

A STUDY ON THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF REPEATED DOWNSIZING ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

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Article Received: 25 May 2026, Article Revised: 13 June 2026, Published on: 03 July 2026

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Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.3418>

ABSTRACT

Due to the dearth of empirical studies in the area and the contradictory information they offer, our understanding of the long-term effects of downsizing and the effects of repetitive downsizing is currently limited. This article reviews the three theoretical perspectives found in the downsizing literature and comes to the following conclusions: downsizing does have a long-term impact on employees and organizations; repeat downsizing outcomes are influenced by the type of downsizing contact and the order of that contact; and employee vulnerability or resilience to repeat downsizing is dependent on the outcome under investigation. Many businesses prefer to shrink as a means of survival during periods of difficult economic conditions like the current crisis. The survivors of downsizing may have a number of negative consequences, which may be harmful to the organization. The way these survivors are treated will determine how well the downsizing process goes. Because employee motivation affects productivity, it's critical to understand how to manage these survivors so that they are as driven as possible. According to researchers, most organizations that undergo downsizing have initiatives to assist the departing employees but very few have programs for the ones that stay.

KEYWORDS: Downsizing, Repeat Downsizing, Long-term Effects of Downsizing, employee motivation.

INTRODUCTION

The absence of a dominating paradigm in the literature on downsizing exposes an area where divergent opinions are common about fundamental issues, such as whether downsizing is beneficial or detrimental to organizations and the people who work there. The institutional approach (De Meuse et al., 2004), the well-being perspective (Ferrie, 2002; Moore, 2004 and 2006), and the psychological contract are three ideas that have been advanced to explain the impacts of downsizing (Lester et al., 2003). While this diversity offers the chance to approach downsizing from a range of theoretical perspectives, it also limits the usefulness that a theory of downsizing could have for practitioners. Whether downsizing has long-term impacts on both the business and the people who work there, as well as how multiple waves of downsizing interact and influence personnel, are hotly debated issues in the downsizing literature. Companies all across the world started implementing personnel reductions as a result of the economic slump in the first ten years of this century. More specifically, nearly 36,000 downsizing events affecting approximately 64.5 million employees were reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the United States between 2006 and 2010. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006-2010). In the UK, the redundancy rate peaked in 2009 at about 15 per 1000 employees, and the unemployment rate increased from 5% in 2006 to 8% in 2010 (Campos et al., 2010- 2011). The issue of the duration of downsizing effects and the combined effect of repeat downsizing is of the utmost importance to accurately account for the true costs, risks, and benefits of downsizing given that a firm that has downsized once is over 65% more likely to downsize again in the following year than a company that has never downsized (Cascio, 2002). The world is evolving. The financial crisis of 2007–2008 began after the US housing bubble broke, and it also influenced the crisis in the Eurozone (Williams, 2012 & Elliot, 2012). Consumers in today's society were not the only ones affected by this crisis; businesses also encountered significant issues (Florian, 2009). They experienced significant drops in their profits or even losses, and some of them felt pressure to shut down, restructure, and lay off staff. According to the CIA World Factbook, countries including France, the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom have increased unemployment rates, which are likely the result of company closures and downsizing (2012).

Employee relocations and staff reductions are two aspects of these reorganizations. The Dutch ING bank (ANP, 2012), one of the firms that has reduced, has plans to lay off 2350 staff this

time after firing 2700 people last year (ANP, 2011). Since they may be concerned about losing their jobs during this or the next reorganization, employees and survivors of the downsizing plan at a corporation like the ING bank may alter how they operate. They can be uncertain about how the business will carry on its activities. In current challenging times, your chances of finding work again in the short and long terms after being dismissed are declining. Since unemployment rates are rising and there are fewer open positions available, getting fired as a result of a downsizing or restructuring may be less problematic in economically stable periods than it is now. A (new) employment and (continuous) income security might not be as likely. The psychological contract, which is used to explain negative outcomes for individuals as a result of a violation of organizational promises and expectations of employees (Lester et al., 2003), and the rational paradigm (economic theory), which highlights the risks and benefits from reducing costs and streamlining operations, are the three theoretical perspectives that predominate in the literature on the long-term effects of downsizing and the effect of repeat downsizing (Ferrie, 2002; Moore, 2004 and 2006). An overview of these three viewpoints and their implications for theory and practice are provided in this article. Preliminary conclusions related to hotly debated subjects in the discipline are presented, and areas needing more research are noted.

Economic perspective

Two prevailing assumptions describe the existing work on the consequences of repetitive downsizing and the long-term effects of downsizing on economic indicators. First, multiple shrinking signals substantial issues, which in turn causes negative market reactions and other financial indicators because downsizing is a symptom of financial trouble (Carriger, 2017; Gilson et al., 2004). Second, that downsizing can be viewed as a continuous improvement process (Gandolfi and Littler, 2012) where evaluation and learning from prior waves of downsizing could result in a) better planning of subsequent waves (Gilson and Wagar, 1996 in Gilson et al., 2004) and/or b) better realignment of operations and goals that result in improved operating performance (Lin and Yang, 2006). According to the frequency of downsizing in that time period, research of Fortune 500 businesses between 2008 and 2015 found no appreciable differences in ROE, EBITDA, current ratio, long-term debt, inventory turnover, revenue per employee, total asset turnover, or total revenue (Carriger, 2017). However, compared to single downsizers, businesses that downsized more frequently had weaker profitability ratios and more negative market valuations. Significantly, businesses that underwent a downsizing program in or around 2008 were more likely to undergo another

one than businesses that did not do so at the start of the study period, reflecting the high incidence of repeat downsizing when a business has already implemented a downsizing program once. The signaling theory, which holds that downsizing sends out negative signals to the market and consequently has a negative impact on stock equity, and the Band-Aid theory, which holds that downsizing doesn't address the root causes of strategic or financial problems, are both supported by these results, according to Carriger (2017). Therefore, downsizing as a strategy might offer a quick fix but not a permanent one. Although they have been challenged for concentrating on immediate consequences when the long-term effects of downsizing may not have yet materialized, certain empirical research have demonstrated that downsizing has no apparent influence on financial indicators (Cascio, 1998; De Meuse, 1994).

Despite downsizing enterprises having worse profit margin, ROA, ROE, asset efficiency, and market-to-book ratio than non-downsizing firms in the first five years after the downsizing, the gap vanished in the years that followed, according to a 12-year study by De Meuse and colleagues (2004). Therefore, overall financial performance did not differ considerably between organizations that were shrinking and those that were not. It's interesting to note that companies that downsized repeatedly three times or more in an eight-year period performed financially worse than those that reduced less frequently. Companies that downsized by more than 10% of their personnel outperformed those that did so by less than 10% of their workforce due in large part to the scale of the downsizing program. The authors came to the conclusion that downsizing did work in that it might have prevented downsizing companies from performing poorly because the majority of disparities between downsizing and non-downsizing enterprises disappear after a few years. Adopting an institutional perspective on downsizing, they argue that it becomes institutionalized, normalized, and makes repeat downsizing very likely. Because the negative impact of repeat downsizing on financial performance was minimal, these authors believe that after repeated exposure to downsizing, employees may begin to accept it as a legitimate competitive strategy. Because these impacts of downsizing are occurring more frequently and intensely, not just labor unions but the entire society is paying more attention to and showing more sympathy for those employees who lose their jobs (Belga, 2012) than for the survivors (Campbell, 2006). Despite the fact that these survivors were able to keep their positions, research by Kammeyer-Mueller, Liao & Arvey (2001), among others, has indicated that following the downsizing, their attitudes and motivation may have decreased. Pollard (2001) discovered that these adverse downsizing

effects decreased over time, however these effects can last longer than just the downsizing's implementation phase (Hanges & Kernan, 2002). In order to increase productivity, efforts should be made to lessen these and other impacts, such as burnout and experiencing job insecurity, loss of cohesion, and loss of sense of justice (Grant, 2008: Grant et. al, 2007; deCharms, 1957; Campion, LeRouge, Maertz & Wiley, 2010; De Cuyper, Raeder, Van der Heijden & Wittekind, 2012). It will be advantageous to keep the current workforce as productive as possible because they represent a key part of the company's intangible assets (Eskildsen, Westlund & Kristensen, 2004). Most organizations fail to meet their goals after downsizing as a result of failing to fully and effectively address the so-called "people factor" with respect to survivors during the downsizing phase, according to Appelbaum et al. (1997).

Psychological contract perspective

It is yet unclear how downsizing and repeated downsizing may affect employees' attitudes and behaviors in the long run, as well as the psychological contract. The body of research indicates that downsizing frequently leads to psychological contract violations and breaches (Rousseau, 1995; Lester et al., 2003; Robinson, 1994). Due to the relationship's termination and subsequent truncation, it is more likely to have an impact on how the business and its personnel perceive their respective commitments to one another. Employees are forced to rethink their view of the workplace since it is so profoundly distressing and regularly disturbing (Jaffe and Scott, 1998). According to Armstrong-Stassen (1998), male technicians who had experienced reductions more frequently felt a greater sense of distributive injustice and a higher risk of losing their jobs, and they also used more positive thinking and direct-action coping strategies than male technicians who had experienced reductions less frequently. The feeling of unfair targeting grows as there is more contact with layoffs. On judgments of procedural injustice, helplessness, and help-seeking avoidance, there were no appreciable changes. Amabile and Conti (1999) demonstrated that the two years following a downsizing were when creativity was most negatively impacted. In extreme situations, downsizing might increase the risk of sabotage, fraud, and theft (Gandolfi, 2006). Two years after the events, Grunberg et al. (2000) observed that layoffs had a considerable detrimental impact on commitment. However, the psychological contract has been significantly impacted by the changes in workplace relationships during the past few decades. Work instability and short-termism evolved from psychological contract breaches (Robinson et al., 1994) to accepted norms as the job market got more unpredictable (De Meuse and Marks, 2003). The psychological contract's emphasis has shifted away from stability and long-term employment

to the organization's other products as a result of the increased job insecurity now anticipated (Lester, 2003). According to Kanter (1989) and Bellou (2009), "new" employees are more concerned with maintaining their employability and marketability of their abilities. Such a shift in expectations suggests that, given that downsizing is now a fact of employment, long-term employee reactions to it may be less negative than previously believed. According to a number of studies, some of the immediate negative effects of downsizing eventually subside. For instance, perceptions of freedom in the workplace, adequate resources, supervisory support, workgroup trust, and job security (Amabile and Conti, 1999), as well as job security (Luthans and Sommer, 1999), are all factors that were found to be affected (Armstrong-Stassen, 2002). There is proof that groups who have had touch with layoffs do better than groups who have had no contact at all (Armstrong-Stassen et

al., 2004). In fact, compared to departments that underwent downsizing, there may be a reduction in outcomes in non-downsized departments (Luthans and Sommer, 1999).

Well-Being Perspective

One of the most hotly debated topics in the downsizing literature is whether or if going through several downsizing events makes workers more resilient because they have grown accustomed to the experience, or whether they get weaker from the repeated shock and become more vulnerable. The fundamental presumptions in both instances are that downsizing is a stressor that affects physiological and psychological wellbeing markers, that prior exposure to downsizing matters enough to determine future reactions to it, and that its effects persist after the events. Understanding the long-term effects of downsizing as well as the interplay between numerous downsizing waves is a priority due to the high prevalence of downsizing and the likelihood of repeat shrinking. The wellbeing viewpoint examines the physiological and psychological repercussions of downsizing while taking into account a number of variables, such as the likelihood of being laid off, which could directly or indirectly endanger people (Grunberg et al., 2001) the sequence (direct or indirect), length of effects, and characteristics of downsizing events, such as major vs small downsizing programs (Moore et al., 2004; Kivimaki et al., 2001 in Moore et al., 2006). The degree of similarity between stressor events is a crucial factor to take into account in the research on stress resilience and sensitivity. According to Dougall et al. (2000), the degree of similarity across experiences affects whether or not resiliency is attained (resiliency is understood as returning to pre-trauma functioning). They contend that only similar events can foster

resilience because people may draw lessons from one experience and apply them to a subsequent one that is similar, whereas various types of trauma may result in more severe chronic stress. As a result, the type of exposure to the downsizing event may determine the effect that is seen. For instance, workers who have been directly exposed to layoffs twice may develop greater resilience than workers who have experienced both direct and indirect exposure. According to Moore et al. (2004), the vulnerability approach is supported. They noticed that frequent exposure to downsizing resulted in "chronic employment insecurity" (p. 248). In contrast to a single contact of either sort, two downsizing contacts of the same kind—direct contact or indirect contact as defined by Grunberg et al. (2000; 2001)—were associated with lower health, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes. This was especially true if both contacts had been direct. Additionally, direct and indirect contact that was mixed was worse than two indirect contacts. Anecdotal data from the

study suggests that the first touch of any kind was significantly more distressing than the second. The researchers came to the conclusion that the direct or indirect nature of downsizing interaction may not be qualitatively different but rather represent various intensities of the same stress. On the other side, the quantity of contacts had a substantial impact on how layoffs turned out. The vulnerability perspective was further supported by Armstrong-Stassen (1997). When she compared managers with different layoff histories, she discovered that managers with more layoff contact had higher continuation commitment and lower affective commitment. In other words, the managers' desire to remain in the company decreased as they experienced more layoffs but still felt unable to quit. However, she discovered that the number of times managers were laid off made little difference to the effects. She attributed this to the possibility that the first layoff could have irreparably damaged the psychological contract, and as a result, subsequent experiences had little bearing on the effects after the initial one.

Implications for theory and practice

An economic approach first predominated the literature on the long-term effects of downsizing and the effects of repeated downsizing. But more recently, the perspectives on the psychological contract and wellbeing have helped to provide a more thorough explanation of the downsizing phenomena. Financial or economic criteria, while very essential, fall short in assessing damages that are difficult to quantify. Corporate reputation, organizational knowledge, skill deterioration, creativity and innovation, work impact, and organizational

dedication are a few of these. A true evaluation of the success of downsizing should take into account both non-financial and financial results (Schmitt et al., 2011). The three literary subgenres covered above have two significant things in common. First, when evaluating the efficacy of downsizing operations, it is important to take into account the effects of shrinking, both in the long-term and over multiple waves of downsizing. The body of research examined in this paper demonstrates that downsizing has long-term repercussions that might be positive or negative. As a result, it is important to estimate the exact cost of downsizing while keeping an eye on potential future effects that may or may not achieve the original goals. Additionally, numerous downsizing waves interact to produce major variations in employee attitudes and actions. As a result, there is a need for a deliberate effort to comprehend the ramifications of these phenomena, which is becoming more and more common in modern firms. Second, a variety of variables, some of which are still being researched, affect how

downsizing is perceived. The kind of downsizing approach that employees experience—such as layoffs, dismissals, and failing to fill openings—has a different impact on the long-term effects of downsizing (Kalimo, 2003). Understanding why some downsizing techniques are more harmful to employee well-being than others require more investigation of the characteristics and perceived significance of various approaches. Higher-level tactics, including reactive or proactive downsizing, have been demonstrated to have various effects on employee outcomes and are closely tied to the downsizing method of choice (Jackson et al., 2000; van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012) (Gandolfi, 2008; Sahdev, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Although comprehending the effects of downsizing has advanced significantly, there are still many gaps in our understanding. One of these is the presumption that repeated downsizing will have homogenous long-term impacts, i.e., causing vulnerability or resilience; another is the overrepresentation of layoffs in literature, which obscures the potentially various effects that other downsizing strategies may have. Future research should also take into account the impact of staff reductions made in ways other than layoffs. Future studies should also include multinational environments or comparisons between other national contexts to account for the complicated interaction between country-level factors and the effect of downsizing in order to represent a larger range of contexts in which downsizing occurs. The industries under consideration must also be more diverse, for instance by integrating knowledge workers, the gig economy, and temporary workers. A more complex assessment of the impact of

downsizing has been made possible by valuable efforts to distinguish between various sorts of survivors (Moore and al., 2004 and 2006) and various types of downsizing contact (Grunberg et al., 2001). The extreme subjectivity of the "indirect contact" category, however, calls into question the concept's practical application. The ability of managers to distinguish between survivors whose friends or close coworkers have been downsized and those whose friends and close coworkers have not is difficult to envision. After all, not everyone will likely have the same definition of a buddy or close coworker. It is vital to account for the nature of the shrinking encounter in various ways as a result. Arzuaga and colleagues (2021) present a contextual proximity perspective that takes into account the degree of similarity between the environment of employees (i.e., relevant contextual features like country and organizational function) and the environment of areas targeted for downsizing. This perspective removes the subjectivity of perceptual measures and extends segmentation strategies to all phases of a downsizing program, meaning it can be used before individual downsizing decisions are made. Finally, despite the existence and applicability of a new psychological contract that would make workers more resistant to downsizing being proposed by several authors (De Meuse and Marks, 2003; Lester, 2003), there is little proof that such a contract would lessen the overall negative outcomes seen in practice.

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