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Managing the Survivor Syndrome as Scenario Planning Methodology … and it Matters!

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Abstract

Purpose: The importance of foresight is discussed in relation to why traditional scenario planning methodology is problematic at achieving it. The 'survivor syndrome' is borrowed from the human resources literature and presented as a metaphor for foresight to illustrate how better 'scenarios' can be achieved by understanding the syndrome better. A practice perspective is given on the use of a 7-theme framework as a method of interviewing survivors.

Methodology: The article draws from an empirical research that took place during the 2008 global financial crisis to illustrate the richness of the insights that would otherwise not be obtainable through scenario planning methods that do not involve 'survivors'. In that research, semi-structured interviews were employed with key personnel at multiple levels of one private and one public organization that had undergone a redundancy process at the time of the crisis to explore its effect on the remaining workforce.

Findings: The 'survivor syndrome' itself would be minimized if managers consider the feelings of survivors with more open communication. Survivors in private firms were found generally to experience anxiety, but are more likely to remain more motivated, than their counterparts in the public sector. These detailed insights create more accurate 'scenarios' in scenario planning exercises.

Originality/value: Organizational performance can be better enhanced if the survivor syndrome can be better managed. In turn, scenario planning, as a form of organizational foresight, is better practiced through managing the survivor syndrome. Scenario planning methodology has proliferated well in the human resource management literature.

Keywords: foresight; scenario planning; survivor syndrome; strategizing; performance management.

Paper type: Reflective practice paper

Introduction

Foresight has become one of the latest management buzzwords, rising above many other tools of strategic competitive advantage, particularly in times of uncertainty and environmental turbulence. Principally the ability to incorporate into the present decisions of organizations (organizational foresight) or specifically into the strategic decisions (strategic foresight) the expectations of future conditions, foresight is the capacity to think systematically and develop as individuals and as an organization to prepare for those future eventualities. More elegantly put, "foresight is a unique and highly-valued human capacity that is widely recognized as a major source of competitive advantage and cultural renewal within nations and corporations" (Chia, 2002, p.5). However, how exactly foresight can be practiced remains at the forefront of researchers' agenda, and has offered a variety of answers, not the least one involving the use of scenario planning methodology.

The much documented global financial crisis of 2008 has provoked an outbreak of research to understand it better, such as the causes and lessons learned so that firms may revert smoothly back to their routine activities (see Chau et al., 2012). While luck may have had a significant role to play (Parnell et al., 2012) in volatile environments, at times when luck is not on a firm's side, it is resorted to utilizing foresight as a valuable vehicle with which to forecast, scan and scenario plan for the future. In this article, the importance of scenario planning (as a methodology of foresight) is presented as a metaphor for how employees felt after coming close to redundancy during a major restructure of the organization. Understanding and stabilizing these feelings are useful in engaging in foresight/scenario planning exercises as these staff are responsible for restoring the organization. The term 'survivor syndrome' is used in this article to refer to this set of feelings, following Baruch and Hind (2000), specifically in the context of downsizing or redundancy, but can concern any other reason for reducing a workforce, such as downscoping, implementation of artificial intelligence systems or simply improving management processes, which itself has been a growing phenomenon and is seen as a part of work life (Datta et al. 2010). As a mental condition originally understood from the discipline of psychology that stems off from post-traumatic stress disorder, it relates to any 'tragedy' felt by the sufferer and the overall guilt about surviving, what should have been done and what the survivor actually did (Hendriksen, 2018). A major reason for the failure of many firms is not

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just the original causes of the downsizing but also their inability to manage the survivor syndrome afterwards, as survivors are unlikely to behave in the same way after the downsizing, despite the small majority who suffer 'learned helplessness' – a condition that explains why sufferers (such as victims of domestic abuse) remain in the same situation, believing little can change and accepting the continued suffering (Appelbaum et al., 1997). van Dick et al. (2016) found that identification (the ability of the survivor to identify themselves within the organization immediately after the downsizing) is a mediator of individual performance, so it is imperative to understand the self-categorization process of individuals that can either plunge the organization into further difficulty or pull it out of existing trouble, which in turn will assist an economy to recover.

Hence, the reason for using foresight as a metaphor to understand the survivor syndrome better – to 'problematize' the body of knowledge, to borrow a term from the management research literature (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) – is because these 'survivors' are those an economy must rely on to pull it out of an existing recession, and so such insights have valuable, practical implications and offer transferrable lessons learned for managers for future recessions of a variety of capitalist types (for a review of such varieties of capitalism, see Witcher and Chau, 2012). Sahdev (2004) argues, because the survivor syndrome can be likened to a breach of the psychological contract and a violation of organizational justice, the reconciliation process (and reorientation of survivors after the redundancy) would involve top leaders (including politicians) in mediating between internal and external institutional forces, thus linking the behaviors of the survivors directly to macro-economic conditions, such as economic growth.

The referent of a major economic recession is also supportive of Taleb's (2007) argument to establish 'convexity' in achieving a positive outcome (Derbyshire and Wright, 2016), when the 2008 global financial crisis was possibly a 'black swan event' due to its high unpredictability and high impact, making the practice of scenario planning particularly difficult. Foresight is therefore facilitated by the micro-practice perspective of the firm (eg. Sarpong et al, 2013) to smooth out the harder strategic options during a recession. The attention of this article is therefore on understanding the detailed management issues, such as individual staff motivation levels from the broad

management literatures (eg. Brockner et al. 1986; de Vries and Balazs 1997; Paulsen et al. 2005; Bean and Hamilton 2006), to advise how to manage better in major economic recessions.

To do so, the present article draws from a firsthand research project to offer insights obtained through the use of conducting interviews with survivors of two large organizations (of around 500 employees in each) that underwent a major redundancy program. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain deeper insights on the themes relating to the survivor syndrome, so that it could be better managed by the senior managers to re-orientate them back into the routine work of the organization in the post redundancy phase. The organizations were selected based on them being a major employer in the region, which meant that jobs were scarce and thus represented an extreme survivor syndrome that the interviewees faced. The fact that the organizations represented both private and public sectors meant the insights obtained would represent good generalizability; while there were some differences between the two organizations that required noting, the purpose of the research was not to conduct a direct comparison between them. Non-probability sampling within the organizations for identifying the interviewees was used because (i) the topic was perceived sensitive to many survivors after the downsizing so it was best not to have pre-discussed matters with them, and (ii) most of the survivors were overloaded with additional work as the structure had just been reduced so it was too much to pressurize an already busy workforce for additional volunteers. Over thirty people volunteered to take part in the study, although the final sample consisted of eighteen individuals because the data had already become saturated and sufficient insights had been obtained. The sample included six females (12 males), nine from the private firm (9 from the public firm) and six in managerial positions (12 at operational levels). The (arithmetic mean) average age was about fifty years. The interviews took place between six and eight months after the redundancy rounds of both companies; this enabled the interviewees to have calmed down, carried on and thought forward with respect to their organizational performance and their own careers, enabling a more accurate reflection of their experiences.

In this illustrative example, semi-structured interviews were used: no specific set of questions was asked to the interviewees, as the nature of the research was inductive with the intention of obtaining as many new insights as possible, although the questions fell within the topic of the survivor syndrome. The conversations were mainly one-sided, allowing the interviewees to discuss their

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experiences and only a few prompts were made by the interviewer to ensure the conversations did not go off-topic. Each interview lasted around an hour in length, was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards. The interview transcriptions were analyzed manually as the researchers knew the contexts extremely well, using traditional theme tree and content analysis (thematic analysis) techniques to group and present the conversations within their popular researched themes (eg. Miles and Huberman 1994). A reflexive account of the researchers' observations and personal judgements was kept to control for bias, in line with recommendations made a decade ago in the present Journal (see Chau and Witcher, 2009).

This article contributes empirically in two ways: first, rich and in-depth insights from survivors are sought that have the benefit of understanding social practice that connects the future and past (as argued for by Sarpong and Maclean, 2014), which complement extant research findings that are too specific and isolated; and second, these views pivot around how defining characteristics of private and public firms shape the emotions and motivation of employees during economically critical times. In so doing, it also contributes theoretically by arguing the appropriateness of interviewing on the themes of the survivor syndrome as an augmented scenario planning methodology for the specific situation of managing in conditions of severe economic crises (but does not necessarily replace other well-established approaches of general planning already in use for other general conditions); this is purported as an improved mechanism as it overcomes the doubts over the suitability of research participants within the technique and strikes an appropriate balance between plausibility and probability, as the participants are exclusively all those at stake and have come close to the most plausible and highly probable conditions concerned.

It is now a decade since the highly impactful global financial crisis of 2008. This article contributes to the special issue by offering a practice reflection on the use of the once considered 'breakthrough' methodology of scenario planning. Thus, it argues that interviewing survivors on the themes identified in this article relating to the survivor syndrome is an improved method of conducting scenario planning because of the near-redundancy experiences that would have led them to a different behavior within the organization, that could not otherwise be obtained through laboratory-based methods of strategizing. The harmony between this interviewing technique and the

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aim of scenario planning suggests a natural proliferation of the use of scenario planning for the broad purposes of managing organizational performance.

What are Foresight and Scenario Planning, and why they matter?

They matter, at least for foresight, as in the words of Chia (2002: p.5) "… the ability to read, interpret, foresee and redefine emergent global socio-political and economic trends … are all important assets that no forward-looking nation or organization can afford to ignore". While it is generally agreed that foresight is a capacity of individuals and firms with which to develop a competitive advantage, the exact way this is achieved has been heavily disputed. In this section, these key propositions are reviewed and discussed in the light of our argument for how it matters for firms considering downsizing strategies as a strategic option during an economic crisis, as a way to remain forward-looking and competitive. Foresight is a metaphor in this sense because of its importance in considering future eventualities, but is only possible in knowing the counterfactual of a strategic downsizing decision, which can only be obtained from those who were placed in a vulnerable position of that decision and 'survived' it and can subsequently tell their stories and comment on that apprehension.

Foresight though is understood under a number of guises. Neugarten (2006) reviews the usable value of foresight as competitive intelligence by likening its limitations to those of a biological eye; looking too directly into the future is problematic (eg. tunnel vision ignores the surroundings and blind-spots), and looking forwards should not neglect the importance of looking sideways. For the organization, additional vision should involve those players who are not ordinarily deemed core to decision making. For example, Chau and Quire (2018) identify the most common – women – and their particular value in foresight exercises in the technology sector. Research by Sarpong and Maclean (2014) and Sarpong et al (2013) also emphasizes the importance of human participants – that is, the need to examine ordinary organizational members – in order for human capacity to connect with the past, present and future in a social practice. In this instance, survivors of redundancy rounds are those key human participants of the organizational process whose 'feelings' are core to the future outcome of a present decision, and can be understood as an opportunity to preview a particular

strategic consequence, thereby linking together all states of past (the economic condition that resulted in the strategic consideration), present (strategic choice of downsizing) and future (the resultant labor force). It is therefore necessary to examine the themes of the downsizing/redundancy literature (eg. e Cunha et al., 2006) in order to understand the minutiae of an organization's working, to enable the conduct of effective foresight exercises.

Scenario planning is probably the broadest form of foresight in that it does not predict the specifics of the future per se, but attempts to understand the critical uncertainties that organizations face in their strategic context and to improve the quality of strategic decisions (Meissner and Wulf, 2016). Argued in Schoemaker's (1995) seminal article as a valuable tool for strategic thinking and based on first use of the methodology over half a century ago at Royal Dutch/Shell Company in the 1960s (see Wack, 1985), scenario planning constructs scenarios to overcome highly uncertain situations for managers to predict; over the long-term, the usual problems of overconfidence and tunnel vision can be compensated for. Its application has been varied and continues to be of considerable research interest in new and different contexts – for example, for energy and online platforms in Alizadeh et al's (2016) and Raford's (2015) respective recent reviews.

At the core of scenario planning lies the main question, 'if then?', to set out such scenarios, and numerous attempts have been made to refine the most appropriate technique for carrying out this task (see Wulf, Meissner and Stubner, 2010). These have typically involved the regular two-by-two matrixes as well as the use of repeated strategic workshops to go through intensive steps of procedure and discussion (see Franco et al., 2013). Cairns et al. (2016) argue the use of such workshops helps make the unfamiliar more familiar, but also suggest the inclusion of scenario refinement and improvisation, such that "the improved scenario(s) must be designed to make the familiar *unfamiliar* [emphasis added], to provoke challenge, but aim to be credible and relevant" (p. 101). Perhaps one of the key problems is that involving the need to understand better the significance of historical events (Bradfield, Derbyshire and Wright, 2016) that average out in future decisions.

Termed the 'scenario planning paradox', it is argued there is insufficient theory to support scenario planning methodology, therefore rendering it chaotic, so empiricism is crucial to make it useful (Spaniol and Rowland, 2018). In other words, more data are needed to support procedure.

Specific steps for conducting scenario planning, like those of Burt et al. (2006) or Konno et al. (2014), offer valuable 'how-to' guidance on the methodology, and are heavily premised on environmental analyses. However, following Taleb (2007) on recognizing 'black swan' events that subvert from industry trends for which organizations struggle to plan due to unpredictable conditions, there is the need to build on more organizationally resilient approaches that establish convexity to redistribute events for a more positive outcome (Derbyshire and Wright, 2014). 'Surprise' (borrowing from 'potential surprise theory') suggests there is some theoretical grounding surrounding the uncertainty around decision making during turbulent environments (Derbyshire, 2017). Much questioned in the extant literature is the extent to which the 2008 global financial crisis constitutes a recent black swan event (Witcher and Chau, 2014) – ie, one which came as a surprise. As history has indicated the likelihood of its occurrence, some might argue that some black swans turn white, and some events are in fact 'grey swans' (as events average out over time).

Averaging out events realistically, or striking the balance between those conditions that are plausible and probable (Ramirez and Selin, 2014), is difficult when environmental conditions are turbulent and highly unstable, so some form of go-between to get closer to the most appropriate scenario is required. The need to scenario plan is heightened when conditions are uncertain and when competitive environments are dynamic (Oliver and Parrett, 2018). It is found that the wider the pool of participants involved in generating the scenarios, the more realistic the scenario might be derived (Zapata and Kaza, 2015), but reliance is placed significantly on additional scenario developers who might already be few in existence. Other common 'pitfalls' or established problems associated with scenario planning in general include bias (availability and reporting, group-think, culture), relevance (appropriateness and availability of participants) and longevity and resilience (short-termism involved in some work and availability of tools and techniques) (KPMG, 2011). Scenario planning can also 'muddy communications' if presentation of too many scenarios complicates current decision-making and lengthens the tails of the distribution (Roxburgh, 2009).

Nonetheless, we argue the use of a methodology that captures a specific event of volatility is core in improving scenario planning, and can address the above problems, such as by relating to the survivor syndrome. This view is consistent with that of storytelling and the use of an inductive

practice approach are a good conceptual lens for successfully analyzing scenario planning and process data (Bowman et al., 2013). The assumption of a linear relationship between scenario planning and strategy development is wrongly conceived by many pre-existing models as human beings are a rather complex species (Rowland and Spaniol, 2017). Some form of extensive scenario orientation (O'Brien and Meadows, 2013), involving the extensive use of appropriate informants, is the bridge to effective strategy creation. The need to draw directly from the intricacies of human beings was recognized as building new social capital in order to access new information, novel strategic options and collaborative opportunities (Lang and Ramirez, 2017). The common pitfalls mentioned earlier are thus minimized: for example, the problem of bias in opinions can be overcome by the personal jobs at stake of the participants and relevance to context would be high as the participants of the exercise are those who have come close with the situation the organization is scenario planning for. Reducing 'muddy communications' and curtailing the distribution of possible scenarios to become more probable/plausible ones will be more achievable as the participants are specifically selected and scenarios are all clustered around the employment conditions in question.

Hence, our suggestion is to use a 7-theme framework relating to the survivor syndrome which offers up closer insights (or 'scenarios') for understanding situations relating to the better management of the syndrome for the benefit of the survivors. These insights might otherwise not have been achievable through the use of other traditional scenario planning techniques, so this approach helps close the gap (Chermack, 2005) between the theory of scenario planning methodology and practice. The themes framework, explained in the next section, is also consistent with thinking on the meaning of theory within foresight (see Piirainen and Gonzalez, 2015) – that knowledge is created (the seven themes), a process of usage (incorporation into interviewing), and which helps to theorize about the future (by raising specific scenarios).

Themes relating to the Survivor Syndrome

The following themes were identified from an extensive review of the extant literature relating to feelings of employees who survived a redundancy round at their place of work, although 'survivor syndrome' was not the only phrase used in the paper search (other keywords included 'feelings',

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'aftermath', 'redundancy', etc, among others). Other related issues that emerged from the literature review were broadly fitted into the themes given below to minimize the number in total, so that the themes could be used collectively as a simple framework with which to ask questions during interviews with other survivors as part of an organization's strategic foresight (particularly, scenario planning) exercise.

Fairness: Brockner et al. (1987) carried out a field and laboratory study utilizing the justice theory which illustrated that survivors' work behaviors and attitudes are influenced by the selection process undertaken by the organization to lay-off their co-workers. The survivors' reactions to the victims of perceived injustice resulted in survivors distancing themselves from the organization and displaying dysfunctional behavior and attitudes. A selection process that is perceived by survivors to be unjust can therefore have negative consequences and reduce commitment and individual work performance. Travaglione and Cross (2006) however find the converse situation in which any injustice survivors witnessed was overpowered by the feeling they had survived the redundancy process and were treated well in comparison with their colleagues. The manner in which downsizing is executed and the perceived fairness of the downsizing process also influence the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of survivors (Brockner, 1988). A series of studies (see work by Brockner and colleagues, 1988; 1990; 1992) examined the effect of perceived fairness in a controlled environment. This involved survivors witnessing that the organization had dealt with the redundancy process fairly using open communication, an explanation of the redundancy along with a fair selection process and consultation. They felt this would leave survivors feeling committed to the organization, thus increasing their motivation, and ultimately overall company performance. Furthermore, Davy et al. (1991) recommended that requesting input from employees into any organizational decision process further enhances fairness, while Trevor and Nyberg (2008) discussed the impact procedural justice has on the perceived fairness of survivors. Therefore, influencing survivors' perceived fairness prior to downsizing has been shown to manipulate survivors' reactions (Travaglione and Cross, 2006) significantly. Similarly, if a survivor has witnessed an unfair redundancy process s/he tends to have a broken psychological contract (Legge 1995; Sahdev, 2004) which can lead to disruptive behavior, with fear displacing loyalty and trust. Fineman (2003) went further to describe that watching colleagues during a redundancy has been depicted as similar to that of experiencing grief.

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Organizational Assistance: The survivor syndrome is more likely to surface if the survivors perceive that organizational support for those who were laid off is low (Travaglione and Cross, 2006). Survivors must not feel that they have been neglected and that assistance had been provided throughout, during and after the process of organizational transformation during the recession. Organizational assistance is also linked to the perceived fairness of survivors. If an organization is seen to assist survivors and victims then perceived fairness is raised, although the opposite effect occurs if assistance is not provided.

Feelings: Managers need to realize that the way in which victims of layoffs are treated will be observed by those who remain (Travaglione and Cross, 2006) and they should therefore consider survivors' feelings throughout the redundancy process. Most research examines the survivor's affective reactions to redundancy such as anxiety, stress or emotional well-being (Appelbaum and Donia 2001a), whereas redundancy can also lead to more specific emotional states, such as guilt or shame (Fineman, 2003). Survivor guilt is defined as including symptoms such as depression, fear and anger, along with feelings of envy towards those who have left the organization (Sahdev, 2003). Brockner et al. (1985) tested a range of emotions that survivors displayed and questioned whether subjects that felt guilt worked harder to eliminate this feeling and the impact this had on the individual's motivation and attitude. However, as this test was undertaken within a laboratory environment, there was no real threat of job loss to the individual, so it lacked credibility. It could also be plausible to argue that survivors should not feel guilt, as they are typically not responsible for making the decision to dismiss their colleagues. Thinking, known as Adam's Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), demonstrates how redundancy can create an assortment of psychological states in survivors such as job insecurity, positive inequity, anger and relief. These emotional states will likely have an impact on the survivor's motivation, job satisfaction and commitment (Brockner et al., 1987).

Motivation: Chipuza and Berry (2010) examined the relationship between a survivor's attitude, commitment and motivation, and recommended that an organization's human resources process should involve survivors within the consultation process, in order to improve motivation and commitment. This research was carried out in Zimbabwe, and may have been subjected to specific cultural and austere economic constraints. Nonetheless, similarly, Weiner's Equity Theory suggests

that motivation is influenced by procedural justice (Trevor and Nyberg, 2008), with job insecurity playing an important role in determining the motivation of survivors. Brockner (1988) shows that motivation is negatively influenced by job insecurity. In addition, motivation may be further affected due to the change in survivor's roles as they adopt increased workloads along with a fear of further layoffs can lead to a reduction in motivation and an increase in anxiety level (Appelbaum et al., 2003).

Communication: Communication is often viewed as one of the most important aspects of the downsizing process (Brockner, 1992; Marks, 2006). It has also been identified as one of the reasons why the redundancy process fails, as a lack of information is likely to cause more damage. Survivors will desperately seek as much information as possible (Brockner et al., 1990) to allay their fears about the future (Paulsen et al., 2005). It is therefore important for employees to feel that they are being listened to and that their feelings, views and suggestions are taken into account, which will also increase the level of employees' trust in the management (Tzafrir et al., 2004). Survivors need to know as soon as possible that they will not be losing their jobs and they will further benefit if information concerning the reason for the redundancy is relayed to them effectively and efficiently. While it is vital that positive information be relayed throughout the process, it is also important that bad news is openly communicated (Noer, 1993). Furthermore, survivors will want to receive news about victims and how they have been treated along with information relating to any assistance offered to the victims as this will provide the survivors with an indication of how they may be treated in the future (Thornhill and Gibbons, 1995). The effective management along with extensive communication (Marks, 2006) and the development of a 'best practice' HR strategy (Noer, 1993), and not just organizational learning (Bui et al., 2016), can assist in diminishing the syndrome.

Workload: Survivors may be expected to take on increased workload in the case of organizational restructuring, but not many organizations have plans in place for them to adjust to this new workload (Appelbaum et al., 2003), thereby resulting in survivors feeling a loss of control and uncertainty, which can cause stress (Chipunza and Berry, 2010). As workloads increase due to the re-distribution of the remaining work among the survivors, the survivors are left facing job insecurity. Work boundaries are often not clear (eg. Chau et al., 2017). However, Brockner et al (1992) find that

sometimes survivors who had perceived an increase in their workload may feel positive and have enriched their skills.

The Future: It is argued that a broader approach for downsizing can have a positive long-term impact in the longer term (Appelbaum and Donia, 2001b). This should comprise a complete strategic transformation and become part of a continuous improvement plan to improve productivity, cut costs and increase turnover (de Vries and Balazs, 1997). The future will also see relationships between individuals and organizations changing with employees becoming more focused on career self-management (Appelbaum and Donia, 2001b). Cameron (1994) proposes a prescription for best organizational practices which includes an approach for the use of long term strategies, good preparation and employee involvement, for example.

These seven themes, in no particular order of preference or importance, are therefore recommended for use as a broad list of categories to cover when interviewing survivors when conducting scenario planning exercises. Any insights obtained within these themes form the new 'scenarios' that advise how to manage redundancies in the future, as well as offer up suggestions for rebuilding the organization.

Survivor Interview Framework in Use

The following practice insights were obtained on each of the themes derived from the above section relating to the survivor syndrome, after interviewing survivors. The insights offer a practice perspective in relation to the private and public organizations, in which only brief differences are presented. They are of a nature that is rich and otherwise difficult to obtain had the principal research subjects not been these survivors, which might be the case in other scenario planning methodologies.

Perception of the Selection Process and Fairness

About double the number of respondents in the private firm felt the process of redundancies was carried out unfairly, compared to that in the public organization. Survivors tended to be somewhat suspicious and fearful of the future, and this observation is in line with Fineman's (2003) finding that

trust and loyalty are diminished by survivors who perceive a process being unfair. A typical comment was on the lines of:

> *"... errh, it probably wasn't fair, in terms of a process I think it is still difficult to quantify coz I'm not sure I fully understood what their process was in the first place"* [Male, 8 years' service]

Only one respondent (in the private firm) had no view on fairness, but perhaps this was biased in that she worked closely with the chief executive during the redundancy process and therefore had increased her feeling of loyalty towards him and the organization, having been so engrossed in the rationale behind the downsizing. Those who felt that the selection process was fair worked in various positions, from managerial to manual work. These insights conform with Robbins' (1999) earlier work that identified the symptoms of the survivor syndrome as fear of change, loss of confidence in management and loss of loyalty, all of which influence an individual's perception of fairness. It seems, if survivors feel they have been ignored at any part of the downsizing process, their levels of anxiety, anger and mistrust have increased.

Perception of Organizational Assistance

The survivor syndrome is most likely to surface if employees have perceived that organizational support for those that are laid off is low. In the case of the private firm, an employee helpline was in operation throughout the redundancy process from the moment it was announced. Only three of the respondents actually mentioned this during their interview. When questioned further, it was found that those who were aware of the helpline had not made use of it and were not aware of anyone else who had utilized this facility. A respondent who was a trade union representative further explained that if any of the employees had issues, they would find it hard to approach the management and would therefore ask for assistance directly through the trade union. The union offered re-training which consisted of various courses at subsidized rates. In contrast, no such helpline existed in the public organization. Two factors seemed to explain this. First, it did not appear to be within the culture of the workforce to ask for assistance, plus the lack of communication from the organization

on the assistance available. Second, the influence of the trade union was extremely prominent and was therefore easily accessible. An employee commented interestingly:

> "... *you have to come back to the culture. I thought that [the union] helped, and I think this is one of the better parts of the union – they got help. I am pleased with that side of things, but it is very difficult at times. How far can you go with people? You can't force them to take help.*" [Female, 12 years' service]

This had been a long tradition with the type of work undertaken within the organization, and employees were probably more inclined to seek assistance via this route than make use of assistance offered by the organization.

Four respondents from the private firm and two from the public organization felt that no assistance had been offered at all. Again, this may have been due to the lack of communication from the organization to the workforce, or the individuals were of the mind-set that they did not require assistance and did not look for it. This is worrying, given Armstrong-Stassen's (1994) suggestion that management need to ensure that perceived organizational support is sustained at all times to maintain motivation within the remaining workforce, and the survivors in particular need to feel that they have not been neglected and assistance has been provided, whether they utilize it or not. Again, organizational assistance is linked with perceived fairness which is increased if an organization is seen to assist survivors and victims, whereas the opposite effect will occur if assistance is not provided (see Baruch and Hind, 2000).

Perception of Communication

The perception of communication within the two contexts was different. In the public organization, all respondents perceived that the top-down communication was sufficient. This information was about criteria based upon which an employee could stay or had to leave. In contrast, the bottom-up communication seemed intentionally ignored, partially due to the pre-selected preference of managers. Thus, it affected the perception of fairness. In the private firm, the initial communication of a loss of key clients/customers, leading to some redundancies, was viewed as positive at first.

Following that initial meeting, contact was reduced and the majority of the survivors commented on a major lack of communication. For example, a survivor commented:

> "… *very uncertain times for everybody – some people not receiving some of the information they need and a lot of people just in limbo really, not sure if it's going to affect them, or not affect them, because some people were told their jobs were in danger, while others didn't have a clue.*" [Male, 27 years' service]

This lack of communication could have been due to a number of reasons. For example, the organization was probably not eager to relay bad news to its workforce. While Noer (1993) argues that bad news should be openly communicated as much as good news, this was not the case for either organization, and additionally there did not appear to be any plans put in place to help the survivors adjust to their new workloads. Furthermore, survivors wanting to seek information to allay their fears about the future (Datta et al. 2010) may, therefore, piece together information from different sources which could result in feeding the rumor mill which further damages the employer/employee relationship with consequent feelings of mistrust and resentment.

Feelings during the Redundancy Process

It emerged that most of the respondents had similar feelings during the redundancy process, and concur partly with research undertaken by Brockner et al. (1985; 1986) which identified anxiety and stress as the two main emotions. Some additional observations emerged:

- *Feelings of Shock:* The initial reactions of the respondents appear to be of shock. The redundancy in the private firm was initiated by the loss of the organization's major customer. In order to survive, the company announced in a memo to all staff that the only way the organization could reduce costs to the required levels would be to downsize and restructure the organization. In the public organization, the selection criteria which were sent out to employees at 5pm on a Friday left many employees in shock as well. Shock was not a key element that was documented explicitly in the extant literature. With the process of being made redundant referenced by Fineman

(2003) as being similar to that of experiencing grief, it is unsurprising that it has not been pursued further. The respondents' sense of shock may have been caused by several factors. First, the scale of redundancies would have a severe impact on the remaining workforce – that being, an increase in workload, stress and anxiety for the future of the organization (Robbins, 1999). Second, the length of time taken to relay this information to staff in the private firm and the surprise that key customer was lost in the first place, when it had been stable for quite some time with no apparent hint of the impending loss of business. Third, the timing of the selection criteria being issued in the public organization was seen as devastating as employees did not have a chance to discuss with their colleagues those criteria and their possible impacts on each individual. Open communication would have been vital in this situation in order to keep rumors at bay and survivors informed, which in turn would have raised their perception of fairness (de Vries and Balazs, 1997).

- *Feelings of Anger:* Only one respondent admitted explicitly to feeling anger. One other referred to his colleagues feeling anger but not himself. This contradicts Noer's (1993) research that identified anger as being one of his four "feeling clusters" and Adam's Equity Theory (see Brockner et al., 1985) which advocated how redundancy can create an assortment of emotional states. There may be many reasons why the majority of respondents did not feel anger. For example, it could be they felt secure that their role would remain safe and had high levels of self-esteem (Brockner et al., 1985). Consequently, they did not fear the outcome of the layoffs. Furthermore, due to the period of time that has lapsed since the redundancy and undertaking this research (between six to eight months), their perceptions of events at the time may have changed. Demography could also be another factor which has influenced their feelings. Nearly two-thirds of the sample had experienced redundancies before which could also explain the difference between these insights and those of Noer's (1993) and Brockner et al's (1985).

- *Feelings of Guilt:* All respondents except one expressed that they did not have any feeling of guilt, which contradicts Brockner et al's (1985; 1986) research. The respondent who did express feelings of guilt was female and had worked for the organization for 20 years, while no male admitted to such a feeling, consistent with Fineman's (2003) view that males tend not to be as subjected to emotions as females within the workplace. Furthermore, the males may have had higher levels of self-esteem due to their positions and security in their current role along with their length of service, and therefore felt justified that they have been able to keep their jobs (cf. Brockner et al., 2004).

Motivation

A redundancy that is not handled effectively will result in survivors demonstrating negative behavior and attitude, such as a lack of motivation (Appelbaum et al., 2003). The period of a survivor's tenure also has an impact on their motivation levels (Furnham, Eracleous, and Chamorro-Premuzic 2009). Furnham et al. (2009) depict motivation as intrinsic to the role and their findings demonstrated that survivors from a management level or higher are less concerned with their working conditions and clarity in their work than those employees of a lower level. This view is consistent with the observations, as the majority of the respondents, mainly from the private firm, expressed that they still felt motivated following the redundancy process. As one respondent commented passionately:

> "... I've always liked the challenge – it doesn't matter how much pressure. I've always loved the work before the pressure. I suppose it's pride – you get something, you've achieved it. It isn't a job, it's in your blood, there's nothing you can do. I worry if this place is going to be here in 50 years' time, but I'm not going to be here, but I would still like to think that what I've worked for will still be here for somebody else." [Male, 27 years' service]

This is also consistent with the view that self-esteem will impact on a survivor's motivation, and individuals that display high self-esteem are more motivated than their counterparts who show low levels of self-esteem (Brockner et al., 1993, 2004; Marks, 2006). However, it seems that the female respondents who were not in a managerial position also displayed good levels of motivation.

Workload

Once a redundancy has taken place, it is inevitable that survivors' workloads will increase as they take on their departed colleagues' responsibilities along with their own. It is therefore necessary for organizations to have plans in place for the survivors to adjust to this increase (Appelbaum et al., 2003), otherwise any uncertainty may cause stress. One example of how an organization may deal with workload increases is explained by a union representative, as follows:

> "… *The organization tried to exploit what was happening – [they] saw us as negative hours the time we were paid for not being at work, and tried to impose annualized hours on us …. On the other side of the coin, for every tool that management can use against you, I can always quote the Working Times Directive – I can't do that, I've got X number of hours between work breaks, etc. … In any negotiation, you're gonna lose something, you're gonna gain something – at the end of the day, it's a two-way street, and in the end, common sense has got to prevail because you're all aiming for the same goal. So, yes my workload has increased, marginally.*" [Male, 5 years' service]

This view was consistent with all the respondents, suggesting that survivors are willing to accept the increase in their workloads despite facing job insecurity. There was no evidence that anyone felt the increase in workload had a positive effect by the need to enrich their skills (see Brockner et al., 1992). Four of the respondents even mentioned the need to resort to physical ailments following the increase in workload!

View of the Future

Twelve respondents, most of whom were from the public organization, expressed that they were worried about the future and did not display a positive outlook. This manifested in a workforce that lacked confidence in the organization's management and no eagerness from the survivors to look forward to the future, resulting in reduced performance and adding to the threat of the organization's future survival. One respondent commented with great passion and concern:

"… I worry about [the future] a great deal. I worry about people sitting on the Board who know nothing about the industry. I worry about Chief Executives who only rule by committee and no by leadership qualities. I worry about interfering Chairmen who are meant to be non-exec and have more say than they should. I worry about outside people dictating to what happens to this place. We are just custodians of this place and we should, instead of like I said just now, people looking to make their own little empire and their own mark on it, they should look on it like – if you do what I do in the mornings, get down here at 5:30 and look out across, and you see an odd house and think I'm so lucky to be here and you should look after it and respect it. But I see other people – all they see is a fast buck and making their mark and that annoys me and that's what worries me." [Male, 33 years' service]

The evidence challenges Thornhill et al's (1997) findings that management have a higher perception of the organization's effectiveness following a redundancy process. It is particularly interesting as many of the respondents held managerial positions and did not feel this way. It appears that some of the survivors perceived a badly handled redundancy process which in turn had an impact on their thoughts for the future. With the six individuals who did not have any worries about the future, four of whom were already shortly due for retirement, which could explain their lack of concern; one respondent had worked closely with the chief executive during the redundancy process, and stated that she "does try very much not to worry about the future". Even though the respondents were on average middle-aged, the findings have shown that regardless of age or gender, individuals tend to worry about the future following a redundancy.

Proliferation of Scenario Planning Methodology

Literature from human resources management was used to understand how the survivor syndrome can be better managed, and if more accurate 'scenarios' are better presented, an improved tool is conceived to carry out scenario planning. In this way, foresight is a metaphor for the implications of the survivor syndrome. The nature of the above observations and their deviation from the extant literature meant they would not have been possible to obtain had interviewing not been conducted with 'survivors'. For example, rich characteristics like feelings of fairness, support and shock would

have been difficult to hypothesize from scenario planning participants had they not been close to redundancy themselves. Similarly, the lack of communication and lack of confidence in management are post-experiences actually felt and difficult to gauge if scenario planners were to bring them up as possible scenarios. In the same way, the traps and pitfalls explained earlier in this article have been better controlled for: bias, for example, would not exist as the views are from genuine participants who would otherwise not be affected, which in turn, overcomes the issue of relevance, and of course, establishing greater plausibility.

Given the benefits of the use of survivors as part of scenario planning, we recommend building in the seven themes as part of the interview schedule to ensure their coverage. However, unlike other theorists who specify steps or procedures, we only argue for their inclusion rather than impose a rigid order for the approach. The application of the 7-themed framework and method of interviewing used may be repeated for understanding similar issues where the context might vary, or be augmented. The interview themes of fairness, organizational assistance, feelings, motivation, communication, workload and the future are the core anchors for designing interviews if used as an instrument for conducting scenario planning, particularly in the part where scenarios are raised. Survivors were used in the research as they pose the closest research subject to those who would be victims but escaped redundancy by a narrow margin. In repeated use, alternatives to survivors can be substituted depending on the economic and political contexts and availability of alternatives to survivors, but they must satisfy the criterion of people who have come extremely close to a situation without having befallen so.

In the 'tin anniversary' of the 2008 global financial crisis, its context, data from researched subjects and representative phenomena still stand as valuable conditions on which to conduct research on performance management improvement and methodology. Scenario planning methodology was a pioneering approach of the 1950s (Wack, 1985), and has proliferated well in the guise of organizational foresight, via the HR field (such as managing the survivor syndrome), in performance management. Its proliferation is due to the good closeness of fit between the need of scenario planning to raise accurate future scenarios and the feelings felt by survivors of the survivor syndrome who have come close to being a victim and incited a retaliatory response concerning the future of the

firm. So, to summarize: improved organizational performance is the ultimate aim, which can be achieved by better strategic decision making, informed by foresight, in the form of scenario planning, which is well achieved through exploring human subjects who meet the criterion of a 'survivor'. Hence, as foresight sits in the middle and acts as the medium, it is the metaphor for all the insights raised by the survivors presented in the illustration part of this article. So, foresight is an important metaphor; it is scenario planning; and for the future of organizations … it matters!

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