needs after downsizing. This leads to a negative change in their reactions and impacts on their health and well-being in an unfavourable way. Moreover, it negatively influences their performance and therefore is a major cause why so many organizations are not successful with their downsizing effort. This study is aimed to shed more light on this issue by examining the impact of organizational downsizing on individual survivors. More particularly, it is focused to find out how downsizing exposure has affected survivors' organizational life in the time after downsizing, and how this caused attitudinal, behavioural or emotional changes. Through the outcomes of this study it is anticipated to achieve a better understanding about the phenomenon of downsizing survival and thereby contribute to theory and business practice.

The previous discussion in section 1.2 has illustrated several gaps in the existing literature, which were identified with regard to downsizing survivors. This study seeks to address these gaps and will thereby add significant value to the knowledge base. As a first point, it has been highlighted that the majority of survivor research has been conducted in North America and only little attention has been paid to downsizing survivors in Europe. The present study is aimed to address this gap by exploring the experience of survivors from the UK, Germany and Switzerland. These countries were chosen for several reasons. First of all, the fact that many organizations in these countries were hit particularly hard by the financial crisis (see figures provided in section 1.1) and were faced with restructuring and workforce downsizing. This justifies investigating British, German and Swiss survivors, with the expectation that the stories

they tell about their survival and how they were affected will enhance the understanding of their situations in the European context and may reveal aspects of this issue that differ from the existing (mainly North American) literature (see previous discussion in section 1.2).

Although other European countries such as France or Spain could also have been chosen for investigation, due to the researcher's language limitation, this was not considered any further and it seemed to be more appropriate to research survivors from countries in which the language can be understood by him (e.g. German and English) without any difficulties. In particular, with regard to such a sensitive topic it is important to be proficient and fluent in a language in order to capture even small and tiny details of a participant's experience (King and Horrocks, 2010). A further reason why survivors from the UK, Germany and Switzerland will be researched results from the fact that the researcher himself has lived in all of these countries and hence experienced first-hand how certain organizations were affected by the financial crisis and how survivors consequently suffered from the after-effects. Therefore, and under consideration of the aspects mentioned above, it is expected that an investigation in these countries provides valuable findings which contribute to the theoretical debate about the experience of downsizing survivors in Europe.

Moreover, this study will also add significant value to theory through the way in which the study of survivors will be investigated. In contrast to the majority of previous studies, which employed quantitative methods to examine downsizing survivors, this research project will apply a qualitative approach (for more details see chapter 4 about methodology and methods) in order to achieve an in-depth understanding about survivors' experience post-downsizing. Thus it is hoped to close a further gap in the

knowledge base (see previous discussion in section 1.2 about research gaps) and to contribute to existing literature. As a qualitative approach is often of an exploratory nature (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2007; Klein, 2009), it is well suited to gain more knowledge about this issue in the European context. Although quantitative studies (e.g. Nair, 2008) have provided a lot of evidence that survivors are negatively affected by organizational downsizing, a qualitative approach however is able to reveal how downsizing has influenced them and why the effects are so toxic and obstinate.

In particular the sensitive nature of this topic advocates the use of a qualitative approach since many quantitative studies have failed to achieve sufficient insight into survivors' emotions and feelings. A qualitative approach allows the direct exploration of survivors' experiences through talk and conversation and thereby heightens the possibility to elicit even small details of their experience, which may hardly be obtained by applying quantitative methods or in a laboratory setting (Bryman and Bell, 2007). This consequently helps to achieve a fuller picture of survivors' experience and their story of survival. In summary therefore, it is intended that the outcomes of this qualitative study will contribute to knowledge, as they will not only provide evidence about the existence of certain reactions among survivors, but they will also broaden the understanding about the context in which they occurred and what has moderated or intensified them.

A further contribution to knowledge is expected by applying the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995) as a theoretical lens to study survivors' experience post-downsizing (see a more detailed discussion later on in section 3.2). In combination with a qualitative approach to research, this concept will help to get a better understanding about what meaning survivors attached to their situation and how

14

they make sense of the downsizing occasion and the events resulting from it. As the concept of sensemaking and its seven properties provide a set of exploratory opportunities (Weick, 1995) it allows the researcher to look beyond the obvious in survivors' stories and thus to identify things that are of great importance but that are less likely to be discovered using other approaches. Moreover, the fact that the concept of sensemaking has not been applied in its entirety (using all of its seven properties) to study downsizing survivors so far provides an opportunity to employ this theory as an analytic tool to examine survivors' responses and hence create new value with respect to survivors' sensemaking post-downsizing.

The discussion above (see section 1.2 about gaps in the literature) also highlighted that in most cases downsizing survivors were studied based on a cross-sectional approach but only little attention has been paid to how their reactions may change over time. To address this issue, the present research project focuses on examining survivors' reactions at different points in time, post-downsizing. This is important in order to get an understanding about how long the effects of downsizing may last and whether certain attitudes and behaviours will return to their initial state after a certain time has passed. As this has not been entirely clarified by previous research (see earlier discussion in section 1.2), the exploration of survivors' reactions at different stages post-downsizing is valuable and the outcomes will make a contribution to knowledge.

The foregoing debate (see section 1.2 about gaps in the literature) also emphasized that management scholars' opinions differed as to whether survivors' previous experiences with downsizing have favourable or unfavourable influences on the way in which they deal with later ones. Most of the existing research in this area (predominately conducted in North America) indicated that surviving repeated waves of downsizing

increases a survivor's ability to cope with the situation and thereby makes them more resilient over time. By contrast, only a few other studies reported that multiple downsizing experiences weakened the survivors with regard to their coping resources and consequently led to more vulnerability. In order to clarify this issue, the present research will examine survivors with multiple downsizing experiences. It is anticipated that such an approach will uncover more information about whether the survival of repeated waves of downsizing has more of a positive or negative effect on participants' responses to future downsizing.

In particular in light of the financial crisis it is most likely that the negative effects of downsizing exposure last over a long time, and survivors for instance may fear that they could lose their job in the next round of a workforce reduction. Therefore, and taking into account that the psychological impact of downsizing on survivors may be visible only later when the downsizing is long over (Noer, 2009), it is crucial that this study pays more attention to survivors' reactions at different stages post-downsizing and not only at one single point in time. Moreover, it is essential to have a closer look at survivors' employment histories and their previous experiences with downsizing, as this may lead to a better understanding of their responses to the most recent downsizing occurrence. The understanding of the harmful and long-lasting effects of downsizing on survivors is also of importance for organizations, in order that they can act appropriately in each phase post-downsizing and thereby mitigate the growth of the negative reactions (Chen, 2009).

A further area in need of additional investigation is management action and its impact on survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing. The foregoing discussion in section 1.1 has indicated that the way in which the management handles organizational

downsizing, and in particular how they pay attention to the survivors and their needs, has a great influence on whether the downsizing is successful or not. However, since the effects of management action on changes in survivors' reactions have not been researched sufficiently by previous studies, this research project is aimed to shed more light on this issue by exploring the impact of management action on survivors' responses.

Through a set of questions focused on what the management did and how they did it, this study is anticipating that it will gain insight into the organizational processes post-downsizing and thereby reveal important aspects with regard to management action and the treatment of the survivors. This may provide information about whether support was provided to the survivors, and if this support was considered to be helpful or not. Moreover, it is expected to achieve a better understanding about whether all managers in the organizational hierarchy provided the same support and if this support was provided continuously over time. This is essential to know, since previous research (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004) expressed concerns that adequate support may be only provided at the beginning of, or during downsizing but later on and after downsizing it is diminishing rapidly. As a consequence, survivors may feel left alone and will show negative reactions. For this reason, it is important to conduct this study and to find out more about how management action affects survivors' reactions in the period post-downsizing. The outcomes gained from this investigation will not only contribute to the theoretical debate, but they will also help organizations to improve management action in the period post-downsizing in order to reduce the harmful effects of downsizing on survivors.

In summary therefore, and in order to achieve a better understanding about survivors'
reactions in the European context and the impact of management action on those
reactions, the following research questions were developed:

1. What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?
2. Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?
3. In which ways does management action affect survivors' reactions to
   organizational downsizing?

By answering these three research questions it is anticipated that this study adds
significant value to the existing debate about the experiences of downsizing survivors.
It is further expected that the outcomes gained from this investigation provide a set of
valuable implications for business practice in organizations and how to deal with the
survivors of downsizing.

A more detailed discussion about previous research related to the respective research
question is presented in the literature review in chapter 2 and 3.

1.4   Thesis structure

The thesis is organized around six chapters and follows a logical structure in order to
ensure that the reader achieves the best possible understanding of the research process
and the subject under investigation. A brief overview about each chapter is outlined in
the following. Moreover, Figure 1 displays the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 and 3 presents the existing literature. Chapter 2 reviews the outcomes and
reactions of downsizing survivors which were discovered in the existing literature.
Chapter 3 critically discusses the theoretical models and concepts which have been

used to study downsizing survivors or organizations undergoing restructuring. This chapter also provides an introduction to the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995) and assesses its potential to be used for the present study and the exploration of survivors' experiences. Moreover, this chapter discusses the literature findings on sensemaking and sensegiving in the period post-downsizing.

Chapter 4 illustrates the methodology and methods. This contains a discussion of the philosophical perspective and the research design which is adopted by this study. Moreover, this chapter outlines the trustworthiness of this study and discusses ethical aspects such as confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings of this work and their interpretation. This chapter is subdivided into three sections. In the first section (5.1) the findings are presented in light of previous research. In the second section (5.2) the empirical findings are interpreted through the lens of sensemaking theory. In the third section (5.3), a model about survivors' process of sensemaking is proposed.

Chapter 6 provides the conclusion of this study. This includes a summary of the key findings of this work in relation to the research questions posed. Moreover, it is outlined how the findings contribute to theory as well as to management practice with regard to how to deal with downsizing survivors. Finally, the research limitations are outlined and recommendations for future research are given.

The following chapter presents the outcomes and reactions of downsizing survivors which were discovered in the existing literature.

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│   │                   Chapter 1:                         │   │
│   │                   Introduction                       │   │
│   └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘   │
│                          ⇓                                   │
│   ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐   │
│   │                   Chapter 2:                         │   │
│   │ Literature review part 1: Outcomes and reactions of  │   │
│   │                downsizing survivors                  │   │
│   └─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘   │
│                          ⇓                                   │
│   ┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐   │
│   │                   Chapter 3:                         │   │
│   │    Literature review part 2: Theoretical models and  │   │
│   │        concepts to study downsizing survivors        │   │
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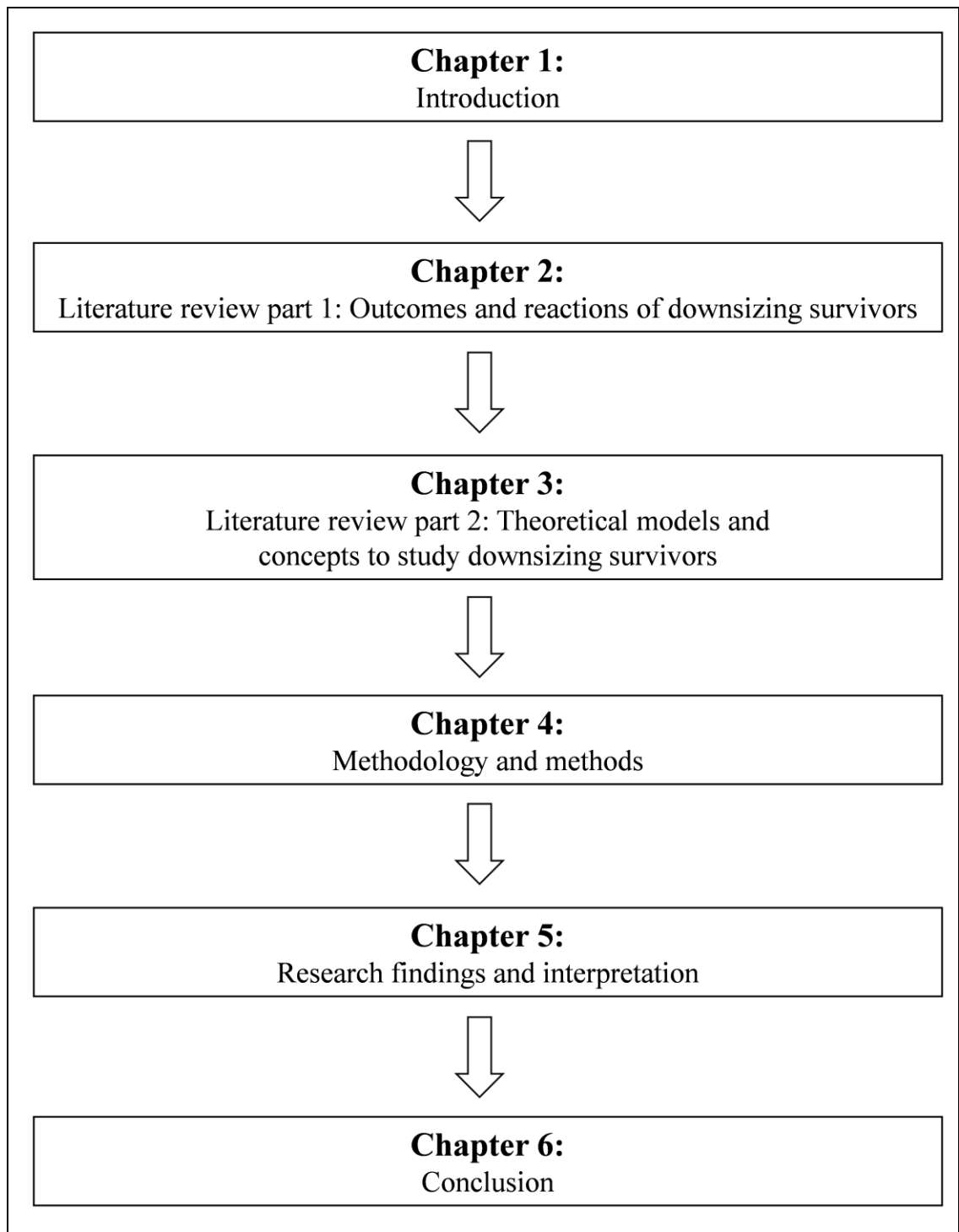
Figure 1: Structure of the thesis

2 Literature review part 1: Outcomes and reactions of downsizing survivors

2.1 Introduction

This chapter forms the first part of the literature review and is aimed to shed more light on what has been discovered by previous research. It is subdivided into different sections. First of all the approaches and perspectives which were used by previous research to study downsizing survivors will be outlined (section 2.2). Thereafter the researcher's own framework was applied to structure the literature findings will be illustrated (section 2.3). Based on this framework the findings will be presented around the three research questions (sections 2.4, 2.5, 2.6). In the last section (2.7) the findings will be summarized.

2.2 Approaches used in previous research to study downsizing survivors

Previous research has indicated that the research on survivors of downsizing is problematic and different approaches and concepts could be applied in order to explore this complex phenomenon. Cameron (1994) argued that downsizing could be investigated from at least three perspectives. The first perspective focuses on the industry or global level, the second one on the organizational level and the third one on the individual or micro level. On the industry or global level Cameron (1994) investigated downsizing activities caused by mergers and acquisitions or joint ventures. Downsizing from the organizational viewpoint is focused on alternative strategies for successful downsizing. This involves also how these strategies impact the effectiveness and performance of an organization. The third level, which approaches downsizing from the micro or individual point of view, endeavours to explore the

21

different reactions of the survivors which result as a consequence of organizational downsizing. This considers elements such as emotions, psychological states and attitudes but also behavioural reactions. Furthermore, it deals with perceived work stress and involves the discussion about survivors' coping strategies.

Another attempt to study the entire phenomenon of downsizing survivors was made by Weiss and Udris (2001) (see Figure 2).
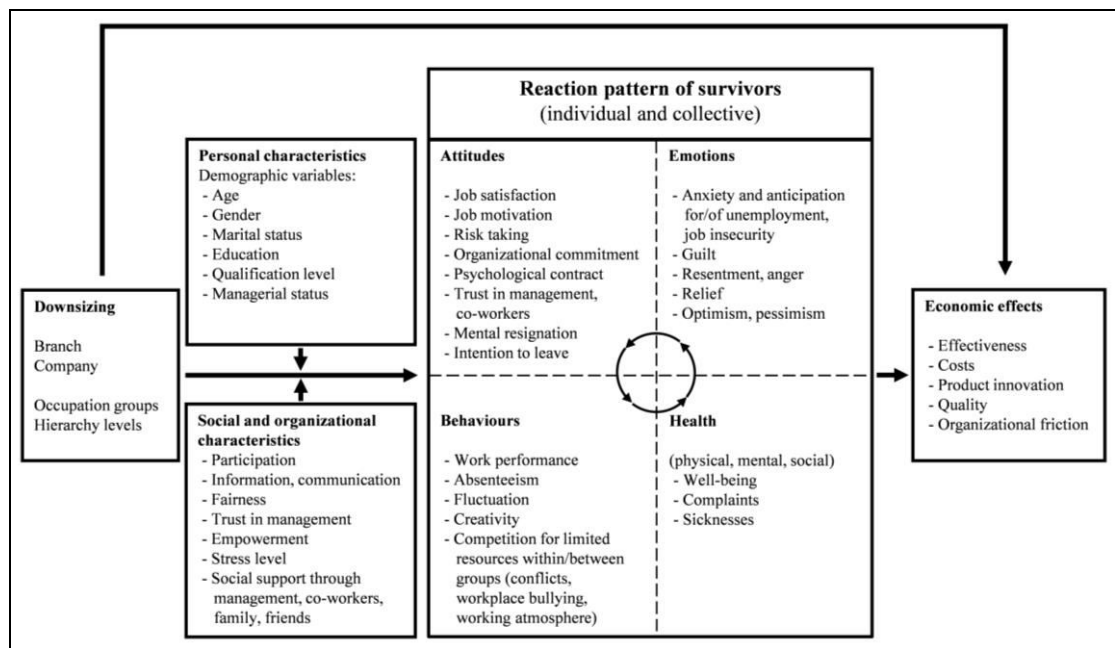
Figure 2: Preliminary conceptual framework about downsizing and survivors proposed by Weiss and Udris (2001, p.117)

In their study, they developed a preliminary conceptual framework, which subsumes the constructs and characteristics about downsizing survivors, which were theoretically conceived and empirically collected. Their conceptual framework is not intended to serve as a theoretical model in the first instance, but it offers the possibility to categorize the individual characteristics into groups. The arrangement and grouping of the categories follows a logical order based on influential and moderating factors as well as psychosocial consequences and economic effects. The framework shows how

personal, social and organizational characteristics have an influence on the reaction pattern of survivors (which considers the individual and the collective), where each individual pattern category (e.g. attitudes, emotions) has a mutual interaction (Weiss and Udris, 2001; Klein, 2009).

2.3 Approach to studying downsizing survivors used in this research

The present study will combine elements from Cameron (1994) and Weiss and Udris (2001) in order to structure the individual literature findings around the research questions. It is anticipated that the combination of certain elements, namely the individual perspective from which survivors could be studied (Cameron, 1994) and the reaction pattern developed by Weiss and Udris (2001) serve as a useful guideline to present the literature findings around the three research questions in a structured way. A framework illustrating this combinational approach is provided in Figure 3.
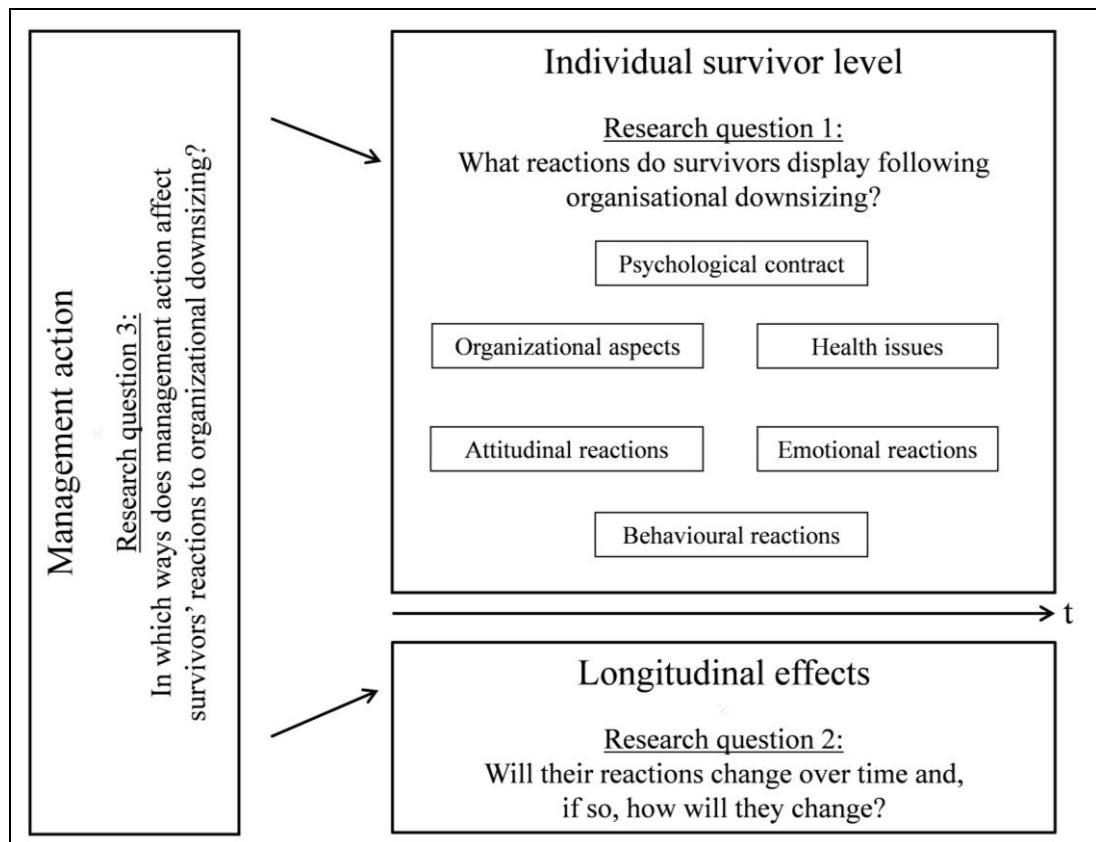
Figure 3: Framework to review the literature on downsizing survivors

As illustrated, the framework considers three areas, which are the "Individual survivor level", "Longitudinal effects" and "Management action" and reflect the author's three research questions. The previous research reviewed in this thesis will be based on this framework. The section 2.4 will focus on findings from the individual survivor level related to research question one (What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?). Section 2.5 will illustrate previous research concentrated on longitudinal effects associated with research question two (Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?). Finally, section 2.6 will focus on findings about the management action related to research question three (In which ways does management action affect survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing?).

2.4 Individual survivor level

This section discusses downsizing survivors from the individual survivor perspective and focuses on major themes, which have emerged from the literature review related to the first research question. As shown in Figure 3 it will be focused on the Psychological contract, Organizational aspects, Attitudinal reactions, Behavioural reactions, Emotional reactions, and Health issues.

2.4.1 Psychological contract

The concept of the psychological contract forms a key element in researching downsizing survivors, since various aspects of survivors' changes in reactions can be derived from, but also explained by it (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). The American researchers Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998, p.679) defined a psychological contract as "an individual's belief in mutual obligations between that person and another party such as an employer (either a firm or another person)". Such a belief is "predicated on the perception that a promise has been made (e.g., of employment or career

24

opportunities) and a consideration offered in exchange for it (e.g., accepting a position, foregoing other job offers), binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations" (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998, p.679). These beliefs however may be different from written statements or from what is interpreted by third parties (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998).

Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998, p.680) assert that psychological contracts are "mental models or schemas of the employment relationship" which are intact as long as the organization is able to fulfil employees' beliefs about these relationships (Shah, Saeed and Nisar, 2011). However, if employees get the impression that the organization is not able to meet these obligations anymore, they will consider it as a violation of the psychological contract (Shah et al., 2011). This in turn may lead to unfavourable reactions towards the organization (Makin, Cox and Cooper, 1996). Turnley and Feldman (1998) who conducted a large scale research project among employees in the US support this statement and added that employees' perception of psychological contract violation was much more likely to increase when organizations were not fulfilling promises which were of a high importance for their employees. This has implications for the present study, as downsizing survivors may have important expectations towards their employers such as a fair treatment or security of employment, and the non-fulfilment of these may cause a change in their behaviour (Makin et al., 1996).

Campbell (1999, p.53) argued that employment relations have changed and "the contract is becoming more short term as employees may no longer expect a 'job for life'". This is in particular true in light of the recent financial crisis where thousands of employees have lost their jobs (e.g. McDevitt, Giapponi and Houston, 2013) and even

for the survivors the psychological contract is still under threat, as they could lose their job by an impending wave of further downsizing. As a consequence survivors may perceive this as a violation of their psychological contract because, in their eyes, the employer failed to meet their obligations namely to guarantee them job security (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998).

The work of Krause, Stadil and Buenke (2003) and Shah et al. (2011) corresponds to this, and revealed that organizational downsizing caused a violation of the psychological contract and led to an unfavourable change of survivors' work attitudes and behaviours such as a decrease of their organizational commitment or an increase of turnover intention (Shah et al., 2011). Moreover, it influenced survivors' job satisfaction and thus had a direct impact on their performance level (Arshad and Sparrow, 2010).

However, it is not only the content (e.g. reward for extra effort) which matters in relation to the psychological contract, but also the processes and procedures which underlie dealing with the change and the workforce (Makin et al., 1996). In this context, several studies reported, that the perception of justice and fairness has a positive influence on the psychological contract (e.g. Feldman and Leana, 1994). Feldman and Leana (1994) argued that those employees who perceive procedural justice within the organization are unlikely to show negative reactions with regard to a psychological contract violation. On the contrary, however, if employees consider the decision-making process as unfair, they might show stronger reactions to a violation of the psychological contract. In particular, when survivors perceived the treatment and selection of designated victims as being unfair it was likely to increase the probability of future contract violation (Feldman and Leana, 1994).

In relation to the current research this implies that survivors may be sensitive to events occurring in their immediate environment and organizations' neglect of justice may violate survivors' expectations of a fair treatment of all organizational members even though survivors were not directly disadvantaged by it. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how the downsizing process was handled by the organization, as this most probably has an influence on whether survivors perceive the psychological contract between them and the organization as being violated or not (Campbell, 1999).

Calderone (2004), who researched psychological contract violations in the context of US survivors, argued that the renewal of the psychological contract between the survivors and the organization is crucial in the aftermath of downsizing as the conditions of the psychological contract have a strong influence on survivors' experiences. For instance, employees who are still working under the conditions of the old psychological contract, may expect that their job position is secure due to a good performance or their affiliation to the organization. However and as already mentioned above, if the downsized organization is not able to meet this expectation it will cause negative reactions in the individual, which in turn might be a first indication that the psychological contract has been violated (Calderone, 2004).

This may also apply in the context of the current study where the old contract may have broken down because organizations were not able to provide survivors a guaranteed employment any longer (e.g. Campbell, 1999). Thus, it is the organizations' duty to renew the psychological contract with the survivors in order to rebuild trust and to regain their commitment. This involves that future perspective and career opportunities are discussed openly with them, but also that new expectations (e.g. overtime, reduced holidays) are re-negotiated with survivors, so that they are

aware what to expect in the downsized environment (Makin et al., 1996).

Unfortunately however, most of the previous research on downsizing survivors (e.g. Campbell, 1999; Noer, 2009) revealed the contrary and demonstrated that organizations seldom involved the surviving workforce in their change initiatives and the new expectations and therefore a renewal of the psychological contract did not take place. This caused very often a violation of the new relationship and consequently survivors felt left alone and cheated by the organization. In a study conducted by Campbell (1999, p.197) British survivors for instance perceived the new psychological contract only as "a poor substitute" with regard to their career progression and the opportunities which provides a first impression about how survivors studied in this research may consider the new conditions under which they have to work.

2.4.2 Organizational aspects

Organizational downsizing can be considered as a process, which consists of a set of individual actions emanating from the organization. Such actions may include, for instance, the process of communication or the decision-making procedure to identify and select the stayers and the leavers. The way in which survivors perceive these actions was found to influence their reactions either in a positive or negative direction (Campbell, 2009; Klein, 2009). For this reason, it becomes important to explore survivors' perception of the downsizing process, since this helps to obtain a better understanding of their attitudinal and behavioural reactions.

Along these lines, the themes below emerged from the literature review and were considered as relevant to gain more knowledge about survivors' perception of the downsizing event:

- Information and communication (e.g. Evans, 1999; Amundson et al., 2004)

- Justice and fairness (e.g. Brockner et al., 1986; Brockner, 1990)

- Trust in management (e.g. Spreitzer and Mishra, 1997; Noer, 2009)

In the following sub-sections, each of these themes will be discussed and critically assessed with regard to its contribution to the present research project.

2.4.2.1 Information and communication

The American psychologist Evans (1999) considered information to be the lifeblood of an organization and lack of it might have a dramatic impact on the organization, and on every individual in it. In particular, in times of organizational downsizing, information becomes a crucial element, since the work force has concerns about the purpose and procedure of such a dramatic change and how it influences them as a consequence (Evans, 1999).

Evans (1999, p.347) asserts, that "information has the potential to resolve uncertainty for the individual by indicating the behaviours that are most appropriate for achieving a desired outcome". Against this background it seems to be a valuable element in the organizational context, since a downsizing initiative undoubtedly creates a high level of uncertainty among those involved (Evans, 1999). In her study, Evans (1999) showed that information has direct and indirect influence on survivors' reactions and supported information theory inasmuch as, once information was provided, individuals' uncertainty was reduced. This supports the work of Doherty, Bank and Vinnicombe (1996), who reported similar findings among UK survivors, who were seeking information in order to reduce their uncertainty in the aftermath of downsizing. For this reason, information is also a relevant aspect in relation to the present study as

many survivors may still be stuck in an uncertain state, where they do not know what is coming next, since the economic difficulties are not resolved entirely (e.g. McDevitt et al., 2013) and bear a further risk for organizational downsizing.

However, a lack of sufficient communication not only causes uncertainty, but it also impacts several other survivor attitudes in an unfavourable way. Evans (1999) for instance reported that missing information also influenced survivors' levels of satisfaction, commitment, fairness and performance directly and had an indirect influence on psychological well-being and turnover intention. It was found, that in particular at the beginning of the downsizing, when information was communicated, survivors remained committed. However, at a later stage, when communication decreased they felt not connected anymore and distrusted the organization (Evans, 1999).

This is an interesting finding which highlights the importance of communication during the management of organizational downsizing. It indicates how poorly organizations are prepared in handling a downsizing scenario as it seems that "unfortunately, at a time when communication was most needed, existing communication systems were often breaking down" (Amundson et al., 2004, p.262). Therefore, and with regard to the current research, information needs to be provided permanently and at every stage of the process as this ensures that survivors feel a valued part of the organization and not as someone who is only kept to do the dirty work (Gandolfi, 2008). This is in line with Campbell's (1999) notion who argued that survivors were seeking information before and during the change and not only after, when everything is already in place.

Previous research (e.g. Von Baeckmann, 1998) further revealed that many of survivors' negative reactions were caused by unofficial communication and the use of the grapevine. A significant number of survivors reported that they received a lot of information by circulating rumours (Weiss, 2004) and information from the media before they were informed by their employer (Von Baeckmann, 1998). Moreover, it was found that rumours which "circulated wildly in the vacuum" (Amundson et al., 2004, p.262) further increased the confusion and were considered to be the result of an incapable management which is not communicating appropriately.

However, what survivors may view as a management failure may in fact be an action with a firm intention, as in times of organizational downsizing it is unlikely that managers want to communicate adequately (Noer, 2009). They withhold information for certain purposes, namely power or security. Managers may feel that it could turn into a serious threat if they provide too much information to the employees and involve them in the strategic plans about how the organization intends to proceed in the future. However, line managers may find themselves in a difficult situation too; on the one hand they are forced to follow the directions made by their managers or stakeholder, on the other hand they have to lead their employees successfully by finding a balance in providing as much information as needed, but not more than allowed (Noer, 2009).

In the context of the current study, it would therefore be unrealistic to have too high expectations in terms of management communication, as it is to large extent, part of the managers' normal behaviour that they withhold information, for the reasons mentioned above. By conducting this study however, the readership will be reminded again, that survivors will sooner or later get a clue anyway about what is going to happen, with or without the help of the management, but it would make their transition

phase more comfortable and decrease levels of stress and uncertainty if they would be informed by their managers and not through gossip and the rumour mill (Campbell, 1999).

2.4.2.2 Justice and fairness

Greenberg (1987) described organizational justice as the way in which employees judge the behaviour of an organization and the outcomes resulting from it. Depending on whether individuals perceive these results as fair or unfair is likely to impact their reactions in a positive or negative way. With regard to the present study it is therefore important to explore how fair the process of downsizing is, as perceived by the survivors, as this may help to understand their behaviour.

Organizational theory differentiates between three types of justice namely distributive, procedural-, and interactional justice. The first type, distributive justice (which is also referred to as outcome fairness) relates to the extent to which a decision outcome is perceived as fair. The second type, procedural justice reflects the fairness of the underlying procedures and processes which are used to make a decision or to determine an organizational action (Daly and Geyer, 1994; Campbell, 1999). The third element, interactional justice relates to the interpersonal side of practices applied in the organization, in particular the treatment and the communication by the management (Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002; Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012). As all three elements of organizational justice theory were found to have an influence on survivors' attitudes and behaviour (e.g. Campbell, 1999), each of them will be discussed in the following and in the context of previous survivor research.

<u>Distributive justice</u>

Distributive justice as mentioned above is concerned with the question whether the outcome of a decision or an action is perceived as fair (Daly and Geyer, 1994). Previous research revealed that the underlying decision rule (e.g. company seniority or job function) which was used to determine the stayers and the leavers impacted survivors' perception of fairness (Brockner, Tyler and Cooper-Schneider, 1992b; Weiss, 2004). In more particular, it was found (e.g. Weiss, 2004) that when the selection criteria for dismissal were perceived as unfair by the survivors, it had a negative influence on their attitudes such as their work commitment or their job satisfaction and consequently led to higher turnover intention.

With regard to the selection process in a downsizing situation, a study conducted by Brockner et al. (1986) examined the impact of redundancy on downsizing survivors in the US. In line with equity theory and distributive justice, Brockner et al. (1986) reported that a selection based on a random process influenced survivors in a more positive way than a selection based on merit criteria. However, due to the fact that their study was carried out under laboratory conditions and was performed already some years ago, raises some doubts about the transferability of these findings. Although the findings of Brockner et al. (1986) may be unique and valuable in their own way, with regard to the current study it is questionable whether the findings of a laboratory study provide a contribution for the exploration of survivors' real life experiences.

In summary and with regard to distributive justice the findings nevertheless are important, because they highlight the great importance which survivors attach to the selection process of redundancy. It remains to be seen if the current research reveals similar findings, or whether the survivors studied in this research compare their

situation not only to those of their colleagues but also to others in the same industry that may have experienced similar turbulences (Campbell, 1999). In any case, it can be expected that if survivors perceive the outcome of a management decision or an organizational action as unfair, they show unfavourable reactions towards their organization.

Procedural justice

Most of the findings from previous literature (e.g. Davy, Kinicki, Scheck and Sutton, 1988; Brockner, 1990; Mollica and Gray, 2001) relate to procedural justice and thus are concerned with the perceived fairness of the procedures used to determine a decision rather than on the fairness of the results of that decision. In a study performed by Campbell-Jamison, Worrall and Cooper (2001) participants expressed unfairness as one of the most frequent experienced emotions. It was found, that the perception of how fairly the downsizing process was managed is an important factor influencing survivors' reactions. In particular, when survivors were not informed by the management about the layoff reasons they were likely to consider the process as not fair and hence showed a lack of understanding and mistrust (Campbell-Jamison et al., 2001).

Besides management justification, which can be considered as the "extent to which management adequately explained the reasons behind a given decision" (Campbell, 1999, p.63), Brockner (1992) found that also the involvement of the personnel in the decision-making process impacts their perception of fairness. When survivors were either not asked for their opinion or not allowed to participate in the decision-making and planning process, they perceived the downsizing process as unfair (Brockner et al., 1992b). This suggests that survivors not only seek for sufficient information about why

the organizations had made a particular decision (see also sub-section 2.4.2.1 about information and communication), but that they also want to play a part in the decision-making process in order to perceive it as fair (e.g. Weiss, 2004).

Previous studies (e.g. Brockner et al., 1987; Brockner, 1990; Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996; Kernan and Hanges, 2002) also revealed that the way in which co-workers or victims were treated had an impact on survivors' perception of fairness. For instance, when leavers were treated unfairly in terms of their compensation, survivors perceived the downsizing process as unfair and reacted with anger and remorse (Brockner et al., 1987). Moreover, it was found that survivors showed stronger emotions when the ones who were treated unfairly were close colleagues to whom they felt attached to. As a consequence survivors worked less hard or showed a reduced commitment to the company (Brockner et al., 1992b).

These findings are interesting because they provide evidence that survivors are not selfish with regard how to move on in the downsized organization, but that they are also concerned with the way their friends are treated. With respect to this research project, it is therefore important to pay attention to the people in survivors' organizational environment, because their treatment may provide an indication to understand survivors' perception of fairness and consequently the reactions resulting (Campbell, 1999).

Interactional justice

A search for relevant literature revealed that only a few studies were concerned with the examination of interactional justice in the context of downsizing survival. The majority of those studies (e.g. Brockner et al., 1992b, Campbell, 1999) reported that

the effects of interactional justice are strongly related to management communication during organizational downsizing. However, this goes beyond the aspects of communication which deal with explanation or justification for decisions, but focuses on how information is presented to the survivors instead. Campbell (1999) for instance reported that survivors perceived a greater sense of interactional justice when the managers provided them the information with some form of sincerity and sensitivity. Furthermore, she argued that the more believable the information was perceived to be by the survivors, the more they perceived the treatment and hence the downsizing process as fair. This implies that even though survivors may consider the outcome of a decision and its underlying processes as fair, they may still feel unfairly treated when they perceive the managements' communication as not being honest and believable.

Kilpatrick (1999) in her study about downsizing in American hospitals supports the fact that appropriate management communication is crucial with regard to survivors' perception of fairness. However, she pointed out that survivors have to believe that the downsizing is necessary, and not caused by management failure, in order that they consider it as justified. This is an important point, because organizational downsizing can be the result of mismanagement and individuals may blame the organization for their behaviour since they might have lost control over the business and consequently had to file for bankruptcy (Mohr, 2000). However, it might be also the case that employees perceive the downsizing to be outside the control of the organization (e.g. external market forces) and hence perceive less injustice. In the context of the present study, it would therefore be interesting to discover whether survivors consider the financial crisis as an event out of the organizations' control and hence the organizations' action as justified, or if they consider the organization as fully

responsible and downsizing only as a cheap excuse for managements' incapability and thus not justified.

2.4.2.3 Trust in management

According to Spreitzer and Mishra (1997, p.6) "trust is an individual's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the belief that another party is competent, honest, reliable, and concerned about the individual's own interests". In the organizational context, trust between survivors and their organizations is important, as lack of it may influence survivors' attitudes and behaviours in an unfavourable way (Sahdev and Vinnicombe, 1998).

Previous research (e.g. Cascio, 1993; Ndlovu and Parumasur, 2005; Cheng, 2009) revealed that mistrust against the management and the organization is one of the most frequent concerns expressed by downsizing survivors. In studies conducted by Spreitzer and Mishra (1997) and Ndlovu and Parumasur (2005) it was found that, for a variety of reasons, two thirds of the survivors reported that their trust was damaged after the downsizing. Spreitzer and Mishra (1997) for instance reported that survivors distrusted the management because they felt that the managers were initiating the changes mainly because of their own interest rather than for reasons which were in the interest of the organization. Sahdev (2003) supports these findings, arguing that survivors' trust was suffering because, according to their understanding, managements' focus was more on the satisfaction of shareholders than on the employees.

These literature findings are interesting, as they suggest a positive correlation between trust in management and survivors' perception of fairness with regard to the way management acted. It shows that survivors' trust in management is sensitive and can

be easily damaged if management is ignorant with regard to the common welfare of the organization (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1997). Thus it seems to be necessary to pay attention to the focus and direction of managerial action, as this may not only provide an indication about survivors' perception of fairness (as discussed earlier in sub-section 2.4.2.2) but it may also help to understand their feelings of mutual trust towards the management.

Another reason why managerial trust suffered during downsizing is related to the fact that management did not share information with the survivors or was not quite honest with them (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004). Campbell (1999) argued, that managerial trust can be easily destroyed if survivors were told one thing, but experienced another. As a consequence, this diminished the amount of belief in further information they received from the management. This supports the work of Spreitzer and Mishra (1997), who found that survivors' mistrust led to the result that they discounted the information provided to them, because they did not consider it as credible anymore and were concerned that it might have been manipulated by the management.

With regard to the current research a lack of managerial trust may also be unfavourable in the period post-downsizing, in particular when the managements' firm wish is to inform survivors about good news such as an increased order income or potential opportunities for their careers. However, if the management is not considered as trustworthy any longer, it is unlikely that these messages are believed, but the downsizing most probably is still viewed as a threat instead (Spreitzer and Mishra, 1997). In such a case it is hard to convince them of the contrary because, as reported by Campbell (1999) even sensitive messages may not be successful in rebuilding the trust once it has been lost.

Besides the fact that information impacts managerial trust, previous research (e.g. Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002; Reinardy, 2010) also provided evidence about the relationship between managerial trust and survivors' work attitudes. Spreitzer and Mishra (2002) for instance, found trust in management to be related to higher assessments of commitment and Reinardy (2010) reported a positive relationship between organizational trust and survivors' job satisfaction, where their intention to leave was increasing as an inverse function of trust.

These findings may also be of significance for the current study, as many survivors may have changed their attitudes in a negative way as a result of the continuing financial crisis (e.g. Schaeffer, 2012) and for reasons which might be related to managerial trust. The knowledge gained from previous research about the power of trust in influencing survivors' attitudes may help to challenge the reasons for their reactions and thereby further increase the understanding of the complexity of survivor sickness with relation to trust (Noer, 2009).

In his study about survivor sickness, the American scholar David Noer (2009) concluded that survivors' sense of personal violation plays an important role with regard to their trust (see Figure 4). He argued that the more survivors trusted their employers the greater may be their sense of violation in case of downsizing. A high sense of violation in turn, may make them more susceptible to the symptoms of survivor sickness (Noer, 2009). This is a notable argument which suggests, that survivors with a long company seniority may suffer more from the effects of downsizing than survivors with less seniority, because mutual trust usually develops slowly and takes years to build (e.g. Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998) and consequently those with more years of company seniority may show stronger feelings of trust than

the younger ones. Subsequently they may experience more violation and suffer more survivor sickness.
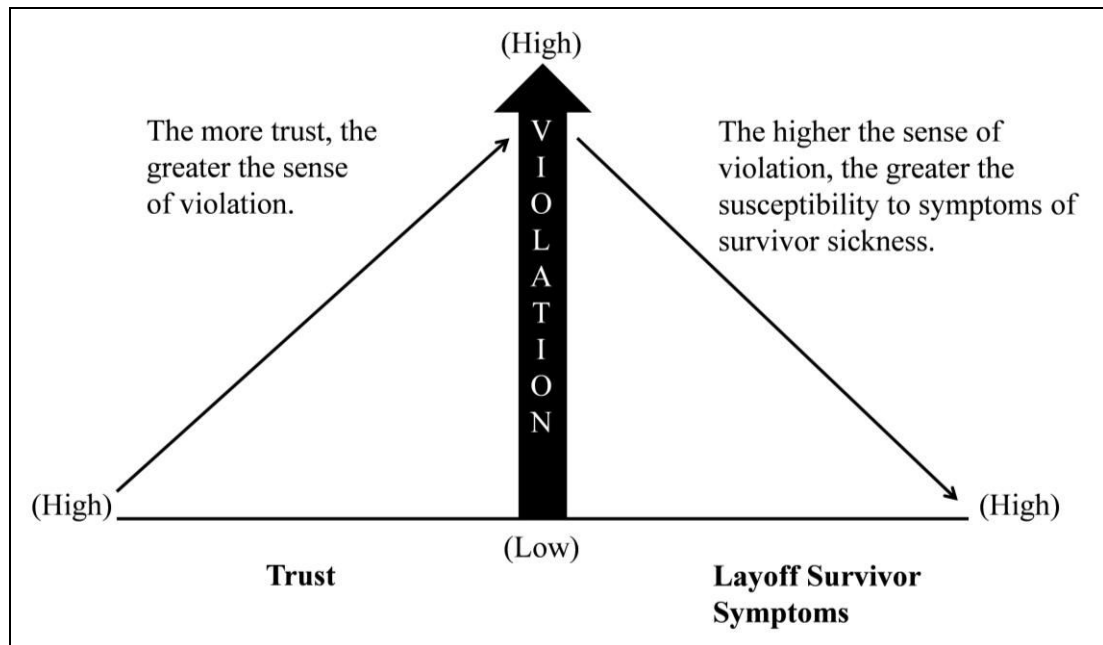
Figure 4: The basic bind (Noer, 2009, p.7)

2.4.3 Attitudinal reactions

The success of an organization, in particularly during times of downsizing, depends on survivors' behaviours, such as their effort or work performance (e.g. Nair, 2008). However, in order to predict survivors' behaviour, it is essential to understand their attitudes first, because an attitude determines the subsequent behaviour of an individual (Myers, 2005). Eagly and Chaiken (1998, p.269) described an attitude as a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". Attitudes are shown when people love or hate certain things, persons or events (Eagly and Chaiken, 1998). In the organizational context, employees show attitudes towards different people they work with (e.g. their co-workers or managers) or aspects of their daily work (e.g. work content) (Weiss, 2004). These attitudes may be favourable or unfavourable, but in any case bear the potential to predict certain behaviour.

With respect to the current study, the following sub-sections will illustrate and discuss the main attitudinal reactions found in previous research evoked by downsizing survivors. Each of the themes below was considered as important and will therefore be studied critically in order to assess its relevance within the research.

- Organizational commitment (e.g. Cross and Travaglione, 2004; Ugboro, 2006)

- Job satisfaction (e.g. Malik, Ahmad, Saif and Safwan, 2010c)

- Job motivation (e.g. Chipunza and Berry, 2010)

2.4.3.1 Organizational commitment

Brockner et al. (1992b, p.244) asserted that commitment has a "long history in organizational and social psychology". It is broadly defined as "a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target" (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001, p.301). In the organizational context however, previous research has shown that individual employees, and in particular downsizing survivors were found to have low commitment (e.g. Levitt et al., 2008; Reinardy, 2010) which in turn provides a major reason why organizational downsizing does not show the expected benefits in the long term (Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012). Therefore, this sub-section will examine the impact of organizational downsizing on survivors' commitment and how this may lead to a behavioural change.

Meyer and Allen (1991) in their three component model of commitment distinguished between three forms of organizational commitment: affective, normative and continuance commitment. The first one, affective commitment is caused by a person's affection for an organization where he or she is expressing a strong desire to identify with it. The second one, normative commitment originates from an individual's feeling

of obligation to remain part of the organization (e.g. a moral obligation to be loyal to the organization) (Ugboro, 2006). Continuance commitment, which is the third form of organizational commitment, results from an individual's decision to continue working in the organization, motivated by the right to personal benefits (e.g. retirement pension) gained over a long time working for the organization (Ugboro, 2003).

A search for relevant survivor literature (e.g. Ugboro, 2006; Lee and Corbett, 2006) showed, that survivors' organizational commitment is mainly predicted by affective and continuance commitment. This in turn was found to have further impact on survivors' behaviour. Savery, Travaglione and Firns (1998) for instance researched the links between absenteeism and commitment in an Australian railway company and found that a lower commitment among survivors led to higher absenteeism. Cross and Travaglione (2004) and Lee and Corbett (2006) reported further relationships with affective commitment and argued that affective commitment predicts an intention to quit the job or for voluntary turnover. In most of the cases, a low level of work satisfaction was found to be the reason for a decrease in affective commitment (e.g. Savery et al., 1998) which suggests that survivors post-downsizing suffer a lack of affection for their organizations, and are no longer willing to identify with them.

Previous research (e.g. Ugboro, 2003; Armstrong-Stassen, 2004) also revealed that organizational downsizing led to an increase of continuance commitment among survivors. This resulted mainly from a lack of personal investments and alternative job options, which made it hard for the survivors to leave the organization (Ugboro, 2003). Similar findings may be expected with regard to the current research, where downsizing survivors may not feel affection for their employer anymore, but may evaluate their situation with regard to gains and losses (Meyer and Allen, 1991). In that

case, it is most likely that such side bets (Becker, 1960) or speculations in possible future benefits (e.g. pension or further training) for the time after the economic crisis influences their continuance of commitment with regard to work in a positive way. Besides that, survivors' continuance commitment may also be influenced by social aspects such as a long friendship (Meyer and Allen, 1991) with their surviving colleagues, whom they do not want to lose, because they all share the common experience of downsizing survival (Noer, 2009).

A further study found a correlation between survivors' career level and their organizational commitment. Allen, Freeman, Reizenstein and Rentz (1995) who researched survivors in a US manufacturing industry, reported that organizational commitment varied between mid-career and early-career survivors, where early-career survivors showed a lower commitment than mid-career survivors post-downsizing. Allen et al. (1995) argued that one reason for the difference in survivors' commitment may result from the fact that early-career survivors are likely to believe that they will find a job elsewhere and therefore show a lower commitment. However, another explanation could be that mid-career survivors might have experienced reorganization in the past, and hence the downsizing does not influence their commitment that much (Allen et al., 1995). This view suggests that older survivors with longer job histories may be more resistant to the effects of downsizing and, therefore, may not experience an immediate commitment decline. Their prior experience with downsizing may mitigate the negative impact of a recent downsizing on their commitment, and hence would serve them as a coping resource as it was found by Armstrong-Stassen (2004).

However, in times of downsizing it is also important that the managers are a living example with regard to organizational commitment, and not only demand it from their

survivors. Campbell (1999) found that a significant number of survivors criticised the fact that their managers were not committed to the change, which in turn had a negative effect on their own commitment and the way they identified with the organizations' actions. This shows again that it is also important to explore managerial action post-downsizing, as many of survivors' attitudes (e.g. commitment) and subsequent behaviours (e.g. absenteeism) are directly impacted by it. Thus, a downsized organization needs both, committed employees who feel attached to the organization and identify with their goals, but also managers who set a good example and are committed to lead the change, in order to be successful (Pitts, 2006).

2.4.3.2 Job satisfaction

According to Malik et al. (2010c, p.202) job satisfaction "refers to the degree to which the working environment meets the wishes and the needs of the employees". Job satisfaction can relate to different aspects of the work, such as the work itself (e.g. work content or required skills) the social working environment (e.g. colleagues, management or salary) or the physical working environment (e.g. workplace equipment, lighting and so on) (Malik et al., 2010c).

In the organizational context, job satisfaction is considered as an important element, because satisfied employees show a tendency to be more productive and committed to the organization which in turn leads to higher outcome and profit (Malik et al., 2010c). Therefore, and with regard to the present research, it is necessary that organizations and, in particular, in times of downsizing, retain the job satisfaction of their survivors, since downsizing is aimed at improving an organizations' performance in the first instance (Cameron, 1994), which again does not work without having satisfied survivors.

Previous research (e.g. Vermeulen and Wiesner, 2000; Cross and Travaglione, 2004; Malik et al., 2010a) however showed that in almost every case survivors' job satisfaction was negatively influenced by a downsizing event and little was done to maintain or improve their satisfaction level. This had unfavourable consequences on their work attitude, but also increased their intention to leave the organization.

One of the main reasons why survivors were not satisfied with their job anymore resulted from the higher workload they had to deal with in the time post-downsizing (e.g. Devine et al., 2003; Virick et al., 2007; Malik et al., 2010a). Devine et al. (2003) found that downsizing survivors reported an even lower level of job satisfaction than the employees designated redundant, because they had to take on the burden of additional work and responsibilities. In a further study which was conducted in Asia, Malik et al. (2010a) reported that survivors felt frustrated and dissatisfied with their work, because they had to accommodate the increasing amount of work at their work places. This required them to spend more time at work, and consequently led to a shortage of their free time. Virick et al. (2007) mentioned that the additional workload had a negative impact on survivors' job satisfaction, because it disrupted their work-life balance. This seems to be the predominant view suggesting that organizations need to help the survivors in handling the increased amount of work as otherwise they will suffer role overload and dissatisfaction caused by a work-life imbalance (e.g. Appelbaum, Delage, Labib and Gault, 1997).

Although previous research did not provide a definite answer how to support survivors in managing the additional work, due to the importance of an intact work-life balance, one possible solution frequently discussed involves the possibility to initiate flexible work or telework arrangements (Virick et al., 2007). Such conditions would not lead to

a decrease of survivors' workload, however, it would enable them to spend more time with their families or at least allow them to organize the time freely according to their own preferences. This would enhance their work-life balance and consequently regain their job satisfaction. In particular in these days this should not be a big challenge anymore, as the information and communication technology has developed to such an extent, that working from home and over a longer distance is possible and simple (Martin and MacDonnell, 2012).

In a further study, Malik and Usman (2011) investigated the relation between an increased workload and survivors' job satisfaction. However, their findings, that even when survivors noticed a role overload, they tended to be satisfied with their job, are interesting as they are contradictory to the majority of findings that survivors' job satisfaction is negatively influenced by high workloads (e.g. Virick et al., 2007). Malik and Usman (2011) provided two explanations for their findings. First, survivors remained satisfied because of their affection for the organization, and second because of the possibility that they were pressurized by the demands of their family to stay in the organization at all costs. The latter reason seems to be the most evident one, as their study was conducted in a developing country, where survivors usually do not have so many alternatives other than to be satisfied with what they have (Meyer and Allen, 1991). However, this is unfortunate for these survivors, as in reality they may be dissatisfied with their job, but they cannot express this tendency because of fear of being dismissed next. Noer (2009) shares this view, arguing that survivors tend to repress their feelings and do not want to openly criticise their conditions, as this could bear consequences for them.

Concluding the findings about the influence of organizational downsizing on survivors' job satisfaction, it has been shown, that most of their complaints were related to the work itself (more work and more responsibility) and not caused by deficits in their social, or physical environment. Although promotion opportunities, or fair pay were found to facilitate employees' job satisfaction (e.g. Cross and Travaglione, 2004), non-financial measures such as social support or flexible work arrangement may be even more important to ensure that survivors can deal with the more difficult working conditions and thereby still remain satisfied through a good work-life balance. Saif, Malik and Awan (2011, p.612) who researched the impact of work-life balance on job satisfaction share this notion arguing that survivors are the asset of an organization and arrangements are to be made for their betterment that leads to more satisfaction "and motivates them to retain their jobs with a sense that they are better managing their work and life responsibilities".

2.4.3.3 Job motivation

Motivation is not a modern concept and was already researched decades ago and in many countries. In the beginning of the 1900s, the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud developed a theory defining the word "Trieb" (which was translated as "drive") which exists in order to determine humans' motivation by inner forces (Mills, 2004). Further theories in the field of motivation were mainly developed by American psychologists such as Maslow (1943) or Herzberg, Snyderman and Mausner (1959).

Maslow's (1943) motivational theory focuses on the hierarchy of needs. His theory relies on the assumption that a human being has a strong desire to satisfy his needs, which implies that when one need is satisfied, he/she seeks to satisfy needs on a higher level. To further describe the relationship between employee attitudes and their

motivation, Herzberg and his colleagues developed their motivation-hygiene theory. Herzberg et al. (1959) found that there is a difference between factors which lead to employee satisfaction and factors which lead to dissatisfaction. They called the first ones motivators since they lead to positive satisfaction and the latter ones hygiene factors since those do not cause direct satisfaction but their absence leads to dissatisfaction.

In order to motivate people in the business environment and to ensure job satisfaction, managers must demonstrate an understanding of employees' needs, motivators and hygiene factors and use them as an expedient tool or method for motivation. In turbulent times of organizational change, and in particular in the aftermath of downsizing it is crucial to recognize employees' needs and how to motivate them, since previous research (e.g. Doherty et al., 1996; Worrall, Campbell and Cooper, 2000; Obilade, 2009) provided evidence that most people involved, but especially survivors suffered a lack of motivation caused by the negative effects of organizational downsizing. This in turn hinders the achievement of organizational goals.

Sahdev and Vinnicombe (1998) argued that organizational downsizing, which is mainly aimed to increase organizations' efficiency and effectiveness also creates a "motivational paradox". On the one hand survivors are expected to learn news tasks, and to be more flexible and creative, however, on the other hand they are faced with work overload and higher job insecurity. Appelbaum, Leblanc and Shapiro (1998) provide further evidence for this contradiction, as they found that survivors were mainly demotivated because of their higher job load in combination with a salary freeze. Besides that, further budget cuts and the cancellation of social events and recognition programmes led to a drop of motivation (Appelbaum et al., 1998).

In summary therefore, these findings suggest that survivors' motivation is not primarily suffering from an increased workload and the more complex tasks, but rather more from the fact that the overall conditions became worse and their extra work is not recognized appropriately. Appelbaum et al. (1997), who researched the symptoms for the survivor syndrome in Canada, found that survivors were only motivated to perform well when they could expect a positive consequence for their efforts in terms of pay or recognition. However, when survivors perceived negative consequences to their efforts, such as a salary cut, their motivation was found to decrease. These findings correspond with the work of Brockner, Reed and Glynn (1993), who reported that survivors showed a higher motivation when they believed that their extra work was appreciated or would enhance their career opportunities in the long term. For this reason, it is important to gain insight into the way survivors' work was recognized by their employer, as this aid in understanding why they suffer a lack of motivation.

Previous research (e.g. Doherty et al., 1996; Chipunza and Berry, 2010) revealed that survivors' motivation is related to several other factors, such as their commitment and loyalty to their employers. The British scholars Doherty et al. (1996), for instance, found a strong relationship between survivors' motivation and their commitment and reported that survivors were primarily motivated by their commitment to their work targets. In this context, one of their participating survivors mentioned: "What drove us on to complete the project, even with its impossible targets, were our professionalism and our relationship with the customer to whom we were committed. It had little to do with loyalty to the company." (Doherty et al., 1996, p.56). This finding is interesting, as it indicates that survivors may have lost their trust in the management, but may still feel motivated by their overall task, which is to deliver good quality and to satisfy the customer. This is in accordance with the view of Thomas and Velthouse (1990) who

argued that individuals may be motivated by the valued experience derived from the task itself. To achieve customer satisfaction can be considered as such a task. Generally, however, it may be rather seldom that survivors remain highly motivated towards their work, as the majority of the studies (e.g. Appelbaum et al., 1998; Sahdev, Vinnicombe and Tyson, 1999) reported that survivors' motivation had a direct influence on their performance and led to a decrease of productivity.

In a further study, the American researchers Bommer and Jalajas (1999, p.31) investigated the extent to which survivors were motivated by their desire to do the job well, and the extent to which they were motivated by fear. Their findings showed that in the majority of all cases survivors were motivated by fear resulting from the threat of further downsizing. Campbell (1999) also found a relation between survivors' motivation and the threat of further layoffs. Survivors studied in her research felt strongly demotivated by the continued existence of the threat of further downsizing. Moreover, Campbell (1999, p.248) reported that it was hard to motivate survivors, because they distrusted the management, and initiatives developed for re-motivation, were considered, by many survivors as, "token offerings to soften the blow of expected future changes and redundancies".

A comparison of the findings of these two studies (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999 vs. Campbell, 1999) shows how differently survivors' motivation was influenced by organizational downsizing, in particular, when they perceived a threat of further redundancies. As stated earlier in this sub-section, many studies (e.g. Noer, 2009; Reinardy, 2010) have found that survivors suffered a lack of motivation post-downsizing, however, to what extent fear and threat may motivate them was seldom researched. However, it is desirable that organizations should reduce the fear, whether

or not this has a positive or negative influence on survivors' motivation. Organizations should ensure that survivors are intrinsically motivated, so that they feel an interest and enjoyment in what they are doing (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999). This is crucial, because fear may motivate survivors in the short term, however beside the fact that it is unethical (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999), it may lead to unfavourable reactions such as psychological complaints in the long term (Warr, 2002).

2.4.4   Behavioural reactions

In the previous sub-section survivors' attitudinal reactions to organizational downsizing were discussed. However, whether an organization is able to meet its original goals such as the improvement of efficiency or performance not only depends on survivors' attitudes, but is also significantly influenced by survivors' behaviours, since these give some indication how survivors act in the downsized environment (Weiss, 2004). Myers (2005) who researched the relation between attitudes and behaviour argued that behaviours become real as an outward expression of an attitude which suggests that an attitude predicts behaviour to a certain extent (Pate, Martin and McGoldrick, 2003) and hence influences the way individuals manage their daily work. Therefore, this sub-section will explore and discuss survivors' behavioural reactions as this may aid understanding of why so many downsizing initiatives fail and organizations are not successful in achieving their goals (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004; Noer, 2009).

Previous research (e.g. Richey 1992; Travaglione and Cross, 2006; Owodunni, 2007) revealed that a change in job performance is one of the most frequent behavioural reactions shown by downsizing survivors and is considered to be a critical element for organizations productivity and their entire success. In a study performed by Richey

(1992), the majority of survivors surveyed, stated that their job performance had either declined or even declined significantly as an effect of downsizing. However, a large number of other survivors who participated in his study reported that their job performance had increased as a consequence of downsizing. These are interesting findings as they contradict earlier research (e.g. Cameron et al., 1991) which reported that survivors' job performance is most likely to decline in a downsizing situation. Brockner's (1992) work sheds some light on this paradox, as he found a relationship between work performance and job insecurity in the form of an inverted-U (see Figure 5), which suggests that moderate levels of job insecurity lead to a higher work performance than lower job insecurity does. In other words, when survivors are fearful of losing their job, it motivates them to work harder so as to keep their job by any means. However, as already mentioned earlier (see sub-section 2.4.3.3), this is rather a short-term effect, and survivors' performance is likely to decline on a long-term basis (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999). Moreover, it is highly likely that organizations will pay the price for this in some other ways (Brockner, 1992).

For this purpose it is important that organizations ensure that survivors feel secure at their workplace, as this may help them to perform their work without feeling constantly threatened with being dismissed. Owodunni (2007) who conducted a study in Nigeria endorses this view, as he found that survivors could work better when they were in a better mental condition and not suffering under prevailing conditions of insecurity. He argued that organizations should provide survivors with more job security, as they need a "tension free environment" in order to perform at a high level (Owodunni, 2007, p.68).
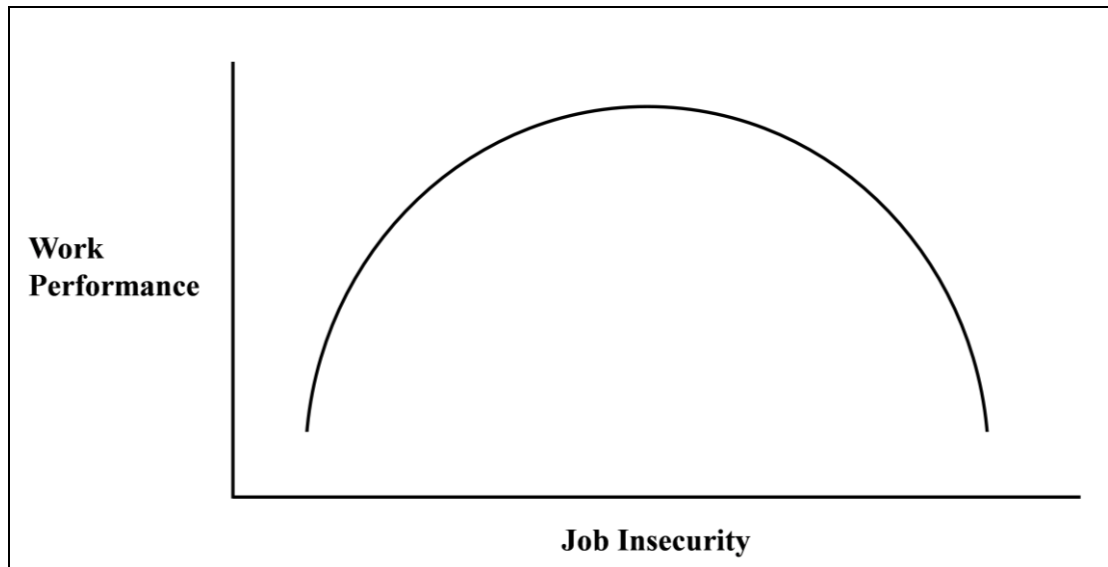
Figure 5: The effect of job insecurity on work performance (Brockner, 1992, p.16)

In another study, Armstrong-Stassen (2005) researched the reactions of executive-level and middle managers in a downsizing situation. She reported that the middle managers showed lower job performance and higher levels of health symptoms than the executive-level managers. As a possible reason Armstrong-Stassen (2005) suggested that middle managers might have felt more threatened by the downsizing and had not sufficient coping resources to deal with the situation, which consequently impacted their behaviour and led to a decline in work performance. This corresponds with the statement from Campbell (1999) that middle managers may struggle with the pressure they receive because of their sandwiched position between top-level managers and front-line managers. These findings are significant as they suggest that organizational downsizing has different impact at different levels where top-level managers may suffer least if at all.

Besides an increased amount of mental stress which was found to have an impact on the way survivors perform their work (e.g. Weiss, 2004), further studies (e.g. De Meuse, Bergmann, Vanderheiden and Roraff, 2004) revealed that survivors'

perception of psychological contract violation (see also discussion in sub-section 2.4.1) caused a decline in their job performance. It was found that when survivors believed that their employer did not fulfil its promises, such as to guarantee job security, survivors did not feel obliged anymore to work as hard as they did prior to downsizing (De Meuse et al., 2004).

Thus, it is imperative that organizations pay more attention to survivors' attitudes and their well-being, as these factors predict survivors' subsequent behaviour. Given the fact that survivors' behaviour (such as their job performance) has a direct impact on organizational success, employers must treat their survivors with dignity and respect and ensure that they can perform their work without being stressed. This in turn not only enhances the organizations' overall performance, but it also encourages survivors to stay in the organization, as they feel valued by their employer (Munoz-Bullon and Sanchez-Bueno, 2010).

2.4.5   Emotional reactions

There are many definitions of the term emotion found in the literature and previous researchers could not agree on a single one. Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981, p.355) asserted that

> Emotion is a complex set of interactions among subjective and objective factors, mediated by neural/hormonal systems, which can (a) give rise to affective experiences such as feelings of arousal, pleasure/displeasure; (b) generate cognitive processes such as emotionally relevant perceptual effects, appraisals, labeling [sic] processes; (c) activate widespread physiological adjustments to the arousing conditions; and (d) lead to behavior that is often, but not always, expressive, goal-directed, and adaptive.

Cabanac (2002, p.69) proposed that emotion "is any mental experience with high intensity and high hedonic content (pleasure/displeasure)". In the organizational context, a downsizing initiative may constitute such a "mental experience with high intensity" (Cabanac, 2002, p.69) and lead to various emotional reactions among downsizing survivors.

A review of previous literature revealed the following themes which were considered as important in understanding survivors' emotional reactions post-downsizing.

- Job insecurity (e.g. Hellgren, Sverke and Isaksson, 1999; Kurebwa, 2011)

- Guilt (e.g. Brockner et al., 1986; Sahdev and Vinnicombe, 1998; Noer, 2009)

In the following sub-sections, each of these themes will be discussed and critically assessed with respect to its contribution to the current research.

2.4.5.1 Job insecurity

Job insecurity is defined as "perceived powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation" (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984, p.438) and may cause similar negative reactions than job loss itself. Moreover, Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans and Van Vuuren (1991, p.44) argued that "job insecurity can be one of the more important stressors in employment situations". This applies in particular in a downsizing situation as several studies (e.g. Greenglass and Burke, 2001; Maertz, Wiley, LeRouge and Campion, 2010) revealed that job insecurity among survivors is increasing and leads to unfavourable reactions, which harm the individual and the organization in the long term. With respect to the current research it is therefore indispensable to shed some light on this critical issue, as survivors studied in this research may have experienced high levels of insecurity during the financial crisis (e.g.

McDevitt et al., 2013) which had altered their attitudes and behaviour towards their employer.

Doherty et al. (1996), who examined the impact of organizational downsizing on survivors in the UK, found that one group of survivors feared losing their jobs in the next round of downsizing whereas another group of survivors was more concerned about losing career opportunities or not being able to deal with the change. Kurebwa (2011) reported similar findings among African survivors. He found that a large number of survivors expressed concerns about the future and worried about how long they could expect to keep their jobs in the downsized organization. Moreover, some survivors were concerned that they would not find a comparable job (e.g. with similar salary and benefits) or any job at all given their countries' weak economic situations.

These findings are notable as they indicate that survivors are not only fearful about potential job loss but also about losing important elements of their jobs (Hellgren et al., 1999). This notion would correspond with the work of Greenhalgh (1983), who found that in times of change employees may also fear losing contact with their workplace friends, losing privileges, or losing the status that their job had previously given them, even though their jobs were not in danger per se. However, the fear of losing certain features of the job but still being employed would most likely cause lower levels of job insecurity and lead to less adverse reactions than losing the job altogether (Greenhalgh, 1983). Such reactions were found to include a decline in commitment (Ugboro, 2003) a lack of motivation (Jeon and Shapiro, 2007) or a higher intention to leave (Bernhard-Oettel, De Cuyper, Schreurs and De Witte, 2011).

In another study, Amundson et al. (2004) researched the experience of Canadian survivors from the public and private sector and reported negative and positive incidents in relation to possible job loss. Besides a large group of survivors who were anxious and fearful that they could lose their job either in the current wave of downsizing or in a future one, another group of survivors was found confident in being able to cope with job loss or that they would not lose their job at all (Amundson et al., 2004). In this context, Amundson et al. (2004) revealed that the fear of potential job loss was largely influenced by survivors' perception of their own employability. This involves how survivors assessed their job skills, their age, or the current job situation.

These findings lead to the assumption that the threat of further redundancies does not cause job insecurity, because of the survivors' belief that they cannot do a lot to mitigate the unfavourable consequences of job loss (Brockner, Grover, Reed and DeWitt, 1992a). However, if survivors are confident of finding a job elsewhere, because of their skills and education, it is unlikely to be the case that they perceive a high level of insecurity (Brockner et al., 1992a). Campbell (1999) provides further support for this view as she found that those survivors who had the ability to move easily to another organization showed lower levels of job insecurity, than those who had difficulties in finding work elsewhere. With regard to the present study, it remains to be seen how survivors assessed their skills with regard to finding a job elsewhere and how this had an impact on their perception of job insecurity. However, in light of the recent financial crisis it may become of particular interest to explore how survivors' job insecurity was affected, when they could not find another job despite their good education and skills, simply because an entire industry (e.g. financial sector) was down (Udokwu, 2012).

A couple of other studies (e.g. Campbell, 1999; Grunberg, Moore and Greenberg, 2001) revealed that survivors' perception of job insecurity was also influenced by their relationship to leavers. Campbell (1999) reported that survivors who had personal working relationships with leavers experienced increased levels of job insecurity and intention to leave the organisation. Grunberg et al. (2001), who researched the impact of layoff contact on survivors' perceptions of job insecurity, found that survivors who had indirect contact with layoffs (e.g. experienced the job loss of colleagues or friends) showed higher levels of job insecurity than those who had no contact with layoffs. Although in both studies, the survivors' job might not have been in jeopardy, the findings provide an indication that when survivors witness the dismissal of someone close to them it affects their emotions and cause feelings of insecurity, because they are not sure about whether they are to be dismissed next. This effect might be even stronger when they additionally perceive the process as not being justified and colleagues not treated fairly, as feelings of inequity were found to impact survivors' job insecurity in a negative way (Loi, Lam and Chan, 2012).

In her study about survivors reactions in the UK, Campbell (1999) reported that although survivors were reassured that there would be no further staff reductions, they still felt insecure, as they did not trust the management anymore. Campbell (1999) found that the continual threat of further downsizing left survivors with insecure feelings, which suggests that the more downsizing initiatives survivors had experienced the more it affected their perception of job insecurity in an unfavourable way. Maertz et al. (2010, p.277) endorsed this reasoning and argued that "past downsizing would generally indicate more, not less, threat to survivor job security going forward". Such a continual threat was particularly detrimental for those survivors who had to take care of a big family or were in debt (Klein, 2009), as they

had an economic need to work and losing the job would have become life-threatening for them (Brockner et al., 1992a).

Therefore, organizations should make an attempt to mitigate the effect of insecurity on survivors, even though they cannot guarantee security for their job (Bernhard-Oettel et al., 2011). This means that employers should provide survivors with clear information about whether their job is at risk and what alternatives are available inside or outside the organization (Kinnunen, Mauno, Naetti and Happonen, 2000). In any case, management communication must be open and honest, as this establishes a sense of mutual trust and reduces the fearful reactions, which may occur as a response to organizational downsizing (Kinnunen et al., 2000).

2.4.5.2 Guilt

Survivor guilt is a critical issue in the aftermath of organizational downsizing and is related to, or led to symptoms such as depression or anger (Vinten and Lane, 2002). Vinten and Lane (2002) highlighted the power of the concept of survivor guilt with respect to its application in different crisis situations, such as ferry or flight disasters. Although the experience related to such disasters will undoubtedly cause stronger feelings and emotions among survivors than a redundancy programme ever will, there might be some parallels, because in both cases, individuals will lose someone (e.g. close friend or just fellow passenger) and feel guilty because they could have been affected instead of them. Against this background, it is important to study survivor guilt in more detail as this may help to reveal the causes but also the effects of this phenomenon.

Brockner et al. (1986, p.374) argued that inequity produces guilt and "motivates individuals to redress this guilt through behavioural or psychological means". In the context of downsizing survival this means that survivors, who consider the dismissal of a co-worker as not being fair, may work harder in order to counteract their feelings of guilt induced by the unfair layoff of their colleagues (Cascio, 1993). Sahdev and Vinnicombe (1998) in their study provide support for this assumption and the possible existence of survivor guilt, as they found that survivors had a stronger focus on their tasks post-downsizing than pre-downsizing. They argued that survivors worked harder in order to "compensate for feelings of loss of colleagues" and to deal with the feelings of guilt associated with it (Sahdev and Vinnicombe, 1998, p.12). However, Campbell (1999) who also paid attention on the potential impact of guilt on survivors' work performance provided an alternative explanation arguing that survivors may work harder in order to secure their place in the organization, as they fear further downsizings and worry about being dismissed. These arguments are noteworthy and the current research should make an attempt to discover whether survivors' performance is more influenced by guilt or by fear as both of these emotions have the potential to trigger certain behaviour (Warr, 2002).

In a further study however, Noer (2009) did not identify guilt as one of the major themes, which is interesting as other researchers (e.g. Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996) have argued that guilt plays a major role in relation to individuals' emotional reaction post-downsizing. Noer (2009) argued that a possible reason for this might result from the fact that guilt is a difficult human emotion, which cannot be identified as such, and may be suppressed or manifested in other emotional reactions (e.g. depression or stress) or behaviours such as an increased work performance as discussed above. Noer's (2009) argument would correspond with earlier findings from Sahdev and

Vinnicombe (1998), as HR managers in their study had difficulties in identifying and quantifying survivor guilt, which was mainly related to the fact that guilt was found not to be a visible, but a complex, emotional reaction. With regard to the present study it is therefore important to pay attention to various emotional and behavioural reactions shown by survivors as they may provide a hidden indication of survivor guilt, and help to develop an understanding of how this phenomenon is expressed in a downsizing situation.

However, previous research (e.g. De Vries and Balazs, 1997; Vinten and Lane, 2002) also revealed that not only surviving staff but also surviving managers experienced guilt in the aftermath of downsizing. Vinten and Lane (2002) stated that although organizational downsizing is a common practice and considered to be legitimate in times of permanent economic growth and competition, many managers suffered from feelings of guilt after they had made staff redundant. This is in line with the work of De Vries and Balazs (1997), who also found that many managers experienced a pervasive sense of guilt wherein they started to blame themselves for what they had done to others. In an extreme case this has even driven them to commit suicide, as they could not live with their guilt any longer. Further research did not provide evidence for this argument; however it can be assumed that even managers may experience a difficult time as the downsizing may have been against their will and in their belief that it was not ethical to execute the downsizing and to terminate staff (DeWitt, Trevino and Mollica, 2003).

2.4.6 Health issues

Previous research (e.g. Devine et al., 2003; Weiss, 2004) demonstrated that the consequences of organizational downsizing are not only limited to changes in survivors' attitudes and behaviours, but also affected their health to a large extent. This involves psychological, but also physical, complaints and might appear in various forms and be caused by different reasons (Hughes, 2000; Grunberg et al., 2001). At this point, it is crucial to pay attention to survivors and their health issues; since survivors are the organization's major resource and neglect of this could lead to even more dramatic issues or long-term absenteeism (Travaglione and Cross, 2006).

The themes below emerged from the literature review and were considered as relevant to gain insight into survivors' health issues associated with downsizing survival. In the following, each of these topics will be discussed critically and in relation to the current research.

- Work stress (e.g. Doherty et al., 1996; Amundson et al., 2004)

- Psychological complaints (e.g. Greenglass and Burke, 2001; Weiss, 2004)

- Physical complaints (e.g. Hughes, 2000; Klein, 2009)

2.4.6.1 Work stress

Folkman and Lazarus (1985, p.152) defined stress as: "a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as relevant to his or her wellbeing and in which the person's resources are taxed or exceeded". This has proved to be true in particular in the time post-downsizing, where many survivors considered their situation as a stressful experience and had difficulties in coping with it (e.g. Knudsen et al., 2003; Nair, 2008). Previous literature revealed various factors which

are likely to produce additional stress among the survivors. This involves the dismissal of colleagues (Armstrong-Stassen and Latack, 1992) the breach of the psychological contract or the adjustment to a new order (Levitt et al., 2008).

However, most of the stress was found to be related to the increased amount of work and the new responsibilities survivors had to deal with after downsizing. In one study for instance, Doherty et al. (1996) researched the experience of British downsizing survivors and found that survivors suffered enormous stress from the workload they had to absorb from those who were made redundant. Survivors in their study reported that it was common that they had to handle the work of two or three people, which put them very much under pressure and led to an increase of stress at the workplace. The work of Amundson et al. (2004) supports this. Amundson et al. (2004) found that the majority of survivors reported negative incidents with regard to their new work tasks, as they had to deal with dramatically increased workloads or had difficulties to learn new skills required to perform the tasks. This all led to increased levels of work stress.

Although an increase of work is bound to happen post-downsizing as many jobs are cut, but work usually remains the same (e.g. Noer, 2009), in view of these findings it may emerge that organizations should make an effort to redesign work processes and the scope of responsibilities after downsizing. Such measures would not only reduce job-related stress, but might also increase survivors' job motivation (see also sub-section 2.4.3.3) and thereby make their working life easier and more enjoyable (Knudsen et al., 2003).

2.4.6.2 Psychological complaints

Several studies (e.g. Weiss, 2004) revealed that survivors' psychological health was more strongly affected by downsizing than was their physical health. It was found for instance that survivors were sinking into depression in the aftermath of downsizing (e.g. Noer, 1995; De Vries and Balazs, 1997) and suffered from mental health problems.

Greenglass and Burke (2001) who researched the effects of downsizing and restructuring on employees in Canadian hospitals found that the continual fear of job loss caused psychological distress and anxiety among the surviving nurses. Moreover, they reported that the persistent and chronic stress associated with the higher workload led to emotional exhaustion which is considered as a typical component of burnout. These findings support the study of De Vries and Balazs (1997), as they had identified job insecurity as a major cause of the deterioration of survivors' psychological well-being and increase in various stress related complaints.

Further studies provided evidence that organizational downsizing has a deleterious impact on survivors' psychological health. Almost half of the survivors participating in Amundson et al.'s (2004) research project reported that they had health problems in the form of sleep disturbances, irritability or headaches. Several other survivors studied in their research mentioned that they took more sick days post-downsizing than pre-downsizing, which suggests that they were not able to cope with the mental disorders any longer and therefore stayed at home. This view would correspond with the work of Hughes (2000), since survivors investigated in her study admitted that they had to see a doctor as a consequence of their anxiety and depression post-downsizing. Besides that, Hughes (2000) reported that downsizing had caused a loss of interest and sadness

among survivors and had a negative impact on their eating and drinking behaviour. This involves that survivors consumed an increased amount of alcohol and smoked more cigarettes, which are all indicators for a lack of well-being and hence demonstrate how survivors react in order to cope with their concerns (Latack, 1986).

Although activities such as gardening, sport or yoga helped survivors to switch off from work (Amundson et al., 2004), the findings from previous research strongly suggest that organizations have to make an active stance to initiate counselling and psychological help in order to mitigate the negative effects of downsizing on survivors' mental health. This is in particular necessary, because deviations in feelings and behaviours such as reported above are common signs of depression (Hughes, 2000) that can become a downward spiral, where survivors may not be able to work at all anymore (e.g. De Vries and Balazs, 1997). In such a case the organization has not only lost workforce, but the effects of downsizing have also damaged individuals' life which is much more dramatic (Noer, 2009).

2.4.6.3 Physical complaints

Besides psychological health problems, previous research revealed that survivors also suffer from physical complaints as a consequence of organizational downsizing. Hughes (2000) who researched the effects of downsizing on survivors of a public institution in the United States found that one third of the participating survivors reported physical illness. This contains back problems or headaches, but also the exacerbation of chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease (Hughes, 2000). Klein (2009) provided further support for the existence of physical sickness among survivors. He reported hearing loss, pain in the stomach and blood pressure difficulties among German downsizing survivors, who mentioned high levels of stress as a

possible cause for their complaints. Moreover, several survivors from Klein's (2009) study reported that they carried on with their work even though they had physical pains, because they felt responsible for their colleagues and the work which needed to be done.

This is an interesting finding which suggests that these survivors may have had a strong commitment to the organization, which acted as a driving force to work and not to report sick (e.g. Savery et al., 1998). Another possible explanation might be that survivors continued their work at any cost; irrespective of how sick they were, because they had a strong fear about potential job loss. However, as such feelings are usually very personal; survivors may not have wanted to share this experience with the interviewer and hence invented a plausible excuse instead to justify their behaviour (Warr, 2002).

In a further study, Schreuder, Roelen, Koopmans and Groothoff (2008) examined the differences in health complaints among blue collar workers in a company belonging to a production industry. Their study revealed that blue collar employees, who were mainly machine operators or maintenance technicians, suffered more physical than psychological health problems as a consequence of their daily work. The analysis showed, that blue collar workers complained more often about pains in the lower extremities and in the lower back, which was found to be related to the higher physical workload (e.g. heavy lifting or dragging) with which they had to deal (Schreuder et al., 2008). Although this study did not explore health problems among downsizing survivors, the outcomes may still be of relevance with regard to the current research, because it can be assumed that blue collar survivors, who work on the shop floor, are most likely to experience similar physical demands when they have to do additional

shifts (e.g. Warr, 2002) or deal with an increased amount of heavy physical tasks in order to keep the production running.

2.5   Longitudinal effects

Most of the previous research studied survivors' attitudes and behaviours based on a cross-sectional approach at a single point in time (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004; Reinardy, 2010), or under laboratory conditions (e.g. Brockner et al., 1987 or Brockner et al., 1993) but did not investigate extensively the longitudinal effects over time. The goal of this section is to review all relevant material related to the second research question with the aim of gaining an insight into the longitudinal effects associated with downsizing survivors. It is aimed to explore if the effects of downsizing on survivors change over time, and if so, how this is happening. This is important, as it helps to achieve a fuller picture of the detrimental influence of organizational downsizing on survivors.

In the 1990s, the American researchers Luthans and Sommer (1999) conducted three surveys (one before and two during downsizing) to compare the longitudinal effects of downsizing on managers' with those of staff employees. The study revealed that managers only experienced small attitudinal changes over time and stated higher levels of commitment and workgroup trust than staff. Luthans and Sommer (1999) argued that this might result from the fact that managers were more aware of future plans and long-term goals and were offered the opportunity to participate in regular meetings to review the progress and to exchange information with peers. Staff employees in contrast only received an information update once in a while and through second hand sources rather than through direct communication, which might have impacted their attitudes towards downsizing more unfavourably (Luthans and Sommer, 1999).

Further support that individuals' level in the organizational hierarchy plays an important role with regard to how they are able to cope with a downsizing over time, was provided by Armstrong-Stassen (2005) who performed a longitudinal study over a period of three years to investigate the responses of middle and executive managers surviving a downsizing initiative in a Canadian governmental institution. Armstrong-Stassen (2005) reported that both types of managers, executive and middle managers' sense of job security and well-being dropped significantly during the downsizing. However, it was found that executive managers were more able to apply positive-thinking, coping better before and during the downsizing, whereas, in contrast, middle managers used more avoidance and disengagement coping strategies, which was found to reflect their sense of powerlessness to control the situation during that time (Armstrong-Stassen, 2005).

These findings are interesting as they support the argument from Latack (1986) that optimism towards the change has a favourable influence on individuals' coping behaviour and their ability to manage a downsizing situation over time. However, these outcomes also contribute to previous research (e.g. Swanson und Power, 2001) by providing further evidence that middle managers are suffering more from organizational downsizing, than executive managers. This might be related to the fact, that in time of downsizing they are more change recipient than change agent (DeWitt, et al., 2003) and therefore feel powerless, but also insecure, as they could be the target of the downsizing as well (Balogun, 2003). With respect to the present study it may therefore be important to pay attention to the responses of survivors at all levels in the hierarchy, as they may provide relevant conclusions about how individuals or certain groups have coped with the situation over time.

Allen et al. (2001) also noted the longitudinal effects of downsizing on survivors. They investigated the attitudinal changes (e.g. job involvement, satisfaction with top management, job security, organizational commitment and intent to change jobs) of surviving managers in an American company at three different time periods: prior to downsizing, four months after downsizing had arisen and 16 months post-downsizing. Overall, the findings showed that the majority of the employee attitudes were more negative in the period during the downsizing compared to the period pre- or post-organizational downsizing. It was found, that after some time had passed, attitudes returned back to a more favourable stage and half of the attitudes studied were again at a similar level to where they were at the pre-downsizing period (Allen et al., 2001). Nelissen and Van Selm (2008) reported similar findings and argued that survivors' responses developed in a positive manner from the unfreezing to the refreezing phase which led to the assumption that they have balanced their reactions more, with regard to the organizational change. This is in line with findings from Nicholson and West (1988) suggesting that after a certain time has passed, attitudes may move to their original state and into a stabilization phase.

Further support for that argument was provided by Armstrong-Stassen (2005) who reported that middle managers' job performance decreased substantially during downsizing, but increased in the aftermath to a similar level to that which it was prior to the downsizing, which suggests that it had only a short-term effect. However, a rather unexpected finding was the significant decline of executive managers' performance during downsizing. This in turn suggests that they are not resistant to all of the negative influences associated with downsizing, even though it is widely assumed, that more information and involvement would put them in a much better position to keep control over the situation (Luthans and Sommer, 1999).

An interesting finding was also provided by Allen et al. (2001), who reported that survivors' level of satisfaction with the management increased continuously, whereas their job involvement constantly decreased. This might result from the fact, that people start to rebuilt their relationship with the management, but still act hesitantly and reluctantly with regard to their engagement in their work. A similar behaviour was observed for commitment, which did not return to the same level as it was before the downsizing, and therefore might be an indication that employees are not willing to provide their full commitment towards the organization again (Allen et al., 2001) since they perceived personal harm and have wounded feelings (Noer, 2009).

Further evidence that time does not necessarily ease the pain was provided by Arshad and Sparrow (2010), who found, that perceived justice and negative affectivity measured immediately one month after downsizing predicted a violation of the psychological contract, which as a consequence predicted a decreased commitment and a greater intention to leave eight months afterwards. This supports the work of Kernan and Hanges (2002) as their study showed that the perception of procedural justice measured two months after reorganization still had a negative impact on survivors' commitment and their trust in management 10 months later. This in turn is a strong indication for the above argument that individuals' commitment is hard to recover, once they have been mentally affected and they have lost confidence in the organization and its management (Mone, 1994).

In an earlier study, Davy et al. (1988) measured survivors' responses at two points during downsizing (one month and three months after the downsizing process had started), with the aim of gaining more insight into the long-term effects of organizational downsizing on survivors. Their findings revealed that variables

measured at an earlier point of time had an impact on later outcomes, in particular how psychological withdrawal soon after downsizing, including aspects such as justice and job insecurity, started to lead to an increase of behavioural withdrawal (e.g. commitment, job satisfaction or intention to quit) at a later stage, which again demonstrates the negative impact of downsizing on a long-term view (Kernan and Hanges, 2002).

Thus, and with regard to the current study, it is important to pay attention to survivors' past experiences of organizational downsizing, since they may provide significant indications which are helpful in understanding their reactions to the most recent downsizing. Moreover, it is anticipated that a closer look at participants' history of downsizing survival reveals more details about how long the effects of downsizing last. The information gained from this will, in particular, help to clarify whether downsizing exposure has only a short-term effect on survivors, as indicated by the work of Nicholson and West (1988) or Allen et al. (2001), or whether the effects of downsizing are long-lasting and visible long after the downsizing process has ended, as reported by Kernan and Hanges (2002) or Arshad and Sparrow (2010).

2.6   Management action

Appropriate management action such as organizational support for the survivors is crucial in the aftermath of downsizing, since many survivors are struggling with its negative side-effects, which in turn impacts their attitudes and behaviours in an unfavourable way (e.g. Brockner et al., 1992b; Reinardy, 2010). The following section is aimed at gaining sufficient knowledge with regard to the third research question, namely, how management action impacts survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing. In this context, the goal is to illustrate and assess strategies and concepts

(e.g. Knudsen et al., 2003) which were suggested in order to mitigate the negative reactions of survivors and to revitalize them in the best possible way (Noer, 2009).

Beside the aspects related to communication, which were already extensively discussed in sub-section 2.4.2.1, the following themes emerged from the literature review and were considered as relevant to gain a better understanding of how downsizing survivors were supported by their organizations.

- Perceived organizational support and the lack of it within organizations

  (e.g. Von Baeckmann, 1998; Amundson et al., 2004; Gandolfi, 2009)

- Measures to make the job more enjoyable

  (e.g. Brockner, 1992; Burke and Nelson, 1997; Knudsen et al., 2003)

- Counselling and training

  (e.g. Doherty and Horsted, 1995; Owodunni, 2007; Nyberg and Trevor, 2009)

- Best practice examples

  (e.g. Doherty and Horsted, 1995; Dolan, Belout and Balkin, 2000)

In the following, each of these themes will be discussed individually and critically assessed with regard to its contribution to the present research project.

2.6.1 Perceived organizational support and the lack of it within organizations

As illustrated in the previous sections, organizational downsizing has a dramatic influence on those who were designated redundant, but also on the surviving workforce. Noer (1995) argued that the majority of the companies paid a lot of attention to outplacement services for the employees made redundant; however, only little help and support was provided to the survivors who remained in the organization

and had to continue their work in the downsized environment (Von Baeckmann, 1998; Amundson et al., 2004).

In the organizational context, perceived organizational support (POS) can be considered as "a critical component of survivor reactions after downsizing" (Travaglione and Cross, 2006, p.4), and was found to have a positive effect on their attitudinal and behavioural reactions, such as their commitment or performance (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch and Rhoades, 2001). This is in line with organizational support theory, whereby "employees have been found to develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived organizational support [POS])" (Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006, p.689). This involves that individuals are acting in a reciprocal manner and perform to the same extent to which support is perceived (Eisenberger, Hungtington, Hutchison and Sowa, 1986).

It was found that many organizations deal only superficially with survivors' needs and their main focus is on the downsizing activity itself. Only once organizations realize that they failed to achieve their business objectives, do they start to investigate potential reasons for it. Moreover, the majority of downsized companies assume that survivors just need to be informed about the downsizing, but not about their individual future prospects in the company (Labib and Appelbaum, 1994). Gandolfi (2009) supports these findings and reported that more than 50% of the organizations surveyed were not equipped with plans or procedures about how to support downsizing survivors. This is an interesting finding, since organizations usually have various processes for individual purposes in place. However, it demonstrates again, that to perform an organizational change which requires also soft and not only hard skills,

companies are not well prepared or simply underestimate the risk involved (Von Baeckmann, 1998).

Amundson et al. (2004) found that more than half of the survivors were suffering insufficient organizational support. They felt that their mental health was neglected by the organization and that support programmes were ineffective or only had a poor quality. In addition, survivors expressed concerns that financial support for training and education was not provided any longer. These findings correspond with the work of the British management scholars Doherty and Horsted (1995), who reported that only 45% of the participants found that survivors received support from the organization. This suggests that regardless of their industry or country of origin, organizations in general pay insufficient attention to their surviving workforce. Doherty and Horsted (1995) reported that although support programmes were in place, they had rather a short-term focus with an emphasis on work-related skills, where coaching and counselling was provided to managers, but very little was done to support survivors' individual career and personal change process. As a consequence, this led to unfavourable reactions among the survivors, in particular among those ones, who did not receive any help, which in turn might be a trigger for attitudinal and behavioural changes such as a decrease in commitment (see also sub-section 2.4.3.1) or a reduction of work performance (Travaglione and Cross, 2006; Reinardy, 2010). Therefore, and with regard to the present study, it is important to pay attention to the way management has supported their survivors, as this helps to achieve a better understanding of survivors' reactions.

2.6.2 Measures to make the job more enjoyable

Brockner (1992) asserts that as soon as some time after the redundancy has passed, survivors should be actively involved in shaping the new organization. It was argued that survivors' sense of control can be recovered to a certain extent by their active involvement in the organization's decision-making process. This, for instance, might be achieved by encouraging them to provide useful ideas or proposals to run the business more efficiently (Brockner, 1992). Such an approach contributes not only to increase their sense of belonging, but is also essential for the success of the business, since they know the organizations' deficits and weaknesses best, and can therefore work out appropriate suggestions for improvement (Brockner, 1992; Weiss, 2004).

Burke and Nelson (1997) highlighted that survivors have to recognize new opportunities, which might arise from the organizational change. This may include new ways to perform the job more successfully or the improvement of individuals' career prospects. In any case, the organization needs to make sure that survivors have the chance to experience success in assigning tasks to them which they are likely to achieve. Only thereafter, they should be provided with more complex work (Brockner, 1992; Burke and Nelson, 1997). This helps to renew their self-confidence and to bring them back to the old routine (Brockner, 1992).

Knudsen et al. (2003) mentioned that elements such as job redesign, job enrichment or rightsizing may be possible strategies to empower survivors in order to avoid a commitment decline in the aftermath of downsizing. They emphasized that survivors have to enjoy the jobs they are going to do after the change. Once they become intrinsically interested in what they are doing it is likely that their productivity and morale goes up and it drives their motivation by inner forces (Mills, 2004).

However, it has to be ensured that survivors are not overwhelmed by additional tasks which were previously done by their former colleagues (see also discussion in sub-section 2.4.6.1). Such tasks very often also include low value work or tasks, which are done because of habitual behaviour, but not because of its necessity (Brockner, 1992). In this context, and with regard to rightsizing, Brockner (1992) argued that companies have to be more supportive to survivors and pay attention to them, so that only important and valuable work is being done. Especially for older employees or those with long company seniority, old habits may die hard and they have to be convinced about new processes and procedures in place. This may take a while. However, older employees and their know-how are the organizations' backbone and without them the company may not stay successful in the future (Brockner, 1992; Sitlington and Marshall, 2011).

Moreover, rewards and recognition were found to contribute to survivors' self-confidence, since survivors are seeking for feedback with regard to their performance in the new job position. In this context, Sahdev et al. (1999) reported that survivors were more engaged when they received high recognition, rather than when they received an increase in pay. This finding is notable, as it suggests that non-monetary benefits convey a stronger sense of being valued than monetary benefits, which in turn leads back to motivational theories (see sub-section 2.4.3.3) and the power of intrinsic motivation (Mills, 2004; Noer, 2009). However, it is also important to publish and communicate the rewards and benefits awarded, since this has a positive effect on the other employees and will encourage them to be proactive and creative as well (Brockner, 1992).

2.6.3 Counselling and training

Previous research (e.g. Owodunni, 2007) highlighted that survivors need counselling, since they have to deal with losses e.g. in their company status or possibly in terms of income, but in any case they have to bear with the loss of their colleagues which might represent one of the biggest challenges for them. Furthermore, they have to cope with the new environment in which they find themselves and are uncertain with regard to their future (Hughes, 2000; Owodunni, 2007).

To address these issues and in order to manage survivors successfully, problematic issues must be approached from the organizational, but also from the individual perspective. This means that HR strategies must consider internal and external assistance in order to provide every individual with the support needed (Doherty and Horsted, 1995). Hughes (2000) asserted that external consultants are beneficial in times of downsizing since they have expert knowledge, but also a more objective perspective than employees who are involved in the organizational system. Such employees might be too much influenced by their own experience that they cannot deal clearly and precisely with the situation (Hughes, 2000).

Moreover, it is important that survivors receive career counselling, which helps them to explore new career opportunities, but also to improve their skills, to make them more prepared for new challenges (Hughes, 2000). This is crucial and might particularly necessary with regard to the present study, because the organization needs qualified survivors in order to become competitive and successful again in times of economic downturn and post-downsizing. In addition, special attention must be paid to high performers, since they are the ones with the highest education and skills, and it is most likely that they will leave once they are not satisfied anymore (Nyberg and

Trevor, 2009). This corresponds with the view of Brockner (1992), who argued that counsellors have to arouse their talents and strengthen their self-marketing skills. Furthermore, high performers have to be convinced that the new organization is able to provide them with new challenges and future prospects in order to make them stay in the organization (Nyberg and Trevor, 2009).

However, not always cost intensive solutions such as external counselling are required; sometimes a short dialogue with a key person from the management is sufficient to help in reducing survivors' sadness and uncertainty (Labib and Appelbaum, 1994). Amundson et al. (2004) for instance recommended initiating team building workshops, where the company can demonstrate an active behaviour with regard to employee support and thereby enhance the team spirit and individual's well-being. This makes sense, since the group of survivors are in the same position and only if they stay together and demonstrate team spirit are they able to deal with the new challenges (Weick, 1993).

Behr and White (2003) mentioned that downsizing survivors must receive social but also "spiritual" support in order to revitalize. It was argued that "vitality days" might support them in understanding how they can take better care of themselves (e.g. how to enhance their work-life balance) after finishing their work ("How can HR re-engage redundancy survivors?", 2010, p.34). This will provide them with new energy, which in turn may cause a performance increase ("How can HR re-engage redundancy survivors?", 2010). This seems to be important and would correspond with a survey result among US layoff survivors demonstrating that organizational support contributed to improving survivors' work-life balance in the post-downsizing period (Kowske, Lundby and Rasch, 2009).

2.6.4 Best practice examples

Although many studies revealed that the majority of organizations are badly prepared or react reluctantly in the way they support the surviving workforce (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004; Gandolfi, 2009; Noer, 2009) some studies demonstrated that organizations are indeed aware of survivors' concerns and know how to address them (e.g. Feldman and Leana, 1994; Dolan et al., 2000). In this sub-section, a series of best practice examples about how organizations managed and supported their survivors successfully is presented and concluded.

A good example was set by the Canadian National bank (CN) where the downsizing announcement was communicated accurately in advance and all survivors received an extensive retraining to improve their competencies and to make them more marketable for future employability in the organization (Dolan et al., 2000). External consultants in co-operation with the management, worked out procedures to rebuild survivors' commitment and to improve their performance. With no doubt, this was a deliberate decision, since help from outside offers a fresh perspective and tends to be less biased and more objective than internal staff (Hughes, 2000). In addition to that, CN developed a "suggestion system" where survivors were encouraged to be creative by providing ideas to increase the level of productivity (Dolan et al., 2000, p.40). Any useful idea provided, was rewarded with a financial bonus and thereby motivated the initiator (Dolan et al., 2000). It is most likely, that this is an effective method since a similar strategy was applied by GE which launched a "Workout" programme to animate survivors to provide useful ideas and finally helped them to manage a higher workload with less people (Brockner, 1992, p.24).

In another case, after undergoing a large redundancy initiative, the American company Duracell launched a "survivor programme" aimed to increase information exchange, the renewal of organizational commitment and a continuous support for survivors. As part of the programme, senior managers participated in group sessions with survivors to support them in understanding the downsizing reasons and its extent. This is important, since survivors have a "thirst for information" (Noer, 2009, p.61) and a desire to understand the organizations' strategy. Similar to CN and GE, Duracell provided internal and external support and every individual received personal and one-on-one career counselling to assess future opportunities for the time after the change. After downsizing completion, the programmes' progress was monitored and survivors were offered the chance to address all open and unclear issues in a follow-up meeting. Such meetings are of great importance, since it is not only about informing survivors, but also about to providing an opportunity to check back with the management and to address open questions (Noer, 2009). This in turn was one reason for Duracell's success, and only two survivors left the company (Feldman and Leana, 1994).

Survivor awareness was also found among European organizations in particular in the UK. In this context, a UK building society, which made more than a thousand people redundant at the beginning of the 1990s, spent immense effort to support their surviving workforce (Doherty and Horsted, 1995). Similarly, as in the case of the Canadian National bank (Dolan et al., 2000) survivors were directly provided with accurate information and board members visited each site to respond to survivors concerns. Support was provided at all levels and to any individual, including training for the managers, a helpline to support staff and assistance by professional counselling. Furthermore, for any survivor, a personal development plan was prepared (Doherty and Horsted, 1995). To motivate survivors, an incentive plan was launched with the

goal to pay them with extra money when customers' satisfaction increased. Although it was shown that a non-monetary incentive scheme is more powerful than a monetary one (e.g. Sahdev et al., 1999) however, money is still considered as an important element to motivate survivors (Malik, Bibi and Rahim, 2010b) and to recognize success. Opinion surveys which were carried out annually revealed that the organization's effort in terms of survivor support, was successful and the organization had chosen the right strategy (Doherty and Horsted, 1995).

In summary, the examples clearly demonstrated how different organizations were managing and in particular taking care of their survivors. Although every organization approached the situation in a different way, there were many measures in common (e.g. advance information or counselling) which contributed managing the survivors successfully and easing their pain after downsizing. The studies provided evidence that management and HR functions have to cooperate with each other in supporting and assisting survivors, and how external consulting is appropriate to provide help and advice. One interesting and remarkable finding needs to be highlighted at this point. The American company Duracell and the UK building society gave special attention to informing survivors about how their dismissed colleagues were progressing in the job market and which kind of support and assistance was offered to them. By doing this, the organization demonstrated sympathy and respect for the ones dismissed. Moreover, it is an indicator for how the organization treats employees and thereby spreads confidence to the survivors (Brockner, 1992). In the context of the present study it is therefore essential to explore the individual measures organizations have initiated to support their survivors, since this contributes not only to a better understanding of their reactions, but it also helps to gain more knowledge about possible causes for the survivor syndrome.

2.7 Summary

This chapter formed the first part of the literature review and discussed the outcomes and reactions of downsizing survivors which were found in the existing literature. The findings gained from this literature review have provided strong evidence for the existence of the survivor syndrome. In section 2.4 survivors were studied from the individual survivor perspective. This revealed that a downsizing experience has a negative impact on survivors' attitudes and behaviours and influences their emotions and well-being in an unfavourable way. In addition, section 2.5 reviewed the literature with a focus on the longitudinal studies about downsizing survivors. In this respect it was found that previous studies arrived at differing conclusions, since the findings of one group of researchers indicated that the effects of downsizing survival were only of a short duration, whereas the outcomes of another group of management scholars indicated that the after-effects of downsizing continued to impact survivors for some time post-downsizing. Finally, section 2.6 analysed the existing literature with regard to management action post-downsizing. This showed that in most cases, no support was provided to the survivors, which in turn intensified their negative responses and increased the mistrust towards the organization.

Through this literature review it was also possible to identify some research gaps (see also previous discussion in section 1.2 about gaps in the literature). In summary this includes that most of the previous research was conducted in North America, where the data were predominately obtained through quantitative methods or in a laboratory setting. Moreover, the vast majority of studies followed a cross-sectional approach, but they rarely examined the effects of downsizing on survivors over time, and thereby missed the opportunity to sufficiently clarify whether experiences from downsizing are short-lived or long-lasting. Although appropriate communication and organizational

support were recommended by management scholars in order to mitigate the extent of survivors' reactions, the existing literature has not sufficiently investigated how management action affects survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing.

As stated earlier already (see section 1.3 about research purpose), the goal of this study is to address these gaps and to explore survivors' reactions in the European context, by paying attention to how management action affects survivors' reactions post organizational downsizing. This is important, because as a consequence of the financial crisis, many European organizations had to downsize their workforce and survivors were left alone and suffered from its effects. Thus, it is justified to conduct this research and to continue the exploration of this phenomenon.

3 Literature review part 2: Theoretical models and concepts to study downsizing survivors

The previous debate (part 1 of the literature review) has demonstrated that organizational downsizing causes various negative outcomes and reactions among the survivors which may even last over a long period of time. The present chapter constitutes the second part of the literature review and is focused on theoretical models and concepts that reflect on these reactions in order to show how survivors' responses vary depending on their perception of the downsizing event and their ability to make sense of their experience (Weick, 1995). Although much has been written about models of organizational change (e.g. Lewin 1947; Bridges, 2002), models of survivors' reactions to downsizing are rarely represented in the existing literature. The majority of the few approaches available were developed by American researchers (e.g. Brockner, 1988; Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998) who, as previously mentioned, take a leading role in generating research on downsizing survivors. Although these models and concepts draw on different schools of thought and vary with regard to underlying criteria and data material, they are relevant in the context of the current research, as they offer a wide range of approaches to explore and explain survivors' reactions post-downsizing.

The models and concepts are subdivided into two different categories:

- Models about survivors' reactions to downsizing (section 3.1)

- The concept of sensemaking (section 3.2)

In the following sections each of them will be illustrated and critically assessed with regard to its usefulness to guide this research project in studying survivors' experience of organizational downsizing.

3.1 Models about survivors' reactions to downsizing

In earlier sections it has been shown that organizational downsizing causes various reactions among the group of survivors. Since individuals' perception of that event might differ, it subsequently will also lead to different responses. The present section will illustrate different models of survivors' responses with the aim to get a better understanding of their diverse reactions and their implications.

3.1.1 Brockner's conceptual model

A kind of a pioneering model (see Figure 7) to investigate survivors' reactions to downsizing was developed by Brockner (1988) and provides a first approach to illustrate the aspects related to the survivor syndrome in a structured and well-thought out way.
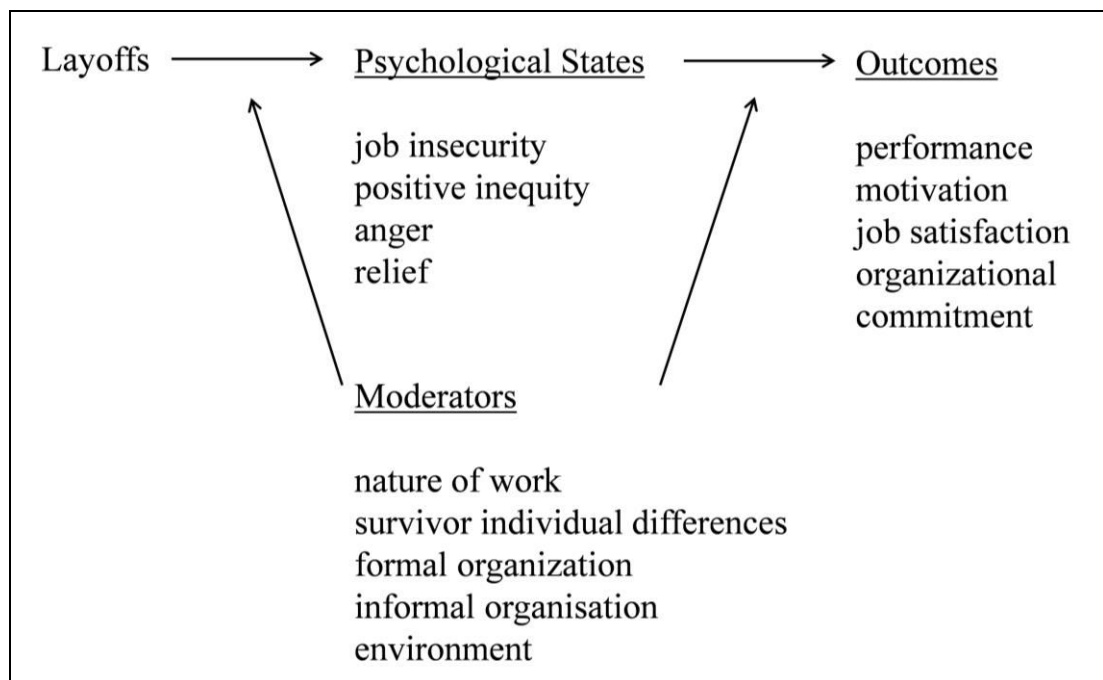
Figure 7: Brockner's conceptual model (Brockner, 1988, p.221)

In a first step of this conceptual model, Brockner (1988) asserts that a downsizing programme may produce various psychological states among survivors such as job insecurity, positive inequity as synonymous with survivor guilt, anger and the relief having survived the downsizing. These in turn may have an influence on survivors' outcomes such as their performance or motivation. Moreover, it was argued, that positive inequity might increase survivors' work motivation in such a way, that when they realize that their ratio between input (e.g. hard work) and output (e.g. salary, benefits) is smaller than the one of their dismissed colleagues, they will make an effort to work harder with the aim to increase their inputs (Brockner, 1988). However, most probably their additional work effort will not only reduce their feelings of guilt, but it will also help to set them apart from other survivors and thereby may put them in a better position once further layoffs are impending in times of financial crises (Klein, 2009).

The third part of the model is concerned with elements which may moderate the negative influence of downsizing on survivors. It was found, that the nature of work serves as an important moderator where the task interdependence plays a key role (Brockner, 1988). Brockner (1988) argued that those survivors who stayed in an interdependent task relationship to their laid off colleagues suffer more from the aftermath of downsizing and perceive higher levels of psychological states than other ones who had rather an independent task relationship with their dismissed colleagues. Similar to that, Doherty et al. (1996) and Virick et al. (2007) concluded that survivors were suffering more work-related stress, which suggests that they are not only struggling with the new structure in place, but also with the additional tasks which tend to overwhelm them (see also discussion in sub-section 2.4.6.1). This in turn may have also impeded survivors' process of sensemaking, as they did not see the benefits, but

experienced predominately the dark side of downsizing (Weick, 1995).

Moreover, Brockner (1988) argued that survivors' individual nature may have a moderating influence on the way they think, feel and act with regard to a downsizing programme. This corresponds to Mishra and Spreitzer's (1998) definition of survivor archetypes (see sub-section 3.1.2) where a calm person for instance tends to respond in a more passive way compared to a person who is more emotionally driven.

As illustrated in the model, aspects associated with the "formal organization" (e.g. underlying rules and organizational procedures) may have a moderating impact on survivors' reactions. However, Brockner (1988) emphasized that informal elements such as values and interpersonal relationships, which go beyond individuals' task fulfilment might be even more powerful to moderate the impact of downsizing on survivors. This in turn suggests that an organization's culture and human resource policies need to be in accordance with each other in order to ease survivors' transformation process (Brockner, 1988).

Finally, Brockner (1988) argued that environmental conditions, external to their own organization may moderate survivors' responses to downsizing. If survivors get the impression that a "similar" organization (an organization which belongs to the same industry for instance) has not had to deal with layoffs, they tend to question if it is legitimate that their own one does, which in turn might trigger negative reactions such as anxiety or anger (Brockner, 1988). This corresponds to equity theory where survivors judge an organization's behaviour, which as a consequence, might lead to unfavourable responses, in particular if things were not perceived to be fair (Greenberg, 1987).

In summary and with respect to the current research project it is therefore important not only to be attentive to survivors' psychological states and their attitudes, but also to focus on the environment in which they are operating, since this provides important cues which may help to achieve a better understanding about the reasons for survivors' reactions and how they make sense of it (Weick, 1995).

3.1.2 Mishra and Spreitzer's archetypes of survivor responses

A further model to study survivors' reactions to downsizing was suggested by Mishra and Spreitzer (1998). They developed a typological model (Figure 8) to classify survivors' responses to downsizing into four different categories, namely (1) fearful, (2) obliging, (3) cynical, and (4) hopeful.
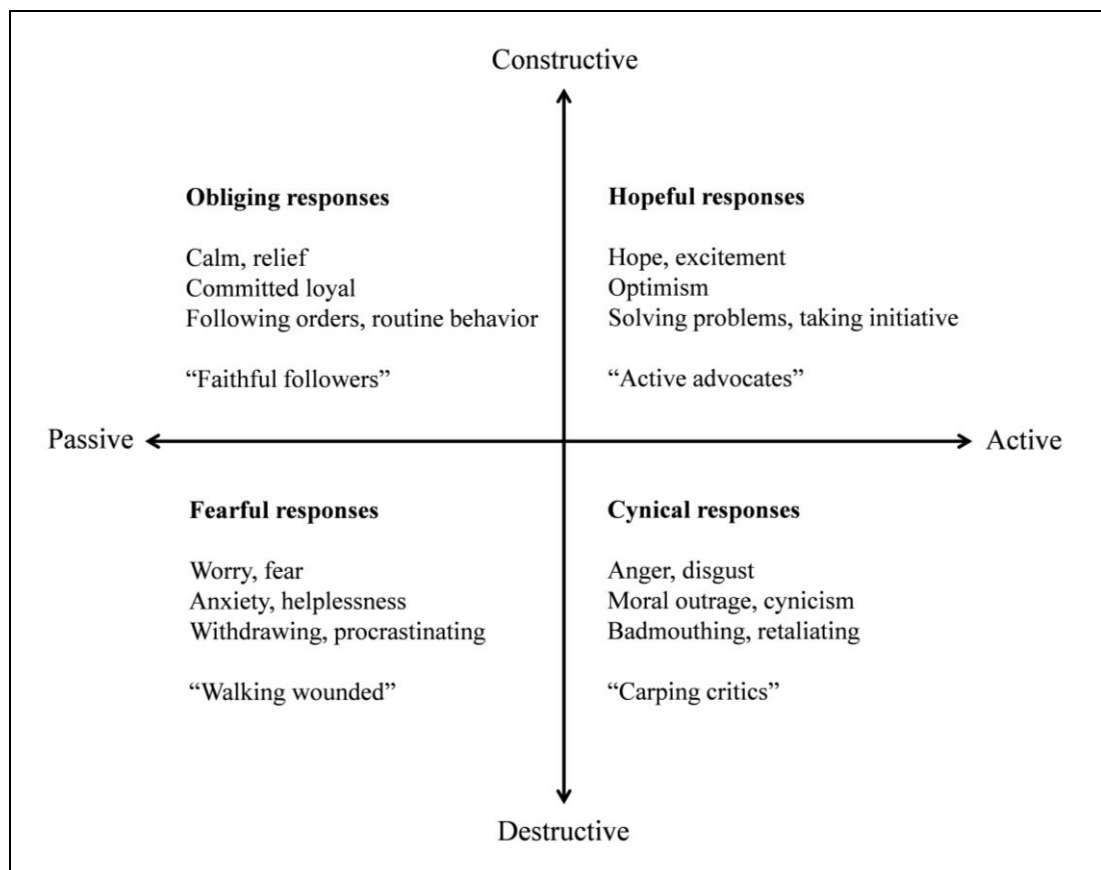
Figure 8: Archetypes of survivor responses (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998, p.569)

Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) applied the four vector model from Farrell (1983) on workers' responses to job dissatisfaction where each vector defines the direction of the identified group behaviour (constructive/destructive in vertical and active/passive in horizontal directions). To illustrate the individual archetypes, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) drew on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress theory which involves concepts of cognitive appraisal and coping mechanism about how to deal with psychological stress.

3.1.2.1 Dimensions of survivors' behaviour

According to Mishra and Spreitzer (1998), constructive survivors do not experience a significant level of threat and harm by a downsizing programme. They are supportive and endeavoured to collaborate with their managers to execute the downsizing. Moreover, they spare no effort and are willing to go the extra mile e.g. work over hours without getting paid for it. In contrast, destructive survivors are just the opposite; they feel a higher level of threat and appraise the situation as more harmful. Besides that, their willingness to cooperate with the management is very limited and they show a reduced level of supportive attitude. With regard to the horizontal dimension an active survivor response is based on the assumption that they will be able to deal with the aftermath of downsizing, whereas a passive survivor response is indicated by a lower degree of coping ability and little action on their own initiative to react to downsizing. Passive survivors show a reserved behaviour with a tendency to wait until their managers provide solutions and plans e.g. to save costs or to make processes more lean. In summary, an active response deals with the problem, whereas a passive response avoids or neglects the problem and is "hoping the problem will solve itself" (Farrell, 1983, p.600). Based on these two dimensions and guided by Lazarus's stress

theory the four different survivors' archetypes were synthesized by Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) and are presented in the following.

3.1.2.2 Fearful responses

Based on their typological classification, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) assert that survivors who respond in a passive and destructive way fall into the category of "Fearful responses" since they feel potentially harmed by a downsizing event. This survivor archetype is considered as "Walking wounded" and reacts in a frightened way and with anxiety when he/she is faced with such a situation. He/she tends to lapse into a depressed state, feels worried about the situation and experienced a reduction in concentration. Fearful responses react with helplessness, which reflects their belief that they are limited in their resources to cope with the situation, which in turn might lead to an increase of absenteeism or time which they spend with non-work related activities (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998). This interpretation corresponds to findings from De Vries and Balazs (1997) who reported that survivors felt threatened by the downsizing and showed symptoms of depression and dispiritedness. Thus, it is suggested that these groups of survivors could hardly make sense of their situation since they suffered from what the organization has done to them when they had initiated the downsizing (Weick, 1995).

3.1.2.3 Obliging responses

The second category of Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) illustrated a survivor archetype which they called "Obliging responses". This type of survivor does not perceive the downsizing as generally threatening, nor does he/she feels significantly harmed by it. From an emotional point of view, the downsizing did not affect them too much and they show a rather calm and tranquil attitude with regard to their response. They react with relief and are glad having survived the downsizing without being harmed by it.

Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) described them as "Faithful followers" since they tend to remain loyal and are committed to do their work obediently. Furthermore, they hold on to old habits and do not necessarily look for new opportunities and challenges, which might be an indication of their affective commitment since they feel attached to the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1991).

3.1.2.4 Cynical responses

The third survivor archetype is described as "Cynical responses" and reacts in a similar destructive way to "Fearful responses". They respond with anger and resentment and feel personally harmed by the situation. "Cynical responses" show a high degree of agitation and perceive that their psychological contract has been violated by the downsizing. Their behavioural response has an active component which implies that they feel able to cope with the downsizing. However, as the name indicates, they are rather cynical than supportive and their reaction is characterized by a destructive nature, where they act counterproductively to the downsizing processes. This includes badmouthing, but may in extreme cases eventually go so far that it leads to vandalism or sabotage. Because of their unfavourable and disruptive behaviour, they were considered as "Carping critics" (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998). This interpretation is significant and maybe unique, since previous research did not report such survivor behaviour. However, it provides a thought-provoking impulse that an archetype which embodies both an active and destructive character may not only have the ability to cope with the situation (e.g. Noer, 2009) but rather more, could pose a security risk for the organization.

3.1.2.5 Hopeful responses

As the fourth survivor archetype, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) identified a "Hopeful response" from those who do not see the situation as threatening and feel able to cope with it. They show an active and a constructive reaction towards downsizing and do not perceive a significant level of personal harm. They show an optimistic attitude with regard to the future and are positive that things will become better. Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) considered them as "Active advocates" since they are endeavoured to actively take part in improving the organization's performance so that they can achieve their targets. Against this background, a constructive and optimistic survivor behaviour seems to be a favourable element in the aftermath of downsizing, since it has a positive influence on work satisfaction (Reinardy, 2010) and contributes to higher levels of performance (Armstrong-Stassen and Schlosser, 2008).

3.1.2.6 Summary

In summary, Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) provided a comprehensive approach to categorizing the individual survivor responses in one single model. Such a model is a useful tool for understanding how individuals react to downsizing and what result that could have for the organization. Besides prior attitudes and beliefs, which may have an influence on survivors' appraisal of stress and their responses, the way the downsizing is implemented (e.g. management behaviour) may also shape their reactions either in favourable or unfavourable direction. Thus this model would support the earlier discussion (see sub-section 2.4.2.3) about the impact of managerial trust on survivors' reactions where mistrust against the management could lead to "Cynical responses" which, as described above, involve quite a lot of potential to harm the organization.

However, and with regard to the current research, survivors' responses may not be limited to only one quadrant, but may combine behaviours of two different archetypes, where they "exhibit hybrid responses in coping with the downsizing mandate" (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998, p.572). Moreover, their responses might have a dynamic character such as organizations themselves (Petrescu, 2010) and survivors shift between individual quadrants over time or once they progress. They may also change their direction and a passive response might become a more active one when the survivor perceives the situation to be improving and is encouraged to do certain things (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998).

The model's potential ability to explore survivor reactions in practice was demonstrated by Burke (2005) who investigated the responses of hospital nursing survivors at two different points in time. The correlations among the four different survivor archetypes corresponded to the findings from Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) in a large part, with the only difference being, that their findings revealed that the destructive response (Fearful and Cynical) are the most predominant one, whereas Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) reported that both of the constructive responses (Obliging and Hopeful) emerged to be the strongest. However, this might result from the differences in the underlying boundary conditions of these studies or the ways in which the downsizing was managed (Burke, 2005) and cannot be taken for further criticism. Generally, however, Mishra and Spreitzer's (1998) proposed categorization of survivor archetypes holds and thereby provides confidence that this model serves a useful tool in studying their responses to downsizing.

3.2 The concept of sensemaking

A further approach which promises to be relevant for this study and the exploration of survivors' experience is the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995). This theory originates from the field of organizational research which aims to study the complexity of organizations and their environments. It is concerned with how individuals make sense of the situations in which they find themselves after some change has occurred. For this reason, the concept of sensemaking may also be of importance in this study in exploring how survivors make sense of their situation post-downsizing. The following more detailed discussion will shed light on the value of this method in examining survivors' experiences. This discussion also includes a review of the existing literature on sensemaking and sensegiving in the period post-downsizing.

3.2.1 The nature of sensemaking

Sensemaking is considered to be an interpretative process and describes how people make sense of and construct the situation in which they find themselves (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995, p.4) defined it "as a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain surprises". Sensemaking is focused on the question, how and what people construct and what are the results and consequences of what they constructed (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, Maitlis, (2005, p.21) views it as an activity "in which individuals attempt to interpret and explain sets of cues from their environments".

Karl E. Weick can be considered as one of the most influential persons who established the concept of sensemaking. In his theoretical framework he described peoples' sensemaking as something that puts stimuli into frameworks and allows them to understand, explain and predict things. To understand the process of sensemaking involves an understanding of how people, as individuals, or within groups, give

meaning to a situation and how their imagination and understanding have an influence on their attitudes and behaviours (Weick, 1995).

3.2.2   Sensemaking vs. interpretation

To emphasize the uniqueness of sensemaking, Weick (1995) put this concept in contrast with interpretation, since people often use it as a synonym for sensemaking. Weick (1995) stated that interpretation is "just as likely to describe a product" (Weick, 1995, p.13). It is aimed at the understanding of a certain text and situation, however, sensemaking also considers how certain circumstances are constructed (Weick, 1995). The main difference is that sensemaking focuses on the ways in which people construct what they interpret. Interpretation assumes that there is already something there which needs to be discovered, whereas sensemaking is more about invention where the subjective has to be constructed and framed (Weick, 1995).

3.2.3   Properties of sensemaking

Weick (1995) defined seven fundamental properties to illustrate the process of sensemaking, and to set it "apart from other explanatory processes such as understanding, interpretation, and attribution" (Weick, 1995, p.17). The first property gives an understanding that sensemaking is based on the construction of identity, where a person's identity is deeply linked to the interaction with other people. Even more, the individuals' identity is constructed in interaction with the others (Klatzke, 2008).

Schwandt (2005, p.183) used the following definition: "An intricate combination of self-identity of the actor and the identity of the organization forms and sustains the socially constructed meanings assigned to events". This implies that the process of sensemaking arises from the individual's need to pose a sense of identity, which is a

common orientation to events that keep up respect and consistency of peoples' self-conceptions. In this context, people become aware and learn more about their identities once they project themselves into an environment and watch the effects resulting (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) referred back to the work of Chatman, Bell and Staw (1986) who stated that by looking at someone's individual behaviour in an organization, two identities might be arising. On the one hand, the individual as himself and on the other hand the individual as a representative of the community. In this case, the individual not only acts on behalf of the collective, but even more imperceptibly as the organization itself, when he expresses and represents its values and aims. Concluding a description of this phenomenon, the behaviour an individual shows, could be more considered on a macro level, than was initially assumed (Weick, 1995).

Weick (1995) highlighted the meaning of retrospective sensemaking as the second and one of the most important properties for the process. Weick (1995, p.12) used the expression "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" to demonstrate the main idea of retrospective sensemaking. He stated that the process of sensemaking is retrospective, since individuals and organizations only know what they are doing, after they have done it. In other words, people and organizations act first and then look at the situation afterwards (in retrospect) to see what happened and to make sense of it. They look back to actions which they performed in the past to make sense of the current situation. So, people do make sense of a situation in hindsight (Weick, 1995).

The third property is about enactment, which is focused on the construction of meaning. Weick (1995) used the term of enactment to explain that, in organizations, people very often construct part of the environment they face. By doing so, people

produce their own opportunities and constraints which, they are then faced with. Once people and organizations create a certain environment, they are consequently forced to deal with it. In this context, Follett (1924, p.60) argued, that "the activity of the individual is only in a certain sense caused by the stimulus of the situation because that activity is itself helping to produce the situation which causes the activity of the individual".

A further property describes sensemaking as a social process and as Weick says (1995, p.39) quoting Allport (1985, p.3) "an attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual presence of others". Thus, sensemaking is considered as intersubjective and does not arise in a vacuum (Klatzke, 2008). In organizations, decisions will be made, either in the presence of all stakeholders, or at least with the knowledge that they need to be understood, performed or approved by other stakeholders, after they have been taken. In any case the information within the decision-making process needs to be shared with the collective or accepted by them (Weick, 1995).

The fifth property views sensemaking as an ongoing process with no beginning or ending. This involves that an individual action is influenced by the previous one, but also affects the later ones. The sense people made of previous similar situations has an influence on the understanding of current and future events. People are always considered to be the central point in the situation (Weick, 1995). In this context, Weick (1995, p.43) stated that "there are no absolute starting points, no self-evident, self-contained certainties on which we can build, because we always find ourselves in the middle of complex situations which we try to disentangle by making, then revising, provisional assumptions".

Another property of sensemaking is that people tend to extract cues from their environment to support their decision making about which information is important and which descriptions are appropriate (Weick, 1995). According to Weick (1995, p.50) "extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring". Moreover, the environmental context, language or organizational vocabularies might have an influence on the extracted cues (Schwandt, 2005).

The seventh property of sensemaking is about plausibility. In the process of sensemaking the focus is rather on plausibility than on accuracy. Although accuracy is important, however, it is seldom produced by executives. In the context of sensemaking this is not a major issue, as long as the sense made of an unexpected event is possible and reasonable (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995, p.57) considers "plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention, and instrumentality" as even more important elements within the process of sensemaking.

3.2.4 Survivors' sensemaking and managers' sensegiving in the period post organizational downsizing

Smircich and Stubbart (1985, p.727) defined organizations as a "set of people who share many beliefs, values, and assumptions that encourage them to make mutually-reinforcing interpretations of their own acts and the acts of others" and that encourage them to act in ways that have mutual relevance.

As in daily life, organizations have to deal with interruptions and events which are not expected nor desired in any way. Interruptions can be caused by organizational changes which violate the environmental framework and disturb the ongoing flow of

peoples' activity. Such interruptions are occasions which trigger the process of sensemaking whereby peoples' focus is only on that interruption. Therefore, an interruption is considered as "a signal that important changes have occurred in the environment" (Weick, 1995, p.46). Very often, an interruption results in an emotional response, which in consequence leads to an emotional impact on the sensemaking process. It is likely that these emotions have a negative character when the type of interruption is considered to be harmful or adverse (Weick, 1995).

Organizational downsizing might be considered as a dramatic form of organizational change and business interruption, where the concept of sensemaking could provide an approach to analyse and interpret such an occurrence (Luscher and Lewis, 2008). The framework of sensemaking offers a holistic method to study different organizational realities and to understand how people make sense of their experiences. This might be particularly relevant with regard to downsizing survivors, as they are confronted with a new situation and might still feel disordered or struggling to understand the change and how to make sense of the complex environment in which they find themselves. This involves how they make sense of their new role, responsibility or the relationship to their new co-workers, which have been created and which they are dealing with (Weick, 1995).

Aside from the work of Karl E. Weick, which mainly focused on studying individuals' sensemaking processes in crises or disaster situations (e.g. Weick, 1990; 1993), previous research (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Sloyan, 2009) has already suggested that the concept of sensemaking is a suitable approach in exploring how people make sense of an environment of organizational downsizing. The following sub-sections will discuss the extant literature on how survivors make sense of

organizational downsizing, as well as presenting previous research on managerial sensegiving post-downsizing. The literature findings are structured based on the seven properties of sensemaking (see previous discussion in sub-section 3.2.3). In addition, the relationship between sensemaking and undiscussability (e.g. Argyris, 1986) will be outlined.

3.2.4.1 Grounded in identity construction

Sensemaking depends on an individual's identity (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010); in other words, the meaning an individual derives from an event is strongly influenced by the beliefs and values in which his or her identity is grounded (Sloyan, 2009). Depending on whether these events are perceived as consistent or inconsistent with a person's identity, they might be either seen as an opportunity or as a threat (Weick, 1995).

Previous research (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Sloyan, 2009) revealed that downsizing survivors often experienced an identity struggle because the new situation post-downsizing was in contradiction with their basic belief system. The British scholars Balogun and Johnson (2004) investigated the sensemaking processes of middle managers who survived a redundancy programme. They found that the new organizational structure that was implemented as part of the downsizing caused a de-identification among the middle managers, since the old work practices and norms (e.g. services, technical excellence) were suddenly replaced by new ones. Consequently, the survivors perceived a loss of meaning and became uncertain about their current position (Balogun and Johnson, 2004). This suggests that the abrupt imposition of structural changes as a consequence of downsizing disconfirmed survivors' expectations about how a new organizational form should be introduced

with respect to their long-held values about their roles and responsibilities within the organization (Sloyan, 2009).

A further example of how a downsizing scenario may lead to an identity conflict among the remaining workforce was provided by the American researcher Apker (2004). She researched the sensemaking processes of surviving nurses in the health care sector, which was undergoing a redundancy initiative focused on cost saving and headcount reduction. Apker (2004) reported that surviving nurses experienced a contradiction with regard to their new role in the hospital. On the one hand, survivors could identify with some of their new tasks and responsibilities, as they provided them with an opportunity for more collaboration and teamwork and thus enhanced their professional identity. On the other hand, however, surviving nurses suffered from more job stress and felt pressurized because they had to do more work with fewer resources. This diminished their professional identity as empathetic caregivers, because they had less time and energy to care sufficiently about the patients (Apker, 2004).

Apker's (2004) study shows that survivors may at least identify with the effects of downsizing that provide them with a "window of opportunity" (Brorstroem, 2012, p.52), such as a career enhancement opportunity. However, both Balogun and Johnson's (2004) study, as well as Apker's (2004) work, provided convincing arguments that a downsizing initiative may still be perceived as unfavourable by the survivors, as it threatens their professional identities even though they were the ones designated to stay in the organization. This is especially the case when the downsizing has caused an interruption of survivors' habitual work routines (Weick, 1995), (e.g. in terms of time or resources) and thus may have invalidated their prior understanding of their organizations' values and work practices (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

Bird (2007) complements these findings. Her study revealed that survivors suffered from feelings of victimhood, since management action was opposed to survivors' original beliefs that the organization's culture was humanistic and that superiors provided survivors with help and advice to enable them to better cope with their strains and difficulties. This finding is notable in supporting the theory that survivors make sense of managerial actions based on whether these actions either facilitate or diminish their individual identities (Sloyan, 2009).

Thus, and with regard to the present study, the use of the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) may provide a unique opportunity to gain further insight into survivors' traditions and basic beliefs and into how those further shape survivors' understanding of their organizations' behaviours (e.g. in terms of management action) and trigger a particular type of response.

3.2.4.2 Retrospective sensemaking

Sensemaking happens in retrospect, where experiences from the past influence the ways in which present situations are interpreted (Weick, 1995; Helms-Mills, 2003). This is relevant to the present study in that survivors who already experienced a downsizing initiative in the past may interpret a more recent downsizing differently from those who never had such an experience before. Although the sensemaking processes of multiple downsizing survivors have rarely been examined in previous research (see also previous discussion in section 1.2 about gaps in the literature and section 2.5 about longitudinal effects) the few studies available will be analysed in the following discussion in order to gain a better understanding about this important topic.

The American management scholars Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) researched how survivors make sense of ambiguous and conflicting information in the period post-downsizing, in which survivors could not be certain about the extent of workforce cuts and whether they would keep their jobs. They found that the perceived ambiguity concerning tasks and the organization's future strongly differed among the group of survivors, and that this caused either more or less severe reactions with regard to strains, job satisfaction and turnover intention.

Interestingly, their study revealed that, in particular, veteran employees who could look back on a long employment history of organizational change and downsizing seemed to be more resilient when faced with ambiguous information such as messages related to their continuity of employment. Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) argued that based on their previous experiences veteran employees may have developed the ability to better absorb and deal with organizational ambiguity and threatening situations, and therefore did not engage in worrying too much about it. Thus, they were able to judge their work situation more objectively accurately than their less experienced colleagues, who suffered from a high level of stress and health problems as a reaction to the perceived ambiguity (Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989).

From a sensemaking perspective, this suggests that these "veterans" may have benefitted from coping mechanisms and other strategies that they have developed in the past as a result of reflection and continuous learning (Nathan, 2004). These strategies served them later on as important resources in facilitating their sensemaking with regard to dealing with or processing confusing and ambiguous information in the period post-downsizing. This would correspond with the claim of Beyer and Hannah (2002, p.648) that individuals' accumulated experiences provide them with a variety of

material "upon which they can build in the future".

Further support for the argument that survivors' past experiences with downsizing may help them to make sense of present and future downsizings was provided by the Canadian management scholar Chreim (2006), who studied survivors of several rounds of job cuts. Chreim (2006) reported that survivors who viewed previous downsizings as a necessary requirement for business survival and future success were more likely to embrace the changes resulting from the most recent downsizing, compared to those who did not see the need and purpose behind the downsizings. Moreover, when previous downsizings provided the survivors with more opportunities to achieve individual goals (see also earlier discussion in sub-section 3.2.4.1) they anticipated that future downsizing initiatives might also lead to positive outcomes and personal advantages. In other words, reflection on the past facilitated their future sensemaking, in the sense that it reminded them of all the positive outcomes they had experienced as a result of previous downsizing exercises. Thus, they did not perceive the impending downsizing as threatening and significantly stressful (Chreim, 2006).

Chreim's (2006) work also revealed that due to the frequency of downsizing and restructuring such scenarios became part of everyday working life for many of the survivors and they got used to it over time. This would lead to the assumption that previous downsizing experience facilitates the sense survivors make of more present or future downsizings, and thereby mitigates the extent of possible negative reactions (Weick, 1995). However, previous research (e.g. Moore et al., 2004; Moore et al., 2006) provided some evidence that former downsizing experience may not always have a positive effect on how survivors make sense of, and respond to, later downsizing events.

The American researcher Moore and her colleagues (e.g. Moore et al., 2004; Moore et al., 2006) investigated the impact of direct and indirect layoff contact on survivors of repeated waves of downsizing, and they collected data at three points of time over a period of six years. They found that survivors who directly experienced a layoff, meaning that they were directly threatened by a downsizing programme, showed the greatest level of negative responses such as intent to quit or depression over time. The survivors' feelings of job security were still influenced in a negative way six years after the events. Contrary to the assumption that survivors may become resilient to downsizing (e.g. Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989), or experience it only as a short-term lived experience (see also previous discussion in section 2.5 about longitudinal effects), the findings from Moore and her colleagues (2004) demonstrated that job insecurity and the intention to quit increased even among the group of survivors who were never directly threatened by downsizing, but only experienced the dismissal of a colleague some years before. Thus, the work of Moore et al. (2004; 2006) underlines once more that the after-effects of downsizing are persistent and long-lasting, as unpleasant experiences from the past affected survivors' sensemaking and thereby caused negative feelings und unfavourable attitudes several years later.

The studies from Moore et al. (2004; 2006) also revealed interesting findings with regard to the effects of multiple downsizing exposures on survivors' health. Moore et al. (2004) found that survivors who had experienced repeated rounds of downsizings suffered more anxiety and psychological distress than those who had experienced it only once. Moreover, the likelihood of experiencing a burnout was found to be higher among survivors of multiple downsizing exercises (see also sub-section 2.4.6.2 about psychological complaints). Moore et al. (2004) postulates that repeated downsizing episodes had a cumulative negative effect on survivors' well-being, as the continual

fear of potential job loss together with the pressure from increased workload led to chronic levels of stress over time, and thereby weakened the individuals' mental coping resources. Moreover, they concluded that the outcomes of their research support a "stress-vulnerability rather than a resiliency model" in terms of survivors' responses over time (Moore et al., 2006, p.327).

Thus, Moore et al.'s (2004) findings differ from what has been reported by Greenhalgh and Jick (1989), Beyer and Hannah (2002) or Chreim (2006) (see discussion above), as survivors participating in their study neither benefitted from their previous experience with downsizing nor did they become resilient to it. However, the findings reported by Moore and her colleagues (e.g. Moore et al., 2004; 2006) provide evidence that retrospection plays an important role in the sensemaking process. Survivors' reactions (such as the fear of job loss) clearly suggest that "future thinking cannot be de-coupled from history and reflection" (Nathan, 2004, p.185), as the accumulation of unpleasant experiences with downsizing may have strongly influenced the sense they made of more present or impending downsizings.

In relation to this research, it may therefore be important to note the employment history of participating survivors and the meaning they ascribe to prior downsizing events. It is anticipated that the information gained from this study will help to achieve a better understanding of how survivors' previous experiences with organizational downsizing influenced the way in which they made sense of a more recent one. As the foregoing debate has not provided sufficient clarity about whether repeated downsizing exposure makes survivors more resilient or more vulnerable over time, shedding more light on this issue would be of particular research interest (see also previous discussion in section 1.3 about research purpose).

106

3.2.4.3 Enactment of sensible environments

Enactment is another important property of sensemaking and relates to the social construction of reality (Helms-Mills, 2003) (see sub-section 3.2.3). In organizations people enact a sensible environment, and this environment then constrains their action (Weick, 1995). In other words, the enactment of an environment affects those who produced it (Helms-Mills, 2003). In times of organizational downsizing and restructuring organizations often create a situation which reflects their own interests, such as efficiency improvement or cost saving (Weick, 1995), but they may not sufficiently consider the possible consequences in terms of survivors' reactions that may result from what they have enacted (Noer, 2009).

Previous research (e.g. Helms-Mills, 2003; De Vries, 2006) revealed that in the course of downsizing organizations predominately enact situations that cause a large number of concerns among the surviving workforce. Helms-Mills (2003) researched the sensemaking processes of surviving employees in a Canadian utility company that underwent a series of restructuring initiatives. She found that survivors experienced a high level of insecurity and worried about their jobs, suggesting that the environments created by the management may not have instilled the survivors with sufficient certainty about their employment continuity in the organization (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Moreover, De Vries (2006) reported that survivors' reactions were dominated by resistance to managerial enactment, because survivors faced an environment with new structures, roles and regulations with which they were not familiar, and which was more imposed on them than discussed with them. The work of Chreim (2006) supports this, as she reported that survivors' aversion to a new employment situation was

mainly caused by the fact that they were not allowed to contribute to the construction of the new organization post-downsizing. This includes survivors having no opportunity to participate in decisions about how to implement the changes, as well as being prevented from active involvement in the implementation itself. Survivors' displeasure with managerial behaviour was also reflected in their reactions, as it lowered their organizational trust and increased their turnover intention (Chreim, 2006). The findings therefore correspond with Weick's (1995, p.31) argument that staff survivors are predominately the passive receivers of enactment, whereas the management constructs "reality through authoritative acts".

Nevertheless, a study by Balogun and Johnson (2004) revealed that it was not only staff survivors who lost their opportunity to re-create the situation post-downsizing, but that also surviving managers, and in particular middle managers, appeared to be relatively powerless to influence upper managements' views about the enactment of the new environment. Balogun and Johnson (2004) reported that middle managers viewed themselves as change recipients, in other words, those who were being told to carry out the work, such as the implementation of new work practices, but who were not involved in the underlying decision-making process. For this reason, the middle managers perceived the management style of their superiors as directive, rather than participative, and they responded with more negative than positive reactions.

These findings are remarkable, as they highlight the fact that neither survivors at staff level, nor those at middle management level were actively involved in upper managements' decisions about how to shape the organizational environment post-downsizing. This, in turn, indicates once more that the actors at the top of the organizational hierarchy may consider themselves as the only ones privileged enough

to enact a new situation and to exert power over their subordinate staff (Helms-Mills, 2003). With regard to the present research it remains to be seen whether or not participating survivors felt empowered by their managers to play a part in the construction of the post-downsizing environment and how this may have impacted subsequent events such as their attitudinal or behavioural responses (Weick, 1995).

3.2.4.4 Social aspects of sensemaking

Sensemaking is a social process in which the conduct of an individual is contingent on the conduct of others (Weick, 1995). In other words, what we say, think or do is influenced by what others say, think and do (Nathan, 2004). Such a social exchange requires conversation, or at least any kind of social contact with others where its demand is likely to increase if an environment is dominated by a high level of uncertainty (Apker, 2004; Nathan, 2004).

Previous research (e.g. Bird, 2007; Klatzke, 2008) found that the group of downsizing survivors had a lot of social contact among themselves in order to make more sense of, and to better deal with, the ambiguous situation during that time. The Australian management scholar Bird (2007) reported that survivors' sensemaking mainly happened through storytelling, as this helped them to cope with their feelings of uncertainty at work. These survivors used storytelling as a communication opportunity, wherein each individual could express his or her concerns (such as personal or professional issues) and share them with other survivors. They benefitted from each other in that they collectively, as a group of survivors, tried to develop an understanding about the nature of a particular issue and potential ways in which the affected individual could deal with it (Bird, 2007). Thus, the social exchange that survivors had when they engaged in storytelling and conversation with their colleagues

helped them to make more sense of the events post-downsizing (Weick, 1995) and thereby reduced feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty (Bird, 2007).

Klatzke's (2008) work provides further indications that downsizing survivors increasingly engage in social exchange with their surviving colleagues in order to satisfy their need for information (see also previous discussion in sub-section 2.4.2.1 about information and communication) about what is going on around them and how they should respond. Klatzke (2008) reported that most of survivors' conversations revolved around the question of how they could adjust to the vacancies left by the individuals who were made redundant. Within these discussions, survivors were sharing information about particular job tasks and duties that they had to take over. Although survivors predominately felt left alone by their managers in terms of advice and support, they were still able to gain a sufficient understanding about how to deal with their new responsibilities (Klatzke, 2008). This would suggest that survivors' knowledge transfer, through social exchange, may have compensated for the lack of managerial communication (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) and thereby facilitated the sense they made of their new tasks.

As well as the communication around job tasks and responsibilities, Klatzke (2008) also reported an increase in social conversations with regard to the victims of redundancies. Klatzke (2008) found that, in particular, survivors who were less experienced with organizational downsizing, or those who had a close relationship to the victims (see also previous discussion in sub-section 2.4.2.2 about justice and fairness), required the most social support in order to come to some sort of understanding as to why their colleagues were laid off.

However, these survivors may have also engaged in more discussions with their colleagues as this may have helped them to better cope with their own mental pains, such as the loss they may have felt when a good friend was made redundant (Klein, 2009). In that case, the conversations may have provided them with an opportunity to openly discuss their feelings with others who may have had similar experiences (Weiss, 2004). This assumption would correspond with findings reported by Noer (2009), wherein those survivors who talked about their feelings with colleagues (e.g. in coffee breaks) recovered faster from the experience associated with the dismissal of a close friend than those who remained silent or did not want to discuss what was bothering them. Thus, social contact with others may not only facilitate the meaning survivors make of a new work situation, but it may also mitigate the negative emotions (e.g. feelings of loss) caused by a downsizing initiative (Sloyan, 2009).

The above examples (Bird, 2007; Klatzke, 2008) showed that it was mainly survivors at the staff level who exchanged with each other in order to make sense of, and deal with, such things as new duties (e.g. Klatzke, 2008) or the prevailing sense of uncertainty (Bird, 2007). However, previous research (e.g. Balogun and Johnson, 2004) revealed that survivors at the management level also engaged in discussions with peers in order to arrive at a common understanding about how to manage the changes in the period after downsizing. Balogun and Johnson (2004) reported that missing information from senior managers made it necessary for the group of the middle managers to exchange their views with each other in order to come to an agreement about how the structural changes should be implemented.

This process of social exchange, however, happened via informal, as well as formal, communication (Balogun and Johnson, 2004). In other words, middle managers'

sensemaking about how to operationalize changes was influenced not only by the conversations they had with peers (e.g. in meetings), but was additionally affected by certain behaviours they showed (e.g. gestures). Even though this may appear counterintuitive, since formal communication seems to be the common way in which individuals share information (Bryman, 2008), it underscores once more the social nature of sensemaking, where individuals' meaning construction is shaped not only by the talk and discourse of others but also by the ways in which they act and behave (Weick, 1995).

The research discussed so far highlighted the fact that most social interactions took place horizontally, either at staff level (Bird, 2007; Klatzke, 2008) or at middle management level (Balogun and Johnson 2004), when upper management failed to sufficiently communicate with their subordinate survivors. However, the work of Luscher and Lewis (2008) provided convincing arguments that social interaction can also occur between surviving staff and surviving managers (see also sub-section 2.6.4). Luscher and Lewis (2008) reported that middle managers encouraged their subordinates to discuss their task-related issues with them and their team so that they could develop a collective understanding about how to address each issue in an appropriate manner. This collaborative approach to dealing with problems proved advantageous for both the surviving staff and the surviving managers. On the one hand, it facilitated the sense staff survivors made of the changes caused by organizational downsizing, because they realized that if they were not able to solve an issue entirely themselves they would collectively discuss it and work out a possible solution for it. This had a positive effect on staff survivors' attitudes towards work (e.g. motivation, commitment) and enhanced their self-confidence (Luscher and Lewis, 2008). On the other hand, the surviving managers benefitted from these attitudinal

changes, as staff survivors were now able to do more tasks in the same time and thereby increase departmental efficiency (Luscher and Lewis, 2008).

To summarize the above findings, it can be said that conversation plays an important part in how social contact is mediated in the post-downsizing period (Weick, 1995). The review of the extant literature revealed that the exchange of information mainly happened through horizontal communication (either between surviving staff or between surviving managers). In each case the individuals benefitted from the dialogue with their peers, as it allowed them to discuss a particular concern together and develop a solution for dealing with it. This had a positive effect on survivors' sensemaking, and in particular on those of the staff survivors, as it may have assured them that they could manage work-related challenges if they worked as a group and collaborated with each other (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2007). However, the findings also showed that upper management communicated very rarely with their subordinate staff (see also previous discussion in sub-section 2.4.2.1) and thereby increased, rather than mitigated, staffs' feelings of uncertainty (Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

The knowledge gained from the above discussion may also be of relevance to the present survivor research. The debate pointed out that most of the social exchanges took place between survivors from the same hierarchy level, either formally or informally, and facilitated an understanding about the situation in the organization post-downsizing. Thus, it may be important to note how the different groups of participating survivors (e.g. surviving staff, surviving managers) have interacted with each other, and to show how these interactions affected their sensemaking processes and the manner in which they dealt with such things as work-related issues or personal concerns.

3.2.4.5 Ongoing aspects of sensemaking and the role of cues and their extraction

Sensemaking is an ongoing process which "neither starts fresh nor stops cleanly" (Weick, 1995, p.49). It is like a flow, wherein people continuously seek to make sense of the situation in which they find themselves (Weick, 1995). In this ongoing activity they constantly search their environment for relevant cues, in order to update their sense of reality (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Cues provide them with a point for orientation, helping them to clarify such things as where they are or what they can expect (Weick, 1995). More comprehensively, cues are defined as "simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p.50).

In the context of downsizing survivor research several studies (e.g. Sloyan, 2009; Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012) revealed that survivors looked on a continuous basis for important cues to help them understand the situation post-downsizing more accurately. Sloyan (2009) reported that survivors were constantly monitoring the progress of particular changes, with the aim of gaining potential information which would support them in developing a sense of how the overall change is proceeding. Moreover, and as discussed in the previous sub-section (see sub-section 3.2.4.4 about the social aspects of sensemaking), Sloyan's (2009) study revealed that survivors continuously observed the actions of their managers, in terms of how they behaved and expressed themselves. Interestingly, survivors perceived their managers' behaviours to be more influential than the speeches given by them. The ways in which the managers handled the changes and dealt with their staff-level survivors provided the survivors with important information about their competence. In particular, when survivors felt insufficiently supported by their managers this served as a cue that the managers may not have the experience and the right skills to manage an organization which is

undergoing a restructuring initiative. As a consequence, this lowered survivors' levels of trust and confidence in their managers (Sloyan, 2009).

The work of Van Dierendonck and Jacobs (2012) provides further indications that survivors constantly search their environments for relevant signs that may facilitate their sensemaking. Van Dierendonck and Jacobs (2012), who referred to the work of Brockner and Greenberg (1990), found that survivors used justice information in order to determine whether the organization and its management can be trusted. The survivors investigated by Van Dierendonck and Jacobs (2012) observed how the managers treated the designated victims, as this provided them with information about the procedural fairness involved in the lay-off process. When survivors perceived this procedure as being unfair they tended to judge the downsizing initiative itself as being unjustified and the leaders as being untrustworthy. This suggests that the treatment the victims encountered was used by survivors as a reference point to gain an understanding about the leadership qualities of their managers (Weick, 1995). A study conducted by Quy Nguyen, Corley and Kraatz (2014) supports this assumption, as survivors in that study behaved in a similar way. They used the organization's sales volume as an indicator to evaluate whether the downsizing had improved the organization's financial situation to the extent previously promised to them by the management.

In summary, therefore, the discussion above highlighted the fact that survivors pay attention to various factors, such as the progress of changes (Sloyan, 2009), the treatment of colleagues (Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012) or sales figures (Quy Nguyen et al., 2014), in order to help them update their understanding of how the situation is proceeding and whether the managers are capable of guiding it

appropriately. Thus, the findings support the notion that sensemaking is an ongoing activity where people search for and connect cues in order to create an account of the events taking place around them (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Moreover, the debate above revealed that information plays an important role in the process of sensemaking, as it serves as cues that help survivors construct their organizational environment (Weick, 1995). In an ideal case the managers provide the survivors with information, either in verbal or in written form (see also previous discussion in sub-section 3.2.4.4), about what is going on around them (Evans, 1999). However, the extant literature on downsizing survivors (e.g. Weiss, 2004) discussed in this chapter and the foregoing chapter (e.g. sub-section 2.4.2.1 about information and communication) revealed evidence that the management predominately failed to inform the survivors sufficiently and on a continuous basis about what was going to happen in the organization post-downsizing. This, in turn, increased the risk of survivors engaging in drawing their sense from other sources that may be not official yet may still provide them with an orientation point from which to make more sense of their situation (Weick, 1995).

Furthermore, Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) reported that survivors felt irritated when they received conflicting information with regard to their employment continuity. On the one hand, the union warned them of worst-case scenarios and told them that they needed to worry about their jobs. On the other hand, however, the management tried to convince the survivors that their jobs were safe. As survivors seemed not to know whom they should believe rumours were increasing and became a source of information. This might be an unfavourable, though not an unusual, behaviour, since doubt encourages survivors to develop new understandings (Maitlis and Sonenshein,

2010). However, as the information from the rumour mill was vague and ambiguous it did not facilitate survivors' sensemaking; rather, it often created more confusion and heightened the level of uncertainty (Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989). Balogun's (2003) study revealed similar findings, as participating survivors reported that the exchange of gossip neither helped them to calm down nor provided them with more information concerning their continuity of employment.

Although the views of management and those of union representatives (see Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989) are likely to differ for several reasons (e.g. the management may pay more attention to the business overall, whereas the union may care more about the employees (Armstrong, 2012)) it would be desirable for organizations to attempt to develop communication strategies that continuously provide the surviving workforce with clear and consistent information (see also sub-section 2.4.2.1). This would most likely lower the risk of survivors relying on information from the rumour network, and would thereby avoid making them more confused (Campbell, 1999). Thus, and considering the ongoing nature of sensemaking, it could be said that reliable information may serve the survivors as a kind of foundation from which they can develop a larger sense of what is going on around them in the post-downsizing period (Weick, 1995). This understanding, in turn, may be updated whenever the survivors receive new information from their managers.

With regard to the present study, it remains to be seen which cues participating survivors searched for in the post-downsizing environment and in which ways those cues have influenced their meaning construction. It is of particular research interest (see also previous discussion in section 1.3 about research purpose) to determine whether managerial information provided survivors with a point for orientation (e.g.

with regard to what they may expect), or whether information from managers was perceived as misleading or vague by the survivors and thereby may have increased, rather than mitigated, such feelings as ambiguity or uncertainty. The knowledge gained from this will certainly improve the overall understanding of management action post-downsizing and its effect on survivors' sensemaking process and the way it shaped their responses.

3.2.4.6 The role of plausibility and the process of sensegiving

In sensemaking plausibility counts more than accuracy (Weick, 1995). People will believe what is plausible, coherent and reasonable (Nathan, 2004). In other words, people need input that provides them with enough certainty. Or, as Weick (1995, p.62) phrased it: "I need to know enough about what I think to get on with my projects, but no more, which means sufficiency and plausibility take precedence over accuracy".

The foregoing discussion (see sub-section 3.2.4.5) showed that downsizing survivors constantly scanned their environment for relevant information in order to update their understanding about what was going on around them. According to information theory (e.g. Evans, 1999), the more plausible the information seems to the survivors the more likely they will be to make appropriate sense of it (Bean and Hamilton, 2006). Although managerial communication was generally found to be rather poor in the post-downsizing period (e.g. Klein, 2009), leading to feelings of uncertainty in many survivors, a few studies (e.g. Apker, 2004; Bean and Hamilton, 2006) revealed that upper management tried to convince the remaining workforce of potential benefits related to organizational downsizing. More specifically, the managers made an effort to influence survivors' sensemaking towards a positive direction by developing a plausible story around the favourable aspects of a downsizing programme. This

activity, which aimed to influence peoples' understanding of a particular situation, is considered sensegiving (Weick, 1995). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991, p.442) defined sensegiving as: "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality".

Apker (2004) found that managers tried to convince the surviving staff that there may be opportunities (e.g. development of skill set, career enhancement) resulting from the downsizing initiative and, in particular, from the fact that they would have to deal with new roles and responsibilities. Similar findings were reported by Bean and Hamilton (2006), where the leaders framed the structural changes as desirable for the organization and the survivors. The leaders attempted to influence survivors' meaning construction by highlighting the development of skills (e.g. self-management, flexibility) from which survivors may benefit (Bean and Hamilton, 2006).

Even though in both cases (Apker, 2004; Bean and Hamilton, 2006) a small group of survivors were in anticipation of the advantages that were promised to them, the vast majority of the survivors were critical of whether the managers' arguments could be considered plausible. For the most part this large group of survivors hesitated to believe their managers, since they had not experienced any benefit up to that point. In fact, the opposite was true: the additional effort from survivors that was required in order to manage the work left by redundancy victims was neither personally appreciated by the managers nor accompanied by any financial reward (Apker, 2004).

This suggests that the story the managers had developed around the benefits and opportunities related to downsizing may have been a cynical tactic used to persuade the survivors to stay in the organization and avoid a potential productivity collapse

(Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989). However, the managers may have underestimated survivors' abilities to judge the plausibility of the managerial story and the likelihood for potential benefits (Weick, 1995). This may provide some explanation as to why the managers' sensegiving efforts were not successful (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned once more (see also sub-section 2.4.4 and 3.2.4.3) that the managers, and in particular those at the middle management level, had to do a difficult job in the period post-downsizing. They often had to fulfil a dual role, namely, the role of the sensemaker and the role of the sensegiver (Balogun, 2003). In their role as sensemaker the middle managers had to comprehend what the changes meant for them and how they affected the standard working procedures (Balogun, 2003). Luscher and Lewis (2008) reported that middle managers occasionally experienced a sense of stuckness and struggled to understand the dimensions of the restructuring and its implications on the daily business. Moreover, Luscher and Lewis (2008) found that the middle managers had difficulties in making sense of the instructions given by the upper management, suggesting that superiors' orders may have not been coherent enough (e.g. in terms of defining the target and scope of the restructuring) to convey sufficient plausibility among the middle managers (Weick, 1995).

In their role as sensegivers, however, the middle managers also had to help their teams of survivors through the restructuring process (Balogun, 2003). As different people may make different sense of the same event (Weick, 1995), middle managers had to mediate the sensemaking of the upper management and the survivors at staff level (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Middle managers' work often involved task-related support (e.g. aligning work packages together with the survivors) as well as mental

assistance (e.g. attending to survivors' concerns and feelings) (Balogun, 2003). These efforts were found to be appreciated by the surviving staff, as the situation post-downsizing was fraught with many negative emotions, including anger and uncertainty, and survivors often struggled to make meaning of their new work environments (Balogun, 2003).

This suggests that the survivors' perceived treatment from their middle managers may have had a constructive effect on their sensemaking and how they viewed the situation. The middle managers' behaviours, in terms of task-related support and mental assistance, may have signalled to the survivors that their managers considered them valuable members of the organization and not just as resources needed to do the dirty work (Noer, 2009). This, in turn, would support Weick's (1995) notion that sense is not given by words only but also by the behaviour of others (see also sub-section 3.2.4.4).

In relation to this study, it may be important to find out whether the management had influenced the sensemaking process of participating survivors and, if so, in which ways they have done this. It is anticipated that this information would improve the understanding of managers' leadership qualities in times of organizational downsizing and the degree of appreciation they may have expressed to their subordinate survivors.

As the above discussion showed, because survivors at the middle management level often perceived upper managements' orders as implausible, and because they experienced difficulties in making and giving sense, this research would benefit from the study of this particular group of survivors as well. The middle managers' downsizing survival narratives may provide valuable insight into their role and

possible challenges related to it. This, in turn, may help to complement the existing knowledge about how different groups of downsizing survivors make meaning of their situations and how this guides the ways in which they respond.

3.2.4.7 Sensemaking and undiscussability

In addition to sensegiving theory, the work of Argyris (e.g. Argyris, 1986) is also relevant to studying management behaviour, with regard to communication and its impact on survivors' sensemaking process, in times of downsizing and restructuring. Chris Argyris's studies in the field of organizational research were aimed to find out why organizational members hesitate to communicate appropriately and what consequences this may have for the organization and the individuals involved. According to Argyris (1986) many organizations and managers in senior positions may not want to enter into discussions with their staff, in order to obscure a certain behaviour, or in other words hide the contradictions in their actions (e.g. they claim that they value their staff, but fire 50% of them for no apparent reason). However, when managers do not openly discuss their plans with their subordinates, or try to obscure certain behaviour, this hinders people in organizations from making positive sense of managerial action. In other words, undiscussability creates a barrier and limits organizational members to attach meaning to their situation and consequently leads to inappropriate sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Bearing this in mind, it may also become important to analyse, if and how managers participating in this research discussed their actions with survivors, and what influence this had on their sensemaking process and their responses.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has discussed theoretical models and concepts that previous researchers had applied in order to study downsizing survivors. Furthermore, it presented the existing literature on sensemaking and sensegiving in post-downsizing situations.

The first section of this chapter reviewed models which were focused on survivors' reactions to downsizing. It was shown that Brockner's (1988) conceptual model serves as a basic concept to understand the impact of organizational downsizing on survivors. In particular, Brockner's idea that the negative influence of downsizing on survivors is moderated by organizational aspects may be relevant for the present survivor research, as it reminds the researcher to be attentive to the context in which a downsizing situation is experienced. However, one point of criticism might be that Brockner does not sufficiently explain how the survivors' change process is happening and how survivors are coping with their emotions and feelings post-downsizing.

Moreover, the model of Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) has been presented. This model is based on the assumption that survivors' responses to downsizing can be classified into four different categories. Although these scholars provided an elaborated approach to categorize survivors' responses in one single model, the discussion indicated that in reality it might be unlikely that survivors' reactions are limited to only one category, but may combine behaviours from different archetypes (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998). In particular, in times of recession and crises, survivors may have to continuously adapt their behaviour to the new situation in order to cope with it successfully and to keep their job. Therefore, these models may not reflect the dynamic character of the business world to the full extent and would benefit from further analysis with regard to practice.

In the second section the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) has been illustrated with respect to its usefulness when examining downsizing survivors. Although this model has not been primarily built to study downsizing scenarios, it was shown that this concept provides a great potential to explore survivors' experience of organizational downsizing. This was found mainly related to the fact that this concept is developed around a set of distinctive properties, which allow the researcher to shed light on individuals' experience from different perspectives with the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding about what meaning they attached to a particular situation and how this influenced their reactions. Thus, sensemaking theory differs from the more traditional change management approaches, as it does not suggest a predefined strategy how to study different organizational realities, but rather offers a set of exploratory opportunities, which guide the researcher to discover them. This characteristic would be particularly relevant for the present study, since survivors' experience is unique and multi-faceted and only an approach which is able to deal with this complexity can lead this study towards a successful outcome.

Moreover, and in order to gain a better understanding of previous researchers' findings on survivors' sensemaking and sensegiving post-downsizing, the existing literature with regard to this topic has been reviewed. It was found that survivors often experienced an identity struggle, as the new situation which had been enacted by the organization and its management in the course of downsizing posed a contraction to their traditional and fundamental beliefs. This, in turn, influenced survivors' interpretations of the organizations' behaviours and triggered largely unfavourable responses. Furthermore, the findings from previous research clearly underscored that sensemaking is a social process where talk and conversation play an important role. It was found that most of the social exchanges took place between survivors from the

same hierarchy level and aimed to gain a better understanding about what was going on around them post-downsizing.

The literature review also revealed that survivors continuously searched their environments for relevant cues (e.g. progress of changes) and connected those in order to create an account about such issues as whether the management was capable of guiding the restructuring appropriately. In this respect it was found that managerial communication was often poor, and survivors drew their sense from other sources in order to understand the often very uncertain situations in which they found themselves post-downsizing. However, the findings from previous research pointed out that in some cases the management tried to influence survivors' meaning construction towards a positive direction by creating a plausible story around the favourable aspects of organizational downsizing. In other words, the managers attempted to give sense to the survivors. Nevertheless, it was found that in the majority of the cases survivors did not consider the managers' promises as coherent and plausible, but as a deceitful strategy aimed to persuade the survivors to remain in the company and thereby reduce the risk of a potential productivity collapse.

However, the findings from the existing literature indicated that managers, and in particular line mangers, had to do a difficult job in the period post-downsizing, too, since they were sensemaker and sensegiver at the same time. This includes not only dealing with the emotions and concerns of their subordinate staff, who appreciated their help and considered them a valuable coping resource, but also interpreting what the situation meant for them (e.g. in terms of their own job security).

Through this literature review it was also possible to identify further research gaps (see also section 1.2 and 2.7). Although the findings from previous research consistently showed that retrospection and reflection on the past have a strong influence on how sense is made of present situations, management scholars are of two minds with regard to how previous experiences with downsizing affects the perception of later ones. A significant number of the available, predominantly North American, studies indicated that the experience gained from previous downsizings had a positive effect on how survivors attached meaning to, and dealt with, more recent ones. Moreover, their findings suggest that surviving repeated waves of downsizing enhances survivors' coping ability and makes them more resilient over time. In contrast, a small group of other North American management scholars stated that former downsizing experience had a negative impact on the way survivors perceived later ones and thereby led to more vulnerability and an accumulation of stress over time.

As previously discussed (see section 1.3 about research purpose), the aim of this research is to address this discrepancy by examining survivors who had experienced downsizing not only once, but several times. It is anticipated that the knowledge gained from this will facilitate a better understanding of whether previous downsizing experience has a favourable or unfavourable effect on survivors and their responses. This improved understanding, in turn, is crucial in order to answer the second research question and thereby enhance the overall understanding about the longitudinal effects associated with organizational downsizing.

The next chapter will discuss the methodology and methods which were applied to conduct this research project.

4   Methodology and methods

Methodology and methods are crucial elements of the research project, as they are concerned with the question how a given problem can be studied and what techniques are appropriate in order to explore the subject under investigation, in order to answer the research questions effectively (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). According to King and Horrocks (2010), methodology is linked to a process which requires that the choice of a particular design and its methods are justified and made evident with regard to the research study. However, methodologies also require the definition of the theoretical and philosophical positions (King and Horrocks, 2010) as "methodologies are concerned with how we come to know of the world" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.10) and thus relate to, or are derived from different schools of thought. Methods, in contrast, operate on a more practical level providing a set of tools which can be applied "when trying to understand our world better" (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, p.10). Research methods are clearly located under the chosen philosophical position and can be considered as techniques and procedures which are used for the purpose of data collection and data analysis (King and Horrocks, 2010).

As the present study is focused on the exploration of survivors' experience post-downsizing, it is important to choose a methodology and a method which support this effort and bear the potential to allow insights into the survivors' situation. This will be achieved by examining different approaches to research with regard to their ability to contribute to meeting the study's objective and answering the research questions. For this reason, the following chapter will illustrate and justify the philosophical perspective (section 4.1) associated with the methodology and the research design (section 4.2) including the methods which were chosen to conduct this research

project. Moreover, all relevant aspects associated with the trustworthiness (section 4.3) of the outcomes will be illustrated, as this is important to assure the quality of the study (Creswell, 2007). Finally, ethical issues (section 4.4) with regard to the process of data collection and the participants involved will be presented.

4.1 Philosophical perspective

Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.105) assert that the philosophical perspective underpinning the research provides the foundation for a research project and is even more important than the research methods: "Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways". According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009, p.107) research philosophy is concerned with "the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge". As such, it covers the researchers' assumption with regard to how they view the world, in an attempt to deal with that knowledge. Consequently, the philosophical assumptions underpin the entire design of the research and the methods chosen and have a "significant impact not only on what we do but we understand what it is we are investigating" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.108). Therefore, the research philosophy chosen must provide a holistic and flexible approach able to delve into survivors' experience, in an attempt to develop new knowledge from uncovering the meaning they attached to a particular aspect of downsizing survival. The literature (e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998) offers two main aspects of research philosophy and the way it deals with knowledge in the research process. These are Ontology and Epistemology.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology is theory about the nature of existence (King and Horrocks, 2010). Ontological debates are concerned with the question "whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors" (Bryman, 2008, p.18). A clarification of the ontological position becomes crucial for the present study as different perspectives about how survivors exist in the world may lead to different conclusions with regard to their experience (King and Horrocks, 2010). A contrast between the two major ontological positions namely objectivism and subjectivism (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2007), will shed more light on the question of which particular view should be adopted in order to gain the desired information.

Researchers who take an objectivist standpoint represent the perspective that "social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors" (Bryman, 2008, p.19). This involves the belief that there is a single objective world "out there" which is fully apprehendable and hence can be measured by applying scientific laws and immutable mechanisms (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lor, 2011). Such a belief is considered as "naive realism" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, pp.108-109), because it is assumed that if just this "real" world is understood then it leads to the correct answer. Thus objectivists clearly assert that scientific methods need publicly observable and replicable facts (Diesing, 1966) and show a hostile stance against meaning, which is created from the perception of the individuals involved. However, and with regard to the current research it is questionable if such a standpoint is the right choice to investigate downsizing survivors, as the reality of organizational downsizing may hardly be separated from those who have experienced it, as they

always stand in close interaction with their environment and its social actors. Moreover, it is unlikely that an objectivist standpoint is able to deal with the complexity of the survivor syndrome as this is not a tangible object, but is very subjective (e.g. Chen, 2009, p.78) and a reflection of survivors' own personal experiences.

In contrast to objectivism, a subjectivist perspective considers social phenomena as a product which is created in relation to others (Demirdirek, 2010). This involves that reality is not considered to exist just "out there" and irrespective of the people, but that reality and meaning-making is a product of social construction instead, where people make their own sense of the social world (Tuli, 2010, p.101). Moreover, it is a repetitive process, where the perception of social phenomena is continuously updated through social interaction with the environment (Bryman, 2008). Thus, meaning is constructed in terms of the subject under investigation (Remenyi, Williams, Money and Swartz, 1998). In the context of human behaviour research, Diesing (1966, p.124) highlighted the importance of meaning arguing "that the essential, unique characteristic of human behaviour is its subjective meaningfulness, and any science which ignores meaning and purpose is not a social science". For the purpose of the present study, such an approach thus seems to be more beneficial compared to an objective stance on ontology, because the fact that people are not treated as research objects, but more as participants, is probably more empowering to them in terms of freely expressing their own view (e.g. Tuli, 2010) and would thus allow the researcher to gain more insight into their personal story of downsizing survival. In addition, understanding the deeper meaning of their description may provide further explanation of their reactions post-downsizing and therefore most likely to contribute to answering the research questions.

4.1.2 Epistemology

Besides ontology, epistemology provides a further aspect of thinking about the development and the nature of knowledge in the process of social research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Whilst ontology is concerned with the question "what is the nature of reality" (Creswell, 2007, p.17) and the study of being (Lawson, 2004) including discussions of whether social entities can be considered to be objective or subjective, epistemology by contrast, can be seen as "the theory of knowledge" (Crotty, 1998, p.3) that defines what kind of knowledge is acceptable or counts in a particular field of study (King and Horrocks, 2010). The two main epistemological positions which have dominated the debates around the right choice of a philosophical perspective in social science are positivism and interpretivism (e.g. Remenyi et al. 1998; King and Horrocks, 2010). A common and central question which arises in this context is concerned with the issue whether phenomena of the social world can be successfully studied according to the same procedures and techniques as applied by the natural sciences (e.g. Hussey and Hussey, 1997, Bryman, 2008). To clarify this concern, both, positivism and interpretivism will be illustrated and assessed with regard to their potential to study downsizing survivors and their ability to discover the meaning of survivors' experience.

Positivism is an epistemological perspective which adopts the methods of the natural sciences (e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Taking a positivist stance means to work "with an observable social reality and that the end product of such research can be the derivation of laws or law-like generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural scientists" (Remenyi et al. 1998, p.32). Positivism is focused to deal with facts rather than impressions (Crotty, 1998) and therefore shows a strong tendency to the ontological view of objectivism where the "the researcher is independent of and

neither affects nor is affected by the subject of the research" (Remenyi et al. 1998, p.33). A main characteristic of positivism is its emphasis on quantifiable observations that are processed through statistical analysis in order to test hypothesis and theory (e.g. Crotty, 1998).

However, within recent years, positivism has been criticized (e.g. Remenyi et al., 1998; Denscombe, 2010) as an approach that does not provide enough insight to deal with the complexity in the area of organizational studies. Remenyi et al. (1998, p.33) argued that even though the application of positivism "opened the door to enormous quantities of knowledge, it provided genuine insights sparingly" and remained mainly at the surface level of things. This however could become a critical issue as the present study requires an approach, which is able to delve into survivors' individual lives, to gain in-depth knowledge about their attitudes and feelings and how they were affected by organizational downsizing. An approach which relies on data quantification and numerical results is most likely to be an insufficient strategy to deal with a sensitive topic such as downsizing survivors. Therefore, positivism may fail to achieve a revealing and authentic account of what has been experienced by the individual and how he or she coped with their destiny of being a survivor of a downsizing programme. Remenyi et al. (1998, p.33) supports that view, arguing that methods associated with positivism work "with concepts of averages which are far too general to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life".

As a response to this critical debate, the philosophical tradition of interpretivism emerged and became a contrasting epistemology to positivism (e.g. Crotty, 1998). Such a paradigm is "informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective

experience" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p.28). This school of thought emphasizes the importance of understanding the differences between researching humans in their role as actors within a social world and objects such as machines or cars (Saunders et al., 2009). Saunders et al. (2009, p.116) argued that, similar to the way in which actors play and interpret their part of a theatrical production, "we interpret our everyday social roles in accordance with the meaning we give to these roles". Moreover, the set of meanings individuals hold influences their interpretation about the social role of others (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, each situation becomes unique, where "its meaning is a function of the circumstances and the individuals involved" (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.34).

This becomes important in the context of complex scenarios such as downsizing or restructuring initiatives. To explore the meaning associated with the experience of being a downsizing survivor an interpretivist stance provides a holistic approach to deal with such a complex situation, as it offers the possibility "to look beyond the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them" (Remenyi, 1998, p.35). Thus, interpretivism, for instance, allows a researcher to gain an understanding of why survivors acted in the way they did, instead of just discovering that they acted differently and that their reactions have changed in the aftermath of downsizing. Through an interpretivist perspective it is possible to understand survivors' experience in its context, where their perception of it, and the meaning they attach to it, in a complex situation, is studied as a whole and thus leads to meaningful knowledge about how they interpreted the downsizing scenario in their role as social actors.

4.1.3 Summary

In summary, this section has discussed the philosophical perspectives in terms of their influence on conducting the present research. It has been demonstrated that an interpretivist stance on social research provides a more holistic approach to exploring survivors' experiences, as opposed to a positivistic stance, "as it scratches beneath the superficial aspects of social reality" and thus enables an understanding of complex issues, such as attitudes and emotions (Denscombe, 2003, p.95).

The following section will outline and discuss how the beliefs associated with an interpretivist methodology are operationalized and put into practice. This includes how the participants were defined and recruited, how the material was collected and analysed and finally how the findings will be presented.

4.2 Research design

The definition of an appropriate research design is an important step in exploring the research problem. Besides the philosophical perspectives (see section 4.1) which represent the basic philosophical beliefs guiding the investigation, the research design provides the organizing principles to structure the methods, which operate in accordance with these beliefs and are aimed at collecting and analysing the data (Saunders et al., 2009). In other words, the research design represents a framework for the purpose of data collection and data analysis (Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2008). As the design thus involves the entire strategy for conducting the research on a practical level, it is important that the individual methods and techniques intended to be used have been chosen deliberately, so that they correspond to the study's objectives (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

The following sub-sections will address these issues through a detailed discussion of the methods and techniques (sub-section 4.2.1-4.2.4) which were employed to collect and analyse the material associated with the study. Furthermore, an outline of the theoretical lenses (sub-section 4.2.5) through which the findings are explained and interpreted will be provided.

4.2.1 Rationale for a qualitative method

Research methods are specific techniques aimed at collecting and analysing data (Silverman, 2006). They can be either of a quantitative or qualitative nature and provide a systematic procedure to conduct the research (Creswell, 2007). In conjunction with an interpretivist approach to research (as described in sub-section 4.1.2) a qualitative method was chosen to examine the survivors participating in this study and to gain insight into their experiences. The rationale why a qualitative method was considered as an appropriate choice will be illustrated in this sub-section.

Previous literature on research methods revealed that different approaches are possible when conducting social research in the field of organizational studies with the purpose of exploring human behaviour (e.g. Anderson, 2004; Bryman, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009). However, (and as already stated above, see section 1.2), most of the influential research on downsizing survivors was conducted in a quantitative way or under laboratory conditions (e.g. Brockner et al., 1993; Chipunza and Berry, 2010) with the aim to measure the relationship between the variables under investigation and to seek statistically supported results. This has provided a large amount of information, but it appears that not all of these studies have gained enough in-depth knowledge and thus only remained on the surface level with their investigation. Against this background, the present study will apply a qualitative method, as this allows more attention to be

paid to survivors' reactions and to achieve an overall understanding of their experience in an attempt to answer the research questions. This is important, because only a method which is able to obtain the information required to answer the research questions proves to be an appropriate choice, and leads to the success of a study (Anderson, 2004).

According to a definition from Bryman (2008, p.22), a qualitative method "emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data". Saunders et al. (2009, p.151) argued that a qualitative method is "a synonym for any data collection technique (such as an interview) or data analysis procedure (such as categorising data) that generates or uses non-numerical data". Unlike quantitative methods, which are focused on the process of measuring, qualitative methods are concerned with understanding the social world through a subjective account (Bryman, 2008). As the present study is focused on capturing the meaning survivors attached to the complex situation after downsizing survival, a qualitative method provides a suitable vehicle to facilitate the direct talk and thus enables them to tell an unencumbered story of what they have experienced (Creswell, 2007).

Moreover, in a qualitative method the researcher becomes part of the research process. Unlike quantitative methods, where the researcher is distanced or isolated from the study's participants, a qualitative method facilitates the close involvement of the researcher. Thus such an approach corresponds to an interpretivist stance on social research as it enables the researcher to gain a closer understanding of what it means to be a survivor (Denscombe, 2010). This involves questions about how they were dealing with such a threatening situation or coping with potential physiological and psychological responses to stress. Furthermore, this understanding about the individual

survivors will help to explain other phenomena which apply at the organizational level, such as the behaviour of the management and how this has affected survivors' responses. This is of particular importance to answer the third research question, which is concerned with managerial actions and its influence on survivors' reactions post-downsizing.

Studying survivors' reactions through a qualitative method also provides more flexibility, as the researcher does not predefine the structure of the investigation, but survivors own view "provides the point of orientations" (Bryman, 2008, p.393). This allows survivors to report what they consider to be important and significant, rather than responding to concerns which were introduced by the researcher's own perspective. Thus, survivors' individual stories may lead to phenomena which are unexpected, or so far undiscovered, and thus provide new insight into their deeper thoughts and reactions (Creswell, 2007).

4.2.2 Research participants

An important step prior to the collection of data is the definition and the recruitment of the participants (Creswell, 2007). This involves that people who meet the criteria of interest are identified and convinced to participate in the study. This sub-section will address these issues and will illustrate how the sample for this study was defined and how the recruitment of the participants took place.

4.2.2.1 Definition of the sample

Bryman (2008, p.415) argued that "the researcher needs to be clear in his or her mind what the criteria are that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of cases (whether cases means sites, people, or something else)". This means that all cases must meet some predefined criterion to provide good data (Creswell, 2007). However, as the

present study follows a qualitative approach to social research, the question whether the participants are located at a single site or if the sample consists of individuals is of secondary importance as long as all of the participants have experienced the phenomenon being explored and can report their experience (Creswell, 2007). Thus, in qualitative research, the most important question to ask when selecting participants is "Do you have the experience that I am looking for?" (Englander, 2012, p.19). This is crucial, because only these experiences provide the key to answer the research questions of this study and to gain the anticipated knowledge about the phenomenon of downsizing survival (King and Horrocks, 2010).

To meet these requirements and in line with an interpretivist stance on research (e.g. Denscombe, 2010) a purposeful sampling strategy was applied. According to Creswell (2007, p.125) the concept of purposive sampling involves that "the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study". Thus, the sample is "'hand-picked'" (Denscombe, 2010, p.35) and the people will be sampled because of their relevance to the research questions being posed with the aim to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon associated with downsizing survival (Bryman, 2008).

With that in mind and with regard to the study's overall aim to explore survivors' experience in the European context with a focus on the UK and the German speaking area (see earlier discussion in section 1.3 about the research purpose of this study), potential participants must have originated either from a member country of the UK (including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) or from a German speaking country (e.g. Germany, Switzerland, Austria or the Principality of Liechtenstein).

Survivors which do not belong to one of these countries cannot be considered for this study as they do not meet the inclusion criteria (Bryman, 2008). Moreover, potential participants must at least have survived two forms of organizational downsizing in order to be able to articulate their experience of being a downsizing survivor and to provide a contribution to answer the first research question (What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?).

Additionally, it is required to recruit survivors within different periods post-downsizing, as this allows exploration of the variety of experiences over time with the purpose to answer the second research question (Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?). With regard to the third research question (In which ways does management action affect survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing?) which is aimed at exploring and understanding the role and the behaviour of the management post-downsizing, the sample will not only consider non-managerial employees, but also different levels of managers who experienced a downsizing activity. Finally, the sample needs to cover examples of age, company seniority, gender and culture in order to study a wide range of individual personalities and characteristics.

In addition to the fact that participants must meet the sample selection criteria, the sampling process is also concerned with the question about the size of the sample. Creswell (2007) asserts that the question about the sample size is equally as important as the question about the sampling strategy. The intent is not only to study a few individuals but also "to collect extensive detail" about each individual (Creswell, 2007, p.126). Unlike in quantitative research, where the sample must be statistically representative with the aim to generalize from the results, in qualitative research "the

sample needs to relate in some systematic manner to the social world and phenomena that a study seeks to throw light upon" (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.29).

However, a concrete number about the ideal sample size is rare, and varies between each individual study. For instance, Creswell (2007) recommended 5-25 participants for qualitative research; however, he also reported studies where the sample size ranged from 1 and 325. Englander (2012) in his work about qualitative research also suggested to select between five or twenty participants and previous studies which applied a qualitative method to explore issues around organizational downsizing collected their empirical material from ten (Vickers and Parris, 2007) and four (Fazio, 2011) participants. So, therefore, it seems as if there is no general rule to define the size of the sample and the ideal sample size is very much depending on the purpose of the study and what the researcher wants to find out.

Englander (2012, pp.18-19) emphasized the importance of gaining in-depth knowledge and the meaning of the phenomenon, arguing that in qualitative research the question is "What is it like?" rather than asking the quantitative question of "How much?" or "How many?". Against this background, and due to the knowledge obtained from previous studies about qualitative sampling (e.g. Creswell, 2007), a sample size of 30 participants was considered as appropriate to gain the anticipated understanding associated with survivors' experience post-downsizing. As the purpose of this study is not to produce generalizable results, "but to elucidate the particular, the specific" (Creswell, 2007, p.126) such a number provides a suitable choice to obtain an in-depth understanding (Denscombe, 2010, p.304) of how the phenomenon of downsizing survival was perceived by the individuals and how it may vary over time.

4.2.2.2 Recruitment of the participants

After the definition of the sample, it is indispensable to find people who are willing to participate into the study. This involves two aspects: First the choice of a suitable strategy to gain access to potential participants, and second the information which must be provided to them so that they make a decision to participate (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Remenyi et al. (1998, p.109) argued that access, which is "the ability to get close to the object of study, to really be able to find out what is happening", is one of the biggest challenges for the researcher. In particular, when dealing with a sensitive topic such as the study of survivors' reactions post-downsizing, it might become difficult to find enough people who want to share their experiences of survival with others (see also previous discussion in sub-section 4.1.2). King and Horrocks (2010) support this concern and assert that potential candidates might be reluctant to talk to a stranger about a topic which is painful and emotive. Moreover, people may be unwilling to participate as they fear that their story of downsizing survival is exposed to others who are not part of the community and thus have not experienced the same stresses and strains (Creswell, 2007).

Bearing this in mind and to mitigate the risk that not enough people would be found for participation, two strategies of purposive sampling were applied. Such an approach is not unusual for the purpose of participant recruitment (e.g. Creswell, 2007) and helped to ensure that the sample size of 30 relevant downsizing survivors could be identified for participation. As a first strategy of purposive sampling, in spring 2012, the largest labour unions and employee associations from the UK and the German speaking area were contacted with the aim that they may provide access to

organizations and individuals that had experienced organizational downsizing. By contacting such kind of organizations, it was anticipated that they would be supportive and willing to help as they have an interest of their own in organizational studies and advocate for employees' rights and labour conditions.

For this reason and in accordance with the Handbook of Research Ethics of the University of Gloucestershire, all of them received an e-mail/invitation letter (see Appendix A) in which the purpose of the study and the confidentiality and anonymity clauses (King and Horrocks, 2010) were explained and where they were asked to distribute or forward the e-mail to organizations and individuals that would be potentially willing to volunteer for this study. Downsizing survivors who responded to this invitation were contacted via telephone and provided with more detailed information about this research project, the potential benefits and the expectations of participation. During these telephone conversations it was also ensured that they met the sample criteria and that they have the experience relevant to the research. Afterwards 13 survivors agreed to participate in this study and to share their experience of downsizing survival.

To recruit the other 17 survivors, the concept of snowball sampling was applied. Such a strategy is another form of purposive sampling and "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Creswell, 2007, p.127). Although some researchers (e.g. Bryman and Bell, 2007; Bryman, 2008) expressed concerns that the sample identified by snowball sampling is unlikely to represent the population, for the purpose of the present study this is not relevant, as the aim of qualitative research, as already stated above, is not to generalize from the sample but to explore what it means to be a downsizing survivor for the participants of

the sample (Creswell, 2007). Thus, snowball sampling does not present a risk to harm or negatively influence the quality of this study.

Against this background, the initial contacts which were made with the 13 survivors through the help of the labour unions and employee associations were used to establish further contacts to other relevant survivors. This worked for both, the UK and the German speaking area, and a sufficient number of downsizing survivors indicated interest to participate in this research project. Likewise as in the case of the first group, all 17 survivors who volunteered were informed about the study's purpose, its nature and the confidentiality and the anonymity clauses according to the Handbook of Research Ethics of the University of Gloucestershire.

Finally, a total number of 30 downsizing survivors were identified. Of them, 20 were from the UK and 10 were from Germany or Switzerland. The gender split was 50-50. The ratio between survivors working in the private and public sectors was also equally balanced. The majority of the survivors had more than 10 years of professional experience and had each survived between two and six prior downsizing programmes. Moreover, and as indicated in the previous sub-section, this study identified survivors within differing time periods (six, 12 or 18 months) post-downsizing. This includes the recruitment of 10 survivors in each case. A detailed overview about all participating survivors and their core characteristics such as their demographic information or their current occupation is provided in Table 1 below. As each survivor had confirmed his/her participation via e-mail or by telephone the recruitment process was thus considered as completed and the recruitment period finished in autumn 2012.

Gender	Nationality	Age range	Partner	Children	Managerial status	Type of organization in which downsizing was experienced	Professional experience (in years)	No. of prior downsizing experiences	Amount of time since most recent downsizing experience (in months)
Female	British	41-50	No	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	> 20	3	12
Male	German	41-50	Yes	Yes	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 10	2	18
Female	British	41-50	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 20	4	6
Female	British	61-70	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 40	5	12
Male	British	41-50	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 20	2	18
Female	British	51-60	Yes	Yes	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 20	3	6
Male	German	41-50	Yes	Yes	Staff	Private-sector organization	> 20	2	6
Female	British	31-40	No	No	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 10	3	6
Female	British	41-50	Yes	No	Manager	Public-sector organization	> 20	4	18
Female	British	41-50	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 20	2	18
Female	German	21-30	Yes	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	< 10	2	6
Male	British	61-70	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public sector organization	> 40	6	6
Male	German	21-30	Yes	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	< 10	2	12
Female	British	31-40	Yes	Yes	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 10	2	18
Female	British	51-60	Yes	Yes	Staff	Private-sector organization	> 20	3	12
Male	Swiss	31-40	No	No	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 10	2	12
Female	British	41-50	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 20	3	6
Male	German	51-60	Yes	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	> 30	4	12
Female	British	31-40	Yes	Yes	Manager	Public-sector organization	> 10	2	12
Male	Swiss	21-30	Yes	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	< 10	2	6
Male	British	61-70	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 40	6	18
Male	Swiss	31-40	Yes	No	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 10	2	18
Male	British	51-60	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 30	5	6
Female	British	31-40	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 10	2	12
Male	Swiss	41-50	Yes	No	Manager	Private-sector organization	> 20	4	12
Male	British	21-30	Yes	No	Staff	Private-sector organization	< 10	2	18
Male	German	31-40	Yes	Yes	Manager	Private-sector organization	< 10	2	18
Female	British	31-40	Yes	No	Staff	Public-sector organization	< 10	2	12
Female	British	51-60	Yes	Yes	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 20	3	18
Male	British	41-50	Yes	No	Staff	Public-sector organization	> 10	2	6

Table 1: Description of participants

To apply a two stage strategy for participant recruitment proved to be an advantage as 30 downsizing survivors with diverse background and experiences could be identified. This provides the opportunity to gain valuable information about survivors' experience and how they coped with the situation. However, the attempt to gain direct access to European organizations which had undergone a recent downsizing programme was not successful, as most of the organizations did not reply to the e-mail sent or refused to get involved into this study. Such reactions were anticipated to a certain extent; however, the reality showed that it is even more challenging and the likelihood of gaining access diminished with the increasing size of an organization.

With hindsight, organizations' reluctance might derive from two reasons. First, the larger an organization the more approvals from gatekeepers are required, which automatically makes it more problematic and reduces the chance to gain access (King

and Horrocks, 2010). Second, organizations may refuse the participation of their employees for confidentiality reasons, because they may fear that information might leak out and could lead to bad publicity and reputation (King and Horrocks, 2010). In particular, when survivors report their experience post-downsizing and how the situation was handled by the organization, based on previous research (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004; Noer, 2009) it can be assumed that they make critical points as they were not satisfied with the way management acted. To avoid the survivors' critique becoming public or that they uncover the truth about the work in a downsized environment, organizations may prohibit participation right from the beginning and thus keep control over the situation.

4.2.3 Data collection

After the selection of the participants it needs to be decided how the data can be collected in an appropriate manner (Creswell, 2007). In line with the qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were considered as a suitable technique to gather meaningful information from participating survivors (Gibson and Hanes, 2003). Through interviews it is possible to "generate detailed and in-depth descriptions" of survivors' experience and thus develop an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Roulston, 2010, p.16). The following sub-sections will discuss the motivation for using interviews and the advantages of a semi-structured approach to interviewing and how this method had the potential to collect the material that was needed to answer the research questions.

4.2.3.1 The motivation to use interviews

Interviews are probably the most common method used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008) and are described as "a purposeful discussion between two or more people" (Saunders et al., 2009, p.318). Remenyi et al. (1998) argued that interviews

provide an effective means to collect a large amount of evidence from the people under investigation. Unlike questionnaires, which are widely employed to collect simple or straightforward information, interviews constitute a powerful method to explore more complex and challenging phenomena associated with human experience (Denscombe, 2010). Thus interviews provide a method "that is attuned to the intricacy of the subject matter" able to gain insight into sensitive or personal issues such as individuals' opinions, feelings or emotions, which cannot be expressed in a word or two, but need to be conveyed in a holistic way (Denscombe, 2010, p.174).

Following the adoption of an interpretivist stance on social research, the intention to interview people becomes even more important. According to Van Manen (1990) interviewing is the dominant form used to collect accounts of personal experiences. This involves a discussion aiming to "elicit the direct description of a particular situation or event as it is lived through without offering causal explanations or interpretive generalizations" (Roulston, 2010, p.17). In such a conversation it is anticipated that survivors report their personal life stories about incidents and experiences post-downsizing which can hardly be gathered by any other means. Van Manen (1990) asserts that it is probably easier for someone to talk about a particular incident than to write about a particular incident, because a written description implies that the interviewee reflects on the situation rather than reporting a story as it was immediately lived. This is important for the investigation of the present survivors, as the purpose is to reveal an authentic and real story that is as close as possible to their experiences.

The use of interviews for the investigation of survivors' experience offers clear advantages compared to other methods in the field of qualitative research. First and

foremost an interview is concerned to discover a description of a situation in which individuals experienced the phenomenon. To gain sufficient knowledge about the situation is crucial, because the meaning of a phenomenon needs to be considered in the situational context in which it was experienced (Englander, 2012). In the present case, the downsized environment constitutes a particular situation and provides the context for survivors' experience and how they attached meaning to a particular part of it (Weick, 1995). Since meanings are context dependent (Englander, 2012) this is the point where interviews show their advantage. Rather than just having a narrow view, interviews offer the potential to shed light on the entire context and thus provide the key to understand the meaning of the experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Interviews can also provide in-depth information about the subject being researched. They can generate data from complex topics in the most extensive way (Denscombe, 2010). In line with interpretivism's basic intention "to look beyond the details of the situation" (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.35) interviews provide the opportunity to probe via further questions and thus allow the investigation of a specific experience and the discovery of the entire meaning that a survivor attached to it. As conducting an interview takes place over some time, it is possible to pursue significant issues over the whole interview period (Denscombe, 2010). Thus, the depth of information may lead to valuable insight about how survivors have experienced the situation post-downsizing and how they have coped with that situation.

Moreover, interviews allow that the interviewees talk about their priorities. As nothing is predefined, but everything is unique in qualitative research (Remenyi et al., 1998), survivors can report what they consider as important associated with their experience of downsizing survival. Unlike questionnaires where individuals have to respond to a

predefined set of questions, interviews enable the survivors to expand the explanation about their beliefs or explain a certain standpoint, which is of relevance to what they have experienced (Denscombe, 2010). The fact that in qualitative research an interview deals with open questions, provides survivors with the opportunity to answer in their own words, reporting their stories of survival and sharing sensitive issues such as feelings and emotions (Roulston, 2010). Bryman (2008) argued that it is mainly its flexible nature that makes an interview an attractive method for data collection. This allows the researcher to adjust the lines of enquiry even during the interview and to develop the scope of investigation, which is case-specific for each individual survivor (Denscombe, 2010). Thus it provides free space to reveal unexpected issues related to survivors' experience and the phenomenon of downsizing survival.

However, to gain in-depth information about survivors' personal life, the interviewee must be carefully listened to, without interrupting their story. This requires interviewers to refrain from challenging survivors' responses (Roulston, 2010) because tiny phrases or comments, which seem to be ambiguous or irrelevant, may become important when they are put together and considered in the overall context, so that the survivors' story makes sense (Weick, 1995). Thus, it is essential that the qualitative interviewer exercises reserve in order to be able to witness how an individual's narrative of downsizing survival is developing and how they assign meaning to particular aspects (Roulston, 2010). Finally, it can be agreed with Roulston (2010, p.17) who views the relationship between the investigator and the participant as pedagogical "in that the interviewer's role is to be a student of the interviewee, learning as much about the topic of inquiry as possible through sensitive questioning".

4.2.3.2 The advantages of using semi-structured interviews

To gain in-depth information about downsizing survivors, the use of interviews, as stated in the previous sub-section provides a suitable method to investigate personal and social issues of the survivors. Although all qualitative interviews pursue the same objective, namely to gather in-depth information through talk and conversation, different types of interviews can be distinguished based upon the amount of structure which is imposed on them (Remenyi et al., 1998). In qualitative research two types of interviews are common: unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Englander, 2012). To collect the material associated with survivors' experience post-downsizing, the present study employed in-depth interviews based on a semi-structured approach. The justification for this choice will be outlined in the following.

According to Cousin (2009), semi-structured interviews are the most common form of interviews in the field of qualitative inquiry because they have the capacity to research complexity. Semi-structured interviews are characterized by their "flexible and fluid structure" which makes them so valuable for the purpose of the present study with the goal of exploring attitudinal and emotional aspects of downsizing survivors (Mason, 2004, p.3). Unlike a structured interview where the sequence of the questions to be asked is predefined right from the beginning, semi-structured interviews are organized around an interview guide, which comprises topics or themes that need to be covered during the interview (Mason, 2004). How and in what way the questions are asked may vary from interview to interview and is dependent on the flow of the conversation. This also includes the opportunity for questions to be omitted in some interviews and added in others (Saunders et al., 2009). However, Mason (2004, p.4) argued that a "form of aide memoire" is required to ensure that topics relevant to the research study are discussed. Thus, a semi-structured interview provides both flexibility and structure.

The flexibility provided by semi-structured interviews is important for this study and sets them apart from other forms of interview, such as standardized format interviews or unstructured interviews. In conjunction with an interpretivist approach to social research semi-structured interviews provide a suitable vehicle for discovering the meanings that survivors attached to certain phenomena (Weick, 1995). The fact that semi-structured interviews consist of a repertoire of relevant questions, which are flexible in their use, offers the advantage of having a dialogue with survivors and thereby allowing the following up of issues, which may be relevant with regard to the research questions (Cousin, 2009).

Saunders et al. (2009) assert that the use of further questions allows the participants to build on or explain their responses in more detail. This implies that survivors may use words or expressions in a particular way in order to describe their experience and what it means to be a downsizing survivor from their point of view. Thus a semi-structured interview may provide an opportunity for the survivors to hear themselves "'thinking aloud'", about particular events or incidents, which they had initially not thought about or pushed to the back of their mind for some reason (Saunders et al., 2009, p.324). Cousin (2009, p.73) supports the way semi-structured interviews operate, arguing that "semi-structured interviews are best conceptualized as a third space, where interviewer and interviewee work together to develop understandings". This opens up more possibilities for gaining insight into survivors' experiences, because in qualitative research "the researcher is not independent of what is being researched, but is an intrinsic part of it" (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.34).

Besides the flexible character of a semi-structured interview, this approach offers another advantage, namely, as the name indicates, structure. Although semi-structured

interviews allow survivors to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions (Mason, 2004) through this method the interviewer still keeps control over the interview environment and thus can avoid that survivors deviating too much from the original topic. This is important as empirical material collection with survivors generally happens only once and therefore requires an approach which enables appropriate information to be gathered in order to answer the research questions (Denscombe, 2010). In other words, semi-structured interviews ensure sufficient focus on the key topics of interest (Cousin, 2009). In contrast to unstructured interviews they also provide an opportunity for comparable findings and thus simplify the process of data analysis.

With respect to the current study, structure was mainly given by using an interview guide (see Appendix B) which consisted of different sections. Each section thereby dealt with a set of interview questions, which were structured around one of the three research questions. Such a procedure provided a clear guidance in asking the appropriate questions and was therefore in accordance with a semi-structured approach to interviewing. Moreover, this interview guide helped to keep an overview about which topics had already been discussed and which ones still needed to be addressed in the course of the interview. Thus it was ensured that nothing remained undiscussed and sufficient information could be collected in order to answer the research questions.

However, Englander (2012) emphasized that the goal of a semi-structured interview is not to lead but to direct the participants. Even though questions should be prepared in advance, they should not overburden the participants, because in qualitative research it is desired to discover how participants view the world, without influencing or manipulating them too much and thus set the agenda for the conversation. Bearing this

in mind, the semi-structured interviews applied in this study addressed this concern through an approach which provided both, flexibility in order to generate the survivors' accounts of their experiences, but also guidance to ensure that meaningful material was collected and important aspects not overlooked (Mason, 2004). This ensured that a set of rich and meaningful information about survivors' experience was obtained. A detailed illustration about how the interview questions were organized to meet the criteria of structure and flexibility is provided in sub-section 4.2.3.4 (Interview questions) and 4.2.3.6 (Interview procedure).

4.2.3.3 The interview arrangement

Apart from the conventional method of conducting interviews on a face-to-face basis there is a growing number of qualitative studies that endorse the use of remote techniques, such as telephone or Skype interviews under particular circumstances (e.g. Bryman, 2008; Saunders et al., 2009; King and Horrocks, 2010). As the present research project dealt with 30 survivors who were spread over three different countries (UK, Germany and Switzerland) it was decided to also incorporate remote techniques, beside the use of face-to-face interviews for the purpose of an efficient and successful material collection. A detailed explanation why and how the individual methods were applied will be illustrated in the following.

Face-to-face interviews

The most common form of conducting a one-to-one interview involves a meeting where one researcher and one participant comes together (Denscombe, 2010). In other words, they meet face-to-face and the communication takes place synchronously in time and place (Opdenakker, 2006). Besides the benefit that there is no significant time delay between questions and responses, this method also offers the advantage of visual and/or social cues (e.g. voice, intonation, body language) which may give the

researcher information additional to the verbal answers provided by the interviewee (Opdenakker, 2006; King and Horrocks, 2010). This is important for the present study, as downsizing survivors may also use non-verbal communication such as gestures or signals to underpin their views and ideas when they talk about sensitive topics such as their situation post-downsizing. Against this background, the majority of survivor interviews (20 interviews) were conducted on a face-to-face basis, where the researcher met with each individual survivor.

One important step in the case of face-to-face interviews is the definition of an appropriate venue or "physical space" in which the interviews can be conducted, as such a choice may have a serious influence on how the interview proceeds and consequently on the outcome (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.43). To ensure that survivors feel comfortable with the interview location it was up to them to make a choice about a place to meet. As the vast majority of face-to-face interviews took place in the South West of England and the researcher himself was based in Cheltenham, survivors either invited the researcher to their territory (their home or their workplace) or they were willing to come to the premises of the University of Gloucestershire for the interview. In each case however, it was ensured that the location was convenient for the survivors and that they were not faced with any difficulties or stress resulting from travel or private time constraints (King and Horrocks, 2010).

In the context of the physical environment, King and Horrocks (2010) defined three aspects which are of particular importance when conducting an interview: comfort, privacy and quiet. With regard to the first requirement comfort, they argued that it is not only the physical comfort but also the psychological comfort which is important when interviewing a person. This means that if participants feel tense or unsettled it

may be reflected in their responses (King and Horrocks, 2010). In practical terms this implies that seats for instance should be arranged in such a way that they encourage a comfortable interaction between the researcher and the participant (Denscombe, 2010). However, it is crucial, that the researcher does not sit directly opposite to the interviewee, as this may create a confrontational feeling, where the interviewee feels pressurized and thus uncomfortable. To address these issues and to ensure that survivors felt comfortable during the interview, the seating was arranged at an angle and with little space between the researcher and the interviewee. Thus it was possible not only to hear and to see the survivor but also to identify visual cues associated with his/her responses (King and Horrocks, 2010).

The second requirement King and Horrocks (2010) referred to is privacy. This implies that the researcher should avoid the danger that the interview is interrupted or disturbed in any form. To reduce this risk, a meeting room at the University of Gloucestershire was booked in advance and for a sufficient amount of time. Thus, the interview, but also formal things such as the introduction or the briefing could be carried out without the danger that anyone was interrupting the conversation (King and Horrocks, 2010). In line with the third requirement, which emphasizes the need for a quiet location, all interviews at the University were only conducted in meeting rooms with closable doors. Open space areas or shared offices were not used, as this would have posed the risk of too much noise and thereby also decreased the privacy.

In all face-to-face interviews, which were conducted at a survivor's home or their workplace, the researcher had limited influence on arranging the physical setting (e.g. seating) at the interview location. However, in this case each of the survivors was informed about the requirements in terms of comfort, privacy and quiet so that they

could arrange an appropriate room prior to the interview. The possibility to meet with some survivors at their home was beneficial, as such a meeting place conveyed familiarity and comfort and thus facilitated the talk about sensitive issues related to their experience of downsizing survival (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Remote interviews

Remote techniques such as telephone or Skype interviews are being used more and more to gather meaningful information in qualitative research (King and Horrocks, 2010; Denscombe, 2010). Such methods are described as a "synchronous communication of time" and "asynchronous communication of place" (Opdenakker, 2006, p.4). This means that the interview takes place in real-time, but researcher and participants are at different places. The main reason for conducting remote interviews is the physical distance between the researcher and the participants (King and Horrocks, 2010, Denscombe, 2010). This has implications for the present study, as the researcher was based in Cheltenham (UK) but participating survivors, as discussed already in sub-section 4.2.2, were not only from the UK but also geographically spread over Germany and Switzerland. Against this background 10 German and Swiss survivors were interviewed via telephone or Skype respectively. This allowed the bridging of the physical distance between the UK and these countries, without requiring the researcher travelling long distances across Germany and Switzerland. This saved him both, valuable time and money.

Besides the advantages resulting for the researcher when conducting remote interviews, participants may also embrace these interview techniques, as it provides them with a "greater sense of anonymity" and thus enables them to speak more openly about sensitive topics and personal stories, compared to when they would participate in

a face-to-face interview (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.80). Even though participating survivors did not explicitly mention that they prefer to conduct the interview via telephone or Skype, the researcher got the impression that some survivors were more willing to share their story of downsizing survival on the phone than in his physical presence. Thus, to conduct the interview via remote technique became also beneficial for the survivors, as they may have felt less distressed when answering the researcher's questions (Bryman, 2008).

However, one major disadvantage frequently mentioned in relation to the use of telephone interviews is the absence of visual cues (King and Horrocks, 2010, Denscombe, 2010). King and Horrocks (2010, p.82) argued that unlike in the case of face-to-face interviews, where visual cues convey "much of the richness and nuance" of a particular meaning, a telephone interview lacks the opportunity to ascribe meaning through facial expressions or non-verbal communication. This in turn implies the risk that information beneficial to understanding participants' thoughts might get lost (Denscombe, 2010).

Although the concerns revolving around the absence of visual cues when conducting telephone interviews seems to be plausible, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) and Bryman (2008) provided evidence, which to a certain extent undermines the criticism against the use of telephone interviews. In their studies Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) explicitly compared the transcripts of telephone interviews with those of face-to-face interviews and concluded that there were no significant differences in terms of "quantity, nature and depth of responses" (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004, p.113). Against the assumption that adopting telephone interviews would weaken the study's outcome, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004, p.107) assert that "telephone interviews can be used productively in

qualitative research". Therefore, and taking into account the above mentioned challenges, when talking to survivors via a remote technique, telephone interviews were considered as an efficient method to collect meaningful information about survivors' experience of downsizing survival.

Nevertheless, to maximize the effectiveness of the telephone interviews and to mitigate the risk that the absence of visual cues would lead to any reduction in received meaning, the following steps were undertaken. Before the telephone interview took place, participating survivors received a separate briefing about what the topic was about and the interaction which was desired. Moreover, it was made clear to the candidates that they had to reserve enough time for the telephone interview, in order to avoid any stress and to ensure that an in-depth discussion could take place (King and Horrocks, 2010). During the telephone interview the researcher paid special attention not only to what the survivors said, but also how they said it, as alternation in voice conveys particular meaning and may be similar in importance to gestures or other non-verbal communication (Owen and Webb, 2004). Compared to the face-to-face interview, the researcher also played more of an active role with a stronger focus on probing for relevant answers. This helped to resolve ambiguities resulting from a lack of visual cues (King and Horrocks, 2010), but also encouraged the individual survivor to open up and be more talkative if their voice became too monotonous. Finally, additional notes were made immediately after the interview, because making notes at a later point would bear the risk that significant phrases or statements could be forgotten as it becomes much harder to recall information if there is not a visual image of the participant which could serve the researcher as a reminder (Owen and Webb, 2004).

Besides telephone interviews, Skype technology was used to conduct the interviews with survivors. Skype is a fast growing software application for making internet based telephone or video calls (King and Horrocks, 2010; Denscombe, 2010). It can be downloaded for free and is easy to use. Using a webcam, it is possible to have visual contact with the person on the other end of the line and to talk to him/her in real time (King and Horrocks, 2010). To take advantage of these benefits, this study applied Skype to interview survivors via a video call. This provided the researcher with the possibility to have a face-to-face conversation with survivors for virtually no cost, whilst making them as "real" as possible. Even though there is a slight delay when interviewing someone (e.g. King and Horrocks, 2010), the criticism that remote techniques lack the opportunity for visual cues cannot be accepted for Skype interviews, as participants' gestures or body language are directly transmitted and visible on the interviewer's screen. King and Horrocks (2010, p.85) argued that "by selecting video full screen you can almost experience the person being in the room with you". Thus, a Skype interview facilitates that survivors appear authentic during the conversation and enable the researcher not only to identify communication expressed through words, but also to read non-verbal communication, which might be used additionally by survivors to underpin the meaning of a particular event.

4.2.3.4 Interview questions

The interview questions for this study were defined from the key issues that emerged from the literature review, which was presented in chapter two and three. To maintain a clear overview, the questions were developed around the three research questions and in accordance with a semi-structured approach to interviewing. They consisted of two parts: an interview guide containing open questions seeking to explore survivors' experience of downsizing survival (see Appendix B) and a form sheet with factual

questions aimed to collect basic demographic information from survivors, such as their age range or their nationality (see Appendix C).

The interview guide itself also consisted of two sections. The first section dealt with a set of introductory questions in order to find out where, when and how many times survivors had experienced organizational downsizing. The second section contained questions on revealing survivors' actual personal experiences. This section constituted the main body of the interview guide and was further subdivided into four sub-sections (A, B, C and D). Each sub-section thereby consisted of a set of distinctive interview questions, which were developed around the respective research question and could be asked individually in the course of the interview.

The first sub-section (A) contains interview questions which were developed around the first research question devoted to obtaining an understanding of survivors' reactions in the aftermath of downsizing. In line with the qualitative research approach of this study the first question invited survivors to provide a description of their experience post-downsizing. Depending on the comprehension and content of their story of survival, follow-up questions, which focused for instance on positive or negative experiences or on the influence of these experiences on their reactions could be asked additionally in order to gain more information about a relevant aspect. This allowed the researcher not only to explore survivors' reactions but also to gain insight about the factors which caused these reactions (Amundson et al., 2004).

The second sub-section (B) comprises interview questions which were designed around the second research question and were concerned with the longitudinal effects of downsizing on survivors. This included questions aimed to find out if and how

survivors' reactions changed over time in the period post-downsizing. Additional questions were prepared to obtain a deeper understanding of influential factors which may have influenced their feelings in particular ways. Moreover, efforts were made to find out how long it took until survivors perceived a change in their reactions and if previous downsizings had any influence on how they perceived more recent ones. This was crucial for the study, as this could reveal the toxic side-effects of organizational downsizing, which remain in an individual's head even over some years (Noer, 2009).

Sub-section C consisted of interview questions which were developed around the third research question and aimed at collecting information about management action in the time after downsizing. As the management plays a central role in downsized organizations (e.g. Reinardy, 2010), questions were focused on exploring how the management handled the downsizing and in particular, if survivors received any kind of support from them. Moreover, follow-up questions were aimed at discovering survivors' expectations in terms of support or improvements, which may have made the situation more comfortable for them.

Questions in sub-section D were asked only to those survivors who were also responsible for managing survivors. Thus, it was sought not only to reveal the criticism they may express with regard to the behaviour of their immediate managers, but also to uncover how they managed survivors themselves. Questions were in particular aimed at discovering their experience in managing survivors and to explore if they had provided survivors with any kind of support. Follow-up questions were designed to find out if those managing survivors perceived their task as challenging and if they received additional advice or help in managing their surviving workforce.

To provide survivors with the opportunity to address topics or themes which were not mentioned in the course of the interview, the interview guide concluded with a last question asking them about anything else they wanted to share with the researcher. This ensured that additional phenomena which were not addressed or missed in previous literature were explored (King and Horrocks, 2010). Many of the participants used this opportunity to reflect again on their experience and to summarise the positive and the negative things which they had reported in the course of the interview. Moreover, they mentioned additional expectations and concerns with regard to their employer, but also associated to their personal life and career perspective.

After completing the interview guide, it was discussed with both supervisors in order to receive feedback with regard to the guide's structure and the appropriateness of the questions (King and Horrocks, 2010). Following a detailed discussion and a few minor modifications, the interview guide was adopted into the form used for the pilot studies. Due to the bi-lingual composition of the set of participants, the interview questions were prepared in both the English and German language. In both cases, however, they were proof read by native speakers to ensure correct grammar, spelling and meaning of the content.

4.2.3.5 Pilot studies

Pilot studies are an important element of a good research design (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001, p.1) "conducting a pilot study does not guarantee success in the main study, but it does increase the likelihood". Saunders et al. (2009) argued that pilot studies are conducted for more than one reason. First and foremost, pilot studies provide the opportunity for trying out a particular research instrument in terms of its ability to fulfil the required purpose

(Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). This implies that potential weaknesses of a particular method can be identified and elements such as the interview structure or the interview questions refined if necessary. Moreover, pilot studies allow the researcher to test the interview procedure with regard to administrative or organizational aspects including the time planning or the use of the equipment (Creswell, 2007).

To address these issues, three pilot studies were conducted during the period from September to October 2012. Although the sample size for pilot studies in qualitative research is not defined, and strongly depends on the research questions and the study's objectives (Saunders et al., 2009), three pilot studies were considered as appropriate to find out if the research instrument, namely a semi-structured approach to interviewing, fulfilled its purpose. To ensure that the pilot studies reflected reality as well as possible, they were conducted under real conditions in terms of participants, location and interview techniques (face-to-face and remote interviews). Only people who had already experienced the phenomenon of downsizing in their prior working life were invited for the pilot test. This allowed the researcher not only to identify unclear questions or issues of poor recording, but also to see if the interview questions have the potential to elicit sufficient information about survivors' experience post-downsizing. This was considered as important as survivors may not respond to all questions in the same manner and, for instance, hesitate to answer questions which are too sensitive (e.g. including political or ethical issues) or invade their privacy as a human being (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001).

In accordance with the findings from the first pilot study, the interview questions and the interview structure were slightly refined and two more pilot studies were carried out. After completion of the pilot studies participants were also asked to express their

opinion with regard to the overall impression of the interview. As all the participants demonstrated a substantial interest in the topic of downsizing survival, they provided valuable comments and suggestions (e.g. the request for more background information) which were considered in the interview guide and thus helped to strengthen the research process and to increase the likelihood for a successful study.

4.2.3.6 Interview procedure

The interviews for this study were conducted during the period from November to December 2012. As mentioned earlier, 20 of the 30 interviews were conducted face-to-face and 10 were carried out on a remote basis. Each interview was scheduled for around 60 minutes to allow an in-depth investigation about survivors' experience of downsizing survival. The vast majority of the interviews stayed within one hour and only a few ones took longer (60-90 minutes) or were conducted faster (50-60 minutes). As participating survivors were from Great Britain but also from Germany and Switzerland, the interviews were held in both, the English and German language.

To arrange an interview appointment with survivors, they were contacted via e-mail or telephone. On the day of the interview they were welcomed and provided with the consent form (see Appendix D) and the form sheet about the demographic questions (see Appendix C), with the request to fill it out. Moreover, they were informed that the interview will be audio recorded, but that everything will be kept confidential and that they can withdraw from the interview at any time. The opportunity to ask questions was also given to them. In the case of remote interviews (telephone or Skype), survivors were provided with the consent form beforehand (electronically), so that they had the opportunity to complete it and/or raise questions up until the interview took place.

The interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder which was tested in advance with regard to acoustic, memory and battery power in order to ensure that it was functioning well and would serve the purpose (Denscombe, 2010). In addition to that, written notes were made. This not only had the advantage of recording non-verbal communication, but also provided the researcher with the opportunity to make written reminders, in order to follow up issues, which were mentioned by survivors, in the course of the interview (King and Horrocks, 2010). When participants refused to give consent to be recorded, only written notes were made. However, this happened only once, as the majority of participants felt comfortable with being recorded.

Before survivors were interviewed about their experiences as a downsizing survivor, they were asked a set of introductory questions, as this facilitated the kick off and enabled the researcher to break the ice and to develop trust (Remenyi et al., 1998; King and Horrocks, 2010). This was crucial for the present interviews, as most of the questions addressed sensitive topics, and therefore required a high level of trust towards the researcher in order for them to reply. However, the fact that most of the questions were open ended meant that survivors were not limited in response, but could freely talk about what they considered to be important (Van Manen, 1990).

At the end of the interview, survivors were asked if there was any additional point they wanted to share with the researcher, in order to complete their story of downsizing survival. Moreover, participants were thanked for their time and their participation and wished good luck for the future. To limit the risk of data loss, the recorded files were assigned with a number and the date, saved on the researcher's computer and additionally backed up on two external hard discs.

4.2.4 Data analysis

The method of analysis was based on qualitative principles. This involves the empirical material being studied in depth in order to discover the deeper meaning associated with survivors' experience post-downsizing (Groenewald, 2004). To address these issues, survivors' stories were examined according to a set of steps which were recommended by several authors (e.g. Hycner, 1985; Denscombe, 2010) with the goal of guiding the researcher in his analysis process:

- Transcription (e.g. King and Horrocks, 2010; Denscombe, 2010)

- Familiarization with the text (e.g. Hycner, 1985; Denscombe, 2010)

- Identification of meaning units (e.g. Hycner, 1985; King and Horrocks, 2010)

- Clustering of meaning units (e.g. Hycner, 1985; Creswell, 2007)

- Determination of central themes (e.g. Graneheim and Lundman, 2004)

- The use of NVivo to support the analysis (e.g. Bryman, 2008)

Each of these steps will be illustrated in as much detail as possible in order to make the analysing process transparent and to demonstrate the researcher's effort to understand how survivors experienced the phenomenon of downsizing survival (Moustakas, 1994; Silverman, 2006).

4.2.4.1 Transcription

Transcription is described as "converting recorded material into text" and constitutes a first step of data analysis as it helps the researcher to become familiar with the material obtained from the interviews (King and Horrocks, 2010, p.142). Against this background, the researcher chose to transcribe all interviews himself and immediately

after recording, as this offered him the opportunity to get close to the material with the potential to immediately discover emergent themes and to reveal similarities or differences with regard to survivors' responses. In other words, it enabled the researcher to get a basic understanding of those situations survivors ascribed a particular meaning to (Weick, 1995).

In line with an interpretivist approach to research, a verbatim transcription was carried out, because this provided the foundation to discover survivors' experience of downsizing survival, where each single word may become of particular importance for the researcher. This involves the interpretation of the material whilst constantly checking against the original interview transcript, in an attempt to maintain authenticity and closeness to the participants' experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In order to capture relevant aspects of speech such as emphases, laughter or similar features in a consistent way, a simple transcription system according to King and Horrocks (2010, p.145) was applied (see Table 2). All interviews which were conducted in German were literally translated into English and additionally checked by experts in order to ensure the correctness of the translation.

Interview feature	Representation
Emphasis	Capital letters
Word/phrase was complety inaudible	[inaudible]
Word/phrase was inaudible, but researcher had an idea what may have been said	[idea?]
Word/phrase was omitted in the transcription (for instance to assure anonymity)	[...]
Laughing, coughing and similiar features	(laughs)
Sentence/phrase was incomplete	…

Table 2: Transcription system according to King and Horrocks (2010, pp.145-146)

Due to the fact that participants did not always speak in clear and complete sentences, the raw material needed to be cleaned up a little bit by the researcher, so that the talk made sense in the written form (Denscombe, 2010). This implied that small words or punctuation were added or mispronunciation corrected so that the sentences became clearer and the text could be used for analysis. However, it was ensured that the modifications made, were so minor that they did not change the original meaning of the talk or the context in which survivors described part of their experience (Van Manen, 1990).

To simplify and speed up the process of transcription, transcription software was employed. The transcript was left with a wide margin on the right side of every page in order to provide enough space for comments, but also for further classification of the material (Denscombe, 2010). Moreover, each line of the transcript was numbered in order to simplify the navigation through the interview text. For the purpose of anonymity, a number (from 1 to 30) was assigned to each particular interview. When quotes from interviews were used in the text, they were italicized and provided in brackets with a code which consists of the interview number (indicating a particular participant) and the line number telling the reader where a particular phrase originated from (e.g. *I love my work. (9, 51-52))*. An example of an entire interview transcript is attached in Appendix F.

4.2.4.2 Familiarization with the text

After the process of transcription, the researcher had to familiarize himself with the material in order to get a sense of the whole and to understand the material (Hycner, 1985). First and foremost, and in preparation for the subsequent steps, this involved each transcript being printed out one-sided and with a large margin at the right hand

side, to allow the opportunity to make annotations in the course of the analysing process. Moreover, and as stated early in this section, each single line was numbered for the purpose of keeping a clear structure. In order not to lose the overview with regard to the 30 transcripts and the massive amount of material (more than 140 000 words), each interview transcript was dealt with separately and one after another (Hycner, 1985).

In a second step each transcript was read several times in order to understand the survivor's story as a whole and as this provided the context to understand potential themes which may have emerged in the later stages of the analysing process. By reading the text thoroughly the researcher immersed himself in the material in an attempt to gain insight into what the survivor's story may have revealed and to see the events through their eyes (Denscombe, 2010). This enabled the researcher to become familiar with survivors' situation post-downsizing and how this had affected their attitudinal and behavioural reactions and the way they made sense of the whole scenario (Weick, 1995). General impressions or specific issues, which arose during this process, were already noted in anticipation of using them later on. However, when reading was not sufficient to understand a survivor's story or particular aspects of it, the researcher also listened to the original interview record in order to clarify para-linguistic levels of communication such as an emphasis or an intonation, which helped him to get a sense of the whole (Hycner, 1985).

4.2.4.3 Identification of meaning units

The identification of meaning units is one of the most important steps in qualitative data analysis as this is the process through which the essence of a participants' story is discovered in the text (Flood, 2010). Kleiman (2004, p.14) argued that meaning units

"are rendered in the words of participants" and may consist of sentences, phrases or paragraphs, which address a significant point in an attempt to convey meaning. Although the identification process of meaning units may be subjective and thus vary among different researchers, King and Horrocks (2010, p.198) argued that this is negligible as long as "the definition is based on apparent meaning rather than any attempt to apply any 'objective' grammatical rule to the task (e.g. defining units in terms of clauses, sentences or paragraphs)".

Against this background the researcher treated the text with a high level of attention, but also with openness in order to mitigate the risk of overlooking anything relevant or meaningful (Hycner, 1985). The search for meaning units involved every single word and detail of the survivors' description being studied carefully, in order to elicit the deeper meaning of a particular statement, but also to identify where parts of the story did not make sense, where there were too many disruptions or contradictions (Creswell, 2007). Even though when a statement seemed to be ambiguous or unclear, it was signed with a remark, but still considered as relevant in the first instance, as it might become clear in the course of the subsequent analysis. However, in order not to lose the focus, the researcher always kept in mind how the meaning units identified, relate to the research questions and the objective of the study, as only relevant information will reveal the phenomenon of downsizing survival and how it was experienced by the participants of this study (Sarantakos, 1993; Remenyi et al., 1998).

Following this, all relevant words or phrases identified as meaning units were marked off with a yellow highlighter and additional notes were made in the margin alongside the transcript accordingly (Kleiman, 2004). The notes made earlier (e.g. during the interview) were also carried over to the respective section of the transcript in order to

consolidate all relevant information about survivors' experience on one single document and thus allowing a more efficient analysis.

Issues of non-verbal communication or paralinguistic cues which were observed during the interview were also taken into account in this analysis step as they may alter the literal meaning of words or sentences (Hycner, 1985). In particular, when words or phrases were given a greater emphasis, through intonation or pauses, this could change the meaning of a statement and thus lead to confusion if not noticed. This became most critical when two survivors used the same literal words to state something, but emphasized it totally differently, so that the meaning became the opposite. For instance, when one survivor expressed that the organization had achieved great things in terms of downsizing, he/she could mean that the organization did the right thing, however another survivor put a different emphasis or added a fake smile to sarcastically describe that the organization made the wrong decision when it decided to downsize (Hycner, 1985). To overcome such pitfalls, the researcher not only read the survivor's story carefully and each sentence repeatedly, but also paid attention to non-verbal and voice cues in order to support the identification of relevant meaning units. This helped him to make sense of the survivors' description and to reveal the deeper meaning of particular phrases and statements (Weick, 1995).

4.2.4.4 Clustering of meaning units

After defining the relevant meaning units, the next step in qualitative data analysis was concerned with grouping units of common meaning together. This required studying the identified meaning units across all transcripts and to look for a common essence that "unites several discrete units of relevant meaning" (Hycner, 1985, p.287). Such an approach is also described as "inductive category development" (Hsieh and Shannon,

2005), as the categories emerge out of the text (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003; Bryman, 2008) rather than being preconceived by the researcher. This involves grouping all meaning units into a suitable category and ensuring that no material was excluded because of the lack of a category (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004, p.107).

However, this is a critical phase, as the meaning units which have the potential to reveal the phenomenon under investigation will be extracted or isolated from the rest of the story and thus context may get lost (Creswell, 2007). Consequently this would limit the researcher's possibility to make sense of survivors' experience at a later stage (Weick, 1995). Remenyi et al. (1998) argued that participants' social behaviour and actions can only be understood in the context in which they occur. Thus context is crucial to analyse a survivor's story, because it contains both; the immediate surrounding text, but also and even more importantly, the information which goes beyond the text and what is obvious (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). Bearing this in mind and to demonstrate an awareness of survivors' holistic account, separation of any meaning unit from a survivor's story without considering the context in which it was described by them was avoided (King and Horrocks, 2010). Thus it was possible to group units of common meaning together without ignoring the contextual factors which make a survivor's story so valuable and unique.

Beside the literal content as a main criterion to identify meaning units, the researcher also paid attention to the number of times a particular word or sentence was mentioned by a survivor, because this provided an indication of the significance of a particular statement and how important it was for the individual (Hycner, 1985; Creswell, 2007). Moreover, by counting the meaning units which belong to the same category, the researcher got a rough estimate of the relative importance of a category and thus a first

overview about a survivor's concerns (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003).

When there was a need to further subdivide and refine the content of the categories, sub-categories were built. At the same time however, categories which seemed to be overlapping or which were not significant enough with regard to their content were merged together (Hycner, 1985). Each category and sub-category was finally given a suitable name summarizing the commonalities among the constituted meaning units. In order to keep a clear overview, categories, sub-categories and meaning units were organized on a separate sheet (word document) and in a coherent order to simplify the subsequent steps of analysis. Moreover, each meaning unit was provided with the identification number of the respective interview (1-30), in order to allow tracking of it, back to the original material. Finally, 54 categories were developed.

4.2.4.5 Determination of central themes

The final step in qualitative data analysis was aimed to determine a set of central themes, which express the essence of the categories which were developed in the previous step (Hycner, 1985). Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p.107) described "themes as threads of meaning that recur in domain after domain". For the present study themes were considered as threads of underlying meaning through meaning units, sub-categories and categories. In going back and forth between the 54 categories, 10 themes able to express the latent content of survivors' stories were determined. All of those themes are listed below and will be presented and explained in detail in chapter 5. An extract of the final list containing the themes, categories, sub-categories and meaning units is attached in Appendix E. (The entire list contains more than 60 pages and was due to space restrictions not attached in the Appendix).

- Theme 1: Emotions and feelings

- Theme 2: Attitudinal and behavioural changes

- Theme 3: Work-related changes

- Theme 4: Health and well-being

- Theme 5: Coping

- Theme 6: Doubt

- Theme 7: Survivors' downsizing history and their learning

- Theme 8: Management behaviour

- Theme 9: Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing

- Theme 10: Measures and challenges to manage survivors

The final overview list was also discussed with the dissertation supervisors in order to receive feedback about the rigour and the judgement related to the categorization and theme development (Hycner, 1985). Moreover, other research students were consulted with the aim to assess the procedure and the outcome of the data analysis. Although, the involvement of others was time consuming, the expertise and advice provided by them helped the researcher tremendously to critically reflect on his procedure and to modify certain units in an attempt to improve the quality of the analysis (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

4.2.4.6 The use of NVivo to support the analysis

To corroborate the findings from the qualitative data analysis NVivo (Version 10) was employed. NVivo is a computer software package developed to support the analysis process of qualitative data (Bryman, 2008). In particular, the word frequency search turned out to be a useful function for the purpose of this study. Although to search and count the frequency a word occurs in the text may be considered as a monotonous activity "the use of some words rather than others can often be of some significance, because it can reveal the predilection for sensationalizing a certain event" (Bryman, 2008, p.280). In the present study, the words which occur most frequently in a survivor's description may point out their major concerns with regard to their situation post-downsizing. This may include emotive words, but also less dramatic terms, which they use to describe their experience (Bryman, 2008). In any case, it was anticipated that the outcome of this analysis would provide a further contribution to reveal the phenomenon of downsizing survival.

In preparation for the analysis and before consolidating and uploading the text to NVivo, the German transcripts were translated once more into the English language, however this time by using an Online Translator (Google Translator). Although such a machine translation is not able to replicate the findings of a human translation, it offers one and important advantage namely to provide uniform results with even consistent failures. Thus it fulfils the purpose to translate the words and not the context in which the words occur (Byrne, 2006). Moreover, and in order to search only for the most frequent words in survivors' responses, the questions asked by the researcher were excluded from the uploaded text. Additionally, the word frequency query was adjusted so that it did not search for conjunctions or prepositions as they were less significant and meaningful for this analysis (NVivo10 online manual, n.d.). The query was

executed to search for exact words only and to identity the most common 1000 words in the text.

The search results were displayed in a summary tab which was saved as an Excel file. Table 3 and 4 show an extract of the summary tab with the most frequent words mentioned by survivors. This illustration however is the result of a further adjustment where various linking words (e.g. all in all, next) were removed as they did not seem significant. The tables are subdivided in different columns. Column A indicates the sequential number, Column B shows the most frequently occurring words and Column C shows the number of times that the word occurred within the text searched (NVivo10 online manual, n.d.).

A detailed examination of the results revealed a large number of meaningful words, which survivors repeatedly mentioned in order to describe their experience post-downsizing. The fact that each of those words relates to one of the ten central themes (see column D) which were determined in the previous sub-section, further supports the approach used to analyse the empirical material and justifies the development of these themes as they are able to express the latent content of the survivors' stories (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004).

No. [A]	Word [B]	Count [C]	Corresponding theme [D]
20	management	225	Management behaviour
35	support	184	Management behaviour
36	feel	181	Emotions and feelings
95	process	95	Management behaviour
105	meeting	85	Management behaviour
116	feeling	77	Emotions and feelings
126	union	74	Management behaviour
133	leave	70	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
139	money	67	Work-related changes
143	hard	65	Emotions and feelings
151	information	61	Management behaviour
154	help	59	Management behaviour
158	happy	58	Emotions and feelings
159	personally	58	Emotions and feelings
161	communication	57	Management behaviour
171	opportunity	53	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
195	meetings	50	Management behaviour
197	decision	49	Management behaviour
235	family	42	Coping
240	angry	41	Emotions and feelings
243	honest	41	Management behaviour
249	helpful	40	Coping
262	attitude	38	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
265	financial	38	Work-related changes
268	reason	38	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
294	helped	35	Coping
297	stress	35	Health and well-being
313	measures	33	Management behaviour
317	training	33	Measures and challenges to manage survivors
320	emotional	32	Emotions and feelings
334	health	31	Health and well-being
338	resources	31	Work-related changes
341	knowledge	30	Work-related changes
363	sad	28	Emotions and feelings
370	feedback	27	Management behaviour
371	friends	27	Coping
372	future	27	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
382	consultation	26	Management behaviour
396	concern	25	Doubt
402	past	25	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
405	procedures	25	Management behaviour
406	salary	25	Work-related changes
408	supportive	25	Coping
416	counselling	24	Management behaviour
418	emotionally	24	Emotions and feelings
430	children	23	Coping
442	procedure	23	Management behaviour
452	communicated	22	Management behaviour
461	pressure	22	Work-related changes
462	reasons	22	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
484	strategy	21	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
485	structure	21	Work-related changes
490	economic	20	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
494	perform	20	Work-related changes
503	worried	20	Emotions and feelings
504	age	19	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
506	bitter	19	Emotions and feelings
508	child	19	Coping
516	learned	19	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
526	anger	18	Emotions and feelings
542	sorry	18	Emotions and feelings
544	trust	18	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
555	message	17	Management behaviour
567	advice	16	Measures and challenges to manage survivors

Table 3: Results of the NVivo word frequency search

176

No. [A]	Word [B]	Count [C]	Corresponding theme [D]
577	fairly	16	Emotions and feelings
578	feelings	16	Emotions and feelings
579	hope	16	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
584	lucky	16	Emotions and feelings
590	performance	16	Work-related changes
593	relationships	16	Coping
594	relief	16	Emotions and feelings
600	strange	16	Emotions and feelings
602	uncertainty	16	Emotions and feelings
615	dramatic	15	Emotions and feelings
636	worry	15	Emotions and feelings
637	accepted	14	Coping
641	commitment	14	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
658	opportunities	14	Work-related changes
659	processes	14	Management behaviour
660	resentment	14	Emotions and feelings
665	transparent	14	Management behaviour
669	valued	14	Emotions and feelings
670	workload	14	Work-related changes
696	learn	13	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
702	motivated	13	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
708	resource	13	Work-related changes
712	sick	13	Health and well-being
719	upset	13	Emotions and feelings
725	balance	12	Coping
726	coaching	12	Management behaviour
727	committed	12	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
735	fear	12	Emotions and feelings
737	handle	12	Management behaviour
738	helping	12	Coping
756	rational	12	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
767	successful	12	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
796	leadership	11	Measures and challenges to manage survivors
799	mood	11	Emotions and feelings
809	shock	11	Emotions and feelings
812	transition	11	Coping
817	vulnerable	11	Emotions and feelings
823	break	10	Coping
825	communicate	10	Management behaviour
828	cope	10	Coping
832	disappointed	10	Emotions and feelings
833	empathy	10	Measures and challenges to manage survivors
843	harder	10	Work-related changes
844	history	10	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
848	learning	10	Survivors' downsizing history and their learning
851	mental	10	Health and well-being
859	power	10	Management behaviour
870	stressed	10	Health and well-being
874	wife	10	Coping
882	atmosphere	9	Health and well-being
883	awful	9	Emotions and feelings
885	budget	9	Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing
891	concerns	9	Doubt
892	conditions	9	Work-related changes
914	financially	9	Work-related changes
929	motivation	9	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
934	personality	9	Coping
941	relaxed	9	Coping
944	resentful	9	Emotions and feelings
966	anxious	8	Emotions and feelings
972	careful	8	Attitudinal and behavioural changes
973	climate	8	Work-related changes
986	frustration	8	Attitudinal and behavioural changes

Table 4: Results of the NVivo word frequency search (continuation)

4.2.5 Theoretical lenses for explanation and interpretation of the findings

The previous sub-sections, illustrated how meaning units and central themes were identified from the survivors' account of downsizing survival. Such a procedure is important in the context of qualitative data analysis as the information emerging from this process constitute the "building blocks" (Remenyi et al., 1998, p.35) for further description and the arguments, which need to be developed, in order to make sense of survivors' stories (Weick, 1995). As a method to present and interpret these meaning units and themes a two-step approach (see Figure 9) was chosen. Such a hybrid strategy, which combines description and interpretation, is in line with a qualitative approach to social research (see earlier discussion in sub-section 4.2.1) and, therefore, provided an effective means of examining the findings in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of downsizing survival.
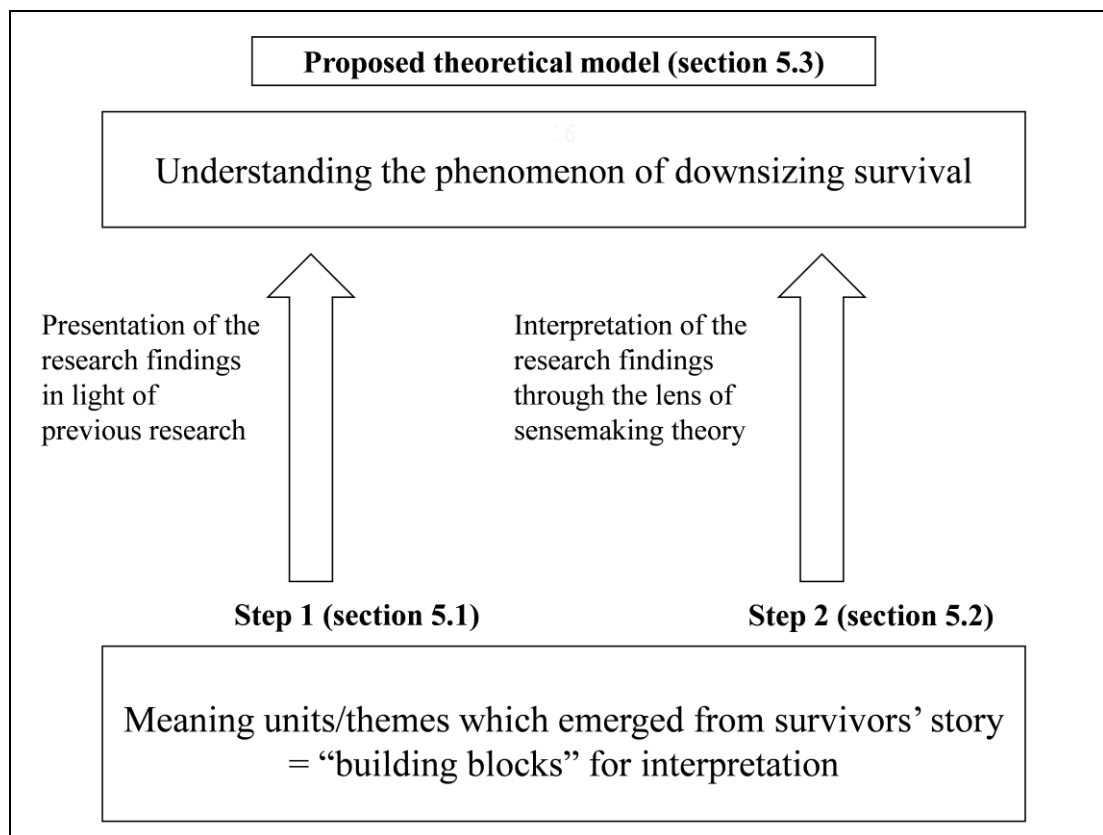

Figure 9: Two-step approach to illustrate the research findings

In the first step of this approach all themes were described and explained in light of the previous research which was discussed earlier in the literature review (see chapter 2) of this work. This was important in order to find out whether the findings from this empirical study support or contradict what has already been found out about the impact of organizational downsizing on survivors.

In the second step, the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995) was applied and served as an analytical tool to investigate how survivors made sense of their experiences. As indicated earlier in this work (see chapter 3 about theoretical models and concepts), sensemaking theory has the potential to explore survivors' experience and how they make sense of the situation in which they found themselves post-downsizing. Compared to other theories and traditional change processes, which have a concrete start and end, and the transformation happens in between (e.g. Bridges, 2002), sensemaking is different, and characterized as being an ongoing activity without a fixed start. It is a continuous process rather than a model with defined stages and boundaries (Weick, 1995). Thus, it is more flexible and allowed the researcher to deal with the complexity and ambiguity of what survivors have experienced and how this had influenced their reactions. This makes this concept so valuable and a suitable approach to guide this research project. Moreover, the fact that there has been little interest from previous researchers in studying the sensemaking processes of downsizing survivors (see also sub-section 3.2.4) provided a unique opportunity to achieve a fresh perspective on survivors' experiences by applying the work of Weick (1995) and contributing to the body of knowledge in this area.

Since sensemaking is concerned with creating meaning and the construction of identity, it is definitely an interpretative methodology (Klatzke, 2008). The fact that

people make sense of what they have experienced retrospectively made it an appropriate concept under an interpretative research paradigm, which is also focused on the understanding of humans' experiences (Van Maanen, 1983) and incorporates dealing with the complexity of organizational downsizing (Remenyi et al., 1998).

The application of the sensemaking concept included that the information obtained from the interviews (e.g. meaning units and themes) were studied through the seven properties of sensemaking (see below).

1. Grounded in identity construction

2. Retrospective sensemaking

3. Enactment of sensible environments

4. Social aspects of sensemaking

5. Ongoing aspects of sensemaking

6. The role of cues and their extraction

7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

The distinctive nature of these properties (see also earlier discussion in sub-section 3.2.3) enabled the researcher to study survivors' experiences from different perspectives with the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding about what meaning they ascribed to a particular situation post-downsizing and how this affected their attitudes and behaviours. In addition to the concept of sensemaking, sensegiving theory (see sub-section 3.2.4.6) was employed in order to examine how survivors' process of sensemaking was influenced by other members of the downsized

organization (e.g. employees designated redundant, managers). Finally, and based on the key aspects which emerged from survivors' process of sensemaking, a theoretical model is proposed.

The explanation of the themes in light previous research findings (step 1) and the interpretation of the findings through the lens of sensemaking theory (step 2) are illustrated in section 5.1 and 5.2 respectively. The proposed theoretical model is outlined in section 5.3.

4.3   Trustworthiness of the study

The findings of a research project should be as trustworthy as possible (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). This is achieved once the research procedure and its results convey the impression that they "are based on practices that are acknowledged to be the bases of good research" (Denscombe, 2010, pp.297-298). The term trustworthiness was coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and discussed by several other authors (e.g. Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2008) with the aim to provide a concept which has the potential to assess the quality and goodness of qualitative work. To examine the trustworthiness of this study and to address the needs of qualitative research the following criteria were applied:

- Dependability

- Credibility

- Transferability

The following sub-sections illustrate how the quality of the present study was assessed according to these criteria.

4.3.1 Dependability

Dependability is defined "as the extent to which the set of meanings derived from several interpreters are sufficiently congruent" (Thyer, 2001, p.274). This involves, for instance, that the observations of other researchers, their analysing procedure and their interpretation of the findings, are similar to the ones of the original researcher (Thyer, 2001). To demonstrate that the present study corresponds to these requirements and to show that procedures and decisions were chosen, which would generally allow a replication, the following steps were carried out (Denscombe, 2010).

As a first measure to achieve dependability a process audit was conducted. This involved all material associated with the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data being given to fellow students with the request to review it. Such a peer review provided an external check of the research process and allowed the peers to act as auditors aimed at checking whether the researcher's methods and interpretations are dependable from their point of view (Thyer, 2001; Bryman, 2008). However, for confidentiality reasons, the raw material was not given to the peers and any identifying information was removed from the material before providing it to them.

In the course of this audit, peers could conduct a thorough examination and ask detailed questions about specific aspects, such as methods or meanings and thus verify whether the researcher's procedure and his conclusions were reasonable. The fact that all steps of the research process (from the participant selection until the determination of themes) were documented properly by the researcher, further enhances the dependability, as procedure and underlying decisions were made apparent and thus easier to reproduce for external members (e.g. peers or examiners) (Thyer, 2001). As the vast amount of the material was judged as reputable and replicable by the peers,

and only minor explanations needed to be provided additionally, the researcher felt that his analysis and the interpretation of the findings were dependable.

As dependability is concerned with the question whether an account is "consistent across multiple occasions" (Denscombe, 2010, p.298) it was important to increase the possibility that survivors talk about their feelings and behaviour in a way as they would normally do, openly and honestly, and as if they are outside the interview environment. Survivors in this study may for instance fear that they could be punished or lose their job when they reveal particular aspects of their former working life and the organization gets informed about it. To address these concerns, survivors were reminded about the anonymity and confidentially clauses in an attempt to encourage them to speak openly and without restraint about their experience post-downsizing (Campbell, 1999).

Dependability was also increased through piloting the interviews in advance (see sub-section 4.2.3.5) as this ensured that participants understood and interpreted the questions correctly. This in turn increased the possibility of gaining sufficient information to answer the research questions of this study (Campbell, 1999; Silverman, 2006). The fact that all interviews were tape recorded contributed further to achieve the dependability of this study and to ensure that other researchers would arrive at the same, or at least very similar, transcripts of a survivor's story. Moreover, it ensured that every little detail of a survivor's story, whether apparently trivial or not, could be captured (Creswell, 2007). In addition to that, the use of an interview guide and a semi-structured approach to interviewing enhanced the dependability, as this allowed each survivor to be approached in a similar manner and thus increases the possibility for potential reproduction (Campbell, 1999).

4.3.2 Credibility

Credibility is the second criterion to achieve trustworthiness and refers to "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers" (Silverman, 2006, p.289). To ensure that the material was produced and checked in accordance with good practice, various measures were initiated during and after completion of the research process (Denscombe, 2010).

King and Horrocks (2010) argued that the people with whom the research was conducted should agree with the researcher's conclusions as they know best whether these interpretations represent the reality in an accurate form (Thyer, 2001). Thus, a so called member validation was carried out, where participants were provided with their raw material, the analysis procedure and the interpretation of the material, with the aim to judge the accuracy of the researcher's account and to give their opinion. However, bearing in mind that "reality is multiple and subjective" (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004, p.110) the goal of this member check was not that others label or sort the material in the same way, but instead agree on the way it was done, and, more importantly, with the outcome. Although many participants refused the request to check the material because of time constraints and finally only a small group of participants volunteered to go through the material, this was very helpful as they revealed some general issues in the interpretation of the material, which needed to be modified and described more accurately in order to strengthen the credibility (Thyer, 2001).

Furthermore, Graneheim and Lundman (2004) assert that in qualitative research it is challenging to define meaning units or themes that convey credibility. In particular, during the analysis process when the survivor's story is divided into separate parts of

meaning, it is difficult to judge whether these fragments still represent the survivor's account accurately. However, in the present study, a detailed record and a description about how each analysis step was conducted enhances the credibility of the analysing process and facilitates externals judging of the analysis as accurate (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). To convey credibility with regard to the determination of the central themes and how people made sense of their experiences, representative quotations from survivors' stories were used in the text and thus helped to reduce the difficulty in assessing the different themes in terms of their similarities or differences.

The use of a voice recorder further increased the credibility of this work because it ensured that every detail of a survivor's story was recorded accurately. To achieve credibility, the findings were also checked against previous research in order to see whether they matched with the existing literature in this field of study and to reveal potential deviations (Hycner, 1985).

4.3.3 Transferability

The third criterion to achieve trustworthiness is transferability and is concerned with the question whether conclusions can be transferred from one case (e.g. setting or group) to another (Thyer, 2001; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). This however, is often difficult in qualitative research as the sample usually is relatively small and participants share a unique characteristic, which hardly ever can be found elsewhere. This applied also to the present study. However, due to the fact that survivors from more than one organization were chosen, and many similarities were found between the results of their responses, enhanced transferability and comparability between the cases was given (Bryman 2008).

Interpretivists critically debate the transferability of findings arguing that a social phenomenon needs to be considered in the context in which it appeared, rather than be transferred to a setting where it may lose its meaning (Remenyi et al., 1998). Instead, it was argued that the researcher should provide a rich and holistic description which allows the readership to make their own decision with regard to the transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007). The nature of this study and the way the findings were outlined and documented, address this point and provide others with a "database for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to other milieu" (Bryman, 2008, p.378).

However, it should be remembered, that the purpose of the present study was not to transfer or generalize the results to a wider population, but to explore the experiences of 30 European downsizing survivors in their organizational setting and to see the events through their eyes and how they make sense of their experiences (Denscombe, 2010). Even though the findings varied between the different survivors, each of their stories contributed to gaining insight into survivors' situations post-downsizing and therefore is unique in its own right (Remenyi et al., 1998).

4.4 Ethical considerations

According to King and Horrocks (2010) social researchers are obliged to treat the people they investigate ethically and protect their welfare. With this in mind, the following sub-sections illustrate the ethical considerations related to this research project. These considerations follow the Handbook of Research Ethics of the University of Gloucestershire (Research Ethics: A Handbook of Principles and Procedures) which was approved by the University Research Degrees Committee in September 2008.

4.4.1 Informed consent

The participants of this study were invited to participate in the present research project. They were informed about the background of the study and if they agreed that their participation would consist of participating in an approximately 60 minute interview (personal, telephone or Skype) where they would be asked questions related to their experience as a downsizing survivor.

Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they not had to answer any of the questions, which they do not wish to. They were informed that they could withdraw at any time and that in such a case all information pertaining to them would be destroyed at a certain point. Participants were also reminded that the interview would be audio recorded and transcribed afterwards if this was acceptable, otherwise written notes would be made. In addition to that they were assured that the interview would only be used for research purposes and that everything would be anonymous and kept confidential (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were provided with the informed consent form (see Appendix D) with the request to sign it if they agreed with the content and if they do not have further questions. The researcher also signed the informed consent form and thereby confirmed that he had explained to the individual survivor the nature and purpose of this study and answered any questions raised. A copy of the consent form was subsequently provided to the participant. As all participants are adults and no one of them was disabled or sick this assured that their understanding was not impaired in a particular way and that they could give full informed consent.

4.4.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

King and Horrocks (2010) argued that it is the researcher's duty to respect the anonymity and privacy of the participants. Therefore, neither the organization's nor the participant's names were mentioned in the research study. When direct quotes were used in the text, any identifying information was removed in order to protect their identity. In order to distinguish between the quotes from the different participants in the text, each participant was allocated a number, instead of their real name (see also sub-section 4.2.4.1). To further assure confidentially the transcription of the interviews was done only by the researcher himself, so that no other people had access to the raw material. This was also explained to participants prior to the interview.

The raw material obtained from the interviews and all other electronic files related to the data collection were stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. This ensures that only the researcher, but no other people can access the material (King and Horrocks, 2010). Additionally, the raw material was backed up on an external hard drive, in order to minimize the risk of data loss. Hard copies such as print outs or field notes were stored at a secure place in the researcher's office at home, and therefore were not accessible for others. Although, the information gained from this study might be published in research journals or presented at research conferences, participants' identity will always be kept strictly confidential. Moreover, all material, either electronic or paper based will be deleted when no longer required for research purposes.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has illustrated the methodology and methods which were used for the current research project. It was shown that an interpretivist stance on social research provides a more holistic approach to explore survivors' experience than a positivistic stance. Moreover, it was shown that semi-structured interviews provided a suitable method to collect the empirical material, as they allow both, flexibility to deal with the complexity of the topic, and a certain amount of structure, with the potential to achieve comparable results. The methods which were used to analyse the interview material were also outlined in this chapter. It was illustrated how the interviews were transcribed and how the text was systematically analysed. This included a detailed description of how meaning units were identified and how the transcripts were searched for relevant sentences and phrases in order to discover the essence of a survivor's story.

In a further sub-section of this chapter, the theoretical lenses to explain and interpret the findings were outlined. It was shown, that a two-step approach, which combines description and interpretation is a useful concept to gain an in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon of downsizing survival. In the first step the themes were explained in light of previous research. In the second step, sensemaking theory from Weick (1995) was applied as a prism to interpret the material obtained from the interviews. In the final sections of this chapter the process to assess the trustworthiness of this study was outlined and ethical considerations such as confidentiality and anonymity were discussed.

In the following chapter the findings from this study will be outlined.

5 Research findings and interpretation

In this chapter the research findings, which emerged from the interviews, will be presented and discussed. In line with the two-step approach, which was outlined earlier in the methodology chapter of this work (see sub-section 4.2.5), the findings will be firstly presented in light of previous research. Subsequently, the findings will be interpreted through the lens of sensemaking theory from Weick (1995). Finally, a proposed theoretical model with regard to survivors' sensemaking is presented.

5.1 Presentation of the research findings in light of previous research

This section presents the research findings in light of previous research (step 1). As discussed earlier in this work (see sub-section 4.2.4.5) ten major themes emerged from the interviews and were considered as relevant in contributing to answer the research questions. The themes cover a wide range of topics related to survivors' experiences post-downsizing and how these had affected them. This section is aimed to describe each of these themes in detail, based on evidence from the interview text. Moreover, the findings will be interpreted with regard to previous research on downsizing survival. An overview of the ten themes identified is provided below:

- Theme 1: Emotions and feelings

- Theme 2: Attitudinal and behavioural changes

- Theme 3: Work-related changes

- Theme 4: Health and well-being

- Theme 5: Coping

- Theme 6: Doubt

- Theme 7: Survivors' downsizing history and their learning

- Theme 8: Management behaviour

- Theme 9: Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing

- Theme 10: Measures and challenges to manage survivors

Note:

Although the nature of this study is purely qualitative, in order to provide the reader an opportunity for a rough estimation about how many survivors mentioned a certain issue (e.g. anger, frustration), a simple quantification policy was applied. Thus a particular number of survivors correspond to a pre-defined term (see Table 5).

No. of survivors	Term
30	All
26-29	Almost everyone
16-25	Majority
11-15	Large group
6-10	Group
1-5	Some

Table 5: Quantification policy

5.1.1 Emotions and feelings

The interviews revealed that survivors experienced a broad range of unfavourable emotions and feelings as a consequence of the downsizing. A large group of survivors had a negative overall impression of the downsizing outcome and felt unhappy with their situation:

> *It was bizarre and mad to do the downsizing, and there is nothing positive about downsizing or making people redundant. (5, 32-33)*

I was not satisfied with the situation and it caused an inner conflict. I remember a lot of negative experiences related to that event. (13, 111)

The unhappiness among the survivors corresponds to the work of Thornhill and Gibbons (1995) who developed the terminology of "unhappy stayers" as a synonym for those survivors who suffer under the effects of compulsory redundancy. The interviews indicate that survivors studied in this research were also suffering from downsizing and expressed bitterness or felt personally harmed by it. In this context, their anger was mainly directed towards the management and the people in charge, since they were considered as the causer and being responsible for it (Campbell, 1999):

I was very angry about having to go through the downsizing process, and I did not understand why the management had done this to me. So, actually, you do not have resentment against your immediate colleagues. It is more against the people who actually started the process of redundancy. (30, 20-24)

The findings support earlier research work from the American researchers Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) to a large extent and suggest that many survivors fall into the category of "fearful responses" since they were in a vulnerable state and despondent with regard to their situation. Moreover, their emotional state is very much reflected by the grieving model of Kuebler-Ross (1969) in particular the second stage, where after having managed the initial shock, survivors start to become angry towards the responsible managers and show a high level of arousal.

Only a small number of survivors who did not feel directly threatened by the downsizing exhibited no, or only minor, mental strain. This seems to be plausible since

the degree of negative responses is strongly depending on the direct threat apparent to the survivors (Moore et al., 2006):

> *It did not affect me at all, in the sense that my role was never threatened. So, I felt confident. I probably just carried on as normal, to be honest. I do not think it did affect me. (17, 15-17)*

However, regardless of whether survivors were directly threatened or not, almost everyone argued that he/she was glad having survived the downsizing and expressed feelings of relief. The American scholar Brockner (1988) discovered the feeling of relief as a major psychological state, appearing in different forms among those who have survived a downsizing initiative. The findings support this view, since survivors responded in different ways, such as feeling pleased, lucky or simply positive about the fact of not being dismissed by the organization:

> *For sure, it was a relief, because I realized that I could stay. I realized that I was still in employment. (24, 18-19)*

> *I was grateful that I kept my job. (21, 352)*

The findings demonstrate that the majority of survivors showed a high degree of insecurity and were mainly fearful about what was coming next and worried about being the target of a further wave of downsizing. Applying Hellgren et al.'s (1999) two-dimensional approach to job insecurity, survivors' reactions correspond to their assumption that, in times of organizational downsizing, the remaining workforce expresses more serious concerns about the continuing existence of their job, rather than losing important aspects associated with it:

I was uncertain about what was coming next. I feared that I could be the next person who was being made redundant. It is really worse when you survive, because every day you live with that fears that it could affect you anytime. (14, 348-349)

I had some fear that the next restructuring could affect me. That fear was kind of hovering over you. (15, 341-342)

Survivors' perception of job insecurity and uncertainty caused worries about their financial situation, if they would lose their job. A large group of survivors was concerned that downsizing would hit them particularly hard, since their entire life is reliant on having a job and a regular income:

Even when you swim you are thinking about it. "What if I get laid off from my job?". You think about family, you think about rent, you think about bills, and you think about car insurance. All of these things are pretty much depending on having this job, so you cannot separate them. (26, 157-160)

Survivors' responses relate to previous research findings, where survivors who were indebted or in the situation of the bread winner, experienced more job insecurity than others without financial commitments (Klein, 2009). Interestingly, the interviews revealed that survivors from the UK worried more about their financial situations than survivors from Germany or Switzerland. The concerns among the group of UK survivors, however, are unsurprising since the UK unemployment rate (September 2012, according to Arbeitslosenquoten, 2014) is considerably higher than the one in Germany or Switzerland; therefore, UK survivors might be more fearful about losing their jobs. Moreover, the fact that the UK government is less likely to offer as many social benefits to unemployed people as would the Swiss or German governments (Your rights country by country, 2015) may be another cause for UK survivors to be

194

more concerned about their financial situations and worried about losing their jobs.

Although survivors were not dismissed, a large group of them reported a lack of recognition and felt undervalued by the organization, because of all the work and the extra hours they have done over the years, and how they have been treated now. The fact that many survivors felt treated just as a resource might be a possible reason why their sense of recognition was found to be at such a low level (Amundson et al., 2004):

> *I know now that I am just a number in the institution and it does not matter if I perform better or work, let's say, at 120%, because nobody is going to see it anyway. (24, 217-219)*

> *I worked hard, but my effort was not rewarded. I honestly felt treated like an animal and, honestly, just like a resource. (14, 220-222)*

It is worth mentioning at this point, that almost entirely the UK survivors expressed such feelings and were disappointed that they, as an individual person, but also their work, had not been appreciated. To clarify these significant findings requires a closer look at the employment regulations of the respective countries. Comparing the UK employment law with those of Germany and Switzerland, a UK employer is in a stronger position and has more power with regard to decision making. UK employers can act quite autocratically and dismiss a certain amount of employees (up to 20) without informing the employee representatives (Richert, 2011). Moreover, the UK union has only a limited influence on employers' decisions, and employees' involvement at an organization's board level is missing altogether (Cunningham, 2011). Bearing these circumstances in mind, it may provide a reasonable explanation why UK survivors are more vulnerable and suffer more from the treatment of their employer than their surviving colleagues from the German speaking area.

The findings further indicate that the way survivors were in relationship with the victims had an influence on their feelings. The majority of survivors showed sympathy for their leaving colleagues and felt sad that they had gone. They felt mainly sorry for their colleagues and reported negative experiences when they saw that they were made redundant:

> *In the very last round of the downsizing that we went through we lost a friend of our office, and that was really hard because we were close friends, and I am still friends with her. (8, 39-41)*

> *I felt extremely bad when I saw colleagues leaving. (14, 42)*

The findings suggest that survivors were seriously affected by the loss of their co-workers arguing that the organization should have done more to acknowledge the fact that they were gone. A small group of survivors also showed feelings of survivor guilt (Brockner et al., 1986), and some surviving managers asserted that they did not like to make people redundant. Generally, however, it was found that survivor guilt increased as a function of survivors' relationship to the ones dismissed, suggesting that downsizing harms employees not only directly, but also influences their feelings negatively in an indirect manner, in particular when they witness the dismissal of a colleague (Shah, 2000):

> *I knew the people who had to go, but we were not that close. So, even though there was a loss in a way, it did not have as much impact on me as it would have if it had been my closest friends, who had stayed for years in the same job, who had to go. (26, 143-146)*

In contrast however, there was a group of survivors who noted that they were glad about the fact that some people were made redundant. The vast majority of this group

were surviving managers who found that some employees were low performers or did not have the what they perceived as the right attitude to work anymore. The findings thus suggest that the directive to downsize provided an opportunity to the managers to exert power over their subordinates and to decide about their future in the organization (Hickok, 2000):

> *Some people did a kind of skiving off and did not have the right attitude towards work anymore. The downsizing helped in that I could demand more performance from these people. (2, 111-112)*

Besides that, a few survivors felt positive about the dismissal of some people since they did not like them in particular and the downsizing provided a measure to solve these interpersonal problems. In such a case, survivors did not perceive any kind of survivor guilt, but rather, to the contrary, experienced a relief since the downsizing had achieved what would not have been possible under normal circumstances (Sahdev and Vinnicombe, 1998):

> *From my point of view, it was good that there was a process for removing those people. And they were removed. (10, 102-103)*

> *One person who we hated had to leave, and that was good because he was also incompetent. (8, 73)*

5.1.2 Attitudinal and behavioural changes

The findings showed that the experience of organizational downsizing caused various attitudinal and behavioural changes among the survivors. The analysis pointed out that the majority of survivors perceived a decrease in their commitment. They stated that their organizational attachment has diminished as a consequence of downsizing and they live more in the here and now and do not plan to remain their entire life in the organization. Thus, the findings corroborate earlier studies from the United States (e.g.

197

Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001) and clearly indicate that, as a result of downsizing, survivors' perception of affective commitment and their desire to work had been harmed and that they are less willing to identify or be involved in the organization anymore. It is worth mentioning at this point that even survivors who had experienced their most recent downsizing initiative 18 months previously reported a lack of commitment. This provides a strong indication that the side-effects of downsizing persist over a long period of time (Kernan and Hanges, 2002) (see also sub-section 5.1.5 and 5.1.7 for further discussion about the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors):

> *The corporate identity got lost to some extent and I have a new perspective on my job and the company now. It is just about making money now, whereas before I identified with my job and the company. (27, 137-139)*

In some cases, the findings showed that survivors' attitude to work decreased to an extent that they did not want to work more than necessarily required:

> *I tend to work more to my hours now, and I do not give as much as I used to. (9, 73)*

> *I do what I am paid to do, but I am not going the extra mile anymore as I would normally do. (29, 245-246)*

Such an attitude is reflected by the dimensional framework of survivors' responses (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998) and relates to the archetype of "destructive survivors" who are not disposed to do any additional work or extra hours anymore without being compensated for it. However, some survivors argued that the downsizing did not affect their organizational commitment particularly, but led to a negative attitudinal change towards the upper management. This is an interesting finding and relates to the work

of the Swiss scholar Weiss (2004) who found that survivors' commitment might not necessarily entirely change for the worst, but only towards certain aspects within the environmental setting:

> *I stayed committed, because I like the work that I do, and because I do not want to let down those young people. I am not doing it for the organization, but I am doing it for the people I work with. (15, 288-291)*

The findings further showed that survivors perceived a reduction in trust, or loss of their trust in the organization and its management entirely. A large group of survivors argued that the organizations' procedures, and how abrupt and rigorous the downsizing was initiated and conducted, led to feelings of mistrust:

> *I would say that the biggest thing is that I do not trust my employer anymore. (30, 65-66)*

> *I lost my trust in the management and in the company. I cannot rely on the company anymore. (27, 35)*

The way management acted created a gap of trust between survivors and the employer, so that survivors lost their belief in the organization. The lack of managerial trust caused a disconnect and increased survivors' perception of threat, since they could not understand why the management was doing it (Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002). Survivors mistrusted the management, mainly because of withheld information or when they were not concerned about them. The findings along these lines support the theoretical assumptions from the American researcher Noer (2009) that survivors perceive a greater sense of threat and feel more violated the more they had trusted the management previously.

The findings also indicated that the negative experiences of downsizing led to a behavioural change among the survivors. The ongoing insecurity caused a passive and risk averse behaviour among a group of the survivors, and they were more careful in dealing with the management. Some of them noted that they were more conforming with regard to their work and tried to keep a low profile or avoided being critical towards the management since they feared losing their job in the next round of downsizing:

> *I automatically think that I must do everything right. I must be careful about everything I do because it could mean that I lose my job. So, I am constantly thinking about how I carry out my work. I am giving examples of competencies for my appraisals, and things like that. (1, 72)*

Another group of survivors argued that they worked harder than before in order to reduce the risk of dismissal. The findings suggest that at all cost survivors tried to keep their job, since they felt insecure and were therefore motivated by fear. However, such an increase in work performance does not last and is neither beneficial for the organization nor for the individual, since real work performance is driven by enthusiasm and not through individuals' motivation by fear (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999):

> *I mean, as a human being, that survival instinct kicked in. I was already working hard in my job, but I found myself putting in more hours. I found myself doing longer hours, doing more work than I should have done. I do not know if I thought that was going to save my job, but I was just fighting as a human being. (26, 99-103)*

5.1.3 Work-related changes

In many cases downsizing has caused changes within survivors' working environment, which were either beneficial or unfavourable for the individual. A small group of survivors considered the downsizing as an opportunity to learn new skills and to move on. The fact that people had left and gaps occurred provided a chance for these survivors to step up and to improve their career status and to explore new job mobility and challenges (Doherty et al., 1996; Amundson et al., 2004). Especially younger survivors reported that downsizing and the restructuring related to it provided them with an opportunity for growth and promotion which indicates that they seemed not to simply deal with it fatalistically (Nair, 2008):

> *I was asked to go to the board meeting, to which I had never been invited before. I could see the people who I'd only heard of by name but had never had the chance to talk to. At the board meeting I could see them. It is interesting to see how people on the upper management level behave and how decisions are made. It was really interesting for me. (11, 141-145)*

However, the vast majority of the survivors were complaining about the imbalance between workload and workforce. They were unsatisfied with their situation, since they had to absorb additional tasks from their former colleagues besides doing their daily business:

> *It affected me very much, because suddenly 30% of the team members were not there anymore and the work remained the same. (2, 47-48)*

> *Five members of the group were removed, so almost half. However, there was no reduction in work, and we had to work very hard indeed, and had to pick up all this work. (10, 46-48)*

201

Thus, survivors' responses are in accordance with previous findings such as from Asia or North America, where survivors had to take over the job of two or three other people and had to work overtime hours in order to deal with the enormous workload (e.g. Layoff 'survivor' stress, 2009; Malik and Usman, 2011). Nevertheless, some survivors perceived a certain enjoyment when carrying on their job duties and considered it more as a challenge than as a pain (Reinardy, 2010).

Furthermore, the findings emphasized that a group of survivors perceived a loss of community and team spirit. They complained that they lost a team, which worked well together, and they would not have the enjoyment with their colleagues anymore. Survivors were suffering a lack of camaraderie and social network, which corresponds with a finding from Schaeffer (2012) who argued that survivors perceive various areas of loss, such as, a loss of relationship or sense of belonging. The findings support this, and survivors were concerned since a good team cannot be developed over night, but it takes a while to produce and to get used to each other's habits and to build trust (Amundson et al., 2004):

> *I think as a team we were working very well together, and I felt that this was suddenly gone after downsizing. It took a while to build relationships and feel confident with what you were doing. I felt a bit disappointed about the situation. (19, 55-57)*

Several survivors argued that their working conditions became worse and they reported a wide range of aspects which had changed to become unfavourable. Some survivors described that their work content changed and they had to deal with tasks they did not really like:

> *I sometimes had to do work which I did not particularly like, but I was kind of forced to do it. (7, 29-30)*

A few other survivors were angry about the insufficient infrastructure, such as technical equipment which was not working properly and hindered their workflow:

> *For the whole of September, the IT system was a complete nightmare. I tried to log in, and it would not let me log in. (15, 170-171)*

In that context, Noer (2009) argued, that moving location or offices as part of downsizing may cause enormous strains among the surviving workforce, and it may take a while until the entire system is in a frozen state and allows the workers to operate under good working conditions again (Lewin, 1947). The findings support that view, since survivors were bothered with various non-satisfying issues resulting from the change. However, the downsizing also impacted the financial situation of some individual survivors, since their position was downgraded and their salary cut as a consequence of the cost saving procedure:

> *I had a salary cut as part of being turned into that new position. However, the salaries for the jobs that I could see elsewhere were even lower, than the salary that I was being cut to. (15, 114-116)*

Loss of knowhow and knowledge was a further topic which emerged from the interviews. A large group of survivors were displeased and worried about the knowledge drain since a lot of good people left and only little expertise remained in the organization:

> *We had lost a lot of technology and knowhow, and good people left the company because they realized they could not move further in terms of their careers. (7, 126-127)*

> *The organization lost most of their experienced and best employees. They lost their most valuable assets. (12, 167-168)*

The findings highlighted that loss of experience and wisdom seems to be a critical issue and might pose a dilemma in times of employee downsizing (Schmitt, Borzillo and Probst, 2012). Although in some cases qualified and experienced staff were kept, there is little doubt that these people may start immediately to look for other opportunities outside, once they have realized that they cannot move further at their current place. Moreover, survivors' commitment will diminish if the organization fails to encourage them and as a consequence it is most likely that they will leave the organization as well (Levitt et al., 2008).

5.1.4 Health and well-being

Survivors' health and well-being was perceived to be negatively influenced by their downsizing experience. In that context, work-related stress was identified as a major issue impacting the survivors. The interviews revealed that work or occupational stress was caused by various reasons, in particular by declined working conditions, such as an increased workload. As mentioned earlier in this study, the majority of survivors were obliged to pick up the additional work from their former colleagues, which overstrained them and produced stress. Moreover, stress was also caused by insufficient information and continuing uncertainty about the future, which is of note and indicates that stress not only arises from additional job duties but also from emotional strains (Levitt et al., 2008):

> *The stress was largely due to the fact that we were not provided with sufficient information. So we did not know what was happening. (9, 51)*

> *I experienced some form of stress because the managers did not provide us with regular updates on the status of the downsizing. (15, 15-16)*

In addition, the findings indicate that the intensity and pervasiveness of stress led to negative effects among the survivors studied in this research. In particular, the survivors who had been exposed to three to four downsizings in the past were found to suffer from a great amount of stress and reported feelings of mental exhaustion, which suggests that the experiences from downsizing had a cumulative negative effect on their well-being (see also sub-section 5.1.5 and 5.1.7 for further discussion about the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors):

> *The more redundancies and restructurings I experienced the more I became uncertain about my job security in the organization. I felt very exhausted after a while, because the stress had a kind of built-up effect, and it was hard to calm down. (18, 45-48)*

Moreover, several survivors reported that they could not relax from work, and working stress led to sleeping problems and mental disorder, which was also found among Canadian downsizing survivors (Amundson et al., 2004) and suggests that symptoms of stress do not stay isolated in the work place, but also interfere in peoples' leisure:

> *I was greatly stressed, and I did not sleep very well at that time. (6, 250)*

> *I remember that I was struggling with sleep problems because of all that stress at work. (3, 271)*

However, the interviews revealed that stress impacted survivors' health even more unfavourable and even caused burn out in individual cases. In this context, Warr (2002, p.207) argued that a burn out is "an extreme form of strain experienced under certain conditions, particularly when the person is confronted by on-going pressures and demands which are (seemingly) irresolvable". The findings from this study

support that argument, and survivors who suffered a burn out where not able to continue their work and left the organization:

> *I was actually off sick for several months afterwards as a result of work-related stress. (9, 54-55)*

> *I felt emotionally exhausted and unable to continue my work. I could not cope with this extreme stress anymore. (8, 292-293)*

Following the theoretical assumptions of Mishra and Spreitzer (1998) such survivors may definitely belong to the group of "hopeful responses" since they have a positive attitude to work and are endeavouring to get their work done at any cost in order to satisfy their employer. However, at the same time, they might expose themselves to a high risk of work-related strains and might suffer from its consequences if the organization is not attentive to identify the signs of stress in time (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998).

A group of participants also reported that the downsizing created a bad atmosphere which had an emotional impact on them:

> *There was a negative atmosphere in the department and it was a little bit depressing, and I felt sad about that. (20, 15-17)*

Reviewing the interview material demonstrated that individual survivors were in an unhappy state, which might lead to despondency in the office or degrade the working atmosphere as reported by Weiss (2004). As a consequence, survivors stated that they felt somewhat disturbed by the existing situation and were complaining about a lack of concentration when doing their work. They argued that it was difficult for them to fulfil their tasks since the situation was threatening and they felt insecure even when they did not want to admit it. The findings left no doubt that these survivors were more

concerned with their job than their actual tasks, which relates to previous findings from Clark (2008) where survivors from the automotive industry were unable to concentrate on their tasks, since they were too anxious and permanently worried about their job:

> *There is nothing as disturbing as coming to work and seeing all these sad faces, and to have a collective team grieving about the same thing, namely, the fear of not having a job in two months' time. There is nothing as depressing as that, and it is hard to operate in such an environment. (26, 115-118)*

5.1.5 Coping

The following topics are focused on survivors' reactions to downsizing over time and the causes of those reactions. In this context, the interviews revealed that survivors applied various coping strategies in order to manage their personal situation in the aftermath of downsizing. Mayton (2011, p.43) described coping as a "function of the relationship between an individual's psychological, social, and organizational resources and his or her primary (how much of a threat to me?) and secondary (can I handle it?) appraisal". In order to understand the longitudinal effects of downsizing on survivors, it becomes crucial to gain insight into their individual coping mechanism, since this might serve as an important indicator of how survivors managed their situation over time.

Analysing the interviews, it was found that survivors' coping behaviour strongly varies between the individuals. The findings indicated that survivors with optimism and positive thinking were more able to recover from the downsizing over time:

> *I did not think back about what happened. I always look forward to the future and not back to the past. (20, 112-114)*

The findings thus support the argument that a positive approach to downsizing and future career mediates the unfavourable side-effects of downsizing, or in other words, a "positive-thinking coping reflects recasting the situation in positive terms such as thinking of the challenges in the situation" (Armstrong-Stassen, 2005, p.120).

A group of other survivors, in particular surviving managers, showed a high degree of self-confidence, which had a positive impact on how they were coping with the situation. Most of them stated that they thought they were competent and doing an important job, which in turn would protect them from further layoffs. In their study about the coping behaviour of American workers in telecommunications, Shaw, Fields, Thacker and Fisher (1992) found that self-efficacy among survivors represents a main coping resource to endure the stressful changes of organizational downsizing. The findings correspond to that view, since several of the surviving managers were confident and reported that the organization needs them and their dismissal would cause a big gap and a loss of knowledge:

> *You know, probably, that you are indispensable at this moment, because your job is too important, and you are already probably doing two persons' jobs. So, you cannot go. (14, 40-42)*

> *I was fulfilling quite an important role. There were four of us doing this work, and I was given the lead. I was the kind-of senior person on that team who was organizing the entire project. It was probably the flagship project of the organization and, therefore, I felt pretty secure. I did not think that I was going to be made redundant, because that would have resulted in a big hole in the organization. (12, 30-36)*

Accepting the situation was found as another form of coping among some survivors. Interestingly, this coping behaviour was exclusively found among female survivors who mainly argued that they were not happy about the downsizing but accepted it after a while:

> *I was upset and bitter to begin with, but either you get over that and carry on or you leave. (4, 119-120)*

The fact that only female survivors showed such behaviour is noteworthy and would lead to the assumption of gender differences in survivors' coping. However, previous research work (e.g. Armstrong-Stassen, 1998) did not provide significant evidence that male and female coping strategies differs from each other. Only Nolen-Hoeksema and Aldao's (2011) finding that females are more likely than men to apply an emotion regulation strategy, such as, acceptance as part of their coping process, which might be considered to partially support the present finding.

The findings also provide an indication that the way survivors were coping with the downsizing was influenced by their age. A large group of survivors reported that their increasing age and life experience contributed to coping better with the circumstances of downsizing:

> *I think that it is also the number of years that make you wiser. (21, 254)*

> *The fact that I am older and that I have more life experience helped me to manage the situation. (12, 99)*

In particular, older survivors who were close to retirement argued that they became more patient and calmer over the years and had a less aggressive attitude towards organizational change compared to when they were young. Thus, the findings correspond with the argument of Armstrong-Stassen and Latack (1992) who

mentioned that survivors with more life experience have greater abilities and resources to cope with the situation than survivors with less life experience, since these cannot do a lot to change the situation and lapse into a state of resignation or avoidance coping.

Beside survivors' age, whether or not they had responsibilities (in terms of family or financial obligations) impacted their coping behaviour. Older survivors with responsibilities found it more challenging to manage the situation than younger survivors with no responsibilities:

> *I was not married at that time, and I also had no children and therefore no big commitments. So, I was not that concerned. (2, 23-25)*

Younger survivors argued that they can make their own choices and do not depend on the employer that much. They felt more flexible and less threatened, which in turn facilitated their coping. In contrast, survivors at an older age with family and property responsibilities (such as dependent children and a mortgage) perceived a higher level of threat and found it harder to cope with the situation:

> *Now I have more financial commitments (e.g. house, family) than before. (3, 281-282)*

The findings thus suggest that it was not only increasing age, which made survivors more reflective about their situation, but also additional responsibilities associated with financial concerns, that led to a higher demand for coping resources (Klein, 2009).

The findings showed that a supportive environment such as family, friends or colleagues helped survivors the most in coping with the situation over time. Survivors reported that friends inside and outside the organization helped them and provided

support for their morale. In particular, the immediate colleagues at work were considered as very important, since they have experienced the same event and were harmed or felt in a similar way:

> *It is this sense of a shared conception of reality, because all of us were exposed to the same situation. (30, 189-190)*

Moreover, when survivors had to move and change offices or location, the support from their new colleagues was crucial, and allowed them to settle in and to become familiar with the new place and new tasks. The findings clearly support Shaw et al.'s (1992) argument that besides personal coping resources (e.g. positive thinking strategy as discussed above) social support is indispensable in coping with stress and strains that appear in the time after downsizing:

> *We have been bonded more due to the fact that we have been through the same situation and we have all survived. I think just having people to talk to is what helps you get through that situation. (1, 91-93)*

> *My colleagues here, they made me feel very positive. (3, 160)*

A large group of survivors stated that their home and family life was a helpful coping resource to regain strength and vitality:

> *Maybe it did not affect me so much, because I had support from my family. (14, 324-325)*

The majority of survivors mentioned that their family provided a familiar and safe environment where they could relax and escape from the everyday work life. In addition to a loyal friendship, Shaw et al. (1992) described family as a form of social support which provides warmth, trust and a strong mental support. The findings corroborate that view, since survivors could rely on their family and were particularly

thankful about their partner, who stood by them and spread encouragement in terms of not worrying too much, but thinking forward, instead:

> *My wife stood by me, which was crucial to it all. If I would have had difficulties with that as well, that would have been very challenging. (23, 163-164)*

The findings further indicate that survivors' relationship to their immediate manager had a major influence on how they coped with the situation over time. It was found that a good relationship with the manager enhanced survivors' coping ability and reduced the extent of negative feelings, which in turn led to a faster recovery. A large group of survivors expressed a high degree of affiliation to their immediate manager, and considered them as an important support beside their colleagues. Noer (2009) argued, that survivors stay in a particular relationship to the persons they are subordinated to, since control and power emanates from them. However, as the analysis revealed, in a good work relationship, the line manager represents also an external coping resource that spreads hope and belief and thus influences survivors' personal coping resources indirectly (Shaw et al., 1992):

> *I guess it depends on the relationship you have with your manager. As I said, I had a very good relationship with my manager. (3, 233-234)*

> *Besides the support of my colleagues, it also helped that I had a good relationship with my manager. (13, 77-78)*

A significant number of participants reported that the passing time was a factor contributing positively to coping with the situation. Survivors described it as a

"natural process of healing" (30, 171) where it has less and less impact as time goes by:

> *The more distance I had, the better I felt. I tend to forget it, and draw a line under it. (25, 278-280)*

> *I think that it was just a natural process. When you go through something like that it takes time; as with everything, time heals. (4, 128)*

It was found that it took survivors around one year to settle in and feel better after a downsizing experience. Several survivors mentioned that a break such as holidays or maternity leave had a favourable influence on them since they could stand back and think about it. It provided them with an opportunity to sort out their mind and enabled them to make the mental transition as described by Bridges (2002).

However, the findings do not show any indication that survivors had forgotten what was done to them. The interview material did not reveal significant differences between the responses of survivors who had experienced the most recent downsizing six months previously and those whose most recent downsizing experience dated back 12 months. Even so, the fact that even those who had been exposed to downsizing 18 months previously still felt less committed with regard to their work (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.1.2 about attitudinal and behavioural changes) or felt a lack of trust provides a strong indication that the effects from downsizing are persistent and long-lasting (Kernan and Hanges, 2002). The majority of this group of survivors could still remember how difficult it was at that time to deal with the situation and, in particular, how the downsizing experience has affected their organizational attachment and the belief they have in their organizations:

I went through a very significant downsizing programme almost two years ago, and luckily I have survived it, but I must say that this experience has changed my relationship to the company. My attitude to work has definitely worsened since that incident, and I do not trust my employer anymore. (29, 89-94)

As discussed above, the passing of time certainly had a favourable influence on survivors and the way in which they coped with the situation; however, the present findings would not specifically support the statement from Nicholson and West (1988) and Allen et al. (2001) that survivors' attitudes might return to their original state after a certain time had passed. Quite the opposite, the findings demonstrate that the negative impact of downsizing on survivors (e.g. with regard to their organizational attachment or managerial trust) is still visible even when the downsizing is long over. Thus, the findings strengthen the argument from Arshad and Sparrow (2010) that survivors' full commitment and their job satisfaction are hard to recover once they have lost confidence in the organization.

Besides the time, many survivors' perceived their work routine as an important factor helping them to cope with the situation. They argued that they felt gradually better when they went back to their normal work routine and could focus on job-related tasks. It helped them to move forward and increased their sense of control about the situation. This might be crucial, since a higher perception of control over the employment situation reduces feelings of stress (Devine et al., 2003) and might enhance the ability to cope with threats, such as uncertainty and insecurity, which is still predominant in the time after downsizing (Armstrong-Stassen, 2005):

*I would say the change happened once I got back into the routine. So,
just doing the things I normally do really had the biggest impact on
changing my mental state. (30, 198-200)*

The majority of survivors from the German speaking area additionally argued that a stabilizing and improving economy contributed positively to manage the aftermath of downsizing:

*I felt better after a while because the economic situation improved and
we received more orders. (27, 70-71)*

Some of them stated that an improving business situation, in terms of a higher sales volume or order increase, but also the fact that new people were hired, led to confidence and provided them with a future perspective, since they could see light at the end of the tunnel. The findings thus suggest that the economic situation, which initially caused the downsizing and all negative effects associated with it, finally rectified the situation again and helped survivors to escape and recover from the depressed state in which they had become stuck (Noer, 2009). The responses among survivors from the German speaking area may also be related to the fact that the German and Swiss economy recovered faster from the financial crisis than the UK economy (September 2012, according to Arbeitslosenquoten, 2014) and therefore may have led to more optimism among survivors from these countries.

5.1.6 Doubt

Of the survivors interviewed, half of them described the aftermath of downsizing as a kind of emotional rollercoaster with ups and downs, wherein they perceived various changes in their emotions and experienced the dynamics of change without much consistency. To illustrate the progress over time, one survivor described it as *"Relief*

215

followed by realization and then continuous improvement" (25, 244-246) which is an indication for the peaks and hollows which survivors pass through (Amundson et al., 2004) until they may gradually enter a regular and frozen state as described by Lewin (1947):

> *It was a bit like an emotional rollercoaster and there were also children and exams for me to think about, and that all made me more vulnerable and I could not really separate these things. So I definitely remember that feeling of being a bit up and down. (6, 339-343)*

A group of survivors struggled with the decision about, if it was right to stay, or if they should have left instead. Mainly, survivors were unsure because their work conditions in terms of workload had changed for the worst without any recognition or financial benefit. This finding is not uncommon and supports the argument of Sahdev and Vinnicombe (1998) that survivors felt a bit cheated of a potential career opportunity or the chance of pursuing other personal interests, since leavers were provided with a significant severance package and they got nothing instead:

> *So you are thinking," I am stupid; I really could have left and done alright, because I would have gotten some redundancy money, and not been working," whereas at the moment I am staying here and I am working twice as hard. (10, 241-244)*

A small group of survivors also reported a behavioural change in the time between one and three years after downsizing completion. They argued that a kind of realization had set in after a while and they either realized that the organization could not come to grips with its financial problems in the long term or did not care about the staff and

were only interested in money and profit instead. As a consequence, survivors decided to leave the organization voluntarily:

> *Later on I realized that the investor was just interested in the money and not in the employees and the knowhow. I started asking myself why I was doing all this work when there were managers at the top who were just interested in the profit and not in the employees. Then I also looked for another job. (7, 199-203)*

Spreitzer and Mishra (2002) asserted that survivors who feel attached or connected to the organization are less likely to leave the organization voluntarily, since they want to be a part of the organization and shape it in the future. However, to gain and maintain organizational attachment implies that the organization cares about its people and provides them opportunity for growth (Nyberg and Trevor, 2009). As suggested by the findings, survivors investigated in this research, on the contrary, experienced it quite differently and felt less attached to their employer, since they were not provided with future opportunities, which in turn drove the survivors to leave the organization. Even though this realization had set in when the downsizing was long over, it shows that survivors need to be treated as a valuable human being on a permanent basis and not just as an asset.

5.1.7 Survivors' downsizing history and their learning

The interviews revealed that survivors' bad experience from previous downsizing exercises caused concerns and influenced their perception about more recent or impending ones in a negative way. A large group of survivors noted that the thought of, and the exposure to, the present downsizing brings back bad memories about staff reduction in the past and all the negative experiences associated with it:

Previous downsizing had a negative influence on me, since it was very hard and I expected that the same thing would happen this time. I was quite fearful. (13, 165-167)

In my past employment I already experienced organizational downsizing, and that was all very negative. So I was concerned about what would happen this time. (7, 47-48)

Survivors mainly feared that they would be treated badly, similar to the last time and outcomes, such as their work conditions (e.g. workload), would change for the worse. The findings suggest that most of the survivors neither got used to, nor became resilient to, the repeated waves of downsizing exposure but, on the contrary, became more vulnerable instead. This supports the argument from the American researchers Moore et al. (2006) that downsizing seemed not to be a short-lived experience but rather it stayed in survivors' minds as long as six years later.

The majority of survivors who had experienced three to four downsizings in the past reported that each downsizing they were exposed to caused more and more stress and increased feelings of insecurity. Survivors mentioned that they always perceived a major shock and felt enormously threatened when a further downsizing initiative was announced. Many of them stated that it became more difficult over time to recover quickly from the negative effects of downsizing and to adjust to the new situation, mainly since they felt exhausted with regard to their mental coping resources. This suggests that the accumulation of unpleasant experiences with downsizing resulted in chronic levels of stress, which had a negative impact on survivors' well-being (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.1.4 about health and well-being) and, over time, weakened their coping resources (Moore et al., 2004):

The more redundancies and restructurings I experienced the more I became uncertain about my job security in the organization. I felt very exhausted after a while, because the stress had a kind of built-up effect, and it was hard to calm down. (18, 45-48)

I have survived several redundancies over the last few years, but I can't cope with it any longer. It is one of the most stressful things, really. These continual changes drain you mentally, and it is always questionable whether you will be able to keep your job. So, I always fear losing my job in a future round of downsizing. (9, 122-126)

Although no comparison could be made between the responses of survivors who had been exposed to multiple downsizings and those who had been exposed to downsizing only once, because all participants had survived at least two downsizings in the past (see sub-section 4.2.2.1 about the definition of the sample), the findings nevertheless strongly indicate that repeated downsizing exposure led to more negative than positive reactions. In particular, the fact that survivors who had experienced three to four downsizings reported more emotional complaints (such as feeling extremely tired or worn out) than those with less downsizing experience provides a convincing argument that the permanent changes together with the continual fear of job loss had a detrimental influence on this group of survivors and thereby seemed to debilitate them over time (Noer, 2009). Thus, the findings contradict a significant number of the previous (mainly North American) studies, such as those of Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) or Chreim (2006), as they strongly indicated that survivors did not become resilient to repeated downsizings and that downsizing did not become part of their everyday working lives.

The recent downsizing experience also caused future concerns among a group of survivors, since they could become a target of the next redundancy wave. Although they had survived, they argued that they did not feel stable, since *"it could all happen again tomorrow" (6, 456).* They mentioned that they have experienced first-hand how fast a good working team could drift apart and next time they might be directly involved as well. Moreover, some of them feared that the underlying selection criteria might change or be applied more rigorously the next time:

> *None of them affected me personally, in the sense that I was ever*
> *threatened with redundancy. However, it might be different next year,*
> *as it could affect me because of my age or salary. (5, 136-138)*

Another survivor argued that *"it is a wakeup call for his memories and he won't forget it" (25, 81-82),* which clearly indicates the pervasiveness and severity of such an experience and supports the fact that, survivors gone through a downsizing procedure perceive more threat and job insecurity with regard to the anticipation of future redundancy, than those ones who never experienced it (Kalimo, Taris and Schaufeli, 2003).

Only a very small group of older survivors who had experienced downsizing on a regular basis (e.g. five to six times), reported that they got used to it and it did not cause an extraordinary disruption:

> *I have a long history of surviving, and perhaps that makes you more*
> *resilient. It almost becomes business as usual to be surviving that,*
> *especially in the UK, at a time of transition and recession and so on.*
> *(12, 70-73)*

For me it is just part of working here, because it becomes so frequent. I mean, if you work somewhere where it changes every 10 years that might be really quite disruptive. (4, 107-109)

These kind of survivors who were described as "veterans" by Clair and Dufresne (2004) might indeed "have developed a somewhat "thicker skin" over time" (Moore et al., 2006, p.325) and therefore support a resiliency rather than a stress-vulnerability model. However, stress resiliency works only under the conditions that previous downsizing experiences caused similar stressful situations (Moore et al., 2006), which might apply for this group of participants, since they can look back on a long history in the same organization. In such a case their previous experiences taught them to develop appropriate coping mechanisms, which they then applied to manage later downsizing events and helped them to become inured to it (Moore et al., 2006).

However, the fact that all of these "veterans" (Clair and Dufresne, 2004) were close to retirement and reported having no major responsibilities, such as financial obligations or dependent children, might further explain why they perceived the downsizing as less disruptive, since the foregoing discussion (see sub-section 5.1.5) had clearly indicated that such circumstances mitigate the extent of negative responses. This, in turn, would suggest that a long history of downsizing survival does not automatically protect survivors from potential future effects related to downsizing (De Vries, 2006) and, in particular, not when survivors are in the middle of their working lives (and not close to retirement, as with the small group of "veterans") and have to pay mortgages or raise children, which applies to many of the participants (see sub-section 5.1.5). On the contrary, the findings discussed above indicated that repeated downsizing exposure had a cumulative negative effect on survivors' reactions and thereby made them more vulnerable, instead of more resilient, over time (Moore et al., 2006).

In addition to the fact that many survivors had difficulties coping with downsizing, a few survivors also reported that their previous experiences of downsizing helped make them aware that a redundancy programme could affect them anytime and that they had to be prepared for such events. Participants reported that having survived the downsizing initiative gave them *"a kick"* to be better prepared for the future. They stated that from now on, they will attach more importance to personal prevention or backup solutions such as the investment in knowledge through permanent education in order to retain their personal market value. This is a significant finding, which suggests that survivors' fear of potential unemployment motivates them to seek for further education. Such behaviour is related to the view of Ndlovu and Parumasur (2005) who argued that education makes survivors more confident about their future prospects and leads to a reduction of feeling powerless in the downsized environment:

> *I think the one thing I do now is that I go to my job every day and I am open to the possibility that something could go wrong tomorrow. And if it goes wrong I will think ahead about what I want to do rather than have the company make that decision for me. (26, 131-134)*

5.1.8 Management behaviour

The forthcoming themes and topics are concerned with the role and behaviour of the management and how they handled the downsizing and the manner in which they supported (or did not support) the survivors. Along these lines, many of the survivors were complaining about the incapable management and their decision making. Survivors argued that the downsizing was handled poorly and managers were ill prepared and lacking in appropriate skills. Some of the surviving staff started to challenge managers' competence, since they were found not be capable in handling the situation and dealing with staff:

Managers can help to get a task done; but if you throw in personnel into
a task, that part they may struggle with. (26, 304-306)

Von Baeckmann (1998) asserted that being a good manager requires not only hard skills, but also soft ones. The findings strongly support this argument, since managers may not have had enough skills and only had training in dealing with the downsizing scenario in particular, but not with the emotional side of it (Noer, 2009).

A large group of survivors were mainly criticizing the way in which decisions were made. They were angry about the autocratic management, which involves a strong control of the people and a one-way communication:

It was a dictum and there was no flexibility. (14, 133)

It is just something that is coming down again from the top and you
have to live with it, really. That is the message. (5, 118-119)

Although it is quite common that managers are empowered by the organization to make decisions and do not have to involve their staff in all of them, an empathetic leadership style is most likely more appropriate than an authoritarian one, since such a leadership stance does not allow them to facilitate survivors' transition after they have left their comfort zone and need to settle into the new environment (Bridges, 2002). Tsai, Yen, Huang and Huang (2007) share this view, arguing that an open management style had a positive effect on Taiwanese downsizing survivors and enhanced their sense of feeling valued and useful.

Moreover, a group of survivors became enraged about the fact that they were not involved in decisions about shaping the future of the new department or organization. They reacted by being particularly upset and disappointed when the management did

not consult their knowledge about established methods such as work protocols or processes:

> *Our feedback was not taken on board and was just ignored, and it was frustrating that when things went wrong they had not listened. So I think paying more attention to staff at ground level is important. (29, 63-65)*

The quote above highlights a serious, however very common deficit, with regard to how management deals with its surviving workforce (e.g. Noer, 2009). The majority of survivors' responses suggest that they were neither empowered by the management to look for improvements nor encouraged or allowed to contribute to any kind of change at all. And exactly these things would be so crucial for survivors (Brockner, 1992), since it would enhance their sense of belonging, which in turn would result in higher levels of motivation, as found by the American scholar Obilade (2009). Besides this, survivors' involvement might most probably contribute to the organizations' success, since survivors have the longstanding experience and the knowledge to make the new organization fit for the future (Weiss, 2004).

The interview findings indicated that many survivors were resentful, since they considered the decision to downsize as not plausible and logical. They did not agree with the management and some of them stated that the organization could have saved the money in other ways than with downsizing:

> *They just wanted to cut personnel regardless of whether the unit made money or not. It was not rational and there was no economic reason to cut within this unit. (27, 20-22)*

> *In my opinion, the downsizing was initiated for no apparent reason, because we were quite successful on the market. It was paradoxical, really. (22, 34-35)*

Ocler (n.d.) argued, that even though organizational growth and business success is observed, the decision to downsize might take place for other reasons, for instance as a reaction to external pressures such as economic or political forces. In such a case, there might not be that much objectivity involved. In the present research, the majority of the survivors were most likely not able to get the full picture of the business situation and therefore struggled to understand the reasons and lost part of their commitment. However, it might also be the case that managerial decision making was not rational since they simply adopted methods and processes from other industries, which did not suit their own purposes (Ocler, n.d.). As a consequence, downsizing might not lead to the expected business benefit such as was reported by Obilade (2009) who stated that nearly 68% of downsizing efforts failed in terms of meeting the goals. This stance was supported by some of the survivors, who argued that the business situation did not improve afterwards and financial figures were not better than they were before the downsizing:

> *I really would like to know that the change was successful. Recently we were doing our budget for next year, and we are still on the same cost level as before. So, what is the point of cutting personnel when you have the same level of costs? (11, 161-165)*

The majority of survivors reacted with a lack of understanding of managers' decisions with regard to personnel cuts. Most of them were angry that people had to leave, even though they were needed in order to manage the daily work in the team:

> *If there are people who cannot be replaced you should not make them redundant, because otherwise you would have to recruit. (17, 267-268)*

Many of the respondents were particularly annoyed about the fact that shortly after downsizing, new people were hired and therefore the downsizing exercise did not follow a purpose and would have been actually needless:

So you have this odd situation of reducing and then expanding. (10, 16)

It was strange that our company advertised new jobs even though they had just made former employees redundant a few weeks before. It was really strange. (22, 212-213)

Previous research about downsizing (e.g. Noer, 2009) mentioned that the reason why a staff reduction is followed by an immediate expansion might be explained by two circumstances. First, organizational downsizing is a slow longwinded process, where the last employee might have been just laid off when the business situation already starts to recover and the organization needs to hire new staff in order to manage their tasks. Such an overlapping of two contradictory processes is not unusual in the dynamic business world; however, it leads to confusion among the survivors involved. A second reason, why organizations show a low level of staff coverage post-downsizing is related to the fact that survivors may turn into leavers since they are not happy with their job anymore (Spreitzer and Mishra, 2002). This is neither desired, nor expected by the organization; however, they have to act quickly by looking for new staff or by reemploying old staff in order to fill the gaps. This is not always the case and might not apply to every situation, but provides an approach to interpret management action in terms of hiring people.

A large group of survivors were also complaining about the underlying rules applied to decision making about which staff to let go. They argued that the selection criteria either were not clear and transparent or not applied rigorously:

The underlying reasons for it did not make sense, since people were not chosen based on their performance; instead it was "last in, first out". (5, 30-32)

The findings suggest that survivors were suffering from missing procedural justice, which was found in many cases (e.g. Brockner et al., 1992b; Weiss, 2004) when survivors considered the criteria for employee dismissal as not being fair. A group of participants clearly argued that the organization made the wrong decision in terms of who was dismissed, and who was allowed to stay:

I feel strongly that they did not let go of the right employees and they did not keep the right ones. (14, 461-463)

In this context, the interviews revealed that survivors were of two minds and therefore responded differently. Some of them wished that a particular person should have been dismissed because he/she was not considered as being useful or was even harmful to the organization. Another group of survivors however, could not understand or hardly understood why the organization made the decision to dismiss their colleague and therefore reacted by being frightened and bitter. Such reactions were found to be relatively common among downsizing survivors, and Brockner et al. (1992b) argued that survivors perceive the dismissal of close colleagues as more unfair than any other employee who had a more distant relationship to them. The findings (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.1.1) support that statement, since survivors studied in this research were more aroused when friends were dismissed than when others had to go.

Besides a lack of understanding of the managerial decision making, the majority of survivors criticized the process of communication before, during and in the aftermath of downsizing:

Communication and information were poor. (10, 342-343)

Communication was the major issue, and we did not know what was going on in the organization and how we were affected. (26, 28-29)

Most of the respondents reported that even before the downsizing was announced, rumours were going around that something might happen, but no official information was provided to them. As a result, this increased their sense of uncertainty and led to mistrust towards the management. In accordance with information theory, Evans (1999) asserted that, the more information was provided to survivors, the more certain they felt. However, insufficient information will have an effect in the opposite direction and causes high levels of insecurity and concerns. Survivors' responses support this view and the previous findings from Europe and North America (e.g. Weiss, 2004; Amundson et al., 2004) where rumours and vague communication led to confusion and anxiety among the surviving workforce:

Another point is the rumour mill, because there are a lot of unofficial plans circulating but none of them will be confirmed, or cannot be confirmed. These points are discussed unofficially, which fuels the conflict and leads to insecurity. (25, 24-28)

But even after the downsizing announcement, a large group of survivors were complaining about the manner of communication, in particular how misleading information caused confusion. Some of them argued that managerial misinformation, such as who can stay or go, or wrong leaving dates given to designated victims, were very disconcerting and did not raise a positive feeling. These are interesting findings, which show, that wrong or confusing information may harm survivors, to the same or even to a greater extent, than missing information, in particular if the information provided might imply negative consequences for those involved. Chen (2009), who also investigated survivors in the UK, reported similar findings and argued that not

only information but appropriate communication is important in facilitating the survivors' situations and mitigating their concerns about what is coming next.

The findings further indicated that, in the period post-downsizing, managerial communication did not improve and "communication from the organization decreased as downsizing proceeded" as found by Amundson et al. (2004, p.262). Survivors studied in this research argued that they did not know what to believe and what is going to happen next:

> *The downsizing had no defined end, and there was no communication saying that it was done. (22, 159-160)*

The findings thus highlight that survivors wanted "to know the bigger picture" (Amundson et al., 2004, p.262) and how they might fit into the new organization. Although quite a lot of survivors reported that a lot of information was provided via electronic communication (e.g. e-mail) the majority of them felt left alone since they missed a personal statement from the management. This is in accordance to the view of Noer (1995) arguing that the management must be present and visible and even the greatest technology cannot replace human interaction.

Comparing survivors' responses in terms of level in the hierarchy, the interviews revealed that surviving subordinate staff was generally more likely to complain about insufficient or missing information than surviving managers. This might be related to the fact that people in managerial positions have access to more information and therefore might imagine how the business situation ends up and what is following post-downsizing. However, they might be not allowed to distribute the information openly and withhold it for reasons of power and security (Noer, 2009) as described

earlier in this work. In this context, Luthans and Sommer (1999) reported that managers had more opportunities to participate frequently in meetings with senior persons, where they were informed about the progress and the next steps of the downsizing initiative. A similar behaviour was found among the managers participating in this study, since they were at least in regular contact with their immediate managers, which helped them to satisfy their "thirst for information" (Noer, 2009, p.61).

Managements' action with regard to survivor support was found to be an important and critical element in the period post-downsizing; however, it is often neglected or not done properly by the people in charge (e.g. Reinardy, 2010). The vast majority of participating survivors reported that they did not receive any kind of managerial or organizational support in the aftermath of downsizing. Survivors were either looking for mental support in order to cope with their emotional pains and to get over their negative experience *"There was nobody to talk to, nobody to go to" (4, 207-208)* but they were also complaining about the fact, that they were not provided with support to manage their new tasks, which they had to deal with since many of their colleagues had left:

> *There has not been any support from the management. So, that was a*
> *hindrance. I came into a new job and there was little induction, but that*
> *was the organization's fault rather than a consequence of restructuring*
> *or downsizing. (9, 78-80)*

This is an interesting finding, because according to organizational support theory, survivors develop a certain perception about how their work effort and contribution is appreciated by the organization (Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006). Survivors in the present research may have also had this expectation, since they considered their

employer "as a living entity" (Shanock and Eisenberger, 2006, p.689) which feels obliged to their staff and cares about them. However, the interviews revealed the opposite and management generally showed an insensitive behaviour and just wanted to move on as if it had never happened without acknowledging survivors' mental strains (Amundson et al., 2004):

> *So it felt a little bit like it was brushed under the rug, and it should not have been. (1, 317-318)*

> *After this downsizing, actually, there were people who witnessed this bad situation, who suffered, who needed to be talked to, who needed to be heard. The managers did not do anything and we had to continue with our work. It was quite sad. (11, 76-79)*

Survivors' responses indicated that in many cases the organization failed to facilitate their transition phase (Bridges, 2002) by neglecting to provide appropriate help to them. Although some survivors mentioned that external support was provided to the victims and it was attempted to soften their leaving by the involvement of outplacement services, the organization made no move to provide any form of counselling either internally via HR staff nor from outside to the survivors:

> *Victims received support in looking for new jobs, but survivors did not receive support explicitly. (22, 214-216)*

The fact that almost no support was provided, caused negative feelings among most of the survivors and they felt a kind of isolation and were generally left alone, which might be a first symptom of survivor sickness and may lead to further and more serious health issues (Noer, 2009). Based upon their research findings among Canadian downsizing survivors, Amundson et al. (2004) suggest that an organization

must increase the sense of community and show an active behaviour, such as initiating team building workshops or group events. Only that allows a recovering and revitalization of the survivors (Behr and White, 2003).

As described earlier in this work (see sub-section 5.1.5), immediate managers played a key role in the downsized organizations of the present study and survivors considered them as a main coping resource, since they provided support and confidence. Although survivors almost entirely argued that organizational support was poor, they stated that their direct superior stood by them and encouraged them, which, as a result, influenced their attitude and behaviour in a favourable way. The present findings highlighted the importance of superiors' support and correspond with previous findings from the United States, where survivors' reactions and outcomes were strongly impacted by the active help of their managers (DeWitt et al., 2003):

> *They had personal discussions with me, which was helpful. I got support from my line manager, who encouraged me to continue: "We count on you". (7, 164-166)*

> *However, I must say that my line manager was very helpful and was always available to listen to my concerns. That was very important for me at that time. (24, 209-210)*

However, at the same time, many of the surviving managers had to deal with their own emotions, since they felt threatened and could have been a target of the downsizing as well. Responses of surviving managers revealed that they had been put into a difficult and "sandwiched position". DeWitt et al. (2003) argued that middle managers are agents of change since they have to carry on the downsizing; however, they are also recipients of it, and experiencing it first-hand. Thus: "they have to cope with the double burden of their own emotional reactions and those of the other survivors" (De

232

Vries and Balazs, 1997, p.17). The interview findings corroborate this view, since surviving managers studied in this research had to deal with various aspects of change, such as the pressure to run the business, but also with the mental side of the downsizing and the uncertainty about whether they would be made redundant as well:

> *I had to look after my people, but I also had to make sure that we dealt with our clients in an appropriate manner and satisfied their needs. For sure, the organization could have made me redundant as well. (22, 148)*

Moreover, a lot of surviving managers were found to be in a quite powerless state, where they admitted to having only a little autonomy with regard to the decision making and were not empowered to change anything. Surviving managers perceived a sense of frustration, because they were willing to do something, but they could not, and they felt "stuck in the middle" DeWitt et al. (2003, p.32). One reason for that might have resulted from the fact that they were more in the role of the change recipient than the change agent (DeWitt et al., 2003) and therefore not in the hierarchical position to exert sufficient influence on the situation, compared to managers on an executive level (Armstrong-Stassen, 2005):

> *All my motivational talk encouraging the team that we had a common goal was suddenly useless, and I was powerless against the management's decision. (2, 57-59)*

5.1.9 Survivors' interpretation of the downsizing

The findings from the interviews showed that a certain group of survivors developed an understanding for the downsizing, since they realized that their organization was facing financial difficulties mainly impacted by the unfavourable economic situation. The interview outcomes indicate that survivors assumed that in dire straits, such as the

economic crisis, the organization has to compensate for a low turnover by reducing human capital costs in order to sustain the organization (Kowske et al., 2009):

> *If the organization must survive and they have no money, the only chance is to get rid of the non-profitable part to make sure that the profitable part can remain and continue to grow. (19, 129-131)*

In particular, this quote is interesting and leads to Morgan's (2006) view of organizations as open systems, where organizations are considered as living organisms and only the fittest ones will survive in the environment. Some survivors most likely shared this interpretation, however, mainly the ones who were not directly threatened, since these survivors might be less emotionally affected and therefore still able to think more rationally. Others, who are in the midst of it, might be mentally too much affected and distressed, that they could not deal objectively with the situation anymore (West, 2000).

In terms of survivors' interpretations of each downsizing event, the interviews further indicated that participants working in public-sector institutions found it more difficult to understand the reasons and motivations for downsizing than survivors who worked in the private sector. Survivors' responses correspond to the historically common thought that a public authority is a great place to work because it provides job security, and that people were willing to accept a lower salary for a job in the public sector for this reason (Tooley, 2012). However, times have changed and even the public sector is nowadays subject to corporate-style downsizing and reengineering initiatives. Compared to private-sector organizations they have even fewer opportunities to control their own fates since they are more restricted by governmental regulations that the managers have to follow obediently (West, 2000). Survivors studied in this research who are working for a public-sector institution often considered their jobs as

"cradle-to-grave employment opportunities" (West, 2000, p.8), which may explain why organizational downsizing had such a shocking and devastating effect on them:

> *However, in a public authority you do expect it to be different from industry or commerce. We just look after people. We are not trying to make money, just trying to survive. (4, 213-215)*

Organizations can be considered as cultures where an organizational change might automatic imply a cultural change. An important aspect of cultures is concerned with its learning (Singh, 2010). Some organizations might be considered as learning organizations (Argyris, 1999) and therefore be more receptive to organizational change, such as downsizing or restructuring. However, there might also be other organizations which have difficulties in learning and struggle to deal with change (Singh, 2010). Survivors' responses revealed the existence of both types of organizations. One group of survivors mentioned that the organization has reflected on it, and put systems and procedures in place to make either organizational change smoother or support survivors' personal needs:

> *I also found what some people would describe as a learning organization. So, there is the opportunity, as it were, for individuals to develop within the organization, and this organization will support people as part of that development process. (21, 441-444)*

However, on the other hand, some survivors argued that the organization had not learned any lesson in treating people as a valuable resource, according to a more sustainable model, which would imply a more holistic approach to people management (Wilkinson, 2005):

However, I would like to think that they have learned from the mistakes
they have made. I am not convinced they have, because there has been a
decrease in morale and commitment, and they have lost good staff and
other assets. (29, 127-130)

5.1.10 Measures and challenges to manage survivors

The interview findings have shown so far, that not only the group of surviving staff is suffering the after-effects of downsizing and feels despondent, but also surviving managers were partly found in a miserable situation and felt powerless in leading and supporting the survivors. However, survivors' responses showed as well, that some managers have had the power, but concentrated their actions on business activities, and did not recognise survivors' needs (Noer, 2009). Only half of the managing survivors participating in the present study admitted that they provided active support to the survivors. They mainly argued that they provided mental support through meetings and discussions, talked to survivors, but also listened to them and tried to answer their questions:

I wanted to give them as much support as possible and to provide them
with a supportive environment. We talked about their problems and
concerns. (14, 387-388)

The responses highlighted, that the majority of the surviving managers tried to be an empathetic superior caring for and looking after survivors' needs and concerns. Although the managers stated that they did not resort to any HR measure in particular, the fact that they paid attention to survivors' concerns seemed to be crucial and bearing fruits. The way in which managers acted supports the view of Appelbaum and Donia (2001, p.15) arguing that a "sincere desire to address concerns" and a dialogue, where survivors are listened to in a sympathetic manner, might be more helpful than any kind of strategy derived from the HR sciences.

A large group of surviving managers argued that it was important to provide the survivors with clear and transparent information about the reasons for downsizing. Moreover, they kept the survivors informed about the next steps, which are going to happen in order to avoid that they get stuck in a state of ongoing uncertainty, not knowing what to believe and what might happen to them (Doherty et al., 1996):

> *It is important to be transparent and explain the reasons for it. I explained the situation to them; but I also mentioned the fact that no further actions were planned, in order to make people calmer. (2, 320)*

Some of the managers encouraged their surviving staff not to be too pessimistic about their situation, but to be positive and optimistic instead. Managers' behaviour corresponds to the field of positive psychology in leadership theory, which says "that the more optimistic the leader, the more optimistic the followers" (Luthans and Church, 2002, p.65). The finding suggests that managers may indeed have diffused optimism into the survivors, since they argued earlier in this work (see sub-section 5.1.5), that positive thinking and optimism helped them to cope with the situation:

> *I told them that we all went through it before and we all have done well with it. So let's go into this. I tried to speak to them in a fairly positive way so they would bear in mind that there might be new career opportunities as a consequence, and that it was not entirely negative.*
> *(6, 146-149)*

The findings provided insight that surviving managers had to deal with various challenges when managing their remaining workforce. In this context, a group of managers stated that dealing with survivors' mood and negative feelings posed a major challenge since it also had an influence on their behaviour at the workplace. This was considered as particularly unfavourable when survivors had to deal with customers

who have the right to be served by a happy employee and not by somebody whose job performance and enjoyment has decreased because of his or her negative experience associated with downsizing (Travaglione and Cross, 2006):

> *Their job is to provide service. However, how the hell do you smile and greet and be happy when you are always under that fearful cloud? Managing that feeling was very challenging for me. (14, 433-435)*

A large group of the managers also argued that the ratio between workload and available resources issued a challenge for them, especially when they had to fight in order to keep the existing ones:

> *It was a difficult situation, because the team was busier than before but I still had to provide a justification to the management for needing all these people, otherwise they would have assigned them to other tasks. (25, 89-91)*

The fact that in the majority of cases the workload of individuals was relatively high or work was distributed unequally, led to another issue and managers had to pay attention that survivors were not overworked. The findings are interesting for the reason that some managers actually showed awareness of survivors' workload and prevented them from being overworked or from possibly suffering a burnout, as described earlier in this work (e.g. Brockner, 1992). However, this behaviour was found mainly among line managers, who, as illustrated above, stand anyway in a good relationship to their subordinate survivors and where considered as supportive and caring by them. Upper managers might respond differently and maybe have a more business outcome or profit orientated approach with less emphasis on survivors' needs (Orpen, 1997):

Productivity-wise it is like: "Let's have a meeting about how we are going to allocate resources". You have to have those kinds of conversations to make sure that they are not overworked, because you have fewer people. (8, 307-309)

In terms of support from superiors, the vast majority of surviving managers reported that they did not get any support or help in managing the survivors and were left to their own devices. Managers clearly stated that the organization failed to provide them with sufficient expertise to deal with their surviving workforce. They argued that they mainly drew on their experience or managed their employees based on intuition. These findings are thought provoking, because managers and HR staff receive training in recruiting people or how to hold exit interviews with leavers (Armstrong, 2012), but not how to deal with employees who have gone through a downsizing initiative and needed to be reintegrated. Besides that, surviving managers are also just humans and might have experienced the downsizing to a similarly harmful extent to that of other survivors and therefore their needs should not simply be ignored (Armstrong-Stassen, 1998):

I think we were expected to do quite difficult, specialist things. We may or may not have done them well, but nobody told us how to do them. I think it is worthwhile for an organization to think about how it wants those managers to behave. (6, 628-632)

The interviews revealed that some managers were engaged in reflection, and thought more about what happened and how they dealt with the situation. Reflection is considered as an important element in the process of learning and "an assessment of how or why we have perceived, thought, felt, or acted" (Hoyrup, 2004, p.443). The

outcomes of managers' self-reflexion revealed aspects which were in two opposite directions. One group was satisfied with the way in which they had managed the downsizing and the survivors, another group again seemed to be more critical and thoughtful about their behaviour and expressed concerns about whether or not they had provided sufficient support. Some surviving managers just realized the importance of survivor support during the interview when the discussion about the downsizing aroused memories about how they witnessed it, and how they treated their surviving team. Although this is a late insight and would not help any of the former survivors, however, it is still a positive outcome and demonstrates how reflection leads to consciousness about undesired mistakes and makes people learn from it (Hoyrup, 2004):

> *I think it made me think more consciously about the power and the influence that you have as a manager. And I take that more seriously than I have taken it before. (6, 595-597)*

5.1.11 Summary

This section has presented the 10 themes that emerged from the interviews. The above discussion has shown that the findings of this study correspond to a large extent with what has been reported by previous, mainly North American, research. As in previous research, it was found that survivors participating in this study experienced a broad range of unfavourable emotions (e.g. fear, bitterness), attitudes (e.g. reduction in commitment) and behaviour (e.g. lack of motivation) as a response to downsizing, and thereby provided further evidence for the existence of the survivor syndrome.

Moreover, the interviews revealed interesting findings about differences between survivors from the UK and survivors from the German speaking area (see sub-section

5.1.1). It was found, that survivors from the UK suffered more, from organizational downsizing and the ongoing insecurity, than their colleagues from Germany and Switzerland. The responses of the UK survivors may indicate that the general economic situation and the high unemployment rate in the UK (September 2012, according to Arbeitslosenquoten, 2014) increased their feelings of insecurity, since they may not have found a job so easily if they would have been dismissed in a potential wave of further downsizing. Moreover, the fact that the UK unions are less powerful than the German unions in negotiating a good deal for their employees, may have led to more fearful responses among the UK survivors (e.g. Cunningham, 2011).

The above discussion also pointed out that survivors working for public-sector institutions struggled more to understand the motivations for downsizing than those working for a private-sector organization (see sub-section 5.1.9). They were more bitter than survivors from the private sector and responded with a lot of resentment towards their organizations when they were faced with the consequences of organizational downsizing. This was an interesting finding, suggesting that these survivors may have considered their job in a public authority or governmental institution as a "cradle-to-grave employment opportunity" (West, 2000, p.8) that was unlikely to be affected by a downsizing programme.

The interviews also revealed several factors that affected survivors' reactions. For instance, survivors' ages were found to have an influence on survivors' coping behaviour where, in particular, older survivors and those without financial obligations reported only minor difficulties with regard to how they managed the situation (see sub-section 5.1.5). The findings suggest that older survivors may have developed coping mechanisms in the past on which they could rely to help them better deal with

the recent downsizing. However, the fact that the majority of the older survivors were almost at the end of their working lives when they experienced the most recent downsizing may have also had an influence on their reactions. They may have been aware that they only had to work a few years more in the organization until they become retired and, therefore, felt less disrupted when organizational downsizing was announced. Moreover, survivors' responses indicated that a supportive environment, such as colleagues or family, facilitated survivors' coping ability.

However, the findings left no doubt that the side-effects of downsizing are toxic and persistent. Although a group of survivors reported that a break from work (e.g. holidays) provided them with an opportunity to stand back from what they had experienced the findings revealed that it took the majority of survivors almost one year until they had better coped with the situation, indicating that the effects of downsizing are detrimental and long-lasting (Noer, 2009). Thus, the findings do not particularly correspond with the outcomes of several of the previous studies, such as those of Nicholson and West (1988) or Allen et al. (2001), since they had reported that after a while survivors' attitudes returned to where they were pre-downsizing, which implies that downsizing had only a short-term effect. The findings from this work (see sub-section 5.1.2 and 5.1.5) point to the contrary and suggest that the effects of downsizing impact survivors on a long-term basis, as even survivors who had experienced their most recent downsizing episode 18 months previously reported that they did not feel fully committed and they distrusted the management while doing their daily work.

It was also found (see sub-section 5.1.7) that bad memories from downsizing in the past had an influence on how survivors were interpreting a more recent downsizing situation. They were fearful of having to deal with the same sort of negative things as

in the past (e.g. an increased workload or more responsibilities), and may have additionally suffered from feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. Thus, the findings showed once more that negative experiences with downsizing persist over a long period where time does not necessarily ease the pain.

Moreover, the interviews revealed (see sub-section 5.1.4 and 5.1.7) that multiple downsizing experiences led to an accumulation of stress and thereby negatively affected survivors' health and well-being. The majority of the survivors who had been exposed to three to four downsizings in the past reported such feelings as mental exhaustion and stated that they found it increasingly harder to recover from their experience with downsizing. This provided a strong indication that repeated downsizing exposure had diminished their coping resources over time (Moore et al., 2004). Thus, the findings support the argument from Moore et al. (2006) that multiple downsizing exposures lead to chronic stress and thereby make individuals more vulnerable over time. However, the present findings do not affirm the statement from the North American scholars Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) and Chreim (2006) that surviving several rounds of job cuts makes individuals more resilient over time and thereby mitigates the extent of negative reactions.

The interview findings also provided strong evidence about the poor behaviour of the management (see sub-section 5.1.8), and thereby supported previous research on this topic to a large extent. Nearly all of the survivors complained about the way in which the management handled the downsizing. They did not consider them as being competent and criticized their decision making (e.g. with regard to personnel cuts) and the fact that they were neither provided with appropriate information nor got the opportunity to openly discuss their concerns with the management. Moreover, the vast

majority of survivors were annoyed because the management did not support them in order to better cope with their mental issues or to deal with the additional workload. Consequently this increased their negative feelings and their resentment towards the organization and its management.

However, the responses of the surviving managers participating in this study also revealed interesting findings and showed that they had been put into a difficult position in the time post-downsizing (see sub-section 5.1.8). Although they emphasized that they tried to support their survivors in the best possible way, many of them admitted that they had to deal with their own emotions, since they felt threatened and could have been a target of the downsizing as well. Moreover, most of them were found to be in a quite powerless state, where they admitted to have only a little autonomy with regard to the decision making. As the majority of them belonged to the lower and middle management, the findings suggest that they might have been more change recipients than change agents (DeWitt et al., 2003) and therefore not in the hierarchical position to exert sufficient influence on the situation, compared to managers on a higher level.

5.2   Interpretation of the research findings through the lens of sensemaking theory

5.2.1   An introduction

After the previous section has discussed the findings of this study in light of the existing literature, this section will further interpret the research findings through the lens of sensemaking theory (step 2, see also sub-section 4.2.5). In particular, it is focused on the ways survivors make sense of the situation in which they find themselves after downsizing. The subsequent work draws on Weick's (1995) seven

properties of sensemaking (see sub-section 3.2.3) and the theory of sensegiving (see sub-section 3.2.4.6) (e.g. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) since they offer powerful and holistic guidance about how to study the process of survivors' sensemaking. An overview about the seven properties of sensemaking is provided below:

1. Grounded in identity construction

2. Retrospective sensemaking

3. Enactment of sensible environments

4. Social aspects of sensemaking

5. Ongoing aspects of sensemaking

6. The role of cues and their extraction

7. Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

5.2.2 Grounded in identity construction

Weick (1995, p.18) stated that sensemaking is "grounded in identity construction" where "an intricate combination of self-identity of the actor and the identity of the organization forms and sustains the socially constructed meanings assigned to events" (Schwandt, 2005, p.183). In other words, the meaning attached to, and the sense made of something, depends on who the sensemaker is and where his or her traditions are grounded (Sloyan, 2009). In the context of organizational change, identity construction plays a major role because a successful change requires a redefinition of identities (Thurlow and Helms-Mills, 2007). Or as Gioia and Thomas (1996, p.394) argued "for substantive change to occur, some basic features of identity also must change". However, if this transformation process from the old to the new identity is not managed and maintained in a proper manner, organizational members are likely to

show a resistance to change and feel uncomfortable with the new situation (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this work (see section 5.1), the decision about employees' survival was mainly based on certain criteria, which means that the organization imposed a unique identity in the form of their performance or value to them. Consequently, one would think that survivors appreciated their identity since they were designated to remain in, rather than chosen to leave the organization. However, the analysis revealed diverse findings with regard to how they were dealing with their new identity. The responses suggested that the majority of the survivors struggled with their new identity and thus were prevented from making appropriate sense of the situation. This was related to both, the redefinition of the organizational identity which is "a shared belief about "who we are" as an organization", but also the updating of the individual identity, which is concerned with "an individual's definition of "who I am"" (Sloyan, 2009, p.47). This is of importance therefore, since in the majority of the cases not only the organization, and survivors' image of it, had changed, but also their personal or self-identity had altered during and in the aftermath of the downsizing (Gioia and Thomas, 1996).

The interviews indicated that many survivors perceived a loss of identity when they had to deal with new responsibilities and struggled with the question of how they fit into the new structure imposed on them. Survivors showed a tendency to oppose the new functions and how they operate, since it was deviating from their view of their own identity and how they had provided service before and satisfied the needs of customers:

I struggled to accept the new job they had given me, because it was very different from what I had done before. I did not want to do this job. It was hard for me to identify with these things. (13, 65-67)

Chreim (2006, p.331) argued that any changes that are consistent with organizational members' view of role identity or which enhance their organizational and individual identity are more likely to be embraced than those that are considered as "inconsistent with the valued identity attributes held". The findings support this in a sense that survivors had attached a certain meaning to the organization and in the course of downsizing struggled to reframe this meaning, since the change was not consistent with their notion of how it should be. The fact that "attributes that are central, distinctive, and enduring" but were abruptly replaced threatened their organizational image and hindered their process of sensemaking (Sloyan, 2009, p.47). However, this applied also to surviving managers when their superiors had a view of structural change which contradicted how they wanted to develop and reorganize the department. In such a case they also got into an identity conflict where they struggled to accept the change (Gioia and Thomas, 1996):

The way I understood the purpose of this restructuring programme was obviously different from the way my manager finally introduced it, because I thought we might reorganize the production lines and renew our machine park in order to improve our efficiency. However, the whole programme was more about headcount reduction, and this was nonsense because we needed the people. So, that didn't appear logical to me. (2, 108-114)

Weick (1995, p.18) stated that "sensemaking begins with a sensemaker" around the question "who I am". This understanding is important and helps to shed light on how survivors' identities had changed or were restrained in the aftermath of downsizing.

247

Since the working life of many survivors was characterized by a long-time affiliation to the same organization, it seems likely that their identities were grounded around these organizations' history and the traditions associated with it. In many cases the way in which survivors identified with the organization goes back to a time when it had a different set up and other management, which generally was more embraced by them. Their identity is grounded in beliefs developed when the organization was more valued than business orientated and the personnel played not only a secondary role in the organization:

> *In former times, prior to when this change happened, they were more caring about the staff, and people were appreciated by the employer for what they were doing. But this had changed; the new managers seemed to have a different attitude towards their workers, and money became more important for them. (4, 101-105)*

This corresponds to the statement from Thurlow and Helms-Mills (2007, p.2) that "identities result from prior beliefs and experiences, ongoing interactions, and the retrospective process of sensemaking that individuals use to reconcile changes in their social, organizational identities". However, this is where the problem lies, namely precisely in the fact that the new reality which survivors had to deal with, posed an extreme contrast to the beliefs which they had developed over years. These beliefs in turn were not reflected in the present form of the organization's identity and thus impeded their acceptance of the new structure and understanding of the change.

The findings indicated that the vast majority of the leaders failed to develop a coherent identity among the survivors and did not deal sufficiently with survivors' identity ambiguity in the period after downsizing. As discussed earlier in this work (see sub-section 5.1.8 about management behaviour) survivors' responses revealed that the

managers very often missed the chance to communicate the change appropriately to the survivors, in terms of how it fits into the broader story of the organization. So, for instance that the downsizing is part of a strategy to stay in the market and in line with the organization's identity, namely to be a successful and global player in its field. This in turn may have enhanced the process of sensemaking, since survivors would have gained an understanding that downsizing is not a threat to their identity, but rather a "next chapter in the ongoing story of the organization" (Sloyan, 2009, p.125):

> *We were not informed about the intention of this restructuring and whether it was part of the company's objective. Honestly, I had no clue what was going on and how it all ended up and how we were affected by it. We were left in the dark with regard to the purpose of this change, and that caused some concerns. (26, 122-127)*

Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010, p.560) argued that organizational leaders must "unfreeze employees' existing meanings about an organization's identity, replace them with new meanings about its identity, and then refreeze those meanings". However, this would imply the use of language, talk and active conversation (Weick, 1995) with those left behind, rather than ignoring their needs by brushing the whole story under the rug, where the "breakdown of shared meaning around an organizational identity" is inevitable (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010, p.560).

Moreover, the findings revealed, that some survivors were puzzled when their managers announced that the downsizing had been successful and led to the desired results, namely to cut the costs and thus save the organization from bankruptcy. Survivors' irritation was mainly caused by the fact that they could see behind the curtain and thus uncover that the financial numbers had not improved:

I really would like to know that the change was successful. Recently we were doing our budget for next year, and we are still on the same cost level as before. So, what is the point of cutting personnel when you have the same level of costs? (11, 161-165)

Helms-Mills (2003, p.128) asserted, referring to the ongoing and controversial discussion about the outcome of the Iraq War in the 1990s, that success or failure of an organizational change "depend more on the identity needs of senior managers than actual results". The fact that the majority of surviving managers investigated in this research have a successful career history, and on average, more than ten years of managerial experience, leads to the assumption that they have a strong identity. The same may also apply to the managers of the survivors quoted above. However, the question arises, how much of the success they claimed was really associated with the downsizing outcome, and how much was based on their personal need to identify with success (Helms-Mills, 2003). Even though their role might have not been at risk by a potential wave of further downsizing, they could have been voted out of their position, and thereby losing important aspects of power (Noer, 2009). Against this background it might have been crucial for them to announce the programme as being successful and thereby construct a personal identity around positive achievements, avoiding losing face.

Studying survivors' responses, the findings provide further evidence that individuals' identity can be unfavourable in dealing with change, and thus impeding the process of sensemaking, if their identity appears to be too strong. In the present case, some of the surviving managers had a strong identity because they were in a leadership position and had held that role for many years. However, that hindered them in adapting to the new role and slipping into another identity:

They don't have to tell me how to run the business because I have more experience than these guys above me. I was aware that we had to do this downsizing but to a certain extent I could also make my own decisions, at least at that level. (2, 53-56)

The findings suggest that the change programme imposed on them caused a conflict between their individual identity, which was grounded in their position, and the identity the organization was going to adopt as part of the downsizing. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) argued that strong identities are more likely to impede rather than enhance the process of sensemaking. This became evident in the Westray mining disaster in Canada where the leaders' strong identity as "real men" had "created a mindset of invulnerability" (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010, p.557) and blinded them from realizing the imminent danger related to their work. The identity through which they framed their work was hindering the way they made sense of the situation and their ability to take appropriate action. This led to a disaster where many mining workers died (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Drawing a parallel between this scenario and the situation of the surviving managers, it shows even though in a different context, how a strong identity can be a disadvantage. In the case of the present managers it was clearly not life threatening for them; however, the fact that they were firmly anchored in their position may have hindered them from noticing the potential benefits associated with the new reality and to perceive the change as enhancing their positions, rather than violating them. They could hardly let go of their old reality, because their strong identity blinded them to seeing the aspects as "fulfilling their needs for self-enhancement" (Dirks, Cummings and Pierce, 1996, p.8).

Although the majority of survivors suffered from the negative effects of downsizing, as illustrated in the preceding section (see sub-section 5.1.3), surprisingly there were

some who considered the change to be an opportunity. This in turn might suggest that there were certain elements of the change they could identify with, since they were consistent with their notion of reality. Sloyan (2009, p.126) argued that the challenge organizations are facing is to "expand their identity so more changes are perceived as consistent". The more a change programme is perceived as part of the members' identity, the more likely they will accept it (Sloyan, 2009). The findings correspond to this view, since in some cases certain aspects of the downsizing suited the survivors and they could, for instance, achieve a desired career move and the restructuring thereby became, at least to a certain degree, "a positive component of an organization's identity" (Sloyan, 2009, p.126).

Moreover, when participants with a long history of survival and, in particular, those who were close to retirement showed less resistance to the new structure, this might be an indication that the continuous change in their organization led to downsizing survivorship itself becoming part of their identity and therefore caused only minor emotional reactions (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). The continuous change experienced by this small group of older survivors may have altered their personal, or self-identity, so that they identified with the downsizing and it became part of their life:

> *I have a long history of surviving, and perhaps that makes you more resilient. It almost becomes business as usual to be surviving that, especially in the UK, at a time of transition and recession and so on. (12, 70-73)*

> *For me it is just part of working here, because it becomes so frequent. I mean, if you work somewhere where it changes every 10 years that might be really quite disruptive. (4, 107-109)*

However, the fact that these veteran employees were almost at the end of their working lives when they had experienced their most recent downsizing initiative may have also influenced their responses and played a role in their sensemaking processes (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.1.7 about survivors' downsizing history and their learning). They may not have perceived the downsizing as particularly threatening to their identity, as they were aware that regardless of any organizational disruptions they just needed to work a few years more in the organization until they became pensioners.

5.2.3   Retrospective sensemaking

Sensemaking happens through retrospection, because "people can know what they are doing only after they have done it" (Weick, 1995, p.24). This is important to understand survivors' experience of organizational downsizing, because such a process occurs over a certain time, and survivors attach meaning to their experience after and not during the change (Chreim, 2006). Or as Weick (1995, pp.25-26) highlighted it "the creation of meaning is an attentional process, but it is attention to that which has already occurred".

As the interviews showed (see sub-section 5.1.7), every survivor had already experienced a form of organizational change, such as restructuring or downsizing, in the past and was therefore either less or more fearful when he or she was faced with the most recent downsizing, about which they were interviewed for the current research. Although survivors are living forward, they have to understand their situation backwards in order to make sense of the present (Smerek, 2009). Thus, it is crucial to understand the meanings derived from their past experience, because these may have the potential to shape present and future downsizing interpretations (Chreim, 2006). In other words, it is worth paying attention to survivors' history, since they may have

reinterpreted past events to support their new perspective of being a survivor.

Survivors' retrospection seemed to be of particular importance for their current sensemaking, when they had benefited from mechanisms which they had developed and applied to cope with downsizing in the past. In such a case, they could rely on their knowledge about how the process is going to be and what they might have to expect (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.2.2). However, it has also heightened their awareness of events, which might occur in their environment, and how to deal with them. Helms-Mills (2003, p.166) argued that retrospection is strongly linked to the extraction of cues (see also sub-section 5.2.7 for further discussion about cues), where "the influence of past accounts guides the extraction of specific cues to support current sensemaking activity". When the organization started to hire new people or sales numbers improved, this might have provided survivors with a signal that the organizations' situation is improving, since they had noticed similar cues in the past and therefore had confidence that the same is going to happen this time. Thus, it facilitated their process of sensemaking, because they felt somehow familiar with the way the situation was developing (Weick, 1995):

> *I felt continuously better when I could see that the numbers became stable and things were getting a bit better. At the same time, we also had additional quality issues, and I felt better after we had managed them. (22, 165-170)*

However, this might not have been the case for all of the survivors, and Weick (1995) argued that threat and opportunity, which are contrasting labels for experience, may influence the process of sensemaking at an early stage, since they direct the definition of a project and thus have an effect on what individuals extract from their elapsed

254

experience. The most recent downsizing initiative may have been such a project where survivors drew on their prior experience and reflected on the past. They made an attempt to explore the nature of this project in terms of its pros and cons in order to ascribe meaning to it. The fact that the majority of present survivors had experience with failed downsizing programmes might be the reason why they showed such a reluctant behaviour and struggled to make sense of their situation. Their interpretation was mainly based on unpleasant memories of downsizings, which remained as a disturbing and irritating event in their head:

> *Previous downsizing had a negative influence on me, since it was very hard and I expected that the same thing would happen this time. I was quite fearful. (13, 165-167)*

Although individuals' experience may, under normal conditions, provide them with a "variety of materials to work with" that facilitate adjustment to new settings (Chreim, 2006, p.318 citing Beyer and Hannah, 2002, p.648), survivors investigated in this study were rather overwhelmed when they reflected on their negative experience from the past, as too many negative things had happened to them. This may be primarily due to the fact that over the years, survivors had been exposed to downsizing not only once, but several times, and that this repeated downsizing experience had a cumulative negative effect on survivors' responses and the ways in which they constructed their realities (see also sub-section 5.1.7 about survivors' downsizing history and their learning). In particular, the group of survivors who had experienced three to four downsizings in the past reported that feelings of stress and job insecurity increased over time since they perceived each downsizing programme as a shocking event that violated their notion of having a secure job again and again. This made it increasingly harder for them to recover emotionally from their experiences with downsizing.

This would suggest that previous experience with downsizing did not help these survivors to better deal with a more recent downsizing. On the contrary, it weakened their ability to make sense of and cope successfully with it (Moore et al., 2004). In other words, survivors' reflections on the past did not provide them with any positive stimulus that would have facilitated present and future sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Thus, these findings would not particularly support the view of the North American researchers Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) and Chreim (2006) that a long history of downsizing survival enhances individuals' coping abilities and helps them to become inured to downsizing over time:

> *I have survived several redundancies over the last few years, but I can't cope with it any longer. It is one of the most stressful things, really. These continual changes drain you mentally, and it is always questionable whether you will be able to keep your job. So, I always fear losing my job in a future round of downsizing. (9, 122-126)*

Retrospective sensemaking means that people act first and only make sense of their action afterwards (Weick, 1995). However, when some of the survivors reflected on prior downsizings that were entirely associated with negative experiences, such as those discussed above, survivors were biased towards expecting that the impending change might be unfavourable as well. This in turn limited them from seeing favourable occasions, which might have arisen from the upcoming change. Based on their negative experiences from the past they were hostile towards organizational downsizing, but did not consider the fact that it might also involve some positive aspects. Sometimes it seemed as if survivors simply overlooked aspects which might have indicated an opportunity for them and therefore failed to ascribe appropriate meaning to the situation. According to Weick (1995, p.27) "meanings change as

current projects and goals change". Analysing survivors' retrospective accounts, the findings suggest that some of them may have made hasty interpretations of the situation and only later, in retrospect, realized that the current downsizing was more potentially a positive "project", to which they finally could attach meaning since it provided them with a unique chance for growth and enabled them to make sense of their survival. Thus, in retrospect a threat may have turned into an opportunity (Klatzke, 2008):

> *In the end it was a good thing, helping me to get promoted and to step up into this new position. At the time I hadn't thought about it, and actually it was a bit of a surprise when my boss called me into his office and told me to take over the other role. So, that was good. (26, 286-289)*

5.2.4 Enactment of sensible environments

Helms-Mills (2003, pp.173-174) emphasized the importance of enactment in the process of sensemaking and argued "if the other six properties are about influences on sensemaking, enactment is about imposing that sense on action". This implies that "when people act, they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion. People who act in organizations often produce structures, constraints, and opportunities that were not there before they took action" (Weick, 1988, p.306). In other words, organizational members often create their own environment and this environment consequently restrains their actions (Weick, 1995, p.31).

This also applies for the case of the organizations present in this research, where the managers enacted a new situation, with structures, roles and responsibilities, which were not in place before, and survivors therefore were not familiar with them. However, by initiating the changes caused by the downsizing, the organizations' management had enacted an environment whose consequences they literally

underestimated, in terms of survivors' reactions. This was related to both, the emotional aspects and the behavioural changes resulting from the change. Helms-Mills (2003) highlighted that managers often misjudge how the sensible environment they enact influences subsequent events and how that leads to constraints. The findings support this view, because the new situation imposed might have reflected management's aim to save money and improve performance; however, it is unlikely that it reflected their notion of staffs' behaviour. The quote below provides a good example that the sensemaking of the managers seemed to be diametrically opposed to the ones of the staff members and the situation enacted by the managers could therefore not be understood:

> *My expectation was that people would appreciate having survived, and that has not been true. I think my expectation was that people would feel really glad to have a job and really improve their performance. And that has not been the case. (6, 449-451)*

Weick (1979, p.153) in his work understood the complexity of managerial enactment very well, and wisely expressed that "The environment that the organization worries over is put there by the organization". The present outcomes correspond to that view, because the management was consequently faced with what they had enacted and had to deal with a lot of fearful and negative responses. Helms-Mills (2003) argued that environments are not fixed and the way employees enact their environment is a reaction to the structure and regulations which were created for them. More importantly, "members of an organization will enact the part of an organization that exists for them" (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.175). Survivors' responses relate to that, in the sense that they lost their trust in management, and developed the idea that the organization is mindless and had let them down. The interviews showed that the way

in which survivors enacted their environment after downsizing was very much influenced by anger and despondency about the management:

> *I would say that the biggest thing is that I do not trust my employer anymore. (30, 65-66)*

> *I lost my trust in the management and in the company. I cannot rely on the company anymore. (27, 35)*

As a consequence this was reflected in their actions and how they performed the work (e.g. commitment to work, work motivation), which again supports the argument that the environment is not "concrete and external to the organization" (Smerek, 2009, p.32) since "the socially created world becomes a world that constrains actions and orientations" and thus influences individuals' sensemaking (Weick, 1995, p.36).

The interviews revealed that power and capacity played a significant role with regard to how the downsized situation was enacted by different parties. Magee, Milliken and Lurie (2009, p.1) defined power as: "the capacity to influence other people" where "one source of power is formal authority, which is derived from one's position and legitimated by policies, rules, and laws". In the context of the present survivors, this is crucial, since people with different authority and hierarchy level "have differential access to power" which consequently defines the success they have when they impose their enactment on other organizational members (Weick, 1979, p.168). Thus, to understand the impact of power helps to answer the question concerned with why the environment, post-downsizing, was enacted in the way it was, and why so many survivors seemed to be the "passive receivers of enactment" rather than playing an active role which would have contributed to their sensemaking (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.176).

The findings showed that most of the staff survivors lost their opportunity to re-enact their environment and to contribute to change in terms of how structures and roles could be arranged. They were confronted with a new situation but they were not allowed to shape part of it and to participate in the creation of this new world, which was imposed on them. Weick (1995, pp.31-38) underlines the powerlessness of low-level employees, arguing that reality is constructed "through authoritative acts" and "power privileges some meanings over others". Thus, the importance of power and the role of those who hold control become even more important in the context of enacting a situation. The situation around the aftermath of downsizing was not simply put there or emerged out of nothing; it was enacted by the managers who had authority over the survivors. Or as Weick (1995, p.31) enunciated it "there is not some impersonal "they" who puts these environments in front of passive people. Instead, the "they" is people who are more active".

The findings support Weick's (1995) view, but also point out a further criticality when survivors' capacity with regard to enactment was neglected. This is related to the fact that survivors' know-how and their individual skills could have been of great usefulness for the organization, since some of them could draw on longstanding experience and were therefore able to provide a lot of expertise. However, as a result of how power was distributed in the organizations' hierarchy, the right to enact the situation was reserved only for the managers. Weick (1988, p.312) argued that "the person in authority is not necessarily the most competent person to deal with a crisis, so a contraction of authority leads either to less action or more confusion". To emphasize the importance of front-line employees with regard to enactment Weick (1988, p.311) quoted Perrow (1984, p.10) who noted that "'operators need to be able to take independent and creative action because they are closest to the system, yet

centralization, tight coupling, and prescribed steps prevent decentralized action'". The present findings relate to this argument, yet at the same time showed that managerial action was privileged over survivors' ability to participate actively in enacting the new situation and make use of their skills. This therefore is another indication about who holds the power in the downsized environment:

> *Our feedback was not taken on board and was just ignored, and it was*
> *frustrating that when things went wrong they had not listened. So I think*
> *paying more attention to staff at ground level is important. (29, 63-65)*

However, presumably the most difficult role, with regard to enactment, needed to be fulfilled by survivors in middle and line management positions. As discussed earlier in this work (see sub-section 5.1.8) the findings left no doubt, that most of the effort around enactment happened through middle managers, however, the interviews clearly revealed that they were more involved in dealing with the constraints and consequences of what has been enacted than with the underlying decisions which were made to enact the change. Middle and line managers investigated in this study did not initiate the downsizing, however, they were used as managerial instruments responsible for executing it according to the orders from top management. Nevertheless, since they were the direct contact for most of the survivors they were responsible for enacting the support and help for them. They had to deal with their emotions, but they also had to ensure that survivors fulfilled their tasks in an appropriate manner in order to achieve the daily work:

> *I had to look after my people, but I also had to make sure that we dealt*
> *with our clients in an appropriate manner and satisfied their needs. For*
> *sure, the organization could have made me redundant as well. (22, 148)*

Magee et al. (2009, p.1) argued that in times of organizational crises "information about issues and problems often needs to be transmitted through a hierarchy" in order to achieve a common sense about what and how something needs to be enacted. The findings support this in a sense that middle managers were part of this hierarchical ladder. However, they had relatively less formal power with regard to making decisions and enacting the change and thus found themselves more in a passive role of enactment receivers (Helms-Mills, 2003), where they had to "follow the lines of power" in a top down direction (Weick, 1979, p.168):

> *All my motivational talk encouraging the team that we had a common goal was suddenly useless, and I was powerless against the management's decision. (2, 57-59)*

5.2.5 Social aspects of sensemaking

Sensemaking is both, individual and social where "human thinking and social functioning are essential aspects of one another" (Weick, 1995, p.38). On the one hand "we make sense for ourselves, drawing upon a common language and everyday social interaction" (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.57) however, on the other hand, at the same time our sensemaking "is contingent on the conduct of others, whether those others are imagined or physically present" (Weick, 1995, p.39). This means that individuals' sensemaking is influenced by the way in which others react or are anticipated to react (Helms-Mills, 2003).

In the organizational environment the interaction of the social and individual aspect of sensemaking can become critical for the individual, but also for the organization, when they conflict or stand in contradiction with each other (Helms-Mills, 2003). The fact that individual sensemaking "occurs in the context of organizational routines, symbols,

language and scripts" (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.57) plays an important role in this respect, because the less a person values or respects the opinions of managers or colleagues, the less likely their views will influence his or her sensemaking. This in turn has a major influence on how similar situations are interpreted, because people who rely on their personal habitual routine may attach a different meaning to a situation, from that of those who make sense based on social interaction with others. Consequently, similar situations may be interpreted differently, or in other words, people may understand a similar experience different when their sense of reality is shaped by elements which do not match or are opposed to those of others (Weick, 1995).

The interviews revealed several examples where participating survivors understood a similar situation differently, which therefore support the complexity of social sensemaking in the organizational setting. Two of them are considered particularly noticeable because surviving staff and surviving managers from a public-sector organization reported differing accounts of how they have experienced similar events. Both of these examples are illustrated in the following. The first of these examples is about how the organization had managed the downsizing and how support was provided to the people involved. Both, surviving staff and surviving managers arrived at a different understanding of how this was done.

As illustrated in the previous sections (e.g. sub-section 5.1.8 about management behaviour) most surviving staff described the downsizing procedure as totally unacceptable, where management failed to provide them with sufficient information about the situation and what was going to be happen next. They strongly criticized the fact that they were not involved in the process and that their suggestions for improvement were simply disregarded. Moreover, survivors did not see the reason

behind it, because in retrospect it had not led to an improvement. Since the organization had been a safe harbour over years, their anger was mainly directed towards the management because they were considered as the ones who were responsible for the downsizing procedure but also for the miserable situation in which they found themselves afterwards:

> *I was very angry about having to go through the downsizing process, and I did not understand why the management had done this to me. So, actually, you do not have resentment against your immediate colleagues. It is more against the people who actually started the process of redundancy. (30, 20-24)*

However, the story of the surviving managers revealed that they attached different meaning with regard to how the organization had managed the downsizing. According to their interpretation, the organization, but also they themselves tried everything possible to make the transition as smooth as possible, by providing support and help for the employees. Some of the surviving managers argued that the downsizing was inevitable, because the organization was in a bad financial situation, where cost cutting and headcount reduction provided them with the only possibility to survive. However, they also claimed that they felt themselves quite powerless with regard to initiating actions:

> *If the organization must survive and they have no money, the only chance is to get rid of the non-profitable part to make sure that the profitable part can remain and continue to grow. (19, 129-131)*

The two stories demonstrate that surviving staff and surviving managers from the public-sector organization make different sense of the same experience. Surviving staff

attached more meaning to how the organization had treated their employees. They placed a special emphasis on management behaviour and were interested in background information, which might have justified the downsizing. Their notion of organizational change was grounded in values that staff should be treated fairly and as an important asset of the organization. Thus, the interpretation of staff survivors drew strongly on social factors, which framed their understanding and how they make sense of the organizational action (Weick, 1995).

Although the process of sensemaking implies that the conduct of individuals is influenced by "the conduct of others" (Weick, 1995, p.39), the findings indicated that on the individual level of sensemaking, surviving staff interpreted signs from their immediate environment, such as how their colleagues were treated, and relied on their own values to make sense of the situation. This leads back to the work of Helms-Mills (2003, p.59) who stated that "similar experiences can be understood in different ways and subsequent interpretation of a situation depends on what meaning is attached to the activity and what influence locally shaped values have on the situation".

The responses of surviving managers support that, because their values were more business driven and grounded in a leadership culture. They had an awareness of why organizational downsizing becomes necessary, because they could assess the political situation and the effect which the cost saving programme ordered by the government would have on individual organizations in the country and the public servants working for them. Thus, they could rely on elements of more knowledge, which helped them to make sense of the situation. However, they still claimed their innocence with regard to informing staff, since they felt more in the role of the change recipient than in the role of the change agent, which thus limited their control and power over the process

(DeWitt et al., 2003). Finally, however, the fact that they, in a managerial sense, could draw on a set of familiar structures and knowledge, reduced the interrupting effect of downsizing on their organizational work.

Helms-Mills (2003, p.152) argued that an organizational change programme is more likely to be successful when its direction supports the activity of the staff involved, which implies that the change measures are "(a) clearly spelled out in words and in practices, (b) translated into routines; and (c) sufficiently rooted in the thinking and behaviour of individual employees to be the primary sensemaking guide for workplace developments".

The different interpretations about how the organization had managed the downsizing correspond to the above view, in the sense that deviations from routines, but also the importance of values, have an influence on how an individual makes sense of a situation. The story of surviving staff clearly indicates that they suffered more from the downsizing than the surviving managers, since their understanding was rooted in social values (e.g. appropriate communication) to which they attached great importance and which guided the way in which they interpreted the organizational action. In contrast, the managers could draw on more background information (e.g. need for cost cutting) which served them as a sensemaking device to understand the organizational procedure. Thus, their sense of downsizing reality was shaped by factors associated with relevant knowledge, which helped them to develop a plausible interpretation towards an understanding of the need for and purpose of the change (Weick, 1995).

The second example, which demonstrates that a similar situation can be interpreted differently, came about when downsizing survivors of a public-sector organization had

266

to change locations and to deal with new tasks and processes as a consequence of the organizational change (see also sub-section 5.1.3 about work-related changes). Each group of participants, surviving staff and surviving managers attached a different meaning to this experience in terms of how it was done and if the outcome proved to be appropriate and successful. Surviving managers considered the structural changes as an improvement measure to reduce the effort of bureaucracy, but also to enhance individuals' work efficiency and to make their job more pleasant. They were convinced that the change would lead to success, and therefore tried to impose the new structure and procedures on their subordinates.

However, the story reported by staff survivors was rather contrary and they complained about problems in adjusting to the new tasks and perceived their new work as challenging and exhausting. Moreover, they had to become familiar with new colleagues and their habits and found that quite difficult, since "newcomers need to learn both how to interpret and how to express themselves in the natives' vernacular" (Weick, 1995, p.41). However, some of the survivors mentioned in passing that they benefited from their past experience, which helped them in managing the situation.

Helms-Mills (2003) in her study about organizational change and restructuring highlighted the way in which an individual's sensemaking relies, to a certain extent, on routines and symbols. The present stories support this, since surviving managers and surviving staff had a different notion of routine. Managers believed that the new structure, how jobs and roles were organized would simplify the daily work of survivors and lead to more efficiency. Based on this assumption and bearing the anticipated success in mind surviving managers made sense of the change. However, surviving staff attached a different meaning to the change, since they struggled with

many challenges and therefore did not consider the new setup of the organization as appropriate, nor leading to any advantage for them. As a consequence, they drew on their own ability and a more individual way of thinking in order to make sense of the measures imposed on them.

Helms-Mills (2003, p.57) argued when "people fall back on a more personal or habitual way of making sense" these are first indications that the "social aspects of sensemaking break down". The behaviour of surviving staff seems to correspond with this statement, because they refused the structure and work procedures ordered by the managers and reverted back to their routinized set of skills, which they as a group had developed over years and which made more sense for them in terms of how to organize and structure the work. They relied on their own script of working procedures which they had internalized and thus neglected the conduct of their superiors (Weick, 1995, p.39) by placing more emphasize on their own rather than on the managerial sense.

However, this is where the danger lies, because the consequence, when survivors engage more in individual rather than social sensemaking, is that this limits the managers' possibility to influence and control the process of action (Helms-Mills, 2003). This in turn may lead to a disaster as it happened in Mann Gulch and South Canyon where 27 fire fighters lost their lives because they relied on a habitual routine. They continued to carry their heavy tools with them and ignored the order of the leader to drop them, which would have saved their lives, since they could have moved faster and thereby escaped the exploding fire (Weick, 1996). Although Weick (1996) analysed a variety of potential reasons which may have caused the puzzling behaviour of the fire fighters, the fact that they reverted to habitual action, namely keeping their tools, is an indicator of individual sensemaking (Helms-Mills, 2003).

Applying Weick's (1996) story of the fire fighters as an allegory for the downsized environment, such a human behaviour was found when survivors showed a resistance to change. They relied on routines such as organizational cultures or traditional procedures which hindered the process of change. Similar as in the case of the fire fighters, surviving staff neglected the orders from the managers and drew on their own personal script to make sense of the downsizing programme. However, their resistance to change may have not only impeded the restructuring, but may have also made their personal transition more difficult, putting them in a more vulnerable and unfavourable position (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2007). However, recognising that "old habits die hard" (Brockner, 1992) organizations have to make an attempt to translate their change programme into a routinized and justified form, which is easier to accept by staff and therefore more likely to be successful (Helms-Mills, 2003). For the present study, this would include that the managers needed to play a more active role in supporting survivors through the downsizing recovery. In other words, managers must both, facilitate survivors' mental transition (e.g. recognize their emotions and feelings) (Bridges, 2002), but also guide their physical change by increasing their awareness why office movements and the implementation of new procedures are necessary. This would help survivors to understand how the initiated changes would lead to improvements (e.g. more efficiency) and thus stimulate their positive sensemaking about the managerial order.

In some other cases, however, the downsizing in the public-sector organization posed not only a challenge with regard to new structures and processes that were imposed on the survivors, but also engendered a feeling that they had been downgraded and their work was no longer valued. This was the case when, in the course of the restructuring, survivors' job descriptions were adjusted and their job title changed, for example, from

project management, to a more administrative role. However, this formality was understood as a degradation of their position and they felt displeased and personally hurt by the management.

Helms-Mills (2003, p.58) argued "when deviations from anticipated outcomes occur, it is usually when methods of guiding and coordinating social activity, such as use of symbolism and language, are misinterpreted, misread, or plain inappropriate". The current findings support this, because the manager's intention was not to degrade anyone's position, but merely to adjust the positions in a way that fitted into the new organizational structure. For staff survivors, however, the job description meant a lot and served them as a symbol for their hierarchical status. Thus, the belief that the change of job description implied a loss of status and position, served them as a device for interpretation and strongly influenced their sensemaking. This again demonstrates the power of the social aspect of sensemaking, because "social influences on sensemaking do not arise solely from physical presence" as Weick stated (1995, p.40) referred to Blumer (1969) but also through the impact of symbolism, which in the present case provided another explanation why so many survivors were upset and felt unvalued in their new position. Moreover, this negative effect was reinforced by the managers' failure to recognise survivors' situation, which once again may reflect their assumption that employees are just a resource rather than a valuable asset and a human being too.

Besides the two examples provided above, where survivors almost entirely engaged in more individual sensemaking than in sensemaking drawn from the group of the managers, the findings however also revealed how survivors benefited from the social aspects of sensemaking. This occurred when surviving staff shared their interpretations

about the situation with others in an attempt to develop common solutions in order to master their situation in the new working environment. Thus, they tried to make sense of the situation as a group of colleagues who all shared the same destiny as survivors of downsizing. Stigliani and Ravasi (2012, p.1253) highlighted the power of collective sensemaking, arguing that recipients of change should "make sense together" rather than influencing each other by creating different interpretations and thereby even increase the prevailing insecurity. The findings emphasize this argument, because the sense survivors made as a collective helped them to calm down. Thus, it supports the social aspect of sensemaking in a sense that "feelings do not grow within us but between us" (Weick, 1995, p.39) and contribute to arriving at a common understanding of a situation.

5.2.6 Ongoing aspects of sensemaking

Sensemaking is ongoing, which means that "people are constantly making sense" (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.61) of the situations in which they find themselves (Weick, 1995). Thus the sense they make of a situation can be described as a continuous flow (Weick, 1995), which is reaffirmed and modified on a constant basis in order to understand the events occurring in the environment (Helms-Mills, 2003). However, similar to crises situations (e.g. Weick, 1990), when organizations are undergoing downsizing scenarios, this often causes an interruption of peoples' ongoing flow and consequently leads to emotional reactions (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Weick (1995) asserted that a basic element for emotion is arousal in individuals' autonomic nervous system, which in turn is triggered when an ongoing activity is interrupted. The psychological impact is thereby important, since the perception of arousal, triggers a significant act of the sensemaking process. It serves people as a

warning system, that a stimulus has occurred, to which they have to pay attention in order to act in an appropriate way. Arousal provides them with a signal, that one's well-being might be at stake. That means, that sensemaking is not directly activated by an interruption, but by the arousal triggered by it (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Bearing that in mind, sensemaking involves emotion, or at least arousal as one of its main elements (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

As illustrated in the previous sections (e.g. sub-section 5.1.1), survivors in the present study showed positive, but also negative, emotions, which therefore might have either enabled or impeded the sense made of their ongoing experiences. The following sub-section will deal with the negative emotions first, since they were the ones predominately found in relation to the survivors participating in the present study.

5.2.6.1 Survivors' negative emotions and their influence on sensemaking

Weick (1995, p.47) argued that "negative emotions are likely to occur when an organized behavioural sequence is interrupted unexpectedly and the interruption is interpreted as harmful or detrimental". If the interruption cannot be removed, the negative emotion is expected to increase, the longer this interruption continues. The fact that survivors had to deal with more intense negative emotions, such as fear or anger, but also with less intense ones, such as sadness or guilt, had an impact on how they make sense, "since intensity is the critical dimension determining the adaptive or maladaptive effect of emotion on sensemaking" (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010, p.570). However, the critical issue is, that on the one hand emotions need to have at least a minimum of intensity in order to be noticed, on the other hand, very strong and intense emotions tend to distract and absorb more of an individual's cognitive resources than emotions with less intensity would do (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Survivors' emotional response to downsizing involved various intense emotions, including a first shock as an indication for the unexpected interruption, followed by anger and sadness about the organization and its management. These expressed emotions could be crucial with regard to survivors' sensemaking, since they appeared in the form of conscious or unconscious action, and therefore provide a powerful frame for the "interpretation of an ambiguous situation" (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010, p.568). This became, for instance, of particular importance when survivors had shared offices together or worked in the same department. In such a case, the panicking reactions of some survivors caused a fearful situation, which had a significant impact on their colleagues and how they interpreted the situation in an attempt to make sense of it:

> *Although I was positive, there was a negative atmosphere prevailing in*
> *my immediate working environment that had an impact on me and the*
> *others. Some of my colleagues were panicking about losing their job*
> *and what consequences that might have for them. This influenced me in*
> *a certain way and led to some concerns about my own job and the*
> *future. (20, 25-30)*

This is the crux of the matter, since emotions may not only consume cognitive resources of the ones who have to deal with them, but rather more when they are expressed might be contagious and impacting the sensemaking process of an entire group of people (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

According to Weick (1995), an emotion is triggered by the interruption of a flow, in the form of an activity or a certain routine which is unexpectedly interrupted. The downsizing may have interrupted many routines of the people involved, who mainly responded with negative emotions which derailed their sensemaking (Maitlis and

Sonenshein, 2010). In some cases, however, survivors reacted relatively calmly and emotionlessly when their working area was affected by the downsizing and by the restructuring measures associated with it. For some survivors for instance, moving offices and location did not represent a great problem or was undemanding for them, which might be a further indication that their ongoing flow has not been seriously interrupted:

> *There was also a little bit of excitement over moving to the new location and taking over this work. At the end of the day it just needed some organizing skills. I mean, it is about how you adjust and plan your daily business. I don't think that it has influenced my feelings. (22, 32-35)*

Weick (1995, p.46) argued that "emotion is what happens between the time that an organized sequence is interrupted and the time at which the interruption is removed, or a substitute response is found that allows the sequence to be completed". In the meanwhile, arousal increases unless opportunities are found to complete the interrupted flow. In such a case, arousal would not climb to a high level. This in turn, implies that generalists or people with improvisation skills might be able to find substitutions in order to complete the interrupted sequence (Weick, 1995). The present findings suggest that some of the survivors (see quote below) might belong to the group of generalists, since they were able to look for substitutes (e.g. adapted working style) in order to complete the interrupted flow in their working environment, so that they could continue with their working routine. Thus, this group of survivors was definitely less emotionally involved in the restructuring and therefore it took them less effort to make sense of it (Weick, 1995):

I think you need to be flexible in what you are doing, because that helps you to manage the situation much more easily. You have to adapt your way of working so that it works for both the organization and yourself. For instance, you have to learn to work according to new work instructions or a different process. (20, 54-58)

The interviews revealed that survivors expressed intense negative emotions, when the downsizing had caused a disruption of a business plan or strategy which was of high importance, and its successful completion mattered personally to them. In that moment, survivors' attention was focused only on this interruption which consumed "considerable information-processing capacity" (Weick, 1995, p.101) and limited their concentration on other activities:

You get the impression "That's sheer madness!" because, actually, we wanted to secure this big order and at the same time they cut our headcount. That definitely led to anger and disappointment. There were a lot of negative emotions, and it was very irritating. (2, 187-190)

Weick (1995, p.49) argued, when "the interruption has thwarted a higher level plan, then the anger is likely to turn into rage" and it becomes even more difficult to make appropriate sense of it. Survivors emotional reactions are reminiscent of the Tenerife air disaster (Weick, 1990), where the pilot's plan for take-off was thwarted by two unexpected interruptions and caused an arousal in his autonomic nervous system. The arousal in turn, influenced the pilot's capacity to process information and diminished his attention to relevant signs, such as the news reported on the radio. As a consequence, it impeded his sensemaking and led to a disaster, where many people lost their lives (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Some of the survivors in the present study might have experienced the interruption in a similar way, since the arousal reduced their ability to notice and process indications from their environment, such as any

information from the newspaper or internet, which would have helped them to get a basic understanding why the interruption occurred and how to make sense of it. However, survivors' focus was entirely on the interruption and therefore would support the argument of Weick (1995, p.101), that interruption "has the potential to escalate cognitive inefficiency" because it not only produces arousal, but rather more, it reduces important signals and therefore makes sensemaking harder.

Beside the emotions which were triggered by an unexpected interruption of a work-related flow, survivors also showed negative emotions when something unexpected happened in the context of the relationship with other people. Some survivors for instance felt very disappointed and let down by their managers, when they did not receive the support which they had expected from them:

> *I have some very good friends among the management team, Alex and the people in that office. I also consider one of the managing directors a friend, even though he did not help me. I was hurt, I suppose, at the time, but that's life. That is how it was at that moment. (4, 55-58)*

The findings revealed, that one major reason for survivors' negative emotion is related to the fact that they thought they knew their managers, because of all the years they had worked together, and could therefore trust them that nothing unexpected would occur and affect them in an unfavourable way. However, this is a false conclusion, since in close relationships, even over time, the occasions for negative emotions tend to remain consistently high (Weick, 1995) and it is likely that managers thwart the plans of their subordinates and thereby create disrupting stimuli impeding sensemaking. In contrast, however, it is unlikely that managers can produce positive emotions by supporting the survivors, since their help is anyway always expected and predicted (Weick, 1995).

Although the majority of survivors reported that the aftermath of downsizing was characterized by highs and lows, the whole situation resulted in a lot of negative emotions and survivors struggled to make sense of their situation:

I remained bitter. Even though I had survived, and some time had passed, I still felt angry because the downsizing had changed my daily work life and it was done so abruptly that I didn't understand what the purpose of it was. (13, 142-144)

People are in the midst of projects, and if those are interrupted they try to make sense of this interruption. The emotional response induced by an interruption impacts the way in which people make sense of it (Weick, 1995). However, "the longer they search, the higher the arousal, and the stronger the emotion" (Weick, 1995, p.48). And this is exactly the reason, why so many of the survivors were still emotional even when the downsizing was long over and one would expect that they would have coped with the situation and settled in. They could not make sense of it, because they still felt interrupted by the negative stimulus resulting from the downsizing. This hindered them from interpreting the situation and from answering the questions "what is going on?" and "for what reason is it happening?". The struggle to answer that led to intense emotions and explains why an interruption in the form of organizational downsizing is so detrimental for individuals (Weick, 1995).

The interviews showed, that intense emotions mainly impeded, but in a special way also enabled, survivors' process of sensemaking. This latter was the case, when survivors felt that emotions served them as a crucial foundation to interpret that something in their environment was going wrong and might become harmful for them:

I realized that the whole thing wasn't good, and it was a kind of a disturbance. It was not only the additional work, but also the mental impact that made me re-think whether this situation was all good and whether I could resist this pressure without getting stressed that much.
(9, 26-29)

Weick (1995, p.45) highlights the psychological significance of arousal and emotion with regard to sensemaking and argued that arousal "provides a warning that there is some stimulus to which attention must be paid, in order to initiate appropriate action". The present findings correspond with that view, since survivors' felt emotions might have provided them with a signal that the downsizing procedure might have a negative impact on them and "that one's well-being may be at stake" (Weick, 1995, p.45).

However, in the context of organizational learning, survivors' emotions may provide valuable information to their managers with regard to how they have received the changes post-downsizing (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). This might be crucial, since previous researchers have argued that efforts to bring about organizational change tended to be more successful when managers noticed the emotions of their subordinates and responded to them accordingly (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). However, the present research (see also previous discussion in section 5.1) revealed that managers almost entirely neglected survivors' emotional response and did not attend to staffs' feelings at all. As a consequence, it fuelled survivors' emotions even more, since the organization made no attempt to remove this interrupting stimulus by providing adequate support and thus forced them to continue their search for plausible interpretations in order to make sense of it (Weick, 1995).

Although, the managers interviewed in this study did neither entirely nor clearly enough admit that they may have neglected survivors' emotional needs, the interview

outcomes suggest that in general many managers might have thought that keeping their jobs should be enough satisfaction for the survivors and mental support is therefore needless. So, it might not have been purely laziness or selfishness, but more the managers' notion that it is more the group of designated victims rather than the survivors which need mental help and support in managing the change (e.g. searching for a new job). The quote below provides a good example about managers' thinking and their failure to consider that the surviving workforce might suffer intensive harm from the business interruption caused by downsizing:

> *I spoke a lot with the ones who had to leave and I tried to be empathetic. I also offered them help in looking for a new job. No, I didn't support the survivors, at least not mentally, because they could stay in the organization anyway. It was the victims who really needed support. (2, 398-402)*

5.2.6.2 Survivors' positive emotions and their influence on sensemaking

Although survivors' emotions were predominately of a negative nature, there were, surprisingly, also some positive emotions exhibited by them. Two positive emotions which were frequently experienced among survivors were relief and enjoyment (see also discussion in sub-section 5.1.1). Almost every survivor reported an enormous relief, when it had been announced that he or she is designated to remain in the organization, whilst some of their colleagues had to leave it. In some cases, survivors also experienced pleasure about the fact that some harassing or annoying people had to go as a consequence of the downsizing. The sudden and unexpected dismissal of those people implied the removal of an interruption which had been a longstanding issue and a thorn in the side of survivors. Thus, the interruption in form of downsizing "has accelerated accomplishment" and survivors experienced positive emotions in the form of pleasure (Weick, 1995, p.48).

As illustrated earlier in this work (see sub-section 5.1.3) a small group of survivors also showed positive emotions when the downsizing had provided them with an unexpected opportunity to move further and to improve their career situation:

> *In the end it was a good thing, helping me to get promoted and to step up into this new position. At the time I hadn't thought about it, and actually it was a bit of a surprise when my boss called me into his office and told me to take over the other role. So, that was good. (26, 286-289)*

Weick (1995) argued that people may experience positive emotions when an unexpected event accelerates the completion of a plan. Even though not all of the survivors were career orientated and had a fixed plan (e.g. where they want to be in five years' time), but the ones who got the opportunity to progress faster in terms of their career were quite pleased and positive about it.

The examples above showed that positive emotions contributed to survivors' sensemaking and thus helped them to understand the situation (Weick, 1995). However, the analysis also revealed that over-positive emotions entailed some unfavourable side-effects and were harmful for the survivors involved. This was in particular the case, when survivors experienced a huge relief shortly after downsizing completion and felt very positive about the fact of not being dismissed. However, at the same time, these over-positive emotions hindered survivors from noticing the large amount of work which had remained since so many people had left the organization and thus needing to be picked up by them (see also sub-section 5.1.3). Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010, p.570) argued that intense positive emotions "can provide valuable energy", but may also have a confusing effect, since they pose the danger that important signals from the environment are overlooked and thus impede sensemaking. The present findings support this view, because some survivors experienced the

positive emotion of relief to such a strong extent that they unconsciously ignored certain factors which would have helped them to interpret and understand the situation more accurately.

The research also revealed the existence of positive expressed emotions and their powerful application in the context of sensegiving (see also sub-section 5.2.9 for further discussion about sensegiving). The interview findings showed that, when those managing survivors expressed enthusiasm and were committed to successfully drive the downsizing, it had an impact on the survivors since these kinds of emotions act as a sensegiving resource and thereby influence their interpretation about the need for and purpose of the change (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). Survivors' responses showed that they felt more confident when their managers were fuelled with positive emotions, which may be an indication that the managers have created an environment which enabled the survivors to make sense of the change initiative (Weick, 1995).

5.2.6.3 Summary

The findings clearly showed that survivors' continuous flow, to make sense of the situation post-downsizing, was interrupted by more negative than positive emotions. Weick (1995, p.48) argued that the conditions for positive emotions are rarely in most of the organizations, since "people have little control over the onset or termination of interruptions". Moreover, in an organizational setting, plans and projects are more likely to be delayed rather than accelerated, which in turn creates an interruption of flow and leads to negative rather than positive emotions (Weick, 1995). The present findings support this, because as a result of the economic crisis survivors have experienced major and unexpected interruptions in the form of restructuring or downsizing, where they had only a minor influence on its process and duration.

5.2.7 The role of cues and their extraction

According to Weick (1995, p.50) extracted cues "are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring". Cues stand in relationship to a framework of beliefs and actions which influences not only what individuals extract as a cue, but also how they give meaning to that cue (Helms-Mills, 2003). In the organizational context, for instance, employees may extract cues that are inconsistent with their assumptions, but they may also extract cues that are consistent with their views about how the organization should operate (Dougherty and Drumheller, 2006). In any case, organizational members search their environment for cues which might be relevant for them and provide them with a point of reference to make sense of the situation (Weick, 1995).

Survivors participating in the present study were constantly looking for relevant cues in order to make sense of the events post-downsizing. When they were not informed appropriately about the organization's situation, or not involved in the decision-making process, it provided survivors with an important cue that the management might be not capable of handling the change. In particular, when survivors had bad experiences with downsizing in the past, this cue acted as a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (Weick, 1995, p.54) as it was consistent with their expectation that management is not competent enough in dealing with the survivors:

> *Managers can help to get a task done; but if you throw in personnel into*
> *a task, that part they may struggle with. (26, 304-306)*

Moreover, when managers were not present and available at the time most needed, this was a strong, even though non-verbal cue, which signalled to the survivors, that management was ignorant and not caring about staff:

We had this kind of roadshow where we all came together, but the CEO did not appear and sent only a deputy instead to provide us with the briefing about the situation. So, that was another example of the incapable management and another reflection of their attitude. (2, 73)

As already mentioned earlier in this work (e.g. sub-section 5.1.1) the situation of the present survivors was characterized by continuing uncertainty, and cues in terms of information would have helped them to master the situation more successfully. Survivors' responses clearly indicated that they had an urgent need for more information that would provide them with a set of cues about how their situation might turn out (Weick, 1995):

Communication was the major issue, and we did not know what was going on in the organization and how we were affected. (26, 28-29)

There was a lack of communication, and at no time were we properly informed by the management. (15, 164-165)

However, in several cases the interviews revealed that uncertain survivors in an act of desperation drew on any available cue in order to achieve certainty about their situation. This involved listening to the office gossip and the information from the rumour mill, to satisfy their thirst for information and to remove uncertainty. Even though this information may have been equivocal, survivors just searched for a sign, which would help them to make sense of their situation:

There were a lot of ongoing rumours and, honestly, at that time you didn't know what to believe and what to dismiss. That can be quite confusing. However, you sometimes believed this gossip because management did not share information at all. So, you were very glad to get some news from somewhere. (7, 112-116)

Weick (1995) argued that in times of change people do not have much to rely on when their intention is to become familiar with another setting and thus "almost any point of reference will do" (Weick, 1995, p.54). That however made survivors' situation even worse, because the information (e.g. gathered from discussions with their colleagues) ought to be helping them, did not provide them with any news in order to remove their uncertainty, but instead led additionally to confusion, since the information consisted of vague and unclear elements not providing any explanation how things might turn out. In other words, they were overwhelmed with ambiguous cues and did not know how to frame them together in order to make sense of the situation. Thus, and in an attempt to avoid that survivors succumb to the temptation to search for any possible cue and interpret them in a way which might lead them to the wrong direction, managers should continuously and in advance provide them with enough cues, either verbally (e.g. through talk and conversation) or in terms of their behaviour (e.g. showing presence at meetings), as this would provide survivors "a point of reference" (Weick, 1995, p.50) with regard to the current situation and thereby help to reduce their uncertainty and confusion.

However, survivors contributing to this study were not only searching for cues, but they also gave cues to others (e.g. superiors) within their organizational environment. Several of the surviving managers participating in this research project noticed that the work attitudes of their surviving employees and the ways in which they performed particular tasks had altered post-downsizing. This change of work habits provided some of the managers with a cue that these survivors may not be satisfied with their work anymore:

I could see that some of the survivors were less motivated at work, which made me think about whether they were still satisfied with their jobs. (27, 89-91)

Survivors' satisfaction had probably changed after downsizing and this was kind of reflected in their attitudes towards work and in how they did their jobs. (25, 66-68)

Although in that situation the managers may not have known, whether these cues were linked to survivors' job dissatisfaction or more related to dissatisfaction with the overall organization, Klatzke (2008) asserts that managers must learn to interpret such cues early enough, so that they can make sense of staff's situation and act appropriately in order to mitigate the extent of potential negative reactions. For the present research this would imply that managers need to pay more attention to their surviving workforce and that they support them as soon as possible, if they realize there is a deviation in their attitude or behaviour. Such support may include physical assistance aimed at helping survivors in managing the increased workload, but also psychological help, supporting survivors in coping with the mental stress and thus avoiding them suffering more job dissatisfaction and further demotivation (Obilade, 2009). Moreover, organizations should establish an environment where survivors can be open with their feelings (Klatzke, 2008), and thus signal managers their concerns. If this is not possible, survivors may leave the organization without having given a sign of their dissatisfaction before, and nobody in the organization could make sense of it and understand why it has happened.

5.2.8 Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

Sensemaking is driven by plausibility and thereby is strongly linked to sensegiving (see sub-section 5.2.9), because the success in influencing others' meaning depends on the way messages are considered as plausible by the respective recipients (Weick,

1995). According to Helms-Mills (2003, p.67) "plausibility is a feeling that something makes sense, feels right, is somehow sensible, and fits with what you know". Whether plausibility can be achieved or not, depends on the context in which a "story" is being told and how people could make sense of it (Helms-Mills, 2003). Put simply, the more plausible a story is, the more likely people can make sense of it (Weick, 1995).

Although managerial communication was considered poor by the majority of the survivors (see also sub-section 5.1.8) the interviews revealed that in some cases surviving managers developed different stories about the need for downsizing and how this change might be beneficial for individuals because of its potential to enrich their personal work portfolios. In their stories surviving managers drew on various elements to frame their stories and to generate plausibility. In some cases, for instance, in their narratives managers reverted back to survivors' organizational histories, reminding them that they had all gone through several downsizings and restructurings in the past but ultimately survived and managed them successfully:

> *I told them that we all went through it before and we all have done well*
> *with it. So let's go into this. I tried to speak to them in a fairly positive*
> *way so they would bear in mind that there might be new career*
> *opportunities as a consequence, and that it was not entirely negative.*
> *(6, 146-149)*

By drawing on the good old times, managers tried to evoke survivors' past and their history of survival in an attempt to influence and maintain their emotional commitment to the organization (Helms-Mills, 2003). Once managers had the feeling that they were successful in establishing a sense of trust among their surviving workforce, they moved further, telling them that even though they are the organizations' backbone some organizational changes with regard to functions and roles are required, however

they will not have an unfavourable, but rather a positive effect on them, because they provide the possibility for personal development. In doing so, managers left nothing untried to create an embellished story with plausible arguments in order to convince the survivors about the positive side of the downsizing. The action of these surviving managers corresponds with Weick's (1995, p.61) notion who argued that

> "A good story holds disparate elements together long enough to energize a guide action, plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens, and engagingly enough that others will contribute their own inputs in the interest of sensemaking".

Following this view, managers' story may have created a feeling of a shared conception of reality, because it may have concurred with the notion of their surviving staff that some change is needed. This in turn enhanced their sensemaking, since they considered the information given to them as plausible, based on the fact that certain aspects of the managers' story were in accordance with their expectations.

Helms-Mills (2003, p.169) argued that at the introduction of a change programme such as organizational downsizing managers are less concerned with "whether the program is said to be 'widespread' and 'successful'" but care more about whether it is "translated into a real sense for employees". The interviews showed that in most of the cases the managers created a plausible story around the unfavourable general economy, which according to their view, had caused the organizations' downturn and forced them to cut their costs by downsizing the headcount. Such an argumentation was generally considered as sensible by the vast majority of survivors, because it was a matter of common knowledge, that the recent economic crisis had an influence on the business of almost every organization, and thus survivors could make sense of it

(Weick, 1995). Managers' argumentation was only questioned when some survivors compared their situation with those of a similar organization (e.g. in the same industry) which had managed the recession without executing organizational restructuring and headcount reduction. In such a case they became more doubtful about need and purpose for downsizing and questioned the story told to them:

> *For example, consider Miller group in Birmingham. They have not made a single employee redundant during the toughest times, and even now they are not doing it. They never had redundancies. So it's hard to believe that this downsizing in our company was necessary. (14, 205)*

In some of the cases it seemed as if the link between the need for downsizing and the organizations' success had contributed to achieving plausibility in the managers' story. When managers could convince their team, that downsizing was the only chance to make the organization profitable again and save them from bankruptcy, survivors were more likely to consider it as plausible. Moreover, when these stories finally turned out to be true, since the organizations' situation had improved and they became successful again, survivors retrospectively made sense of what has been initially told to them (Weick, 1995). In particular, when higher managers appeared personally, and hence were visible during their speech, survivors were obviously impressed. This supports Weick's (1995) argument that "seeing is believing" and demonstrates once more the explanatory power of sensemaking, because sense is not only given by words, but also by gestures and the presence of those who convey plausibility (Weick, 1995).

However, the fact that so many survivors expressed negative reactions is an indication that their managers most likely failed to generate an elaborated story about need and purpose for the downsizing, which could have been considered as plausible, by the

remaining workforce. The interview findings repeatedly showed that, especially when survivors had bad experiences with downsizing in the past (see sub-section 5.1.7 and 5.2.3), they were more likely to react hesitantly, and expressed feelings of doubt and disbelief when managers provided them with information. This suggests that survivors' prior knowledge helped them to reveal the managers' cynical tactic, which was aimed to convince their staff that downsizing is a good thing in order to get them back to work and therefore meeting top managements objective. Helms-Mills (2003, p.67) argued that a plausible story "should embody past experiences and expectations" and thereby encompass peoples' feelings and beliefs (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.67). However, the interview findings demonstrated the contrary, since the managers' story evoked bad memories about the harmful side-effects of previous downsizings, and therefore was rather hindering than facilitating survivors' process of sensemaking. In particular, when survivors realized that managers' attempt to convince them was rather manipulative than genuine, they disregarded it and drew their sense from other cues, such as their repertoire of past experience to interpret the situation.

The interviews provided further indications that sometimes the managers' story could not withstand the reality and survivors' acumen. This was in particular the case, when managers' messages were not considered as reasonable by the survivors, because they consisted of vague elements and it was too obvious that something must be wrong and cannot be true. For instance, when managers argued that a sudden drop in sales makes downsizing necessary, however added that it would only be a short-time act until the crisis is managed and therefore would not last very long. In such a case, their message included two types of aspects. On the one hand, aspects which were fact based and considered as plausible since sales figures, could be accessed and checked by everyone. On the other hand, however, it consisted also of some implausible

information since even the managers could not be sure how long the crisis would last and when the organizational situation was going to improve. Thus, this part of the information was rather a speculation, than based on facts. However, in some cases survivors were able to interpret relevant signs from the environment such as economic indicators (e.g. from the newspaper) which helped them to uncover the managers' story and to understand the situation more accurately. As a consequence, this led to mistrust against the management in their attempt to produce a plausible story.

In other cases, a group of survivors considered the messages provided by their superiors as plausible, but still showed some resistance, when it came to the implementation of the change. This raises the question: at what point can something be considered as plausible (Helms-Mills, 2003). The most appropriate answer might originate from the fact that some of the survivors were informed about the change and what is going to be happening to them, however, almost no one was finally involved and could make a contribution to shaping the organization. So, therefore, the plausibility generated by the managers was only helpful at the beginning, where the change was introduced, however this could not be retained at a later stage, since the course of events was against survivors' perception, that they are part of the organization and also wanted to be treated as such:

> *We were told that some organizational changes were going to happen in our unit; however, later on none of us were involved or could make any suggestions. (18, 120-123)*

Although it is assumed that accuracy counts the most in an organizational setting, Weick (1995) argued that managerial action is rather seldom characterized by accuracy, and can be neglected as long as the story framing those actions is plausible

and believed by the others. Therefore, "a good story is the essence of plausibility, the medium through which plausibility is created" (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.67). In particular, in the aftermath of downsizing, when many managers had realized that the downsizing effort was not successful and did not lead to the desired results and improvements, it was important that they "constructed a plausible story of success" where they engaged in invention in order to create plausibility among their surviving team (Helms-Mills, 2003, p.67). However, as mentioned above such a tactic is cynical and manipulative and could result in mistrust amongst the survivors, where they engage in alternative sensemaking and draw on past experience or signals from their environment instead believing in the managers' story.

5.2.9 Line managers' sensegiving

As the preceding discussion has shown, survivors' sensemaking was influenced by their environment and by the actors who play an important part in that environment (Weick, 1995). These groups of actors, which involve colleagues, but also managers, tried to sell their vision of the downsizing to the survivors and thereby influenced survivors' understanding (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

One of the most powerful actors influencing the survivors was probably their direct superior to whom they felt attached. The fact that most of the survivors had a close relationship with their immediate managers, had an even stronger effect on the way they interpreted managers' information when attempting to understand what the situation meant for them. Thus, managers' effort to create meaning acted as a sensegiving device to shape survivors' process of sensemaking (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007). Depending on how managers ascribed meaning to the situation, this had an

effect in a positive or negative direction, with regard to how survivors make sense of the downsizing situation (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991):

> *Even our line manager was not happy because it had an effect on the running of the office. It seemed to me that he did not agree with it and was looking for an explanation as to why they were doing it. That was a strange feeling, because usually he is the guy who keeps control of the situation. (3, 26-29)*

Hope (2010, p.213) argued, that managers play an important role in times of downsizing, and the way they act "can either be convergent and hence support the change goals, or be divergent, meaning moving in a different direction compared with the plans". The views collected support this, since some managers who usually served as a major resource and anchor point for the survivors, were puzzled and could neither make sense for themselves nor give sense to the others (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). As a consequence, survivors felt irritated, and interpreted managers' divergence as a signal that the downsizing must be detrimental, because usually, their superiors had constructed stories, which enabled them to make sense of uncertain situations (Weick, 1995; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007).

However, as illustrated earlier in this study (e.g. sub-section 5.1.8), managers partially had to fulfil a difficult and challenging role which combined two functions, namely those of the 'sensemaker' and those of the 'sensegiver' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Responses of surviving managers revealed that they were very often left alone by their superiors and had to construct their own meaning, in order to understand the situation. The difficulty consisted of the fact that they had to mediate the sensemaking process between top management and their subordinates. In that case, they had to provide an appropriate version for the purpose of the downsizing in order to allow that survivors

could make sense of the situation and the environment in which they found themselves (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). However, even though surviving managers could give sense to their surviving team, the findings showed that it was almost impossible to influence the meaning construction of their bosses, in an attempt to change their idea about need and scope of the downsizing and how to facilitate it for those involved. Hope (2010, p.213) argued, that "those who are able to exert the power of process are able to have an influence over other people's meaning construction". However, the present research, suggested, that surviving managers were relatively powerless (see also previous discussion in sub-section 5.2.4 about enactment) in terms of the impact they had on their superiors, and the negotiation process, where the sensegiver tries to impact the sense of the others, did not take place (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007).

The interviews further revealed that surviving managers' sensegiving was not always consistent with survivors' sensemaking. Based on the messages which they had provided to the survivors, the managers' assumption was that they should appreciate the fact that they have a job and have survived. However, very often this was not the case, and surviving managers were slightly perplexed when they were confronted with survivors' reactions:

> *My expectation was that people would appreciate having survived, and that has not been true. I think my expectation was that people would feel really glad to have a job and really improve their performance. And that has not been the case. (6, 449-451)*

Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, and Humphries (1999) argued that although leaders typically assume that the sensemaking of change recipients corresponds with their sensegiving, the reality is, that there are differences in how these groups attach meaning to a situation. This results from the fact, that change recipients not only make

sense of their situation based on leaders' sensegiving, but also additionally from other signals within their environment, which they consider as relevant for their interpretation. In particular, when change recipients' sensemaking is characterized by personal threat, it is unlikely that they respond to the change in a way the leaders would expect from them (Bartunek et al., 1999). The present findings support that argument, since survivors' sensemaking was most likely to be influenced by other factors such as managers' skills and their incompetence which served them as a sign of how to ascribe meaning to the downsizing scenario. Thus, the sense survivors made, deviated, in some cases dramatically, from those of the managers. What managers considered as a strategic move to increase aspects of performance, survivors might have perceived as an unfavourable and personally harmful change, which hardly allowed them to make sense of it (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

Analysing surviving managers' reactions, the interviews revealed another interesting finding with regard to the importance of sensegiving. Responses of some surviving managers indicated that their attempt to give sense to the survivors also had an influence on their own sensemaking about the situation. The more they engaged in the process of sensegiving, by trying to sell their vision of the change to the survivors, the more thoughtful and reflective they became, starting to search for a sensible meaning for themselves. However, this might have been foreseeable "since the ways in which we speak will always inform our understandings of our own beliefs and positions" (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007, p.18):

> *I met with my people on a regular basis, usually once a week, and we had some discussions about the downsizing, but the more we talked about it the more it made me question whether this was really the right thing to do. (6, 599-601)*

294

5.3 A proposed theoretical model about survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing

Sensemaking is a process that is needed "for organizational members to understand and to share understandings about such features of the organization as: what is it about, what it does well and poorly, what the problems it faces are, and how it should resolve them" (Feldman, 1989, p.19 cited by Weick, 1995, p.5). The above discussion showed that survivors' sensemaking was influenced by many factors that each had a favourable or an unfavourable influence on the way they interpreted and responded to the situation post-downsizing. Based on the main findings a theoretical model is proposed (see Figure 10). Unlike the few existing models of survivors' reactions to downsizing, which have a rather linear or static character (see previous discussion in sub-section 3.1.1 and 3.1.2), the model proposed describes survivors' sensemaking as an ongoing process with the aim of providing a more holistic view about how meaning is constructed post-downsizing. In the following section, this model will be illustrated.

The model suggests that survivors' sensemaking process is influenced by seven factors. On the right-hand side there are factors that were found to have an unfavourable impact on survivors' sensemaking and thereby caused predominately negative reactions (as indicated by red arrows). These factors include: "Managerial enactment (F1)", "Environmental cues (F2)" and "The passing of time/ survivors' retrospective views (F3)". On the left-hand side there are factors that were identified as having a favourable effect on survivors' sensemaking and thereby caused predominately positive responses (as indicated by blue arrows). These factors include: "Social and supportive environment (F5)" and "Line managers' sensemaking/ sensegiving (F6)". The model also shows factors that were found to have a favourable

influence on the sensemaking and the responses of some survivors and an unfavourable influence on the sensemaking and the responses of others. These factors include: "Economic situation/ organization type (F4)" and "Survivors' age/ financial situation (F7)". Since the previous discussion had shown that survivors' sensemaking was predominately influenced by factors that had an unfavourable impact on them factors F1-F3 in the diagram will be explained first.
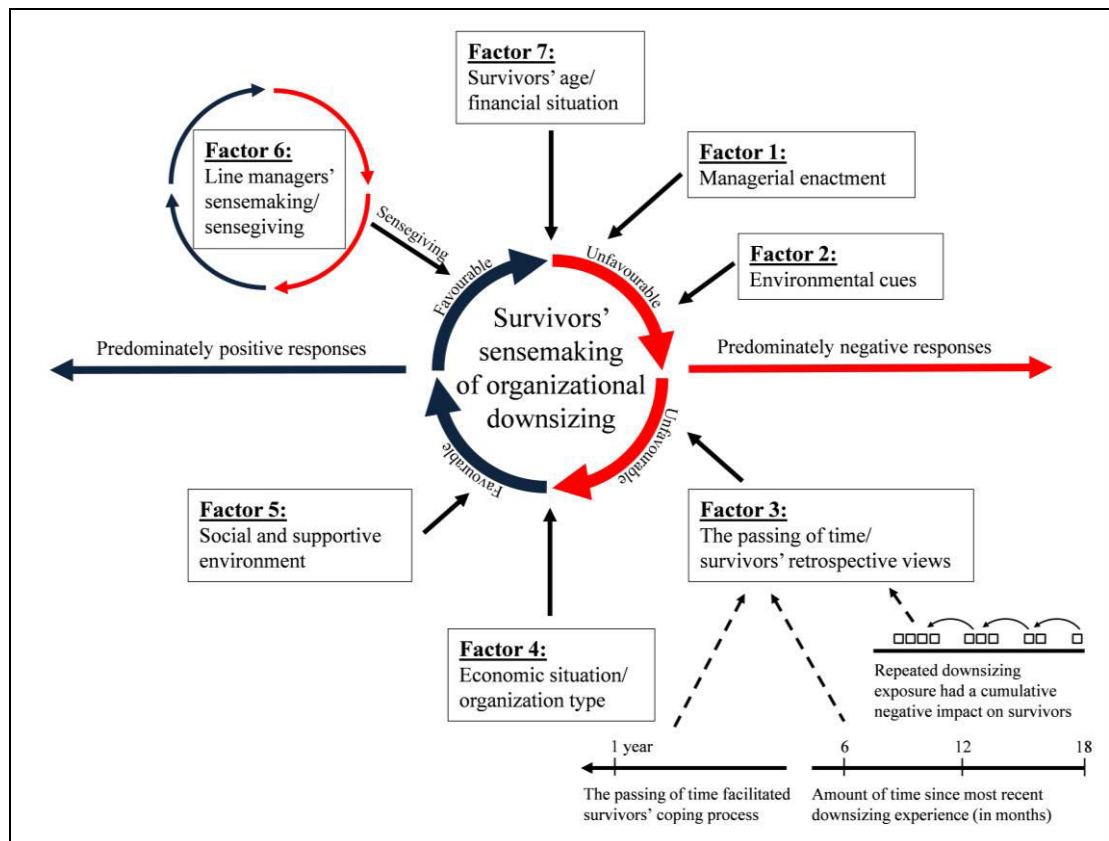

Figure 10: Proposed theoretical model about survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing

5.3.1 Factor 1: Managerial enactment

Enactment is concerned with the question of how reality is constructed (Sloyan, 2009). In organizational life people often enact a sensible environment, and this environment then constrains their action (Weick, 1995). The previous debate (see discussion in sub-section 5.2.4 about the enactment of sensible environments) highlighted the fact that in the course of downsizing the organization and its management had enacted a new

situation with structures and responsibilities which were not in place before and with which survivors were not familiar. However, in many cases the managers created an environment in which they underestimated the severity of survivors' reactions. Many of the survivors perceived a loss of identity when they had to deal with new roles and functions, and they struggled with the question of how they fitted into the new structures imposed on them. The new reality survivors had to deal with in the time post-downsizing was deviating from their notions of how an organization should function (e.g. that changes should be aligned with employees' needs) (see sub-section 5.2.2 about identity construction). This caused a lot of resentment among the survivors and thereby hindered them from making positive sense of what had been enacted by their superiors.

The foregoing discussion (see sub-section 5.1.8 about management behaviour) also revealed that the vast majority of the survivors complained about the incompetent management and about how decisions were made in the post-downsizing period. They were angry about the fact that they were not involved in making decisions about shaping the future of the organization. Unsurprisingly, they could not attach a positive meaning to the managerial action since they were not allowed to contribute to the changes even though the organization could have benefitted from their longstanding experience.

Moreover, many of the survivors considered the decision to downsize as illogical and implausible, since the organization could have saved money in other ways than with downsizing. Survivors found it particularly difficult to make sense of their managers' enactment with regard to the need and purpose for the downsizing when the business situation and financial figures had not significantly improved after the downsizing.

This, in turn, led to a reduction of trust and diminution of survivors' commitment.

The above discussion (see sub-section 5.1.8) also revealed that the majority of the survivors were angry about the fact that people had to leave even though staff were needed to manage the daily work post-downsizing. The findings suggest that survivors were suffering from a lack of procedural justice since they were complaining about which staff were being let go. In particular, when the survivors had to absorb the tasks of the leavers this not only led to work-related stress but reignited their emotions and increased their negative sensemaking with regard to the superiors' managing capabilities post-downsizing.

It was found that managers predominately failed to provide sufficient support for their surviving employees, which, in turn, led to a lot of resentment and unfavourable sensemaking among the majority of the survivors. The findings pointed out that most of the managers, and in particular those at middle and upper management levels, made no attempt to support their survivors with regard to how to manage their new roles and tasks, nor did they provide them with any mental assistance in coping with their emotional pains. The findings suggest that the managers considered the survivors mainly as a workforce rather than as sensitive human beings. Thus, the managers' sensemaking seemed to be opposed to those of the survivors, who believed themselves to be valuable assets of the organization in which the management should be socially supportive and should take care of them.

Although in some cases the managers attempted to persuade the survivors of the potential benefits related to downsizing, albeit with the intention of getting them back to work so that upper management could achieve their targets (see sub-section 5.2.8

about plausible stories), the majority of survivors criticized their managers' behaviour and blamed them for not having sufficient discussions with them. This increased their uncertainty and made them concerned about their future in the organization. The interviews revealed that survivors felt perplexed and left alone when they received information from the media or company newsletters instead of personally from the managers. Survivors struggled to understand why the management acted reluctantly in terms of management communication (see sub-section 5.1.8). Therefore, it was not only a lack of communication but also the lack of explanations as to why the managers behaved the way they did that annoyed survivors and made positive sensemaking difficult. This raises the following questions: what was the purpose of the managers' behaviour, and why did the managers fail to give sense in terms of managerial communication to the survivors?

The questions surrounding such behaviour lead back to the work of Chris Argyris (see earlier discussion in sub-section 3.2.4.7) and his studies in the field of organizational research. According to Argyris (1986) many organizations and managers in senior positions may not want to enter into discussions with their staff because they wish to obscure a certain behaviour, or in other words, they wish to hide the contradictions in their actions.

In the case of the present research, survivors may have experienced such behaviour when they uncovered implausible propositions in the managerial sensegiving. They may have discovered a mismatch between what managers claimed to do and what they actually did. Examples of such contradiction include: managers announcing greater efficiency as part of organizational downsizing but then requiring the lower-graded employees to enact it and deal with the higher workload, and managers promising that

the downsizing would not affect survivors' hierarchical status but then survivors were downgraded or suffered a salary cut (see sub-section 5.2.5 about the social aspects of sensemaking). These are just a few examples of mixed messages that led to confusion because managerial actions did not correspond with what they had promised to the survivors. As the managers' actions were vague and ambiguous it was hindering rather than facilitating survivors' sensemaking towards an understanding of the situation.

Even though the managers may have been aware of their contradictory behaviour they did not want to discuss it, since any additional discussion could have made their situation worse because survivors probably would have confronted them with difficult questions about their actions and false promises. Survivors' responses (as discussed in the previous sub-sections) left no doubt that they would have bombarded the managers with questions about illogical or ambiguous decisions and the inconsistency within their messages. As a consequence, it is most likely that survivors would have revealed that the management was not competent in managing the downsizing and leading the organization through this scenario. To avoid that conflict and to save face managers deliberately maintained distance and undiscussability (Argyris, 1986). This also applied when some of the survivors tried to challenge their managers with regard to how the increased workload could be managed with fewer people. In that case survivors feared that they themselves would be dismissed (see sub-section 5.1.1) due to their managers' reluctance to discuss their behaviour or allow anyone to question their authority (see quote below). Managers tried to draw a veil of silence over the downsizing and their behaviour and were reluctant to enter into any discussion which would pose the risk of threat and embarrassment:

But it was even more difficult to discuss some of the issues with senior managers, because I did not actually get the opportunity to talk to them. They probably rarely want to talk to people at my level. And we also felt that if there was any implied criticism of them, you know, we wouldn't want to mention it because you do not want to be seen as criticizing your senior managers. If you do not think they have handled the situation entirely well then you might be reluctant to point that out.
(12, 150-156)

However, the fact that the management maintained its distance and did not want to enter into discussions with survivors fuelled their emotional reactions even more and increased feelings of uncertainty and insecurity (see sub-section 5.1.1). In other words, management behaviour created a barrier to sensemaking and thereby hindered the survivors from attaching a positive meaning to managerial action and to how they were treated in terms of communication.

5.3.2   Factor 2: Environmental cues

Cues are defined as "simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995, p.50). In other words, cues provide people with a point of reference, helping them to clarify such questions as where they are, or what they can expect (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010).

The findings discussed in the previous sub-sections (e.g. sub-section 5.2.7) demonstrate that as a result of the uncertain situation that had been enacted by the management (see also discussion above) many survivors increasingly engaged in searching their environment for relevant cues and drew on various elements to satisfy their need for information in an attempt to make more sense of what was going on around them.

Survivors looked for signals associated with the organization's business success in terms of order intake and turnover (see sub-section 5.2.3) in order to find out how the situation may turn out. In addition, they drew on discussions with their colleagues as such conversations provided them with opportunities to share experiences and thereby gain more information about what was going on in the downsized organization (see sub-section 5.1.5 and 5.3.5). Survivors searched for cues that might be familiar to them based on their prior downsizing experience and that would provide them with guidance in interpreting the present situation (see sub-section 5.1.7 and 5.3.7). Moreover, in an act of desperation survivors also listened to the gossip and information from the office rumour mill in order to discover whatever news they could find (see sub-section 5.1.8 and 5.2.7). Thus, they left no stone unturned in searching their environment for cues that would help them achieve a better understanding and thereby compensate for the lack of management engagement with regard to communication.

However, survivors' responses indicated (see sub-section 5.2.7) that the news gathered from unofficial sources (e.g. from the rumour mill) very often did not lead to more certainty (e.g. about their employment continuity) but, rather, caused additional confusion. This was primarily because the unofficial information consisted of vague and contradicting elements that seemed to overwhelm the survivors instead of providing them with an orientation point from which to develop a larger sense of what may be happening around them (Weick, 1995). Thus, to avoid forcing survivors to draw their sense from cues which may either confuse or mislead them it would be desirable for managers to provide their surviving subordinates with clear and reliable information on a regular basis (see also sub-section 5.3.6 for further discussion).

5.3.3 Factor 3: The passing of time/ survivors' retrospective views

The findings revealed that the passing of time was a factor that generally helped survivors in coping with their negative experiences from downsizing and enabled them to attach a more positive meaning to their situation (see sub-section 5.1.5). Many of the survivors were very upset immediately after a downsizing experience but after a while they became less angry towards the organization and its management, indicating that they have, at least partially, accepted the changes they had to deal with. Moreover, it was found that a break from work (e.g. holidays or maternity leave) had a favourable effect on survivors' sensemaking, as it provided them with an opportunity for reflection and recovery. The interview material revealed that it took around one year post-downsizing for survivors to feel better and experience a change in their reactions.

However, the findings left no doubt (see sub-section 5.1.5) that the effects of downsizing on survivors are toxic and long-lasting (Noer, 2009), as there was no evidence found that survivors had forgotten the circumstances and how they were treated after time had passed. This claim is supported by the fact that the vast majority of survivors who had most recently been exposed to downsizing 18 months previously still reported a lack of organizational commitment and managerial trust. Thus, the findings do not concur with the assertions of Nicholson and West (1988) and Allen et al. (2001) that experiences from downsizing are of a short duration and that survivors' attitudes may return to their initial state after a certain amount of time has passed.

The findings (see sub-section 5.2.3) also showed that retrospection played an important role in the process of sensemaking and influenced how reality was constructed post-downsizing. The interview material indicated that when survivors reflected on their experiences with previous downsizings this had an impact on the way

they made sense of, and responded to, more recent ones. As the majority of survivors' experience was with failed downsizing and restructuring initiatives they feared that they might have to go through the same negative experiences again. For instance, they worried that their working conditions might decline in the period post-downsizing (e.g. with increased workload) or that managers may not sufficiently support them and attend to their problems. Survivors' responses clearly suggest that their present sensemaking was based on unpleasant memories associated with previous downsizing exercises. Those events remained in their minds and thereby had a strong influence on the ways in which they ascribed meaning to a present or impending downsizing.

The interview material (see sub-section 5.1.7 and 5.2.3) also indicated that repeated downsizing exposure had a cumulative negative effect on survivors' well-being. This study, therefore, contradicts previous, mainly North American, studies, such those of Greenhalgh and Jick (1989) or Chreim (2006), which had indicated that multiple downsizing experiences strengthen survivors in becoming inured to its effects. In particular, those survivors who had experienced three to four previous downsizings reported that the more downsizings they experienced the less able they found themselves to recover quickly from it; this indicated that multiple downsizing exposures had weakened their coping resources over time (Moore et al., 2004). The findings revealed that the downsizing announcement itself was always perceived as a tremendous shock by several of the survivors, as it threatened their pattern of stability (in terms of having a safe job) again and again (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010). This was found to cause a lot of uncertainty and, thereby, intensified feelings of stress.

Although the interview findings indicated that the passing of time helped the survivors to heal their wounds (Noer, 2009) and to update their sense of reality; the fact that

many survivors expressed feelings of exhaustion and reported difficulties in getting over their negative experiences from downsizing is a strong indication that the exposure to repeated waves of downsizing has made them more vulnerable instead of more resilient (Moore et al., 2006).

5.3.4 Factor 4: Economic situation/ organization type

The previous discussion (see sub-section 5.1.1) indicated that the economic situation seemed to influence survivors' sensemaking processes. It was found that survivors from the UK suffered more from their downsizing experiences and the prevailing insecurity than their colleagues from Germany and Switzerland. Survivors' responses suggest that the general economic situation, and in particular the higher unemployment rate in the UK (September 2012, according to Arbeitslosenquoten, 2014), increased UK-based survivors' feelings of insecurity since they may not have found an employment opportunity elsewhere in the country if they were made redundant in a future round of headcount reduction. Moreover, the fact that the UK unions are less powerful than their German or Swiss counterparts with regard to negotiating a good deal for employees may have caused more fearful responses among the survivors from the UK (Cunningham, 2011). In addition, the UK government is less likely to provide as good social security arrangements (e.g. social benefits) to unemployed people as would the German and Swiss governments (Your rights country by country, 2015). Bearing these factors in mind it is unsurprising that UK survivors expressed more feelings of uncertainty and reported more difficulties in making sense of their survival compared with their colleagues from Germany and Switzerland. Consequently, they responded with more resentment against their managers and the people whom they considered responsible for the downsizing. The fact that the German and Swiss economies recovered faster than the British economy from the recent financial crisis,

and thereby provided survivors from these countries with more future opportunities, may explain why these survivors could attach a more positive meaning to their situation and were less concerned about what was coming next.

The previous debate (see sub-section 5.1.9) indicated that survivors' sensemaking also seemed to differ between survivors working for a public-sector organization and those working for a private-sector organization. Survivors working for a public-sector organization, such as a governmental institution or public authority, could hardly make sense of their survival and struggled more to understand the purpose of the downsizing than those working in the private sector. They felt more uncertain than their colleagues from private-sector organizations and responded with a lot of anger towards the organization when they had to deal with the after-effects of organizational downsizing. As many of them admitted that their jobs in the public sector had been a safe harbour over the years this provides an indication that the downsizing may have threatened a higher-level plan, namely, their aim to have life-long employment. In other words, the downsizing may have interrupted an ongoing flow for this group of survivors and thereby led to more intense negative emotional reactions. By contrast, survivors working for a private-sector organization (e.g. within the machining industry) were less hostile and could ascribe a more positive meaning to their situation and to what had been enacted by the management. This suggests that they were more prepared, since downsizing and restructuring is more common in their branches of work.

5.3.5 Factor 5: Social and supportive environment

The previous debate (see sub-section 5.1.5) also highlighted the fact that a supportive environment had a favourable influence on survivors' responses and contributed to their sensemaking effort. It was found that when survivors could rely on their families

or received support from their colleagues this mitigated their fearful emotions and concerns about how the situation would turn out. It was found that when survivors received support from their colleagues at work this enhanced their morale and helped them to better deal with the stress and strains that appeared in the post-downsizing period. Many of the survivors considered their immediate colleagues as important coping resources since they had gone through the situation with them, were treated in a similar way and felt similar emotions. For instance, one survivor mentioned that *"it is this sense of a shared conception of reality" (30, 189-190)* to highlight that they as team of survivors had collectively developed a similar understanding of their experience with downsizing since all of them had been exposed to it.

Survivors' responses revealed that they benefitted from conversations with their colleagues (see sub-section 5.1.5), which clearly indicated that sensemaking is a social process in which meaning is constructed in the presence of others (Weick, 1995). For instance, when survivors could share their work-related issues with their team mates or those who supported them in becoming familiar with new tasks this mitigated feelings of uncertainty and helped to make more sense of the new working environment that had been created by the organization and its management.

The previous discussion also showed that the majority of survivors considered their home and family life as an important coping resource in helping them relax and escape from the everyday work life. Survivors mentioned that they could rely on their families and appreciated their mental support, because they helped them cope better with the emotional pains associated with the experience of downsizing survival. Moreover, when survivors were encouraged by their partners thinking ahead instead of being overly upset this was found to have a positive effect on the survivors and their

responses, indicating once more that social support is indispensable in the post-downsizing period and has a significant influence on how reality is constructed.

5.3.6 Factor 6: Line managers' sensemaking/ sensegiving

In addition to the social support that survivors received from their family and friends (as discussed above), the line mangers were identified as a very powerful factor in the downsized environment since they could influence survivors' meaning construction and their responses in a positive manner (see sub-section 5.1.5 and 5.2.9). In other words, they were successful in giving sense to their subordinate staff. Although it was found that management action with regard to help and advice was perceived almost entirely as being poor by the survivors (see sub-section 5.3.1) they nevertheless considered their direct superiors as important resources which helped them to better cope with the situation.

Survivors' responses indicated that active support provided by their superiors contributed to returning survivors' trust with regard to managerial action and thereby enhanced their sensemaking process in a favourable way (see sub-section 5.1.8). In particular, when the managers facilitated survivors' mental transitions (e.g. attended to their negative feelings and emotions through discussion and counselling) and guided their physical changes (e.g. helped them in managing their new roles and dealing with increased workloads) this had a constructive effect on the survivors and mitigated their negative responses. Moreover, it helped to regain survivors' morale and gave them a more positive attitude towards work.

The findings also showed that when the line managers provided survivors with plausible arguments (see sub-section 5.2.8) about the positive aspects of the changes

308

initiated (e.g. the possibility for personal development) and why they are necessary (e.g. economic crisis) this had a favourable effect on their responses and enhanced their sensemaking capability. In those cases, the survivors may not only have developed an understanding of the reasons for the downsizing and the reduction of human capital costs but they could also identify with certain elements and see the personal benefits. Consequently, they could make more sense of their situation post-downsizing and attached a more positive meaning to the organizational changes and the need for them.

Moreover, when the line managers expressed themselves with positive emotions, such as enthusiasm, and were committed to translating upper managements' orders into action this had a favourable influence on survivors' attitudes (such as on their motivation) (see sub-section 5.2.6). This suggests that these emotions may have acted as a sensegiving resource (Maitlis and Sonenshein, 2010) and thereby enabled the survivors to ascribe a more positive meaning to the changes.

It was found that survivors probably benefitted the most when their line managers kept them continuously informed about the next steps (see sub-section 5.1.10). In those cases, they were less likely to engage in alternative sensemaking, such as searching their environments for cues that could have been misleading, as discussed above; rather, they could draw their sense from the information provided by the line manager in order to understand the situation more accurately. In other words, the information from their line managers served them as a reference point to help them develop a larger sense of what may be occurring (Weick, 1995). This had a favourable effect on survivors' emotions and their well-being as it mitigated feelings of uncertainty and insecurity and thereby also reduced the perceived level of work-related stress that was

identified as a serious issue impacting survivors' health (see sub-section 5.1.4 about health and well-being). Moreover, it contributed positively to their attitudes (e.g. improving their commitment and their morale) and the ways in which they performed their work in the post-downsizing period.

However, the previous discussion (see sub-section 5.2.9) underscored the fact that the line managers had to perform a challenging job in the post-downsizing period because they not only had to give sense to their subordinates, as discussed above, but they also had to make sense of the new situation themselves. So, they were both sensegiver and sensemaker at the same time. This was found to be difficult sometimes, and responses from participating line managers revealed that they often felt left alone in their positions and hence had to develop their own meaning about what was going on around them and how they should respond to it.

Line managers' responses indicated that they got almost no support from their superiors. The interview findings revealed that they were neither instructed on how to deal with their surviving employees (e.g. in terms of how to deal with mental or work-related issues) nor did they receive any kind of motivational encouragement which would have helped them attach a more positive meaning to the situation. Line managers admitted that they largely drew on their practical experience or managed their subordinates based on intuition. Moreover, the findings revealed that many of the line managers felt relatively powerless with regard to influencing the meaning construction and decisions of the upper management. Line managers reported having little autonomy and could not make significant changes in areas such as work-related processes and procedures even though they wished to do so. They felt "stuck in the middle" (DeWitt et al. (2003, p.32), yet they had to mediate the meaning-making

between upper management and staff.

Although surviving line managers were not the ones who had introduced the downsizing they, like the surviving staff, needed to enact the post-downsizing environment with all the challenges associated with it. Thus, they were more change recipients than change agents. In other words, the line managers were mainly used as managerial instruments and had to carry out the changes according to the orders of upper management. This underscores once more the difficulty of being a line manager in times of organizational downsizing and supports the argument that this group of managers are simply not in the hierarchical position to exert sufficient influence on the situation.

The findings also showed that line managers had to cope with their own emotions since they, too, had been exposed to the prevailing uncertainty and could also have become target of the current round of headcount reduction. Thus, they had "to cope with the double burden of their own emotional reactions and those of their subordinates" (De Vries and Balazs, 1997, p.17) (see sub-section 5.1.8). This is another reason why line managers so often struggled to deal with the situation and could neither make appropriate sense for themselves nor give sense to their surviving teams.

5.3.7 Factor 7: Survivors' age/ financial situation

The findings revealed (see sub-section 5.1.5) that survivors' ages had an influence on their sensemaking processes and on how they dealt with their downsizing situations. The findings indicate that older survivors, and in particular those close to retirement, could rely on strategies for coping with stress and other mechanisms that they had

already applied to successfully manage a downsizing scenario in the past. This had a favourable effect on their emotional responses and contributed positively to their sensemaking since they had a notion of how the process would work and how they could deal with it in the best way possible. However, the fact that this group of older survivors, or so called "veterans" (Clair and Dufresne, 2004), were almost at the end of their working lives have certainly also influenced their meaning construction and their ways of coping with the downsizing event. They may have been aware that they just had to work a few years more until retirement and therefore did not become too stressed and stayed more calm when experiencing the most recent redundancy programme.

The findings (see sub-section 5.1.5) also showed that survivors with financial commitments, such as a mortgage, expressed more negative emotions, such as fear or bitterness, than those ones without financial commitments. Survivors with financial responsibilities struggled to attach a positive meaning to their situation and suffered from the prevailing insecurity since they were more dependent on their job compared with their colleagues with no financial responsibilities. In particular, when survivors were in the position of the bread winner and had to raise small children they were very concerned about what their financial situation would be if they were dismissed in a further wave of redundancy and consequently would not have a regular income any longer. Their sensemaking seemed to be almost entirely dominated by fears of the future since their entire lives relied on their jobs.

6   Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes and concludes the outcomes from the present research project. This involves a discussion about the research findings and how they answer the research questions of this study. Moreover, it will illustrate how the outcomes of this PhD thesis contribute to the existing literature about downsizing survivors, as well as how they add new knowledge to the business practice in downsized organizations. Finally, the research limitations of this research will be discussed, and recommendations for future research will be given.

6.1   Summary of the key research findings and how they relate to the research questions

The findings of this study were presented in chapter five. This included a discussion of the themes in light of previous research (section 5.1) and through the lens of sensemaking theory (section 5.2). This section will summarize these findings and how they address the initial research questions of this research project. The research questions of this study included:

1. What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?

2. Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?

3. In which ways does management action affect survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing?

6.1.1   Key findings related to the reactions displayed by survivors

The first research question sought to explore the different reactions of survivors post-downsizing. Earlier studies such as Brockner et al. (2004) or Weiss (2004) reported a wide range of unfavourable attitudes and behaviours, which survivors showed in the

aftermath of organizational downsizing. The outcomes of this study provide further evidence for these reactions and revealed that downsizing negatively influenced survivors' emotions, their attitudes and behaviours, but also their health and well-being. This sub-section will summarize these findings in relation to the first research question.

Although the majority of survivors were glad about having survived the downsizing and showed feelings of relief, their experiences were predominately of a negative nature. They were suffering from downsizing and felt personally harmed by it. In this context, their anger was mainly directed towards the management since they were considered as the causer and being responsible for it. Moreover, the findings provide a strong indication that the downsizing had interrupted an ongoing flow in terms of survivors' working routine and hence provoked negative emotions, which in turn derailed their sensemaking (Weick, 1995).

A large group of survivors also reported a lack of recognition and felt undervalued by the organization, which suggests that the managers may have just treated them as a resource and not as a valuable asset, who deserves appreciation (Amundson et al., 2004). Besides that, the interviews revealed that survivors showed a high degree of insecurity, which in turn caused worries about their financial situation, should lose their job subsequently. Interestingly, it was found that UK survivors worried more about their financial situation than survivors from the German speaking area. The concerns among the UK survivors, however, were unsurprising since the UK unemployment rate (September 2012, according Arbeitslosenquoten, 2014) is considerably higher than that of Germany or Switzerland, and for this reason survivors from the UK might have worried more about losing their jobs. Moreover, the UK

government may not provide as much social benefits to unemployed people as it might the German and the Swiss government do (Your rights country by country, 2015). This concern may also have increased the fears of a potential job loss among the UK survivors.

Aside from that the findings further indicated that participants working for public-sector organizations suffered more from the negative effects of downsizing than survivors who worked in private-sector organizations. This suggested that survivors working for a public-sector institution may have thought of having a "cradle-to-grave employment opportunity" (West, 2000, p.8), but did not consider that times have changed and even the public sector is faced with cost cutting initiatives and organizational downsizing.

Survivors' responses further indicated that, the way they were in relationship with the victims had an influence on their feelings. In this context, it was found that emotional reactions such as survivor guilt increased as a function of survivors' relationship to the ones dismissed, suggesting that downsizing harms employees not only directly, but also influences their feelings indirectly negatively, in particular when they witness the dismissal of a colleague (Shah, 2000). By contrast, however, there were some survivors who noted that they were glad about the fact that some people were made redundant. This included mainly surviving managers who found that some employees were low performers, but also a few survivors, on staff level, who felt positive about the dismissal of some people, since they did not like them in particular. Thus, the downsizing not only caused negative emotions, but also led to positive reactions, since the sudden and unexpected dismissal of those people implied the removal of an interruption, which had been a longstanding issue and a thorn in the side of survivors.

Besides emotional reactions, the interview responses further revealed that survivors experienced a change in their attitudes to work. The analysis pointed out that many survivors perceived a decrease in their commitment and felt less attached to the organization. Thus the present findings support earlier studies (e.g. Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001) which reported the view that, as a consequence of downsizing, survivors' perception of affective commitment and their desire to work has been harmed and that they are less willing to identify or be involved in the organization anymore. The findings also showed that the organizations' procedures, and how abruptly and rigorously the downsizing was conducted, led to feelings of mistrust amongst many survivors. This was found to result mainly from the fact that the downsizing was more imposed on, rather than discussed with survivors, which in turn impeded them from making appropriate sense of the management action.

Moreover, the interviews indicated that the ongoing insecurity caused different behavioural changes among the survivors. In some cases, for instance, it led to a passive and risk averse behaviour where survivors were more careful in dealing with the management, since they feared losing their job in the next round of downsizing. However, another group of survivors argued that they worked harder than before in order to reduce the risk of dismissal. Although previous research (Bommer and Jalajas, 1999) emphasized that such an increase in work performance does not last, and is neither beneficial for the organization nor for the individual, the findings suggest that at all costs survivors tried to keep their job, since they felt insecure and were therefore motivated by fear.

The interviews also revealed several work-related changes with which survivors had to deal post-downsizing and which required them to adjust their behaviour. The vast

majority of the survivors complained about the imbalance between workload and workforce, since they had to absorb additional tasks from their former colleagues besides doing their daily business. A small group of other survivors described that their work content changed unfavourably and that they had to deal with tasks they did not really like. Others again were angry about the insufficient infrastructure, such as technical equipment, which was not working properly and hindered their workflow. In the context of sensemaking theory, the findings therefore suggest that survivors could not identify with certain elements of the change (Weick, 1995), since they were not consistent with their notion of how the change outcome should be. This, in turn, hindered them from making appropriate sense of the situation and arriving at a common understanding about the need for, and purpose of, the downsizing.

However, there were also some survivors who considered the downsizing as an opportunity to learn new skills and to move on. The fact that people had left and gaps occurred, provided a chance for these survivors to step up and to improve their career status and to explore new job mobility and challenges. This however indicates that the downsizing also had some positive influence on survivors' sensemaking as they could identify with certain aspects resulting from it and could for instance achieve a desired career move.

Besides attitudinal and behavioural changes, the interviews revealed that the downsizing also influenced survivors' health and well-being in a negative way. In that context, work-related or occupational stress was identified as a major issue impacting the survivors. This form of stress was mainly caused by the fact that survivors were obliged to pick up the additional work from their former colleagues, which overstrained them and produced stress. However, stress was also caused by insufficient

information and continuing uncertainty about the future, which is of note and indicates that stress not only arises from additional job duties but also from emotional strains (Levitt et al., 2008).

6.1.2   Key findings related to the changes in survivors' reactions

This sub-section will present the key findings associated with the second research question and how survivors' reactions changed over time. As most of the previous research examined survivors' attitudes and behaviours based on a cross-sectional approach at a single point in time (e.g. Amundson et al., 2004) and only a limited number of studies investigated the longitudinal effects over time (see section 2.5 and sub-section 3.2.4.2), the present research project makes an attempt to contribute to knowledge by answering this research question and uncover how survivors' reactions changes over time.

The findings revealed that the passing of time helped survivors the most in coping with the situation and influenced their behaviour and emotional states in a positive way. Interview responses indicated that many survivors were bitter and upset at the beginning post-downsizing, but a after a while they accepted the changes and showed more balanced reactions towards the downsizing and were less hostile about the management. It was found that it took around one year post-downsizing for survivors to feel better and experience a change in their reactions. Several survivors mentioned that a break such as holidays or maternity leave had a favourable influence on them, since they could stand back and think about it.

However, the findings did not show any indication that survivors had forgotten what was done to them, and therefore they would not support the assertion from previous

studies (e.g. Nicholson and West, 1988; Allen et al., 2001) that survivors' attitudes might return to where they were pre-downsizing after a certain amount of time had passed. The fact that the vast majority of survivors who had experienced the most recent downsizing 18 months previously stated that they still did not feel fully committed to their work and they mistrusted their management clearly demonstrates that the side-effects from downsizing are toxic and persist over a long period of time (Kernan and Hanges, 2002; Arshad and Sparrow, 2010).

The findings also indicated that survivors' prior experiences with downsizing influenced their present sensemaking and, consequently, shaped their responses. As the majority of the participating survivors had bad experiences with downsizing this caused concerns about the outcomes (such as the work conditions) and led to reluctant behaviour in areas such as performing their daily work or dealing with their managers (see sub-section 5.1.7). In other words, survivors' reflections on the past did not provide them with a favourable stimulus and thereby hindered an attitudinal and behavioural change towards a positive direction.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that when a group of survivors had been exposed to three to four prior downsizings this had a negative impact on their well-being and led to an accumulation of stress. As survivors expressed feelings of exhaustion and reported increasing difficulty in recovering from their experiences with downsizing, this suggests that repeated downsizing experience had weakened their coping abilities over time (Moore et al., 2004). This, in turn, provided a strong indication that multiple downsizing exposures had not made survivors more resilient but, on the contrary, made them more vulnerable (Moore et al., 2006). Thus, the present findings contradict the statement from the North American management scholars Greenhalgh and Jick

(1989) and Chreim (2006) that repeated downsizing survival facilitates sensemaking and enables individuals to better deal with future ones.

In addition, of the survivors interviewed half of them described the aftermath of downsizing as a kind of emotional rollercoaster with ups and downs, wherein they perceived various changes in their emotions and experienced the dynamics of change with little consistency. A group of survivors for instance struggled, if it was the right decision to stay, or if they should have left instead. They felt a bit cheated of a potential career opportunity or the chance of pursuing other personal interests, since leavers were provided with a significant severance package and they got nothing instead.

Besides the passing time, the interviews revealed several other factors, which seemed to cause a change in survivors' reactions. Many survivors perceived their work routine as an important factor helping them to cope with the situation. It was found that, when survivors could focus on job-related tasks again, this increased their sense of control about the situation and thereby enhanced the ability to cope with the uncertainty, which was still predominant even several months after downsizing.

Summarizing the demographic differences, the findings showed that age and life experience impacted a survivor's ability to make sense of his or her situation over time. In particular, older survivors who were close to retirement reported that they became more patient and calmer over the years and had a less aggressive attitude towards organizational change compared to when they were young. Thus they could recover faster from the downsizing than younger ones who were just at the beginning of their career. Although these "veterans" (Clair and Dufresne, 2004) have experienced

several downsizings during their employment history, and thereby possibly developed a "thicker skin" (Moore et al., 2006), the fact that they were close to retirement also definitely had a favourable influence on the ways in which they made sense of, and responded to, the most recent downsizing. "Veterans" could attach a more positive meaning to the situation as they knew that they just had to do their job for a few years more in the company until they became pensioners and, therefore, it may not have been worth worrying too much about downsizing.

The findings indicated that a supportive environment, such as family, friends or colleagues, had a positive influence on survivors' reactions and thereby helped them in managing the situation over time. In discussions with their colleagues, survivors could make sense of their situation as a collective group, which helped them to calm down by achieving a shared understanding about how the situation was developing (Weick, 1995). Moreover, their family provided them with a familiar and safe environment, where they could relax and escape from the everyday work life and which spread encouragement in terms of not worrying too much, but thinking forward, instead.

6.1.3 Key findings related to management action and its influence on survivors' reactions

This sub-section will summarize the main findings of the present study related to the third research question and how management action affected survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing. Findings from previous research (see earlier discussion in section 2.6) provided evidence, that the management behaviour, and how employees were treated post-downsizing, have a major influence on survivors' reactions. However, for several reasons, which were discussed throughout this work, managers seemed not to learn from previous experience with organizational change and still

neglect survivors' needs in terms of assistance and support. The present study aimed to shed more light on this issue, by exploring the management action post-downsizing in more depth and thereby adding new knowledge to the existing literature about downsizing survival and the role of the management.

The findings revealed that management action, with regard to facilitating survivors' transition post-downsizing, was poor and the managers often failed to provide them with sufficient support. This affected survivors' reactions in various ways. Many of them considered the managers as not being competent in dealing with the situation after downsizing and in particular not with the emotional side of it. A large group of survivors mainly criticized the way in which decisions were made. They were angry about the autocratic management style, which in turn diminished their sense of feeling valued and useful.

It was found that survivors became enraged about the fact that they were not involved in decisions about shaping the future of the new department or organization. The majority of survivors' responses suggest that they were, neither empowered by the management to look for improvements, nor allowed to contribute to any kind of change at all. Thus, the findings underline the powerlessness of low-level employees (Brockner, 1992; Weick, 1995) in the aftermath of downsizing, since survivors were only the passive receivers of what has been enacted and not allowed to contribute to shape the future. This reduced their sense of belonging and led to a reduction of work motivation.

The interview findings further indicated that many survivors were resentful, since in retrospect, they considered the decision to downsize as not plausible and logical. They

stated that the organization could have saved the money in other ways than with downsizing. In particular, when the business situation did not improve afterwards and outcomes such as financial figures were not better than they were before the downsizing, this led to doubts and prevented survivors from making appropriate sense of the need and purpose for downsizing. Consequently, survivors lost part of their commitment. Moreover, the majority of survivors reacted with a lack of understanding of managers' decisions with regard to personnel cuts. Most of them were angry that people had to leave, even though they were needed in order to manage the daily work in the team. It was found that many of the respondents were particularly annoyed about the fact that shortly after downsizing, new people were hired and therefore the downsizing exercise did not follow a purpose and would have been actually needless.

Besides a lack of understanding of the managerial decision making, the interviews revealed that the majority of survivors criticized the process of communication in the aftermath of downsizing. Survivors mainly suffered from the fact that the management had not provided them with sufficient information about what was coming next. Even at a later stage, the way survivors were provided with information remained poor and managerial communication did not improve. As a result, this increased their sense of uncertainty and led to more mistrust towards the management.

Managements' action with regard to survivor support was found to be an important and critical element in the period post-downsizing (e.g. Reinardy, 2010), however the findings indicated that it was often neglected or not done properly by the people in charge. The vast majority of participating survivors reported that they got neither mental support in order to cope with their emotional pains caused by the negative experience of downsizing, nor were they assisted to manage their new tasks, which

they had to deal with since many of their colleagues were made redundant. The fact that no support was provided, increased the negative feelings among most of the survivors and they felt a kind of isolation and were generally left alone.

In the context of managerial support the study revealed an interesting finding since many survivors considered their immediate manager as a main coping resource who provided them with support and allowed them to rebuild their confidence. Although the support from middle and upper management was poor, survivors reported that their direct superior stood by them and encouraged them, which, as a result, influenced their attitude and behaviour in a favourable way. It was found that a good relationship with the direct manager enhanced survivors' coping ability and reduced the extent of negative feelings, which in turn led to a faster recovery. Moreover, the majority of survivors reported that they could rely on their line managers on a continuous basis, since they were on hand with help and advice for them in every phase post-downsizing.

However, the findings also indicated that many of the surviving managers had to deal with their own emotions, since they felt threatened and could have been target of downsizing as well. Moreover, the fact that almost none of them had received any kind of support from their manager in dealing with the survivors also had an impact on their reactions and evoked some concerns about whether they had acted appropriately in supporting their surviving workforce after downsizing. Thus in retrospect, some of the managers struggled in making sense of their action and how they had treated the survivors.

6.2 Research contributions

An important requirement of any research project is to make an original contribution to knowledge. This means that something which is considered as significant and valuable is added to the discipline in which the research is being conducted (Remenyi et al., 1998). This includes theoretical contributions as well as managerial contributions. In this section, it will be illustrated how the present study contributes to the theoretical debate about downsizing survivors as well as how this work adds new knowledge to the management practice in downsized organizations.

6.2.1 Contribution to the theoretical debate

A new contribution to theory was made by employing the concept of sensemaking as a theoretical lens through which to study survivors' experiences. While earlier studies mainly used transition models (e.g. Reinardy, 2010) or organizational justice theories (e.g. Saunders and Thornhill, 2003) to examine survivors' experiences of organizational downsizing this research was aimed at getting a fresh perspective by focusing on the work of Weick (1995) and on how survivors make sense of downsizing occurrences and the events resulting from them. Although the concept of sensemaking had already been applied to the analysis of different scenarios of organizational change and restructuring (e.g. Helms-Mills, 2003; Bean and Hamilton, 2006), this study is the first one to operationalize this theory in its entirety (using all of its seven properties) for the purpose of exploring survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing. The application of sensemaking theory, and in particular these seven distinctive properties, provided a set of exploratory opportunities that enabled the researcher to study survivors' experiences from different perspectives and thereby gain in-depth knowledge about the meanings they ascribed to each specific situation and how this influenced their responses. In addition to the concept of

sensemaking sensegiving theory (e.g. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) was used in order to investigate the influence of other actors' roles in the post-downsizing environment on survivors' sensemaking. Thus, it is not only the unique application of this concept which contributes to the body of theoretical knowledge but also the outcomes that emerged from it since they add new value to the theoretical debate about downsizing survivors and how they make sense of their experiences. A detailed discussion of the findings with regard to sensemaking and sensegiving is provided in section 5.2.

A further contribution to existing knowledge was made in the form of a proposed model (see Figure 10 in section 5.3) that was developed based on the main findings with regard to survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing. This model depicts survivors' sensemaking as an ongoing process that is influenced by several environmental factors and that leads to different responses. It suggests that certain factors have a more unfavourable impact on survivors' sensemaking and thereby cause predominately negative responses, whereas other factors have a more favourable effect on survivors' meaning construction and thereby trigger predominately positive responses.

Although models of change (e.g. Lewin, 1947; Bridges, 2002) are well documented in the current literature models about survivors' reactions to downsizing, and in particular those focused on their sensemaking processes, are rare (see previous discussion in chapter 3) and seemed to overlook aspects that are important factors to consider in arriving at a thorough understanding of the issue. This limitation was addressed by the creation of the present model and thereby constitutes a significant intellectual contribution from this work. While the few studies available (see section 3.1) provided concepts about cause and effect of organizational downsizing (e.g. Brockner, 1988) or

made attempts to categorize survivors' responses into different archetypes (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998) they failed to sufficiently acknowledge that survivors' interpretations of, and responses to, a downsizing event cannot accurately be described as a linear or static process but, rather, needs to be understood as an iterative cycle where survivors' sense of reality is updated on a continuous basis and responses change accordingly.

Moreover, previous research (e.g. Weiss and Udris, 2001) did not give particular consideration to survivors' retrospection and their line managers' sensemaking in their models, though they have suggested that these factors may affect survivors' sensemaking processes. Thus, they missed out on the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive and holistic view about survivors' meaning construction, since the present findings clearly indicated that previous experiences with downsizing, as well as line managers' actions, had a strong influence on survivors' sensemaking and responses. The present model is a theoretical construct and therefore may not reflect the context-specific ways in which each individual's sensemaking occurs; however, it does add value to the existing literature by illustrating a new dimension of survivors' sensemaking of organizational downsizing and how this process is influenced by environmental factors.

A further contribution to theory relates to the timeframes during which survivors' experiences were investigated. Previous research (e.g. Knudsen et al., 2003) mainly focused on studying survivors' reactions at a single point in time and rarely examined how their attitudes and behaviours changed over time. Moreover, the few existing studies did not provide sufficient and entirely clear information about this issue, since one group of management scholars (e.g. Nicholson and West, 1988; Allen et al., 2001) reported that survivors' attitudes returned to where they were pre-downsizing, whereas

another group of researchers (e.g. Kernan and Hanges, 2002; Arshad and Sparrow, 2010) found that the negative effect of downsizing on survivors was visible over a long period of time. In addition, a significant number of previous, mainly North American, research (e.g. Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Chreim, 2006) concluded that repeated downsizing exposure makes survivors more resilient over time, whilst only a few other Northern American studies (e.g. Moore et al., 2004; 2006) reported that multiple downsizing experiences lead to more vulnerability and has a negative impact on survivors' well-being.

This research project made an attempt to shed more light on the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors by studying 30 survivors from different stages post-redundancy completion and with multiple downsizing experiences. As the interview findings revealed that survivors' attitudes were still negatively affected (in terms of a lack of organizational commitment and a lack of managerial trust) more than 18 months after they had experienced the most recent downsizing, this study adds value to the extant literature by demonstrating how long the toxic side-effects of downsizing last over time without necessarily turning into a stabilisation phase. With this regard, it was also found that survivors' downsizing histories and reflections on the past influenced how they interpreted present or impending downsizings. Due to the fact that survivors had predominately negative experiences with downsizing, they were fearful of having to go through the same unpleasant procedure as in previous downsizings, which again emphasizes that the effects from downsizing are persistent and of a long duration.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that repeated downsizing exposure led to an accumulation of perceived stress, associated with feelings of exhaustion, among

survivors who had experienced three to four downsizings and who were in the middle of their working lives. This provided clear indications that multiple downsizing experiences had reduced their mental coping resources over time and thereby impacted their health and well-being in an unfavourable way. Thus, these findings differ from the majority of the predominantly North American research (e.g. Greenhalgh and Jick, 1989; Beyer and Hannah, 2002; Chreim, 2006), as they showed that multiple downsizing exposures made survivors more vulnerable, instead of more resilient, over time. This knowledge, in turn, expands on the current debate about the long-term effects of downsizing on survivors and thereby contributes to the existing body of survivor research.

6.2.2   Contribution to management practice

Through the findings about how the downsizing was perceived by survivors and how this influenced their reactions, the present study not only contributes to theory (as discussed in the foregoing sub-section), but it also provides implications for business practice. Since survivors' reactions were predominately of a negative nature, the outcomes of this research are of particular importance for downsizing implementers who intend to carry out a redundancy programme. The present findings revealed several important aspects which should help them in dealing more adequately with the survivors in order to mitigate human suffering and improve performance after downsizing.

First and foremost it seems to be important that organizations develop a concept about how to deal with their surviving workforce post-downsizing. Unlike in the present findings, where survivor support was of only minor interest for the managers and more priority was given to the leavers (e.g. in terms of outplacement services), it is

recommended that organizations need to have a clear strategy in place about what needs to be done to facilitate survivors' change process post-downsizing.

The findings which emerged from this study provide convincing indications that organizations need to involve the survivors in shaping the organization. Encouraging them to actively contribute to the changes would be in the interest of the organization (for instance when survivors themselves, make suggestions for improvement), but it would also be favourable for the survivors themselves, since it would enhance their sense of belonging and positively influence their commitment. At the same time managers have to demonstrate that they value the effort which survivors have done over years as well as their willingness to do additional work in the upcoming time. While in the present study many survivors suffered a lack of recognition, organizations need to appreciate survivors' work either in the form of monetary or non-monetary benefits, as this would help to convey a sense of being valued and thereby enhance work motivation (Sahdev et al., 1999).

Managers should also assist the survivors more actively with regard to their future prospects since this was found to have an impact on their commitment and leaving intention. If organizations miss out from providing survivors with new challenges, or do not support them in exploring new career opportunities, their dissatisfaction with the job is most likely to increase and they may doubt if it was the right decision to stay. Considering that a significant number of participating survivors complained that their work content had changed, it is also suggested that managers should provide the survivors with retraining so that they are more able to deal with their new tasks successfully and perceive pleasure and not frustration by doing them.

However, managers have to pay attention so that survivors are not being overworked by the additional tasks they have to take over. To avoid survivors perceiving stress from role overload, the managers need to review the work in more detail with regard to scope and content and distribute it equally among the survivors. Moreover, the managers must be more sensitive with regard to survivors' behaviour, so that they are able to identify potential signs of stress in time (Mishra and Spreitzer, 1998), and hence prevent working stress from causing sleeping problems or mental disorders, as was reported to some extent from survivors in this study. In particular, when survivors have experienced downsizing in the past, it is strongly suggested that they should be provided with mental support and encouragement in order to mitigate their concerns with regard to the outcome of the most recent downsizing. Based on the findings from this study, managers should also initiate team building events, since groups have been split and such a measure would be an attempt to reintegrate the individuals back into a newly formed team.

Communication, as was already emphasized in previous sections, is a key element in dealing with the survivors, as it helped to reduce their uncertainty about what was coming next. However, to avoid survivors suffering from misleading or confusing information, as was reported in the present study, organizations must set up a communication strategy, where the information content and the way how it is communicated, is aligned through all levels in the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, managers must be present and provide the survivors with direct communication, rather than informing them through other channels such as e-mails or the company's newsletter. This is important and increases survivors' sense of being a valuable member of the organization rather than just a resource. In the context of decision making, downsizing implementers should also be able to explain what they have done

as part of the downsizing process and the reasons for their actions, as this was found to enhance survivors' understanding of management actions and hence reduce their perception of injustice with regard to the process.

Another aspect which needs to be considered by organizations relates to the competence of those who have to deal with the survivors. Since many survivors interviewed in this study complained about an incapable management and even participating managers admitted that they were not prepared to deal with the survivors, it is strongly suggested that organizations should provide their managers with more training opportunities with regard to how downsizing survivors should be supported. In particular, the line managers need to be equipped with sufficient skills since they are the immediate contact person for most of the survivors and were described as a major coping resource. However, if the organization's managers are not being able to deal with the survivors on their own, external counsellors for instance could additionally consult them by providing expertise and know how (Doherty and Horsted, 1995).

Finally, it seems to be important that Universities and leadership coaches should also raise an increased awareness of the potential consequences which organizational downsizing may have on the remaining workforce. Since most of the managers participating in this study believed that it is only the victims, but not the survivors, who need support, this provides evidence that the topic around layoff survivor sickness has not been sufficiently taught to leaders and HR practitioners within the last years.

6.3 Research limitations

This research project has examined survivors' experiences of organizational downsizing. Although this study revealed interesting and valuable findings and thus contributes to existing knowledge, possible limitations with regard to aim and scope will be discussed in this section.

A first limitation of this study relates to the data collection and in more particular how survivors' reactions were examined over time. The initial goal of this study was to interview each individual survivor at different points in time post-downsizing in order to gain a better understanding of the long-term effects of downsizing exposure. However, due to the sensitive nature of this research many organizations refused to grant access to their survivors or only allowed them to be interviewed at a single point in time (see previous discussion in sub-section 4.2.2.2). Thus, it was not possible to make this study longitudinal as such and, as an alternative solution, survivors from different stages post-downsizing were selected in order to simulate variations in reactions over time. This limits the extent to which the findings of this research reflect the changes in survivors' reaction from one stage to another. Nevertheless, the fact that the present research interviewed a large number of survivors (30) from different post-downsizing phases, and with differing numbers (two to six) of downsizing experiences, provided sufficient insight into the long-term effects of organizational downsizing.

Another limitation of this research project is that it is not representative for a single nation or industry, as survivors from three different countries (UK, Germany and Switzerland) and various organizations participated in it. Moreover, this study is restricted with regard to representing the experience of survivors from a particular

hierarchy level or occupational group, since manager and staff survivors with different professions were chosen. However, the wide range of characteristics and personalities which were studied makes this research project so valuable with the potential to transfer the findings to another context where organizational downsizing was experienced.

A further restriction of the present study may result from the fact that this work was conducted in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. The impact which this dramatic event had on survivors may have triggered stronger reactions compared to when they would have experienced organizational downsizing under more normal conditions, where the situation would not be that hopeless (e.g. to find another job in case of being dismissed). However, since many of the present findings also correspond to previous research, which was undertaken in times other than immediately after the economic downturn, this strongly mitigates the concerns that the outcomes of this study are limited to a particular downsizing context.

6.4 Future research

Through this research project several issues emerged which would benefit from further investigation. This final section is aimed to address these topics by providing a set of recommendations for future research.

As already discussed earlier in this work (see sub-section 4.2.2.2), a major problem faced during this study was to get access to downsized organizations and their survivors. This challenge, however, seems not to be an uncommon issue, since previous research (e.g. Berner, 1999; Campbell, 1999; Chen, 2009) reported similar difficulties when they tried to gain permission to interview survivors about their

experience. Therefore, and with respect to future research, it is recommended that researchers should already establish good relationships with potential organizations prior to when the research is intended to be conducted, as this most likely increases the chance to obtain permission for examining survivors.

Moreover, future research should be directed to further investigate the longitudinal effects of organizational downsizing on survivors. Although the present study revealed interesting findings about variations in survivors' reactions it seems to indicate that researchers need to intensify their efforts to examine survivors' experiences over time, since the effects of such a change programme are long-lasting and may therefore not be discovered immediately.

This study explored the experiences of downsizing survivors from the UK, Germany and Switzerland, and thus it differs from most of the previous research, which mainly examined survivors in the United States or outside of Europe. Although the present findings correspond to a large extent with what has been reported by previous research from the United States, it would also be of research interest to explore survivors from Europe and survivors from the US as part of the same study, and to compare their reactions, as this has never been done before. Such a research project would most likely add value to the existing literature, as it would provide an opportunity to gain further insight into similarities and differences among survivors' reactions with respect to their particular cultures.

To get a fresh perspective on survivors' experiences, the present study applied the concept of sensemaking from Weick (1995) as a theoretical lens through which to interpret survivors' responses. Moreover, a model of survivors' sensemaking of

organizational downsizing was proposed. Future research may wish to further investigate the ways in which downsizing survivors make sense of their experiences and develop this model further with the aim of discovering more about how external factors influence the meaning-making process and, consequently, the responses of downsizing survivors.

Finally however, the main request is that researches continue to study downsizing survivors and publish their outcomes or make them in any other form accessible for the public in order to achieve a maximum of awareness of the harmful effects which such a programme may have on the surviving workforce. Although many organizations realize that their downsizing effort was not successful in achieving the business target and they also trace that back to the fact that survivors may not have performed as initially expected, however they still act too reluctantly in supporting their most valuable people. This provides justification for future research.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Invitation letter for participation (English version)

April 3, 2012

Subject: Support for my research project

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a PhD student at the University of Gloucestershire (UK) and I would like to ask you for your support.

My research project is within the area of organizational behaviour and is focused on survivors of organizational downsizing. Following a qualitative approach to research, I endeavour to explore survivors' experiences related to that event.

Since I have worked a couple of years in industry and experienced such a dramatic organizational change first-hand, I am aware of survivors' reactions and know that only little attention is paid to them. The goal of my study is aimed to explore and to analyse survivors' experiences in order to achieve a better understanding of their situation.

Therefore, I would like to ask you (name of the labour union/ employee association) for your support! Since you as a union/employee association represent the rights and interests of the employees and advocate for a social treatment of the staff, I would like to ask you for support with regard to my research study:
Could you please put me in touch with organizations or individuals who have "survived" a downsizing initiative and are willing to participate in my study?

In an interview, these individuals would then be asked about their experiences post-downsizing. For sure, all information would be treated anonymously and strictly confidential. Neither name of the person nor name of the organization would be mentioned in my study. After completion of my work, I would of course provide you the results.

Against the background of the financial crisis, whose consequences can still be felt and affected many organizations in Europe with reductions and downsizing, I hope the co-operation with you and look forward to get a response from you.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
For further questions, you could also contact my supervisors: Dr John Laurence, MBA (jlaurence@glos.ac.uk) and Dr Lynn Nichol (lnichol@glos.ac.uk).

Thank you very much in advance.

Yours sincerely,

Joerg Berberich
(joergberberich@connect.glos.ac.uk)

Appendix B: Interview guide (English version)

1. **Introductory questions**

    - How long have you been working for the present organization?

    - What is (was!) your role in the organization?

    - How many times did you experience a downsizing initiative?

    - When did you experience the last downsizing initiative?

    - When was it announced, and when was it completed?

2. **Questions focused on the experience as a downsizing survivor**

A: The following questions were asked in order to answer the first research question: "What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?"

    - Could you please describe, what you experienced after the downsizing was completed?

    - What were positive and what were negative experiences which you remember?

    - How did you react as a consequence of these experiences?

    - How have these experiences influenced your everyday work life?

    - Do these experiences still have an impact on your everyday work life?

    - What helped you to manage the new situation in which you found yourself?

    - Did anything prevent or hinder in your managing of the new situation?

    - Did you have some colleagues, which were made redundant?

    - How did you feel about that?

    - Did your overall attitudes towards the organization change during that time?

    - How did you make sense of the entire situation in which you found yourself after the downsizing? How did you interpret the entire situation?

    - Could the downsizing be discussed afterwards?

    - Before we move on, is there anything else you think I should know about how you feel about the organization now?

B: <u>The following questions were asked in order to answer the second research question: "Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?"</u>

- Did you feel differently after some time had passed?

- What influenced you to feel differently?

- Did anything prevent you from feeling differently?

- How did you feel immediately afterwards?

- How did you feel six months later?

- How did you feel one year later?

- How do you feel now?

- How long did it take until your reactions changed?

- How many times did you experience a change in your reactions?

- What changed with you?

- What changed with the organization?

- You have mentioned that you survived multiple downsizings.

  o Did previous downsizings influence your reactions about later ones?

  o What in particular was different about how you experienced previous and how you experienced recent ones?

C: <u>The following questions were asked in order to answer the third research question: "In which ways does management action affect survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing?"</u>

- How did management in particular handle the downsizing?

  o For instance the immediate manager (line manager), the middle management or the top management

- What were subsequent actions after the downsizing?

- Did you receive any management support after the downsizing was completed?

  o For instance from the immediate manager (line manager), from the middle management or from the top management

- Did you perceive this support as helpful?

  o For instance support from the immediate manager (line manager), from the middle management or from the top management

- Did this support change over time?

    o For instance support from the immediate manager (line manager), from the middle management or from the top management

- Did any lack of support influence your feelings?

- What did you expect the organization to do after the downsizing?

    o For instance the immediate manager (line manager), middle management or top management

    o In general

- Is there anything which should have been improved to make the situation more comfortable for you?

D: <u>Additional questions for those ones, who are (were!) also responsible to manage survivors:</u>

- Can you tell me about your experiences of managing downsizing survivors?

- What did you do to manage the survivors?

- Did you provide support to them?

- What did you consider as difficult in managing them?

- Did you receive any kind of support in order to manage the survivors?

- How did you prepare yourself to manage downsizing survivors?

- Final open question:

    o Is there anything else about your attitude to the organization as a survivor you would like to share with me?

Appendix C: Questions focused on demographics (English version)

Questions		Answers
Nationality		
Age range	21 - 30	
	31 - 40	
	41 - 50	
	51 - 60	
	61 - 70	
	71 - 80	
Do you have a long-term partner?	Yes	
	How long have you been together?	
	No	
Do you have children?	Yes	
	How many?	
	Are they grown up?	
	No	

Appendix D: Informed consent form (English version)

This research study is being performed to explore the experiences of survivors of organizational downsizing. The information obtained will be used to understand their reactions related to that situation.

You are invited to participate in this study. If you agree, your participation will consist of participating in an approximately 60 minute interview where you will be asked questions related to your experience as a downsizing survivor.

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to answer any of the questions which you do not wish to. You can withdraw any time if you wish.
In such a case, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed.

The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed afterwards if this is acceptable, otherwise written notes will be made. The interview will only be used for research purposes. Everything will be anonymous and kept confidential. It will be stored securely and will be deleted when no longer required for research purposes. To obscure your identity, pseudonyms will be used. If direct quotes are used, any identifying information will be removed in order to protect your identity.

The information gained in this study might be published in research journals or presented at research conferences, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

This project conforms to the Handbook of Research Ethics of the University of Gloucestershire.

If you are willing to participate in this research study, please sign the statement below and return this form (electronically or by post) to the following address:
Joerg Berberich, XX Copt Elm Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL53 8AN, United Kingdom; e-mail: JoergBerberich@connect.glos.ac.uk

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study. I have received a copy of this Consent Form.

Name of Participant_____ Signature of Participant_____Date_____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose of this study. I confirm that I have answered any questions raised and have verified the signature above.
A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Name of Interviewer_____Signature of Interviewer_____Date_____

Appendix E: Extract of themes, categories, sub-categories and meaning units

1.) "What reactions do survivors display following organizational downsizing?"

Emotions and feelings *(theme 1)*

- Negative overall impression *(category)*

  - Downsizing was strange *(sub-category)*
    - It was bizarre and mad, 5 *(meaning unit)*
    - The downsizing was disorientating, 29
    - It was completely mad what happened, 30
    - …

  - General *(sub-category)*
    - I had an overall negative experience, 2 *(meaning unit)*
    - I was not happy at all, 3
    - It was very hard at that time, 10
    - I felt unhappy and angry, 11
    - I was not satisfied with the situation and it caused an inner conflict, 13
    - There were mainly negative experiences, 14
    - I was not happy about having to go through the downsizing process, 19
    - It was an awkward situation, 28

- Feeling of relief *(category)*

  - I was happy that I still had a job, 1 *(sub-category)*
  - The economic situation was bad and I was positive that I had survived, because others had lost their jobs, 7
  - It was a relief, that so many of us could remain, 8
  - I felt a great sense of relief, 12
  - It was a positive experience because I had survived, 17
  - I was pleased because I kept my job, 19
  - I could continue my work, 20
  - I was grateful that I kept my job, 21
  - For sure, it was a relief, because I realized that I could stay, 24
  - I was lucky that I had a job, 25
  - I was lucky that I had kept my job, 26
  - It was a relief to have survived it, 30
  - …

Attitudinal and behavioural changes *(theme 2)*

- Attitudinal changes *(category)*

  - Decrease of commitment *(sub-category)*
    - I just do the job not to get bored, 4 *(meaning unit)*
    - I was more conscientious before, 4
    - I tend to work more to my hours now, 9
    - I do not stay late and I am not doing over hours anymore, 10
    - I know now that I am just a number in the institution and it does not matter if I perform better, 24
    - I do what I am paid to do, but I am not going the extra mile anymore, 29
    - …

2.) "Will their reactions change over time and, if so, how will they change?"

Coping *(theme 5)*

- Supportive environment *(category)*

  - Friends *(sub-category)*
    - Friends inside the institution helped me, 4 *(meaning unit)*
    - To have this trust and this support was very helpful for me, 25
    - My friends also motivated me to stay positive and to apply for other jobs, 26
    - I have friends at the other location who helped me, 29
    - …

Appendix F: Example interview with a downsizing survivor

Joerg: How long have you been working for the present organization?

Interviewee: Four years.

Joerg: What is your role in the organization?

Interviewee: I am an […] adviser for […] companies.

Joerg: How many times did you experience a downsizing initiative?

Interviewee: Three times.

Joerg: And when did you experience the most recent downsizing?

Interviewee: It was 12 months ago.

Joerg: Do you still remember when it was announced, and when it was completed?

Interviewee: I do not remember exactly. I heard a lot of it informally before it became formal, so it seemed to be ongoing over a long period of time.

Joerg: Could you please describe what you experienced after the downsizing was completed?

Interviewee: Many things really: initially, happiness about the fact that I had a job. But I would say that probably four weeks later I did experience some sort of stress. But I knew that I had difficulties communicating with my new manager. My new manager was not based in the same office as me. My new manager was based in […] and I was based in […]. She had a totally different communication style, and it was the way she communicated. So, I started to feel quite isolated, that is probably the feeling. And it led to poor communication and a feeling as if the psychological contract had been broken. I don't know. It is difficult to describe.

Joerg: Where there also some other negative experiences?

Interviewee: In the end I confronted my new manager about things, because I felt that I was been treated unfairly compared to others. But the majority of the others, if you like, my team members, were based with her in […], whereas I had one other colleague with me, who I previously had managed and who was now at the same level as me.

Joerg: Do you also remember some positive things related to this downsizing?

Interviewee: The positives were that I still had a job. So, the salary was coming in and I could pay the mortgage. At first I looked forward to new things and working in a different way, and to being more autonomous as well. It was more of an autonomous role, and I had initially looked forward to that. And I looked forward to some change, because change, in my view, can be for the better as well, but it was slightly reverse [inaudible].

Joerg: You mentioned that you had some difficulties with your manager because she was based in […] and you were based in […]. What was the main reason for this having caused difficulties?

Interviewee: I think previously my manager sat next to me, and we had quite a close relationship with each other, and we talked every day. We talked every day, we saw each other every day and we discussed work all the time, whereas the new manager, obviously I did not see her. She communicated rarely and that was via e-mail rather than on the phone, and it was the way, as I said, that the communications came across. I interpreted them in a different way than the way in which she meant them.

Joerg: Did your attitudes or your behaviour change as a consequence of this?

Interviewee: Yes, I think there was a change in my behaviour. I became quite [inaudible]. I was quite an awkward employee, definitely, because I started challenging. I showed challenging behaviour. I challenged decisions and I challenged her management. And I challenged the changes, because we did have to change the way we worked and the hours we worked. We had to work in order to cover certain shifts across the day, whereas before we had flexible working. So, I was challenging and questioning that. At the time I felt that I was doing right, but looking back at it now maybe it is good to have open communication, and I think it is important to tell your manager when you are not happy with something. But, it was probably the way I communicated that to her, because I felt, as I said before, isolated, and I felt I was being controlled even though it was an autonomous role. I felt very much as if I had been controlled. So I was challenging her management, challenging everything.

Joerg: Do these experiences still have an impact on your everyday work life?

Interviewee: Not now, because I think we have gotten over it. And, I think, because I actually wrote a long letter or long e-mail to my manager explaining things. And later on we met several times and talked about things. To some extent she explained to me why things had happened, because my previous manager was made redundant as a result of this, you see. We did sit down and we did do a lot of talking and she changed her communication style slightly. Things were still difficult at that time, but she changed. I have been open with her and tried to tell her what I want in that particular role. But, the one thing I would say is that probably every time there was a restructuring or a review of […], and I know there is some sort of review at the moment since […] is kept very quiet, I automatically think that I must do everything right. I must be careful about everything I do because it could mean that I lose my job. So, I am constantly thinking about how I carry out my work. I am giving examples of competencies for my appraisals, and things like that. So, constantly analysing things in case we end up with further downsizing, and I know that you have to be able to prove that you are the best because you could have to compete against a colleague for a job. If there are further changes I know that I would have to compete against a colleague for a job, because that is what happened previously. Another thing is that I made sure that I completed my […], that was one of the things that did come out of it. I started my […] quite a few years ago and then I joined the company. So, actually, when all of this started happening, and I knew that my job was at risk, I said to them, "I am now at risk and maybe made

redundant. Will you let me finish my […], so at least I can go out and look for a job with […]?". So, that was one sort of benefit, I suppose, from all of this.

Joerg: So, that was positive?

Interviewee: Yes, I finished this year.

Joerg: And what helped you to manage the new situation in which you found yourself afterwards?

Interviewee: It probably made me become closer to my surviving colleagues. We have been bonded more due to the fact that we have been through the same situation and we have all survived. I think just having people to talk to is what helps you get through that situation.

Joerg: Was there anything that was preventing or hindering you from managing the new situation?

Interviewee: That could have been my attitude, and it could have been a lack of knowledge and feeling some distress towards the new management team, because of the fact that it did feel a bit strange because they were based in […]. We were the big fish in the small pond, I suppose, and suddenly we were going to be the small fish in the big pond, and who were these people? And they take over, and we do not know them. So, there was distress there.

Joerg: Did you have some colleagues which were made redundant?

Interviewee: Yes, only one direct colleague was made redundant, in the end, in my particular office. And that was my manager.

Joerg: How did you feel about that?

Interviewee: A mixture of emotions, to be honest. It was partly due to the fact…I will explain why. When she came to the organization I actually felt that she had less experience than me, so it was like a role reversal. So, all the time I worked with her I used to give her advice and I made the decisions. She had originally been on a contract, so they had always told her there was going to be a review. I was sad that she was losing her job, but I had a mixture of emotions after, as well. Another reason for that was that the new manager told me a lot of information about my previous manager and things she had said about my work, such as: "Better watch her, because she does not like being managed" and so on. That is all very confusing in your mind as well, because you have an opinion of someone and then somebody changes that opinion by actually saying to you "I have it written down here, and that is what she said and did". And you had trusted that individual. So, on this occasion, it was very mixed emotions, I think.

Joerg: How did you make sense of the situation post-downsizing?

Interviewee: I constantly thought: why are they trying to do that, and what is the service going to be like after? What is the result going to be? And I had been going through a downsizing the year before and my workload had increased greatly. So, you are thinking about that. I lost two colleagues before, so I took on the work of three people, and therefore you think that's what is going to be happening this time. How much work I am going to end up with now? What is the thinking behind all of this? I know they are trying to save money by creating

shared services, but it is very difficult. I am a very analytical person, so I am constantly thinking things through. Thinking "why is this decision being made?" and I delve into it, and sometimes probably overanalyse it.

Joerg: Did it make sense in terms of the business strategy?

Interviewee: I suppose it could make sense, again because I have previously worked for an organization that had created shared services, and I probably had a pre-existing negative view of it because I had seen it from the customer's point of view. When I had previously contacted […] I could never get through, and I constantly got an answer phone message. So, that was in the back of my mind. It might be good for the company, because they are streamlining the services and they are going to save money because there are fewer […] people. At the same time, I could see negative impacts for the customers, because as a customer you would no longer have that one-to-one service with a […] person that you knew, that you knew their work, probably knew her by name or face, and who would always be there to answer the phone and that sort of thing. So, I had some presumptions about the service. I could see it from both sides.

Joerg: Could the downsizing be discussed afterwards?

Interviewee: No, I think they were very much encouraged to move everything on straight away. It was almost like those people did not exist. The new management team only made negative comments about the previous management. And I would say even now, the lady who used to be the head of […] when we were just working as a company, she did manage to obtain the role of business partner. So, she is business partner for […], the company where I am based. My new manager works for the partnership instead, and she constantly makes negative comments about the business partner because she was the previous […] manager of the management team. You can feel the atmosphere between them all the time. There is still this underlying thing between the new and the old. It is quite uncomfortable to be in the middle of that.

Joerg: Sort of tense?

Interviewee: Yes, you still feel it.

Joerg: Before we move on, is there anything else you think I should know about how you feel about the company now?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. I just had very mixed emotions and, as I said, at the moment I know that there is something like an informal review of […] going on, but nobody is saying anything, which makes me feel nervous. So, I don't trust the company again, because what are they trying to achieve? The service has not been great, to be honest, and I know that they are going to be looking at that and seeing what changes they can make to improve it. And, thinking with my logical head…I often take on work for other companies. I do work for other companies in the partnership when my company is not so busy. So, I go out and take on other work. So, again, I try to keep on the ball because I know there is some sort of review, and I am suspecting what it is.

Joerg: You already mentioned that you felt better after you had a discussion with your manager and eventually the relationship improved?

Interviewee: That took at least a couple of months before that first situation happened, that first discussion.

Joerg: Did you feel differently after some time had passed?

Interviewee: Yes, because, as I said, you are on a high first, because you have got a job. Thank God. And then, I suppose, realization starts to creep in and at first everything is new. And this is interesting. And then, as you start to carry out the new processes and work in a different way, I suppose there starts to be a dip in how you feel about your job and the organization. And then there is the uncertainty of the actual role itself, and you think of yourself as an individual, and you reflect and you start to think "what have I done…Was it the right thing to stay, or should I have just gotten out of here and gotten another job rather than stayed here?". I remember there was probably a dip over time, and I definitely felt a lack of motivation. At the beginning I was motivated, and then it dropped quite quickly and sort of…I can see it as a line, flat and down for a while. A feeling of "what I am doing here? I do not like this and I do not understand this change now. Why are they doing it in this way?". I had to cover the phone. We were meant to work roughly from nine to five. And the other week you had to be there until at least six o'clock. There was no one in the building and it was a dark place in the middle of the countryside. So, it is not a nice place to be in late in the day, and I am an early-morning person. We roll out this new service, and you put yourself out and stay there late at night, or, late to me, and you are not getting any phone calls. And you think, why are they continuing to make me stay at work until that time when there are no customers phoning and there is no need for it? So, you start to feel quite agitated, and you are just not happy with the organization. And when I originally said that I felt like I was going to explode, I did, if you like, but within an e-mail, because I thought I had to say something first. Because as a person who is working in […] I would advise someone, if it was an employee, and I would tell them that they have to try to speak to their manager first to resolve the issue. So, it was very difficult to put myself into that situation, but I thought I had to do that. And then, as I said, it started to improve once we started to talk about the issues and tried to understand why the organization made changes. And that was a big problem. They just did not explain well enough what was going on, why these changes were being made and how long they were going to try all the different approaches.

Joerg: How long did it take until the situation improved?

Interviewee: There were certain things that happened because the restructuring came in November and then obviously we had the Christmas period. And my management report for the […] was due in, and a lot of things had a knock-on effect on that. And so I know that it was the end of January when the communication started with the manager and things started to improve. So, that was from November to the end of January.

Joerg: So, you could say, from January onward it became better?

Interviewee: Yes, definitely.

Joerg: Is the situation with your manager fine now?

Interviewee: Yes, it is better. I understand how she works now and she continued to be honest in her feedback. And she changed her communication style and kept that style, because I explained to her why her original style was negative, it was because I do not know her that well, because I hardly ever see her. I mean, we do not have a fantastic relationship, because you can never get hold of her. I am in an autonomous role, but sometimes you are making decisions that could end up in an employment tribunal. So, you just want somebody to give you the "no" or the "ok", because otherwise it comes back on you after. And it is very difficult to get hold of her. She is not contactable all of the time.

Joerg: You have mentioned that you survived multiple downsizings?

Interviewee: Yes, I have survived three downsizings.

Joerg: Did previous downsizings influence your reactions to later ones?

Interviewee: We started to become used to them. It was not such a big deal, once you have gone through it. But I have to say that in the previous company I did probably experience more of the survivor syndrome. I felt such a lot of guilt, because I had some really good friends and very close friends. And it was meant to be a job for life. And then suddenly you see people you are really close to losing their jobs. And I was the only one left. I felt a lot of guilt because of the relationship I had with the other employees, whereas I did not feel that this time because I did not know my colleagues so well.

Joerg: Were there any other differences between how you experienced the previous downsizing and how you experienced this one?

Interviewee: There are differences in communication, and I think communication is the real big thing, and how employees handle it, handle the change. And I know I had a very negative experience on one occasion, where the director was eating lunch on a video conference telling me and my colleagues: "by the way, I am closing the office altogether". And that stayed in my mind. So, since then, every time there is a restructuring I am constantly looking to see what the person is saying or reviewing the person who is giving the news, and I make it clear to them if I do not think they are communicating effectively. I always give feedback after. So, now I will give feedback every time when I go through a restructuring. I give feedback, whether anonymously or directly, about how I felt they communicated the information, and I have specified whether I felt the communication was lacking information or whether it explained the information that I felt I or my colleagues would have needed.

Joerg: Can you still remember how the management handled the downsizing?

Interviewee: We had a number of meetings over quite a long period of time. I think it started about one year before it actually happened. That was when we had the first consultation. And it was very poorly managed. It was very confusing information. I did not understand anything, and I remember feeding back, and my colleagues fed back, and after that there was a new project team leader, if you like. So, we started to see different managers at the consultation meetings. And they improved the communication in terms of the paperwork they gave us. The person that we met with was the person who would be the new head

of […] services across the partnership. So, she was involved in every one of these meetings, which I thought was good. And then she had different colleagues with her. I cannot fully remember who they were at different stages. I did not meet my actual boss until she was in the job. But I do recall that it was the head of […] services who attended every one of those meetings. And now I recall that we had a lot of […] interim directors. So, every time there was a consultation meeting there was a new interim manager because the last one has been sacked or a contract been ended or something…That was why I could not remember, because they kept changing the interim […] directors.

Joerg: So, information was provided?

Interviewee: Yes.

Joerg: At all hierarchy levels? Did the middle or the low-level management also provide support?

Interviewee: No, I think it was because so many people managers were affected and involved in the consultation. So, it was very difficult to obtain information at times. Usually in the past, you could talk to your colleagues. Actually, everyone was involved, and because of that no one had any extra information that they could share, because no one was being told anything. I know that in the past a manager who was not being involved, or was not at risk, has had information that they could share, whether that was a good or bad thing. I am not really sure, but they have been able to share some information that they know because they were safe employees and they had access to the information. But, this time, everyone that I worked with, including the middle management, was involved, was at risk. And so, they were not given any information as such.

Joerg: What were the subsequent actions after downsizing?

Interviewee: In relation to what?

Joerg: For instance, what happened after the consultation? What happened with the people who were designated redundant?

Interviewee: Then I remember they were given notice. And I recall being told that they were informed by letters rather than face-to-face, which did not seem to be particularly good. And also, dates…They were given incorrect leaving dates. So, I know that that caused quite a lot of bad feelings among my colleagues, because of the fact that they were given one date and then someone said, "sorry, you got the wrong date, you are actually going the week after, because we don't want to pay you to be at home. So, we want you to work every day of your notice period". So, that caused a little bit of a bad feeling at the end of that process.

Joerg: Did you receive any support after the downsizing was completed?

Interviewee: No, nothing. The only thing we had was a team meeting about a month after the new structure was introduced. We had a team meeting to meet all our new colleagues, because we are based in […]. There are […] of us based across the country. So, we had a team meeting to meet each other and to meet our manager. So, there was not any management support. Not in this company. But, that is not my experience from my previous company, because I actually ran

the […] team. So, I am actually used to giving people training and support and arranging that. So, that was my responsibility in my previous company. I even arranged my own...

Joerg: Did any lack of support influence your feelings?

Interviewee: Yes, I think it probably led to the build-up of the feeling of mistrust and just feeling demotivated. Yes, I think it did. I think if something had happened sooner, if there had been some support, then I don't think I would have been feeling like I did.

Joerg: What did you expect the organization to do after the downsizing?

Interviewee: I would have expected lots of communication and an acknowledgment that those people who had left…The way they tried to cover it…The only comments were negative comments about my previous colleagues, and I think it would have been better if comments had been more positive about those people. So it felt a little bit like it was brushed under the rug, and it should not have been. I think they should have acknowledged those people and they should have acknowledged the fact that they had left as a result of the restructuring, and just been more positive and supportive, and not left us. We worked for this company which had 400 employees up until last week and now look after…And I am not really sure what I am doing, and so improved and more positive communication, and more face-to-face contact, would have been beneficial.

Joerg: Is there anything else which should have been improved to make the situation more comfortable for you?

Interviewee: Maybe just explaining why they were making the changes. I did explain a lot of things to my colleagues, because I came from an organization that had been through the same thing and had created shared services. So, a lot of my colleagues did not even understand what was going to happen…I think the organization should have explained that better. I think if you understand why something is happening, and why something is changing, then you can take that on board and you can deal with that situation.

Joerg: Have you ever managed downsizing survivors?

Interviewee: I am dealing with quite a few at the moment, and because of that I received fantastic feedback, which I am really pleased with, because I have ensured that those people affected…It was a team of finance people, for example, that were recently made redundant, and there is one survivor at the moment as well. So, from the beginning, I made sure that I carried out the consultation process correctly, but I have gone beyond that and I have made sure that I have gone to their office because they are actually based in […]. I have gone there and I have seen them. I have built relationships and built-up a rapport with all of the individuals. I have joined them, and I had cookies and sandwiches with them on a Friday morning. Do you know what I mean? I just created that relationship with them. I have e-mailed the whole team every Friday with a cheerful message, such as "I hope every one of you had a great week", and so on. Anything I could find out about these individuals and anything about their personal lives, things they have achieved, everything they have done during the

week, I mentioned and congratulated them on to try to motivate them in those e-mails. And as they were leaving, they were leaving at different dates, offering help, advising them about local offices they could go to for jobs. So, I gave them advice and I arranged training and support for each of them, such as interview skills and CV writing. I shared any local knowledge that I had and that would help them. Each week I made sure I said goodbye to anyone that was leaving and shared that with the team in the e-mail. I made the e-mail very jokey and light-hearted as well, and they fed back that they felt very much appreciated. Most of them had already gone through redundancy in the past, and they mentioned that that was the best redundancy they have ever been through, because of the communication they had and the relationships they had built. I have got one survivor now, and she is the senior manager, and so I am going to see her again. I know she is taking […] as well. I checked when she has […], and tried to motivate her, because I understand that she is really down about that. So, I motivate and support her. I go and have face-to-face meetings with her; I ask her how she is feeling and try to offer support. Because of my experience I know how I felt, and I make sure that they do not feel the same way I did.

Joerg: Is that part of your job?

Interviewee: Yes, but I probably go beyond, because I had feedback from the person who had previously been head of […] and they had carried out redundancies for another team in the same office and there were very negative comments and the people felt very demotivated, very down. I had a lot of feedback, because people found me approachable. However, she did not care: "This is what is happening and that's it", whereas I tried to show empathy. It was empathy that was missing. And I tried to make sure that I showed that empathy when I dealt with them. I am sorry and I appreciate the situation you are in. If there is anything I can do to make the situation better, to help you through, I will. I also gave them my contact number, and I let them know when I was off. And I gave them an alternative contact, but I was quite open to feedback from them and things. And I know that the other manager did not do that, and as a result people were really negative and quite critical of her as an individual because of it. Whereas with me, I had nothing but positive comments, and they have invited me to their goodbye parties when they were leaving, because we built relationships even though I am based in another city. I have been invited and included in things, like their breakfast on Friday mornings, because of the relationship I built with them.

Joerg: Was there any difficulty in managing the survivors?

Interviewee: The particular one I have at the moment…The problem is that this particular survivor knows that her job will still be going next year. And one problem is how her colleagues communicate with her. And they have not been very sensitive, and I think that makes it very difficult for the survivors. So, this survivor has just gone through leadership conferences, for example, and her colleagues said to her, "You are leaving next year, why have you come along to this leadership event?". That is a culture thing. Perhaps the organization should take responsibility for changing its culture and trying to somehow get the message to employees that you have to be sensitive. With everything that is going on you have to be sensitive to your colleagues and be careful about what you are saying, because the individuals can be very sensitive. And something

which usually might not offend might easily offend when there are survivors. And I have found that out for myself. I mentioned earlier that I was more sensitive to things after a certain amount of a time. And I have seen that in other survivors, that they are sensitive to what people say around them.

Joerg: Did you receive, or do you still receive, support in managing the survivors?

Interviewee: No, not really. I think it comes down to my personality that I will remember people and I will follow up, but it is not part of the role as such. And I do not think that the managers tend to take responsibility, and I think that managers need some training in how to deal with it and to go and show some sort of empathy and keep in mind what employees have been through. Like I said, it is probably only because of my particular personality that I will remember people in the businesses that have been through things, and I will talk to them when I see them. And I will recall it: "And how you are doing in that new role? And how are you getting on in your new team?" or something like that. I will acknowledge the fact that it happened, and saying that they are doing really well and I have heard positive things about their work in their new team. But I think a lot of people say "that's it", and they push it to the past, as if it did not happen. And I think it is about acknowledging that it did happen and just remembering that it did happen, because probably this person remembers that it happened. So, you shouldn't ignore it.

Joerg: How did you prepare yourself to manage the survivors?

Interviewee: A lot of it comes down to personal experience, because I had been through three restructurings. That affected me emotionally and mentally. It was very difficult to deal with it. So, I think I took all those feelings that I had and tried to use them, and tried to recall them when dealing with other people, and think that I would not want to feel like that. So, I think it comes down to personal experience. So, we should make all managers redundant and put them through a restructuring and then they would know how it feels. But then, different people react in different ways and some people won't be fazed. And again, the managers won't think of their employees or the person that they manage. So, they won't think Joe, for instance, has got a family of five, or is a single parent, and the impact that all these changes have on his home life or the fact that he has a child going to university and is planning to pay for it. They do not take into account the bigger picture, and that is something else: I tried to take into account the bigger picture when dealing with people.

Joerg: Is there anything else about your attitude to the company as a survivor that you would like to share with me?

Interviewee: Not really. I think they are good now, as we have a fund available to people that were made redundant or redeployed to help them retrain. But it would be nice if they had some proper redeployment training and support in place, as was available in my previous organization, and if they would have acknowledged more the word "stress" and what that means to people. And I think that because they have brushed it under the rug too often. And people do not admit to feeling stress, because it is not talked about with them, and because they would be less respected in their roles if they admitted to feeling stress. So, I think the organization could still do more. And at the moment I am going

through a restructuring of 264 staff. And I may not be able to give all those people the same sort of support as I have given others. But it would be nice saying "look, we acknowledge you might end up feeling stressed", rather than just saying to them "this is the number of the employee assistance programme", and just giving them a piece of paper quietly. Asking them about how they feel and, if they are feeling stressed or they show signs of stress talking to them about stress instead of saying "go and find this employee assistance number", because I think it is important that feelings are acknowledged and that would really help.