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Impact of time on survivor syndrome

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IMPACT OF TIME ON SURVIVOR SYNDROME

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Shannon Bravenec

August 2006

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ABSTRACT

IMPACT OF TIME ON SURVIVOR SYNDROME

by Shannon Bravenec

Layoffs and corporate downsizings are becoming commonplace in today's competitive global marketplace. Focus tends to be on the victims of these downsizings, the loss of their jobs, their income, and their struggle to regain employment. In addition, the downsizing companies are scrutinized for not only the layoffs themselves, but the way the layoffs are handled and how the victims are treated. In contrast, little attention is paid to those left behind, the downsizing survivors. They may still have a job and are able to collect a paycheck and pay their financial obligations. However, research conducted on survivors of downsizings show that they go through a syndrome of their own commonly referred to as "Survivor Syndrome." This thesis looks at the impact of time on Survivor Syndrome through a longitudinal ethnographical study of survivors of a series of corporate downsizings at a Silicon Valley high tech organization.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Background of the Study

Layoffs, downsizings, and reductions in workforce are occurring in companies all over the world. It is a necessary means of staying in business, especially in today's economy. The loss of a job can be not only financially traumatic, but emotionally traumatic as well. The emotional trauma, however, does not only affect those laid off, but it also affects those left behind (Knudsen, Johnson, Martin, and Roman, 2003). Those left may continue to draw a paycheck and are able to continue to pay their mortgages and other financial obligations. However, in addition to those laid off, they go through a trauma of their own, frequently referred to as "Survivor's Syndrome" (Frazee, 1996). Survivor's Syndrome is experienced when an employee survives a lay off at his/her company. It is characterized by many feelings such as guilt, anger, loss of motivation, loss of morale, questioning of self worth, and anxiety (Amundsen, Borgen, Jordan, and Erlebach, 2004). Psychiatrist W. G. Niederland first used the term "survivor syndrome" in his studies in 1968 to describe survivors of the Holocaust and other tragedies. Self-preservation, guilt, anger, and hatred were the common emotional themes present in survivors (Guiniven, 2001). In comparison, much of the research shows that survivors of downsizings have similar emotions to those who have experienced trauma such as the Holocaust.

Having been a survivor of downsizings, the concept of Survivor Syndrome is of great interest to me and is the focus of this thesis. In a review of the literature, there is significant research on the topic, but there is very little longitudinal research or discussion

on if or how the passage of time impacts Survivor Syndrome. In addition, the extant research is limited in the use of ethnographic, participant observer methodologies.

To address these gaps, this thesis is a comparison of two studies. The first study was conducted in the Spring of 2003 after two downsizings and just before a third was about to occur. The second study was conducted three years later when the environment had changed significantly, the Company had not conducted any additional downsizings, and they had been hiring significantly over the past two years. This thesis is an ethnographic study of the different periods and investigation into what impact, if any, time had on the survivors.

Background of the Subject Company

The subject company for this thesis is a high technology company in Silicon Valley. I have worked with the Company in two capacities over the last eleven years. I started as an on site vendor for the Company. I was not an employee of the Company, but had an office on the premises and was embedded, for the most part, in their processes and culture. I managed their contingent work force, also known as contract workers. These employees were not employees of the Company, but employees of my employer, doing work for the Company on their premises. I recruited and managed these workers for a period of four years, from 1995 until 1999. During this time, the high tech sector did experience a downturn in 1998 and I was able to see how the Company dealt with downturns.

The Company manages its workforce in a unique way compared to its competitors. Whereas its competitors might immediately lay off a percentage of their

workforce after a period of lower than expected revenues and profits, the Company has been able to get through downturns without losing a significant amount of its workforce because of its practices. First, the Company's pay scale is a sliding one, with heavy focus on bonuses rather than base salary. In addition to a base salary, employees are paid two bonuses, which are based on the performance of the company. When the company is doing well, these bonuses are a significant portion of an employee's salary. When times are bad, instead of layoffs or downsizings, the bonuses are the first to go. Historically, the Company has been able to retain a significant portion of its employees by decreasing their bonuses rather than laying them off.

If further steps in downsizing need to be taken, in addition to the ceasing of all external hiring, the contingent workforce, or "contractors," is let go. Because these employees are not employees of the Company, this is a cost effective and easy solution and one of the main reasons the Company uses a contingent workforce.

To further reduce costs, the Company gives some the opportunity to voluntarily separate and receive a severance package. Not everyone is given this opportunity, however and it is not used in all departments of the Company. The decision and selection process for who is able to take part in this option is unclear and is not known by many in the organization, including myself.

A final process the Company uses to move itself through difficult times is called Redeployment which further reduces costs and reallocates resources. The Company is very proud of this process because it has kept it from needing significant downsizings. It is a process in which employees of an affected department, one that is being downsized

due to economic or business conditions, are given the opportunity to find other positions in other departments of the company. Employees are “redeployed” from their downsizing department, put into what is called a “redeployment pool,” and are given a certain time period, anywhere from one to four months, to find another position within the Company. The employee is paid their full salary during this time and it is their full time job to find another position within the Company. In addition, when redeployment actions are happening, contingent workforces have been eliminated. Managers needing temporary support for a project are given the option of using “redeployed employees.” This is a win-win situation for both the manager and the employee. The manager, not having the option of using an external contractor due to cost cutting measures, is still able to get temporary support. In addition, the redeployed employee is able to “stop the clock” of the time he/she is given to find a new position in the Company. For example, if the employee is given two months to find another job and after one month is offered a temporary opportunity, the employee’s second month is on hold as long as he/she is working on the temporary assignment. When the assignment is over, the employee goes back into the “pool” and continues to look for either another temporary or full time position. However, an employee can only work on temporary assignments to extend his/her “pool time” for a period of one year. If the employee is not able to find a full time position after one year of temporary assignments, and/or the expiration of their “pool time,” the employee is given a severance package and terminated from the company. With my eleven years of history with the Company, it is my perception that this process has worked very well, seeing a high amount of the employees being retained and

reallocated to other departments within the Company. In speaking with colleagues, I learned that in a 1998 slowdown within the Company, ninety-six percent of the impacted employees were reassigned.

However, towards the end of 2000 and the beginning of 2001, the Company, along with the rest of the country and the world, began experiencing an economic downturn that was to be more significant than any in recent history (Roach, 2001; Dykes, 2001). The Company ran through its normal process of cost cutting, freezing of external hiring, letting go of its contingent workforce, and offering voluntary separation. This, however, was not enough. Those entering the Redeployment pool had very little chance of finding another position within the Company. For the first time, the Company, which has never used the word “lay-off” in its vocabulary, was going to see a five percent reduction in its worldwide workforce. For the first time, a majority, rather than a minority of its redeployed employees would not be able to be reallocated. A majority would receive severance packages and be terminated from the Company.

I became an employee of the Company in the Spring of 1999. The economy was booming and I, and many of my co-workers, came on board to help the Company recruit and hire in order to keep up with the new Internet economy. The Company was branching off into new businesses. In addition to acquisitions, the Company needed employees to help them succeed in areas very new to them. For the year 2000, my department assisted in the recruiting and hiring of approximately 25,000 employees worldwide. It was a crazy but exciting time and we enjoyed the challenge.

The overall feeling surrounding the Company at this time was a formidable one. The workplace was challenging and there was a strong sense of team and mutual respect. Many described the Company as stable and felt secure being an employee. Many felt that because of the size of the company and the opportunity to change careers a few times, they would spend their entire career at the Company until retirement.

However, in the beginning of 2001 my department, in addition to all departments across the Company, went through the redeployment process, redeploying approximately five percent of the department. Those of us who survived the process assisted the Redeployment Program by working with an outplacement organization, paid for by the Company, providing assistance to the redeployed employees from all over the company. We assisted with their resumes, their interviewing skills, and finding jobs outside of the Company. We worked out of a Career Resource Center that the Company provided on its premises. The center provided computers with Internet access, resources, and workspace for the redeployed employees to work on their resumes and conduct job searches. In addition, the outplacement organization provided classes to the redeployed employees to assist them in developing skills for a productive job search. The Company provided these resources to the redeployed employees, free of charge, for three months. According to surveys conducted of the redeployed employees who took advantage of these services, they found them extremely valuable and were very grateful to the Company for providing them. In addition, many of us who worked in the Career Resource Centers were sent emails thanking us for the time and effort we put into helping them during a difficult transition time.

In the beginning of 2002, the economy was still not turning around. The country and the world was still in, what many began to call, a recession. As a result, the Company would be going through its processes again and my department would, this time, see ten percent of its staff be redeployed. Many of us who survived this round continued to work in the Career Resource Centers. Others worked on process improvement projects, while others continued to support the very limited strategic hiring that was taking place for the Company's critical departments, the ones that designed and made the product that kept the Company in business.

Finally, in the Spring of 2003, my department went through a third round of redeployment. It was to be the final round and the Company began slowing hiring again in 2004 and saw significant growth in the year 2005.

Surviving three downsizings in the course of three years, I and my co-workers experienced a very difficult time. Although we still had jobs, we saw our valued colleagues lose theirs and then remained behind to help rebuild the organization. The emotions survivors experience, the processes they go through to heal and move on, and how the passage of time impacts these emotions are of great interest to me. Downsizings will likely continue in today's economy. Understanding survivors and how to manage them could help corporate leaders manage the process to lessen the negative impact of future downsizings.

Chapter Overview

Survivor research has been significant over the past few decades. A thorough literature review and the gaps in extant literature to be addressed in this thesis are

discussed in Chapter 2.

This investigation is longitudinal and is explained in two studies that were performed at different times. Study One was conducted in the Spring of 2003 and Study Two was conducted three years later in the Spring of 2006. An ethnographic participant-as-observer methodology was used in both studies. Data collection included interviews with co-workers who survived the downsizings as well as observations on organizational culture via employee conversations and content analysis of the organization's official communications. The methodological details of this thesis are discussed in Chapter 3.

Findings and results of both studies are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 followed by a discussion comparing and contrasting the two studies in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Given the prevalence of corporate downsizings, there has been substantial research on layoff survivors over the past two decades focusing on many different aspects of organizations' downsizings and their survivors. Research methodologies are fairly consistent throughout the literature. Studies were either conducted in a laboratory setting with confederates and research subjects or at work sites directly with companies who were in some phase of downsizing. Methodologies included surveys, questionnaires, structured and unstructured interviews, and simple participant observation (e.g., Amundson, Borgen, Jordan & Erlebach, 2004; Armstrong-Stassen, 1997; Brockner, 1990; Shah, 2000; Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002).

Non-laboratory study site participants studied in the literature came from across all industries and include consumer products firms, high tech firms, manufacturing firms (both unionized and non-unionized), financial organizations, retail stores, unionized healthcare, military, and government workers. Laboratory studies generally consisted of college students at local universities (e.g., Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt & O'Malley, 1987; Brockner et al., 1986).

In a review of the literature, several themes emerged. The majority of the research has focused on the factors influencing or having an impact on the survivors' organizational commitment and work performance before, during, and after a layoff. One of the most prevalent factors in this area of study is on the notion of *perceived fairness*, including such circumstances as how the layoff was conducted, how victims were compensated and/or taken care of, and how the layoff was communicated.

Research has shown that the principle of reciprocity is prevalent in a post downsizing situation. Surviving employees will be committed to an organization that has treated their employees fairly, even those who are victims of a downsizing (Brockner, Grover, Reed, Dewitt, and O'Malley, 1987). Brockner, Tyler, and Cooper-Schneider (1992) found in their study of survivors in a financial services organization, that both prior commitment to the organization along with perceived fairness “would combine interactively to influence survivors’ reactions” (p. 250). If the survivor was highly committed to the organization prior to the downsizing and perceived the downsizing to be fair, he/she would be more strongly committed to the organization after the downsizing compared to those who were more negatively committed to the organization prior to the downsizing. However, when the survivor was highly committed prior to the downsizing and had a negative perceived fairness of the downsizing, their post downsizing commitment was significantly lower than those who were less committed prior to the downsizing.

Brockner et al. (1986) discussed equity theory as an explanation for survivors increase or decrease of work performance and organizational commitment. In their laboratory experiment of 145 undergraduates at a large state university, subjects were told they would be given extra credit for participating. Subjects were paired with confederates to perform a proofreading task. In one group, subjects were told their performance on the task would be judged and would determine whether they could continue with the research and earn additional extra credit or not. In another group, the subjects were told that after the first task, they would be chosen randomly to stay or go.

Consistent with equity theory, those subjects in the merit group reconciled their guilt with the fact that they were allowed to stay because their quality of work was higher and they continued to increase the quality of their work. In contrast, the subjects in the random group reconciled their guilt by working harder, but not necessarily delivering higher quality after confederates were “randomly” selected to leave, feeling it could’ve been them as easily as the other subjects.

It is possible that the relationship the survivor had with the victims of the layoff may be associated with their perception of fairness. Whether or not the survivor holds the victims within their *scope of justice* may determine whether or not the survivor deemed the downsizing as fair or not. The extent to which survivors hold victims in their scope of justice is dependant on how close their personal and/or professional relationship was and the degree to which the survivor had attitudinal similarity with the victim (Brockner, 1990). In his study of survivors in a consumer electronics firm, Shah (2000) found that many reacted to the layoff and its fairness depending on the extent to which their networks were altered. Networks include not only direct co-workers within an employee’s immediate work group, but employees across the company who contribute or have an impact (even minimal) on an employee, how they do their job, how they learn and develop, and how they get information. Losing not only friends or co-workers, but valued colleagues in a vast network can have significant impact on a survivor and his/her organizational commitment and work performance. With the loss of employees after a downsizing, holes are formed within the organizational structure requiring the survivors to fill the gaps left behind. In their research on the impact of structural holes resulting

after a downsizing, Susskind, Miller, and Johnson (1998) found that survivors could either be advantaged or disadvantaged by the downsizing depending on how the structural holes increased or decreased their networks. However, the shifts in networks, whether positive or negative, have a serious impact on survivors who may have feelings of guilt or distrust. Even if the shifts were positive, the survivor's emotions may keep them from taking advantage of those shifts because they might occur again with yet another downsizing.

In addition to the notion of perceived fairness and scope of justice, Knudsen et al. (2003) wanted a more theoretical explanation of why survivors have lower organizational commitment levels. In their study of interview data collected from 1909 survivors of downsizings from multiple American organizations, they found that survival of downsizing decreases perceived job autonomy and increases job pressure, which results in decreased organizational commitment. They further found that survival of downsizing also decreases perceived organizational support resulting in decreased organizational commitment.

In additional research on organizational commitment levels following a downsizing, Brockner, Spreitzer, Mishra, Hochwarter, and Pepper (2004) looked at the impact of *perceived control*, the amount of control the survivor perceived to have over their own job, and found "...when perceived control is relatively low, organizational commitment is lower in the presence than in the absence of layoffs. When perceived control is relatively high, however, the negative influence of layoffs on employees' organizational commitment is reduced, virtually eliminated" (p. 85).

Spreitzer and Mishra (2002) looked at the longer term impact on downsizing survivors by focusing on factors influencing survivor turnover. Their study surveyed 331 aerospace employees in the areas of trust, justice, empowerment, and attachment. Their research supported previous research that survivors who felt more attached to the organization, had a higher trust in senior management, and felt the downsizing was handled fairly would be more committed and less likely to turnover. However, Spreitzer and Mishra contributed to the present literature by looking at the impact of empowerment. They found that “Empowerment increases employees’ belief that they can cope with the downsizing and that they have retained a semblance of personal control as the downsizing is implemented” (p. 722). Niehoff, Moorman, Blakely, and Fuller (2001) found similar results in their research surveying downsizing survivors of a federal government research facility. They found that although empowerment did not have a direct effect on loyalty or organizational commitment, it did have direct impact on job enrichment which indirectly impacted loyalty.

Communication is another dominant theme in the survivor research. Mansour-Cole and Scott (1998) researched the influence of procedure, communication, and communication source on survivors’ perceived fairness and organizational commitment in their study of employees of a research and development facility of a US industrial organization. They found that survivors had higher perceptions of procedural fairness if they heard about the downsizing from their direct managers (versus through the grapevine). In addition, the survivors’ post layoff commitment was significantly related to perceptions of procedural fairness. Brockner, DeWitt, Grover, and Reed (1990) found

similar results. In their study surveying retail store employees across the US they found that because information seeking behavior increases during times of uncertainty, the survivors had a more positive reaction to the layoffs when their environment (management) satisfied their need for information. Casey, Miller, and Johnson (1997) found similar increase in information seeking behavior, but by means of a third party strategy. Instead of limiting uncertainty by asking questions directly to the supervisor, survivors found other means such as observation and other indirect strategies to obtain information. Because of this, organizations need to understand their survivors' need for information but not assume they will ask for it directly. Organizations might look at the utilization of secondary sources to provide information to survivors through information campaigns or distributing reliable information through neutral or safe zones.

Post downsizing research has investigated the overall attitude of the survivors across time, across multiple downsizings, survivors' job satisfaction and job performance levels as well as perceived job security. Not surprisingly, research shows survivors' attitudes are the most negative the period immediately following a downsizing, and continue to grow steadily to their pre-downsizing level after about one year. Some research shows that survivors begin to feel more secure in their job and their turnover intention decreases over time. However, organizational commitment and job involvement is very slow to increase back to pre-downsizing levels perhaps because employees are hesitant to fully give themselves again (Allen, Freeman, Russell, and Reizenstein, 2001). Jalajas and Bommer (1999) found that surviving a downsizing with the threat of possible future downsizings significantly impacts survivors' organizational

commitment, morale, and satisfaction which can be extremely detrimental to the organization resulting in decreased work performance, quality, and possible turnover. Armstrong-Stassen (1997) looked at the effect of multiple downsizings of management level employees over several years in a Fortune 100 corporation. Although she didn't find any long-term effects of exposure to repeated downsizings, she did find long-term consequences by simply being exposed to one or more downsizings affected job-related strain, burnout, and continued organizational commitment.

With all the research showing the negative effects downsizings can have on survivors, one has to wonder if it is better to be a victim than a survivor. Devine, Reay, Stainton, and Collins-Nakai (2003) researched this question in their survey of unionized health care employees in a Canadian metropolitan area. In their comparison of both the victims and the survivors, the victims who had found alternative employment noted more positive outcomes stating they were less stressed and felt much more in control of their environment than those who had survived and were still employed with the company.

Finally, there is a fair amount of research on how to manage survivors. Much of this research is a follow up to prior survivor research. Survivors' organizational commitment and their post downsizing work performance is critical to the organization and its survival. Understanding the contributing factors and what motivates (or demotivates) a survivor is necessary to manage them through the change and help them remain productive employees. Managing survivors does not start after the downsizing event, but much earlier. From the moment a downsizing is announced, "...the psychological contract between employer and employee changes" (Amundson et al.,

2004, p. 7). Organizations need to understand this and develop their survivor management strategy before hand. Every move from how the downsizing is announced to how the victims are treated is going to have an impact on the survivor and their future with the organization. Research has shown communication is critical before, during, and after the downsizing (Brockner, 1992). The importance of communicating the factors that contributed to the downsizing will help survivors more readily accept the decision if they can understand the “why” (Brockner et al., 1990). In addition, it needs to be kept in mind that survivors have been through an event in which they have had no control. The loss of power, decision making, and job autonomy negatively impacts organizational commitment (Knudsen et al., 2003). Downsizing events can have long term effects. Initial management needs to continue long term in order to hold on to the surviving workforce. “Attachment” to an organization is critical for the employee to be fully committed to the organization so that it can continue to rebuild and grow (Spreitzer et al., 2002).

In this thesis, I attempt to fill two major gaps in the current literature: the use of ethnographic methods for investigation and a longitudinal analysis of Survivor Syndrome. An ethnographic, participant-as-observer methodology has not been used in the extant research and will be the method for this thesis. In addition, a longitudinal study has not been conducted in the current research and this will be addressed by doing a comparison of two studies conducted three years apart.

In addition, this thesis will add to the existing literature by addressing the following research questions:

1. What themes emerge from survivor talk?
2. What differences emerge in the comparison of two studies conducted three years apart and what accounts for these differences?
3. What impact does the passage of time have on the organization's survivors and how do the survivors feel about the organization?

Chapter 3 Methodology

Method

Participant observation, a qualitative ethnographic method, is utilized in this thesis. This method was chosen for two reasons. First, this type of methodology is not utilized in the extant Survivor research literature. In addition, due to the nature of the topics being discussed, confidentiality of the participants' identities and their responses was of utmost concern. Because of my relationship with the participants, having worked with them for many years and earned their respect, I was able to have them confide in me and share information they would not share with just any researcher.

Participant observation is one branch in the tree of various qualitative research strategies. It is believed to have first been used and written about by anthropologist Frank Hamilton Cushing when collecting information on the Zuni Pueblo for the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology in 1879. Many believed Cushing's four and half years spent with the Zuni was too long for him to write about and remain objective (Dewalt and Dewalt, 2002).

Although Cushing may have been the first to utilize what is known now as participant observation, Bronislaw Malinowski is credited with the first to describe the approach that "included an emphasis on everyday interactions and observations rather than on using directed inquiries into specific behaviors" (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002, p.3). Participation observation is now widely accepted "...as the central and defining method of research in cultural anthropology" (p. 1).

Dewalt and Dewalt (2002) listed the following as typical elements included in participant observation:

- Living in the context for an extended period of time
- Learning and using local language and dialect
- Actively participating in a wide range of daily, routine, and extraordinary activities with people who are full participants in that context
- Using everyday conversation as an interview technique
- Informally observing during leisure activities
- Recording observations in field notes (usually organized chronologically)
- Using both tacit and explicit information in analysis and writing

These elements are included in the methodology for this thesis. I have been involved with the subject company either as a vendor or employee for over eleven years and am an active participant in a wide range of activities. I am assimilated into the corporate culture, speaking and understanding the company dialect. In addition to one on one interviews, data collection for this thesis included everyday conversations with co-workers in both work and leisure settings. Field notes of all observations were taken and both tacit and explicit information was used in the analysis and writing of this thesis.

Spradley (1980) further detailed the process in doing participant observation. The participant observer not only engages in day to day activities but also observes the activities, the people, and the aspects of the situation. The participant observer has explicit awareness of everything, utilizing a wide angle lens, including things that would normally be blocked out due to overload or dismissed as trivial to the normal observer.

The participant observer is both an insider, because he/she participates in the activities, and an outsider because he/she is making observation of the actors and him/herself as objects. The participant observer has to practice introspection on the activities in which he/she participates, to understand the feelings of what participating in the activities felt like, greatly enriching the data collected. Finally, the participant observer takes very detailed notes and keeps accurate records of both observations and feelings.

Due to the lack of longitudinal research in current Survivor Syndrome literature, two studies were conducted utilizing the same participant observation methodology to investigate the impact of time on survivors of downsizings.

Procedures

Two primary methods of data collection were utilized. First, an open ended unstructured format was utilized to conduct one on one interviews lasting approximately an hour in length with ten co-workers. Prospective participants were identified based on convenience to the researcher. For Study One, participants were selected by convenience method. An email was sent to my immediate co-workers describing the study, asking for their participation and insuring their participation will be kept confidential. Of fifteen co-workers, ten responded they would participate in the study. Interviews were set up one on one at a time convenient to the participant. The interviews were either conducted face to face or via telephone to meet the convenience of the participant. For Study Two, a second email was sent to the same ten participants asking for their participation in a follow up study. All participants agreed and interviews were conducted in the same style as Study One.

Second, organizational observations were conducted on a larger scale with various organizational employees (not limited to interviewed participants). These observations were conducted during all other times employees conversed with one another such as hallway chats, lunchtime conversations, and in between meeting times. In addition, observations were conducted of official organizational communications. This consisted of email communications, announcements on the Company's intranet and both open face to face as well as confidential employee-manager communication forums called "web chats." Web chats are similar to "instant message" conversations and are hosted on the Company's intranet by senior department management. They give the opportunity to the department's employees to anonymously ask questions and have them answered by senior management. Web chats were utilized primarily during the time Study One was conducted. During Study Two, web chats were no longer the norm and had been replaced by face to face open forums with senior management.

The interviews and organizational observations were conducted during the Spring of 2003 for Study One and during the Spring of 2006 for Study Two.

Interviewed Participants

For Study One, all interviewed participants were members of the same department within the Company. For Study Two, all interviewed participants were still employees of the Company, but three had moved on to different departments.

The interviewed participants consisted of four females and six males in varying points of their career. For Study One, the length of service of the interviewed

participants ranged from 3 years to 15 years with an average of 6.6 years of service. For Study Two, this range increased from 6 to 18 years for an average of 9.6 years of service.

Analysis

Both the interview data and the content analysis of the organizational communications (both official organizational communications and those between organizational employees) were coded utilizing Baxter and Babbie's General Process of Qualitative Data Analysis (2004) where the following steps were followed:

Step 1: Determine Questions

Before a researcher can categorize or even unitize their qualitative data, they need to ask themselves what questions they are trying to answer. What, exactly, is the researcher looking for when they go through their interview notes, their observations, or other communications? For the interview portion of the data collection, my questions focused on the Company, the downsizing, the victims of the downsizing, and the survivors of the downsizing. In the observation and analysis of organizational communications, I wanted to understand what was spoken about, what was on people's minds, and what questions and concerns they tended to have.

Step 2: Unitizing Textual Data

Lincoln and Guba (as cited by Baxter and Babbie, p. 366) state unitized data should possess two characteristics: the data should be heuristic, meeting the inquirer's need or requiring action on the inquirer's part; the data should also be as small as possible yet be able to stand by itself. A unit of data can also be described as a concept. To unitize the textual data for this study, I went through interview notes, observational notes

and organizational communications. I pulled ideas, thoughts, and questions and jotted them down on a 3x3 piece of note paper. This was a concept that could have consisted of a word, a sentence or even a few sentences, that was transcribed into a unit.

Step 3: Developing Coding Categories

Developing coding categories consists of a cycle of several steps that the researcher follows over and over (Baxter and Babbie citing Erlandsen, p. 367):

- Read all of your data through completely, in order to experience a total immersion in them
- Identify your first unit of data
- Identify your second unit of data
- Make a basic judgment of similarity-difference between these two units
- Proceed with the similarity-judgment task for all of your units of data
- Develop category labels and descriptions for each of your categories
- Start over

Taking the 3x3 pieces of note paper, I followed the above steps to get my unitized data into several categories.

Step 4: Plugging Holes

Plugging holes may require the researcher to go back to the field to gain clarity on unitized data and/or categories. This can be the case when several units of data in a category no longer seem to fit together or if a logical category seems to be missing. Once all the units of data were categorized, I did find a few units of data that didn't seem to fit in with the other units in their categories. For those units of data, I went back to the

participants and did further questioning. Through more thorough questioning, more clarity was gained on the units. However, I found I needed to look at the categories again through Negative Case Analysis (Step 5).

Step 5: Checking

It is important to verify that the categories that have been developed by the researcher are both confirmable and credible. Checking is done by the following three processes:

- *Negative Case Analysis* accounts for 100% of units of data. There may be units that don't nicely fit into developed categories and may require recoding of categories until there are no outlying or negative units of data. Negative case analysis was done one time in Study One and two times in Study Two before the final categories were developed.
- *Member Checks* are done to validate the categories with participants. Member Checks were done by presenting the categories of both Study One and Study Two to the participants and having them validated.
- *Triangulation* is done by several methods (Baxter and Babbie citing Nenzin, p. 318): the use of multiple and different sources of data, the use of multiple and different methods of research, the use of multiple researchers, and the use of multiple theoretical perspectives. For the purpose of this study, the use of multiple and different sources of data in the form of interviews, observations, and official organizational communications was utilized.

Step 6: Finding Exemplars

Exemplars give the researcher vivid pictures of what is happening in the data. A “thin” description may simply describe what is happening where a description with exemplars gives more detailed examples calling out the subtle differences in what is happening. The exemplars provided by the researcher go beyond descriptions of behavior, but include participants’ meanings behind the data. For the purpose of this study, exemplars were identified to stress recurring themes or ideas.

Step 7: Integrating Coding Categories

Integrating Coding Categories takes the coding process one step further by doing a “meta-coding” process, coding the categories produced by the coding steps, checking them, finding exemplars, and gathering additional data if needed. This step is done so that the qualitative research is not simply a list of categories, but a development of something bigger. For the purposes of this study, the categories were integrated to show themes amongst the communication of survivors’, their organization, and how those themes differed over time.

Chapter 4 Findings and Results

Study One

Study One was conducted in the Spring of 2003. My department had gone through two rounds of redeployments and lay-offs and was about to go through a third. Although we had survived the first two rounds, it was evident from my data that it was not an easy time and there were many feelings of anxiety, frustration, guilt, and remorse, just to name a few. After reviewing my data, I found recurring themes that were consistent topics of discussion: 1) the communication process of management to its employees, 2) the process in which employees are chosen to be redeployed-“who stays, who goes,” and 3) the surviving process.

Communication

Some felt the communication by management to its employees was good but many of those I spoke with felt it was poor. Those who felt positive about the communication commented that communication of the upcoming redeployments were timely, we were given notice, we received bulletins via email in a timely manner, and the web chats were a great opportunity to get questions answered. However, many felt that, although management seemed to be trying and the intentions were there, via email bulletins and the web chats, it was not enough and they needed to get their “real” information from the rumor mill. Although management was communicating with us, many felt what was being told to us was through “controlled” mediums. The messages from management were extremely vague, scripted, and generic and were seen as only lip

service. Many of those I talked to did not participate in the web chats, as they didn't feel they could get real answers.

The web chats started in 2002 and were held quarterly. I reviewed all five transcripts starting with the first quarter of 2002 and ending with the first quarter of 2003. The 2002 sessions averaged 14.8 participants per session. The 2003 session had 57 participants. Reading over the transcripts, the increase of participation of the 2003 session seems to be due to those wanting information about the upcoming redeployment. The topic dominated the majority of the session. The topics of the 2002 sessions, after the first round of the departments redeployment, ran across the board, but for the most part, were concerned with the constant change of the department, when would things become more stable, and how was the department ultimately going to look. Many of the questions had the theme of "when will we be back to normal and what will normal look like?" The feeling of anxiety, frustration, and not knowing what will be coming was evident. One participant noted the difficulty in "moving on." She found it hard to be motivated to rebuild solid relationships and cohesiveness with co-workers and work groups for fear of more change.

On a positive note, the Communications group of our department ran a Global Effectiveness Survey in the first quarter of 2002 publishing the results in March. The survey, which had a thirty percent response rate, rated the following: 1) the credibility and trustworthiness of the communications, 2) the usefulness of the information received, 3) the satisfaction of the amount of the information received, 4) the satisfaction of the timeliness of the information received, and 5) satisfaction of the overall communications

program. Every area received sixty percent or more of positive responses, which the department rated as “good.” Some areas rated better than seventy percent and the department rated these as “excellent.” Areas that the department would be working on for the future based on recommendations by the survey participants were 1) more face to face communications, i.e. open forums having senior management more visible, 2) allowing first level managers to be communicators and not to have to wait for all communications to come from senior staff, and 3) sharing facts early, being honest and direct.

Process

The process of how employees were chosen to be redeployed was somewhat vague and unknown, according to the conversations with my colleagues. The majority had a very negative perception, feeling the process was secret, extremely subjective and political, and that it was based on who you know and not what you know. We are told that the process for evaluating employees and deciding on who will continue with the department and who will be redeployed is done through what is called a “skills assessment.” Each employee is evaluated and rated on the skills needed for the future of the organization. Those rating the lowest on the skills assessment are the ones who get redeployed. It seems like a fair process, but many are concerned that we are never shown the skills matrix; we do not know what skills are being measured and rated. Therefore, the feeling that the process is political and subjective dominated the conversations. Recurring themes regarding the process were that it was inconsistent and worthless and many had little faith in it as a decision mechanism. In addition, many felt the process

was not fair, believing that employees' skills were being evaluated by managers who didn't know the employees and that the possession of the skill, or the lack thereof, was often assumed. One participant questioned if he never saw the skills assessment, how was he to know what was critical in the organization so that he could work on those skills for the next possible redeployment?

In the minority, there were a few who never questioned the process, that felt the skills assessment was fair or felt it was the best process out there compared to other companies. One of my conversations was with a colleague who had recently been promoted as a result of the redeployment actions. As a result, she had a staff of about five employees and was one of the managers facilitating the skills assessment for her employees. She was part of the selection process and one of the decision makers as to who would be redeployed. Because of this, she was able to comment on the fairness of the process from a prospective the rest of my interviewees did not have. She was adamant that the process was extremely fair and was the most equitable way to make very tough decisions. She illustrated the matrix template during our conversations showing how the names were listed down the left side and the pertinent skills were listed across the top and then each employee was marked yes or no for each skill they had or didn't have. Because of her role as a manager and participant in the decision making process, she had a perspective the rest of us did not. Her illustration and explanation of the process was very clear and seemed very fair, yet it was never communicated to the employees during the time of the redeployments.

Surviving

Employees experienced a wide range of emotions about having survived two rounds of redeployments and lay-offs. Many of the emotions expressed were feelings of anger, bitterness, guilt, and sadness. Some felt like management was dealing with numbers and not people. The question “why them and not me?” was recurring as well as the feeling that it wasn’t fair. It was very difficult to see our co-workers leave and many found themselves avoiding those impacted because of their overwhelming sense of guilt at having survived.

Feelings of frustration and anxiety, over the constant change of the organization and the moving around of some to new jobs with new managers, were common. Many found it was difficult to focus on their job and to rebuild new teams and relationships. One individual I spoke with said he had had three different managers in a matter of three months. One participant I spoke with referred to the survivors as “POW’s” and worked hard to maintain her relationships with her colleagues, organizing monthly potlucks and birthday celebrations to keep spirits up and maintain some sense of normalcy. Although we were still “alive,” having our jobs and incomes, the environment was a very difficult one. We saw the departure of long term colleagues and friends. In order for us to hold on to our jobs, we were expected to take on their work. We worked very long hours with no reward and no idea of when the environment would get better and be more positive. The struggle to stay motivated and productive during this time was constant.

As a result of going through two rounds of redeployments, many found themselves questioning their own abilities. Were they good enough? Would they have

the skills to make it through the next round? The stress over whether they would survive the next time created more insecurity and left many feeling unmotivated to do their job. In addition, the survivors found themselves not performing to two of the Company's core values, open communication and risk taking. We are encouraged from the date of hire to communicate openly, to share our ideas and constructive criticisms to anyone in the organization, despite their level. We are encouraged to take risks and to be innovative. However, after surviving two rounds of redeployment, no one was talking openly. Everyone was keeping to him or herself and not sharing their thoughts or ideas for fear of being thought ill of and losing their job. In fact, many of my conversations were held behind closed doors, and only with people who I have known for years who really trusted me. Two people didn't talk to me, I believe, due to their concern about how what they might have said would be perceived and reported.

Others used the redeployments of their co-workers as a "kick in the pants" to upgrade their skills and better themselves in preparation for the next round. While some fully prepared themselves financially and started making alternative plans should they be impacted in the future, others tried not to dwell or think too much about what was happening. Once they survived the redeployment, they went on about their job and focused on it. It was their way of dealing with the stress, to pretend it wasn't happening and that everything was business as usual. Finally, some mentioned feeling just plain numb and desensitized. After going through two rounds with all the constant changes, they were just going through the motions with no feelings left to feel.

All the survivors who I spoke with experienced an increase in workload and felt the quality of their work decreased significantly as a result. They were now doing the job of their former co-workers and felt spread very thin. Some were moved into new jobs they had no desire in doing and had put them off of their career path. But, they had a job and thus felt that they had no right to complain.

Many of the survivors felt that management did little for them. There didn't seem to be any sense of concern or recognition from management of the difficulties that the survivors were going through. Many survivors felt management thought survivors should feel lucky to still have a job and didn't recognize the hardships of remaining behind. The empowerment the survivors once had was lost and they were being micro managed and treated with little respect. Some mentioned they suspected a significant amount of turnover when the economy turned around and there were more jobs available outside of the Company.

Despite the many negative emotions experienced at seeing their co-workers lose their jobs and the feelings of being overworked with little support from management, the survivors ultimately felt the redeployments were a necessary evil for the continued success of the Company. Although many expressed their concern that the process was not fair, they admitted it was a business decision that needed to be made and would rather go through it at this Company than at any other company. Many rationalized their feelings of "why them and not me" by believing that everything happens for a reason. In addition, many mentioned the Company's treatment of the redeployed employees went far beyond industry standard through the use of "pool time" to find another job and the

providing of the outplacement services through the Career Resource Center. Since many of us worked with the redeployed employees and assisted them through this process, we saw the benefits these services had and were comforted at the Company's treatment of those that it redeployed. Participants felt that the company treated these individuals with respect, giving them the resources to help them through a difficult time. This helped many of us get over our feelings of guilt, hearing the positive comments the redeployed employees had to say about the services the Company provided for them.

Study Two

Study Two was conducted in the Spring of 2006, three years after the last round of redeployments and lay-offs. The Company had been steadily increasing their hiring over the past three years with 2005 being the highest volume year in several years with ~20,000 hires globally. The Company started 2005 with little forecast of the growth it was going to see. However, the Company went through a major reorganization in the first quarter and the CEO forecasted the company to grow from a ~ 90,000 employee company to a ~140,000 employee company in the next seven years. The volume and intensity of the fast paced hiring environment that the Company experienced prior to the downsizings in 2001-2003 had returned.

At the beginning of 2006, just before data collection for Study Two began, the Company had put itself on a hiring slowdown, minimizing external hiring to replace attrition and key strategic hiring after not meeting revenue expectations for the last quarter of 2005. During the time of the interviews and data collection, the environment was slightly different from that of 2005 as our hiring had slowed down, but it was still

significantly different from the environment of Study One. Many organizations within the Company were still hiring and no redeployments or layoffs were being discussed.

Utilizing the same methodology to code interview data and organizational communications (both formal Company communications as well as informal conversations between employees), I found recurring themes that were consistent topics of discussion: 1) the redeployments and layoffs themselves including the process and those impacted, 2) the surviving process, and 3) feelings about the Company today.

The Layoffs

The layoffs that were conducted in three rounds from 2001 to 2003 were a necessary process for the Company's survival. Many participants felt that the environment during that time required the Company to downsize because of the global recession, decreased revenues, decreased profits, and decreased stock share price. Most participants felt the Company's overall process was more than fair and treated the impacted employees with dignity and respect. The concept of Redeployment versus immediate layoff was held in high regard. Many felt that the giving of two or more months to find another job within the Company and outside career placement resources to redeployed employees was beyond fair. Most felt if they had to go through another downsizing, they would hope they were still at the Company.

On the negative side, many questioned the selection process of who stayed and who went. The "skills analysis," which was conducted and utilized as the basis for deciding who stayed and who went, was questioned as an objective mechanism. In theory, it seemed like a very fair process. However, there were many who questioned the

selection of some people leaving while others were chosen to stay. The “fairness” aspect of the process was not trusted and some felt it was “who you know.” If someone was very well networked, it was felt that they were most likely chosen to stay.

Although the layoffs were needed, many questioned the amount of people who were let go. After three rounds of redeployments and layoffs, our department was left very small only allowing for daily “keep the business running” activities and little opportunity for process improvement projects or building proactive strategies for future hiring. This impacted our department significantly in the first quarter of 2005 when the Company, whose hiring forecast was to remain flat for the year, suddenly went through a reorganization causing the need for additional hiring. Our Staffing department was caught off guard, not having the resources to support the sudden additional hiring needs. As a result, our department quadrupled in size in three months adding additional Recruiters and Staffing Consultants to support the demand. This “pendulum swing” was frustrating to many of the survivors having seen so many people let go in 2001-2003 just to see many of them brought back in addition to a lot more. Our department scrambled to meet the new demands and our department worked long hours to keep up. Questions and comments that came up in my conversations included “Where are the controls?”; “Why it is one extreme or the other?”; “Why is it feast or famine?”; “We are very short sided. We don’t plan or look to the future. We only look at today.” Lack of planning and forecast was a common frustration and many felt it contributed to the Company’s state today of needing to slow hiring down after having hiring too many employees in 2005.

Surviving

When asked about how they felt about being survivors of three rounds of layoffs, most felt lucky, relieved, and thankful. There was some mention of guilt and sadness over the layoffs, but not a lot in comparison to Study One. Many comments centered on “Time heals” and “We’ve accepted and moved on.”

Two major themes that came out of the conversations were centered on treatment by management and relationships with co-workers. As survivors, many felt they had not been treated well by management. Increased work loads have significantly upset work-life balance. This was also evident in the last two Organizational Health Surveys conducted in the fourth quarter of 2005 and the first quarter of 2006. Work Live Effectiveness (WLE) is a top concern of current employees. In contrast, there were a few in the minority who felt, as survivors, they had been treated very well and management effectively utilized their skills in the new environment.

With regards to co-workers, many felt their fellow survivors were the foundation and strength in getting through a difficult time. They felt their relationships are now stronger as a result of going through the layoffs together. Others felt they lost their networks and the increase in workload actually impacted their relationships negatively. In the new environment, many of us were doing more work on a global scale, requiring very early morning or very late night meetings with other regions, requiring us to work from home and telecommute. Some felt this isolated them and decreased their interaction with their one time close co-workers.

Overall, the discussions around the surviving process and the emotions that were felt were more positive than negative. One survivor analogized the surviving process to giving birth: it is very difficult at the time, but you tend to forget the pain and agony as time moves on. Another survivor said that we are like loyal puppy dogs: no matter what bad is done to us, we tend to forget and come back for more.

The Company Today

Although many said they felt lucky and relieved to have survived three rounds of redeployments and layoffs, the feelings about the Company were overwhelmingly negative. The pendulum swing was a top topic of conversation during this study. Many felt this is starting to become a pattern with the Company and, particularly, our department. In addition, this was also a top topic in both the Organizational Health Surveys as well as the Open Forum conducted by senior management with employees of the organizations. The Company had a significant hiring increase in 1999 and 2000 for which our department was not prepared. The Company followed that by several significant downsizings in 2001-2003 where many felt too many people were let go because our department was caught again unprepared for another significant hiring increase in 2005. The perception of short sidedness and lack of planning for the future has caused many to lose respect for management and has decreased their confidence in the Company. Many felt the Company has lost their innovativeness and one of their key cultural values of Risk Taking by becoming more bureaucratic. Not only was this a theme in my conversations, but this was also a theme in the Organizational Health Surveys and Open Forum.

Although having felt lucky to have survived the redeployments and layoffs, there were many feelings of frustration, callousness, and jadedness. Having seen a few cycles of the pendulum swing, some felt the Company had not learned its lesson from previous cycles and will continue to make decisions for the short term.

Chapter 5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was not only to study the themes that emerge from survivor talk, but to also look at the phenomenon longitudinally to see if those themes changed with the passage of time. In comparing Study One and Study Two, overlapping themes did occur, but unique themes between the two studies also occurred. In Study One, the themes focused on the Company's communication process during this time period. The time in which Study One was conducted was very ambiguous. How management handled communication before, during and after the downsizings was of utmost importance and a strong theme. The downsizing process itself, how it was conducted and concern for those impacted by the downsizing, was another strong theme. A lot of attention and scrutiny were given to the Company and how it handled itself during a very difficult time. Additionally, survivors' emotions were a very strong theme in Study One. The multitude of feelings about themselves, their co-workers who had been let go, their role in the organization, management and the organization itself, and their future were common topics.

In contrast, themes that emerged in Study Two were much more broad and at a higher level. Talk of the layoffs was in very general terms versus scrutinizing various aspects of the process itself or management's role in the process as was in Study One. Although Study Two's talk around the layoffs was very broad, a recurring theme that was seen in both Study One and Study Two was the process of how and the amount of people who were selected to stay or go. Although the amount of people being let go was questioned in Study One, it was much more prevalent in Study Two. Having witnessed

the rapid growth in 2005, the amount of people who had been let go in 2001-2003 was a frequent topic of discussion in Study Two.

Another aspect that was very broad in Study Two versus being very detailed in Study One was around the surviving process. In Study One, a lot of focus and attention was paid to the emotions and feelings the survivors felt. In Study Two, not a lot of talk occurred around emotions. There was a sense of healing and the emotions that were so very strong in Study One were not expressed in Study Two.

Finally, Study Two saw a lot of talk around the Company today. Whereas in Study One, employees tended to focus on themselves, “getting through today,” and trying to understand their future, Study Two saw much more concern and attention paid to the future of the Company.

In summary, themes from Study One tended to focus on details and the emotions and feelings of the individuals. In contrast, themes from Study Two were “bigger picture” oriented, less emotional, and more focused on the future.

Analysis

There were definite differences in the themes that emerged in Study One and Study Two. Study One’s themes focused on process details and emotions whereas Study Two’s themes were less emotional and more focused on the bigger picture and the Company’s future. Is the passage of time the variable that is responsible for the differences in the themes between the two studies? Should other variables be considered to account for the differences?

As noted, the environment in which Study Two was conducted was quite different than the environment in which Study One was conducted. Study One was conducted after two rounds of redeployments and right before a third. The environment during Study One was very unstable and ambiguous. Study Two was conducted three years after the last round of downsizing. Each of those years, the company was continuing to grow again with 2005 being a very high growth year for the Company. Study One's themes were around communication, the layoff process and surviving. Study Two's themes were somewhat similar around the layoffs and surviving but were spoken to in much broader terms. In addition, communication was not a theme at all in Study Two and Study Two saw a lot of focus on the Company that was not seen in Study One.

Was it the passage of time that accounted for the differences in the themes in the two studies? Had time helped heal or was it because the environment was more positive? What if the Company had not just come off a high growth year when Study Two was conducted and the environment was more similar to the environment in Study One? Would the themes and differences be the same?

The Impact of Time

The overall differences between Study One and Study Two with regards to the layoff process and surviving were all around detail. In Study One, there was a lot of talk around communication, concern over those impacted by the layoffs, and emotions of the survivors themselves. In contrast, communication was not a topic in Study Two and the survivors were much more focused on themselves as survivors and how they were treated versus how those impacted were treated. In Study One, those impacted by the

redeployments and layoffs were highly discussed in terms of the Redeployment process, the use of “pool time,” and the use of career counseling services. There seemed to be a rationalization process happening in Study One as survivors dealt with their guilt of surviving by focusing on those impacted and the good things the Company did to help them. In contrast, those impacted were not at all a topic of conversation in Study Two. Survivors were much more concerned with how they themselves had been treated by management and their own state of being today. In Study One, survivors talked about their emotions to a great extent whereas in Study Two, emotions were not a topic of conversation.

The passage of time seemed to have shifted the survivors focus and areas of concerns between Study One and Study Two. Perhaps it can be explained that the survivors healed and moved on over the course of time or perhaps somewhat of a memory loss had occurred in that the survivors no longer remembered “the bad times” and were focused on today.

The Impact of Environment

One theme that recurred in both studies was the questioning of the selection process of who stayed and who went. In both Study One and Study Two, survivors questioned the fairness of the selection process and the phrase “who you know” was a common one. Overall, most survivors either felt the selection process was unknown or unfair. I have a theory on why this theme may have recurred in both studies and I attribute it to the environment and timing in which Study Two was conducted. As mentioned, Study Two’s environment was far different from that of Study One.

However, after hiring ~20,000 people in 2005, the executive staff were in process of reevaluating our growth needs for the remainder of 2006 and external hiring had been slowed down significantly. Although no mention of redeployments or layoffs had been mentioned, the anticipation or forecasting of this as possible options might have been in the minds of the survivors during the course of Study Two. I believe many were concerned we were going to see a replay of what happened in 2001, that after a year of record hiring, it was quite possible the Company was going to go through redeployments and layoffs once again.

This is also my theory for a theme that occurred in Study Two that did not occur in Study One and that was around the Company. In Study One, the themes were much more focused on the detailed events of the day, the layoffs, the processes, the emotions, and surviving. In Study Two, a major theme of discussion was around the Company, its overall practices, and its future. For the most part, the discussion around this theme was primarily negative. As mentioned, the word “pendulum” and the phrase “pendulum swing” were very common. The survivors had been witness to three downsizings three years ago where they felt too many people were let go. These feelings were validated when our department had to scramble to meet the new growth needs for 2005. Had we not lost as many people as we did in 2001-2003, the need for the “pendulum swing” would not have been needed. To hear talk of hiring slowing down after a year of aggressive hiring had many questioning the management of the Company. Had Study Two been conducted a quarter earlier, perhaps in the Fall of 2005, I am not sure this

theme would have been a dominant one. In the case of this theme, I believe the environment is also the variable responsible and not simply the passage of time.

In summary, not only did the passage of time seem to impact the differing themes in the two studies, but the environment in which the two studies were conducted seemed to also have an impact. The slightest change in environment, regardless of how much time has or has not passed, seems to also be a variable in the themes of survivor talk.

Limitations

Although the use of an ethnographic method of data collection was a gap in the current literature that I wanted to address in this thesis, the possibility of the introduction of the researcher's bias must be accepted. However, I believe the data collected utilizing this method would not have been available to an external researcher. In addition to having access to internal organizational communications, I do not believe the candor of my fellow employees as they shared their experiences, thoughts, and feelings would have been experienced by an external researcher.

As mentioned, three of the ten interviewees had moved on to different departments within the Company. Although still employees of the Company, their environments had changed and this may have influenced their interviews differently in Study Two than had they remained in the same department as the rest of the survivors interviewed.

Interviews were not conducted in a consistent manner. Some were held over the phone while others were conducted face to face, simply due to logistical constraints. Although I let every participant know that I would be taking notes, I found those who

were interviewed over the phone spoke much more in a conversation style, without hesitation. In contrast, I noticed in some of the interviews conducted face to face, the participants were focused on my note taking. Seeing me taking notes may have taken away some of the conversation “feel” that was experienced with the phone interviewees and caused hesitation for those being interviewed face to face.

The research focus of this thesis looked at the themes of survivor talk and the differences of themes that emerged during two different time periods, and it analyzed whether the passage of time was an impact on those themes. Overall, the two studies conducted three years apart had both overlapping as well as unique themes. In the cases of the overlapping themes, there was still some distinguishing characteristics as Study One seemed to be more detailed and focused on the day whereas Study Two was much more focused on the “big picture.” However, the environment at the Company has been more turbulent during the time between the two studies than any other time period in my history with the Company (approximately eleven years). The data collected during Study Two could’ve produced very different results had it been conducted a year or even a quarter earlier. For the themes that were unique to each study (Communication in Study One and The Company in Study Two), not only was the passage of time accredited as the possible explanation as to why they were themes in one study and not the other, but the change in environment could also be an explanation. Although Study Two was conducted in a much more positive environment than Study One, it was also conducted after hiring had slowed down after a year of high growth. Although time had passed,

Study Two might have produced different themes if the environment was not as positive or the high growth of 2005 was continuing into 2006.

Implications and Future Studies

This thesis addressed gaps in the current literature by doing a longitudinal study comparing two studies conducted three years apart with varying environments and utilizing an ethnographic method of data collection by an employee of the subject company. Communication and the notion of *perceived fairness* were common themes in the existing literature and they were themes in Study One of this thesis as well. However, after the passage of time, Communication was no longer a dominant theme, but perceived fairness transcended time emerging in the survivor talk of Study Two. Although the concern over the fairness aspect of the redeployments and layoffs emerged in both studies, the passage of time seemed to have the survivors more concerned about the process versus the people affected by it. In Study One, the survivors seemed to be very concerned about the fairness of the process out of concern for those impacted whereas in Study Two, the concern was simply on the fairness of the process itself, possibly questioning its use in future redeployment and lay-off actions. I believe the environment in which Study Two was conducted might have contributed to this. Although no talk of redeployments or lay-offs had been mentioned, the slow down in hiring from the previous year and speculation on the future was on the minds of the survivors.

Future research should include more comparison of longitudinal studies researching other possible variables besides the passage of time. Differences in environment seemed to have an additional impact on the differing themes in the two

studies analyzed in this thesis. Perhaps other variables should be researched in future studies to see if they impact themes of survivor talk. For example, comparison of years of service or point in career of the survivors, comparison of locations or sites of survivors, or comparison of survivors from varying industries are possibilities.

Although the use of an ethnographic methodology is a possible limitation due to the researcher's bias, the use of this method should be considered more in future survivor research. Feelings and emotions are much more openly spoken about amongst trusted colleagues than in a survey or in a research setting. The continued use of the ethnographic method in future Survivor Syndrome research should produce more detailed data and further help us understand this phenomenon.

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