

# Exploring layoff survivors' experiences of organisational support, wellbeing and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies

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## FOR THE READER'S ATTENTION

The following specifications remind the reader of the guidelines followed in this dissertation:

- This dissertation followed the prescribed format of the American Psychological Association's (APA) publication manual (6<sup>th</sup> edition) as the framework for both the editorial and referencing styles. This practice follows the requirements as stipulated in the by the programme in Human Resources Management at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University.
- The study is submitted in the form of two qualitative research articles, with each article's editorial style following the principle as set out by the *South African Journal for Human Resources Management*. The design of tables within the articles also followed the framework and guidelines as set out in the APA style.
- Although the study is titled "Exploring layoff survivors' experiences on organisational support, well-being and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies" the first article explores the experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their perceived organisational support and organisation commitment, while the second article explores the subjective well-being and psychological well-being of the layoff survivors. Inference onto the entire Namibian fishing industry was also drawn based on the results from four fishing companies. Because the Namibian fishing industry consists of more than four fishing companies, the study did not completely explore the experiences of layoff survivors within all of the Namibian fishing industry.
- Specific references to individuals, organisations or named groups were removed from the participant's accounts in order to protect the participant's anonymity.
- Each chapter of the dissertation will have its own reference list.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

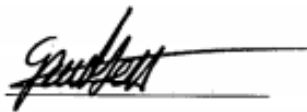
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## DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

I, Carl-Heinz Paulsen, declare that “Exploring layoff survivors’ organisational support, well-being and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies” is my own work and that the views, thoughts and opinions expressed within this study or articles contained within are those of the author, participants, and relevant literature references as indicated both in-text and within the reference list.

Furthermore, I declare that the content of this research will not be submitted to any other tertiary institution for any other qualification whatsoever.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paulsen', is written over a horizontal line.

20 October 2017

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### DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the dissertation by **Carl-Heinz Paulsen** was translated as required where necessary, but without viewing the final version.

The dissertation was titled:

**Exploring layoff survivors' experiences on organisational support, well-being and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies.**

Natania du Plessis

Signed and dated in Walvis Bay on this 26<sup>th</sup> day of April 2017

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## SUMMARY

**Title:** Exploring layoff survivors' experiences on organisational support, well-being and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies.

**Key words:** Fishing industry; Namibia; Employees; Layoff survivors; Psychological well-being; Subjective well-being; Organisational support; Organisational commitment; Positive psychology.

This study focused on the well-being and organisation-employee relationship of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. While the majority of research focusses on laid-off individuals, fairly little attention is given to layoff survivors. These employees are faced with a restructured working environment with many intense pressures which often leads to emotional distress, high turnover, and a wide range of behavioural and emotional responses. Simultaneously, industries, such as the fishing industry, experience frequent periods of downsizing due to the nature of their trade. Surprisingly little research has been done within the African context and no studies as to the knowledge of the author have been done on Namibian layoff survivors. The general objective of the study was to explore the experiences of Namibian employees who survived a layoff intervention in various fishing companies in terms of their perceived organisational support, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and commitment. The study consisted of the following two articles:

**Article 1:** An exploration of the psychological and subjective well-being of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies

**Article 2:** An exploration of employee-organisational interactions of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies.

A qualitative, descriptive research approach which was grounded in a social constructivist research tradition was used in this study in order to achieve the objectives. Post-modernistic methods were used to obtain information based on the experiences of the layoff survivors. The research design and approach allowed participants to express and describe their experiences as they perceived them. The selection feature of the sample was employees who survived a layoff within the previous three years in organisations which have laid-off at least 10% of their workforce during that period. A combination of voluntary purposive and snowball sample of 14 ( $N=14$ ) participants for both Article 1 and Article 2 were drawn from four organisations within the Namibian fishing industry. Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews which covered a wide variety of topics for both articles was conducted with each participant from the sample. Data analysis was conducted by means of

directed qualitative content analysis and an eight-step process as created by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009).

For Article 1, two categories of findings were created, which were subjective and psychological well-being. Respectively, three and four themes were found for each category with several subthemes also identified. The results for Articles 1 indicated that both subjective and psychological well-being of layoff survivors are diminished following the layoff event. Subjective well-being was greatly impacted both by the event itself and thereafter by the restructured working environment. The themes identified for subjective well-being were: satisfaction; emotions; and judgements on others. Psychological well-being of layoff survivors was also negatively affected by the layoffs however to a lesser extent than subjective well-being. The themes identified for psychological well-being were: autonomy and environmental control; growth and purpose; relations with others; and limited self-understanding. The results confirmed numerous findings from foreign studies however many foreign findings could only be partially confirmed, with results of the present study often experienced as less severe than as presented within foreign studies. Furthermore, it appeared that the participant's personal lives and the industry itself also influenced the well-being of the layoff survivors.

For Article 2, two categories of findings were created, which were perceived organisational support and commitment. Respectively, two and three themes were found for each category with several subthemes also identified. The results for Article 2 indicated that the perceived organisational support and commitment of layoff survivors was reduced following the restructuring. The perceived organisational support was influenced by the loss of colleagues, reward structures and reduced remuneration. The themes identified for perceived organisational support were the layoff survivor's altered role in the organisation; and reduced employee support. The survivors' commitment to the organisation also seemed to decrease with many participants indicating that they would be willing to change organisations if it resulted in improved support. The themes identified for commitment were: A slightly reduced affective commitment; decreased continuance commitment; and low normative commitment. Results of the Article validated numerous foreign studies and showed that the principles of Social-Exchange Theory and the Norm of Reciprocity play a crucial role in the layoff survivor's commitment and support. While the support directly provided by organisations do not necessarily decrease, the loss of social support and relationships from laid-off colleagues, and lack of communication cause the perception to layoff survivors that they are not well supported.

Limitations of the articles and recommendations to future research and practice were made.

## **Opsomming**

**Titel:** Naspeur van afleggingsoorlewendes se ervarings oor organisatoriese ondersteuning, asook hulle verpligtinge en welstand in verskeie Namibiese visvangmaatskappye.

**Sleuteltermes:** Visbedryf; Namibië; Werknemers; Afleggingsoorlewendes; Sielkundige welstand; Subjektiewe welstand; Organisatoriese ondersteuning; Organisatoriese verpligting; Positiewe sielkunde.

Hierdie studie se fokus was op die welstand van afleggingsoorlewendes en die organisasie-werknemerverhouding binne die Namibiese visbedryf. Terwyl meeste navorsing fokus op werknemers wat hulle werk verloor het, is daar weinig studies wat fokus op afleggingsoorlewendes. Hierdie werknemers word gekonfronteer met 'n hergestruktureerde werksomgewing wat gepaard gaan met intense druk. Hierdie situasie lei dikwels tot emosionele ang, 'n hoë omset en 'n breë spektrum van gedrags- en emosionele reaksies. Terselfdertyd, ervaar sekere nywerhede, soos die visbedryf, gereelde tydperke van afskaling, gegewe die aard van die industrie. Terwyl daar op internasionale vlak verskeie navorsing gedoen is wat op afleggingsoorlewing in westerse nywerhede en maatskappye fokus, is daar verbasend min navorsing binne die Afrika-konteks gedoen, en tot die skrywer se kennis, is daar nog nie 'n soortgelyke studie in die Namibiese konteks gedoen nie. Die algemene doelwit van die studie was om ondervindings van Namibiese werknemers in verskeie maatskappye in die visbedryf te bestudeer op grond van hulle waargenome organisatoriese ondersteuning, subjektiewe welstand, sielkundige welstand en verpligting na afleggingsoorlewing. Die studie bestaan uit die volgende twee artikels:

**Artikel 1:** Verkenning van die sielkundige en subjektiewe welstand van afleggingsoorlewendes in verskeie Namibiese visvangmaatskappye.

**Artikel 2:** Verkenning van werknemer-organisatoriese interaksie van afleggingsoorlewendes in verskeie Namibiese visvangmaatskappye.

'n Kwalitatiewe, beskrywende navorsingsbenadering, gegrond op 'n sosiale konstruktivistiese navorsingstradisie, is in hierdie studie gebruik om sodoende die doelwit soos reeds genoem te bereik. Postmodernistiese metodes is gebruik om inligting te verkry wat op afleggingsoorlewendes gegrond is. Die navorsingsontwerp en benadering het die deelnemers toegelaat om hulle ondervindings soos hulle dit ervaar het uit te spreek en te beskryf. Die seleksiefunksie van die steekproef was werknemers wat afleggings oor die afgelope drie jaar oorleef het in maatskappye

wat ten minste 10% van hulle werknemers afgedank het gedurende daardie tydperk. 'n Kombinasie van vrywillige doelbewuste en sneeubalproef van 14 ( $N=14$ ) deelnemers vir beide Artikel 1 en 2 is gewerf by vier organisasies binne die Namibiese visbedryf. Semi-gestruktureerde, een-tot-een onderhoude wat 'n wye verskeidenheid van onderwerpe vir beide artikels ingesluit het, is met elke kandidaat van die steekproef gevoer. Data-analise is gedoen deur middel van gerigte kwalitatiewe analise en 'n agt-stap-proses wat ontwerp is deur Zhang en Wildemuth (2009).

Vir Artikel 1, is twee kategorieë van bevindings geskep, naamlik subjektiewe en sielkundige welstand. Onderskeidelik, drie en vier temas is in elke kategorie, met verskeie subtemas, gevind. Die uitslae vir Artikel 1 het bevestig dat beide die subjektiewe en die sielkundige welstand verlaag het na die afleggingsgebeurtenis. Subjektiewe welstand is nie net deur die aflegging self beïnvloed nie, maar ook deur die herstrukturering en die hergestruktureerde omgewing na die tyd. Die temas wat vir subjektiewe welstand geïdentifiseer is: tevredenheid, emosies, opinies oor ander. Sielkundige welstand is ook negatief deur die afleggings beïnvloed, alhoewel in 'n mindere mate as subjektiewe welstand. Die temas van sielkundige welstand: outonomie en omgewingsbeheer; groei en doelwitte; verhoudings met ander; beperkte self-verstaan. Die resultate het menigte buitelandse bevindings gedeeltelik bevestig, met resultate van die huidige studie wat gereeld ervaar is as minder ernstig as in buitelandse studies. Verder het dit voorgekom dat die kandidate se persoonlike lewens en die spesifieke industrie ook die welstand van die afleggingsoorlewendes beïnvloed het.

Vir Artikel 2 is twee kategorieë van bevindings met resultate verdeel in waargenome organisatoriese ondersteuning of verpligting. Onderskeidelik is twee en drie temas gevind vir elke kategorie, met verskeie subtemas wat ook geïdentifiseer is. Die resultate vir Artikel 2 het bewys dat die waargenome organisatoriese ondersteuning van afleggingsoorlewendes verminder het na die herstrukturering en gevolglik is die wedersydse verpligting tot die organisasie ook verminder. Die waargenome organisatoriese ondersteuning is sterk deur die verlies van kollegas, verwyderde beloningsstrukture en verminderde vergoeding beïnvloed. Die temas wat vir die waargenome organisatoriese ondersteuning geïdentifiseer is, is as volg: die afleggingsoorlewendes se veranderde rol in die organisasie; en verminderde werknemerondersteuning. Die oorlewendes se verpligting tot die organisasie het ook afgeneem, met heelwat deelnemers wat aangedui het dat hulle bereid sou wees om van organisasie te verander, sou dit 'n verhoogde ondersteuning of vergoeding beteken. Die temas vir verpligting is: 'n effens kleiner affektiewe verpligting; verminderde voortsetting van verpligting en lae normatiewe verpligting. Resultate van die artikel

het verskeie buitelandse navorsing onderskryf en gewys dat die beginsels van Sosiale Uitruilteorie en die Norm van Wederkerigheid 'n belangrike rol in die verpligting van afleggingsoorlewendes speel wanneer hulle verpligting verminder na 'n waargenome afname in organisatoriese ondersteuning. Terwyl die ondersteuning wat direk van die organisasie af kom nie noodwendig verminder nie, speel die verlies aan sosiale ondersteuning van afgedankte kollegas en die tekort aan kommunikasie 'n rol en skep dit die persepsie aan die afleggingsoorlewendes dat hulle nie voldoende ondersteun word nie.

Beperkings en tekortkomings van die artikels en voorstelle vir toekomstige navorsing en praktyk is ook gemaak.

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## Problem Statement

Economic issues, such as increased recessions, labour unrest and a myriad of other socio-political issues, have all placed additional strain on labour markets (Burger, Berg, & Fintel, 2014; Magruder, 2012; Sinvula, 2014), and as a result companies frequently turn to organisational restructuring, sometimes referred to as downsizing, restructuring or retrenching (Greenglass & Burke, 2002; Sronce, & McKinley, 2006) in order to protect their interests.

Organisational restructuring is a process which can drastically impact the lives of employees who are separated as a result, and many organisations have specific interventions in place to help laid-off employees deal with these changes (Cotter & Fouad, 2012; Robbins, 1999). Namibian labour legislation provides a four-week notice period before layoffs can take place so that employees are provided the chance to adjust their personal, professional and social lives (Labour Act 2007; Venter & Levy, 2011). During this four-week period alternative to retrenchments, negotiations regarding severance packages, and selection methods for retrenchments must be discussed. However, the employees who remain at the organisation after the retrenchments - the layoff survivors as they are referred to, are often forgotten despite being closely involved in the entire layoff process. This layoff process may have a drastic and long lasting impact on the remaining employees (Kim, 2007; Noer, 2009) and at present there are no existing laws or standards which prescribe companies to tend to these layoff survivors. The unemployment rate in Namibia is currently 34% (Trading Economics, 2017), and the fishing industry, the third largest contributor to the country's GDP, has been made particularly vulnerable due to the exchange rate, introduction of fishing quotas and liquidation of underperforming factories (Hartman, 2015). In 2015 to 2016 alone, the fishing industry had its workforce of 14,000 employees reduced by just under 3% in total (Finck, 2015; NAMPA, 2016; New Era, 2016).

Layoffs are described by Makawatsakul and Kleiner (2003) as any processes of reduction in the labour force of an organisation with the intention of improving performance or for the purpose of reducing costs. During challenging economic periods, layoffs are often the outcome of rational business decisions for survival and competition (Freeman & Cameron, 1993; Leung & Chang, 2002). Layoff survivors are defined by Cotter and Fouad (2012, p.2) as "workers who remain at an organisation after a period of organisational downsizing". Layoff survivors are expected to operate with improved innovation, as well as being able to adapt to amplified duties and responsibilities, while handling a wider range of work tasks, all within a reorganised working

environment which often lacks the social support from peers or colleagues and job security from the past environment (Qureshi & Wasti, 2014).

Research on organisational performance following restructuring has found that productivity and profitability in general does not increase (De Meuse, Bergmann, Vanderheiden, & Roraff, 2004). This may be due in part to the widespread variety of behavioural and emotional reactions which are demonstrated by the layoff survivors, in addition to the potential reduction of skills, expertise or innovative abilities which are sacrificed when employees leave the organisation as a result of the layoffs (Edin, & Gustavsson, 2008; Erickson, 2007).

One past study by Moore, Grunberg and Greenberg, (2004) found that exposure to layoffs results in increased role ambiguity, depression and possible health problems among employees. These symptoms, accompanied with feelings of guilt about retention of employment and higher job insecurity has an influence on the behaviour and attitudes of layoff survivors (Noer, 2009); this led researchers to coin the phrase “Layoff Survivors Sickness” to describe this phenomena. Layoff survivor sickness is described by Noer (2009) as a distinctive pattern of emotions which survivors may experience, which include anxiety, anger, depression, guilt, distrust and reduced motivation. Kim (2007) defined the sickness as: “the social and psychological impact of downsizing on layoff survivors” (p.450).

Well-being is a widely researched and varying notion which covers the subjective, social and psychological dimensions of an individual, including any and all health-related behaviour (Seifert, 2005). In this study the aspects of subjective well-being and psychological well-being will be examined in greater detail in order to determine the effects that surviving the layoff event may have on the employee.

Subjective Well-being (SWB), as described by Diener, Oishi, and Lucas, (2003), is a broad construct which is concerned with how individuals evaluate their own lives, in terms of their emotional reactions to events, their moods, the judgments which they make about their life, their fulfilment and their general satisfaction. SWB provides an alternative view of satisfaction or happiness for individuals; SWB is just one indication of the quality of life for workers and individuals. Researchers tend to consider a positive SWB to be necessary for a good life (Govindji, & Linley, 2007), and therefore events which would negatively impact the SWB of an individual, would then also impact their general satisfaction.

The related concept of psychological well-being (PWB) is a concept primarily advocated by Ryff (1989), which is defined as “a multidimensional construct representing an individual's subjective

sense of emotional well-being and comfort” (Repetti 1987, p. 711). Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed that the PWB of any individual is determined through six distinct dimensions in an individual’s life, namely autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

SWB along with PWB provides a good scientific indication for the general well-being of an individual as it reflects an individual’s emotional, affective and psychological wellness with life, and can, therefore, be used as a broad indication for an individual’s happiness. Past studies by Govindji and Linley (2007) and Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) have made use of SWB and PWB as indicators for overall well-being.

Another organisational aspect which may be important to employees who have survived layoffs, is the perceived organisational support (POS) which these employees receive. Dawson (1996) refers to POS as the degree of which the employees feel that the organisation supports their endeavours and cares about their well-being. POS plays a significant role in shaping the affective and behavioural state of employees and individuals who experience higher levels of social support, have also been linked to higher levels of both physical and mental health (Klineberg et al, 2006; Uchino, 2006).

Organisational support theory, as described by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli and Lynch (1997), stated that employees have a natural desire to feel supported, and that this support is crucial for employees to commit and remain loyal to the organisation (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Tumwesigye, 2010). Employees who perceive that they are supported by the organisation feel as if they need to “pay back” their organisation in the form of on-going loyalty and improved performance (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This principle, as stated by Erickson (2007), is grounded in social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) through which perceived support from the organisation is reciprocated back towards the organisation.

Following the survival of the layoff event, employees should experience an impacted commitment towards the organisation. Organisational commitment was defined by Chen, Tsui and Farh (2002) as “the psychological attachment that workers have to their organisations” (p.339). Organisational commitment has emerged as one of the most studied dimensions of employee attachment at work in recent times (Selepe, 2004) and has resulted in an extensive range of varying definitions and theories concerning organisational commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) created a three-component model of organisational commitment which aimed to incorporate the various

conceptualisations and explanations of organisational commitment. This helped to establish three distinct forms of commitment, namely: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

Affective commitment refers to the emotional identification which the individual has with the organisation. Continuance commitment simply denotes the commitment derived from material rewards or benefits and the associated costs which will be incurred if the individual leaves the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1984). Normative commitment refers to the sense of obligation to remain with the organisation (Allen & Meyer, 1990) which is formed prior to and post socialisation (Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan & Johari, 2003).

While scientific research has helped to shape and improve the modern workplace, the majority of studies take place in foreign contexts and one of the major issues when adopting the findings of these studies is whether they are truly applicable and will have the same results as the original research. It is important to explore these varying phenomena in an African context, in order to lay the basis for future studies and the further contextualisation of foreign research. Of all the research done on layoff survivors, none, as to the knowledge of this author, has been conducted on specifically the Namibian context.

The unique relationship between Namibia and South Africa is due to the intertwining history of the two nations. While both countries are fairly similar, South Africa not only has a population well over 20 times that of Namibia, but also has resources which “Namibia cannot begin to emulate” (Hengari & Saunders, 2014, p.178). Due to these reasons, along with their partnership as members of the South African Development Community, it can be considered appropriate for these nations to base research on each other in order to generate mutual benefits. This is condensed well by Hengari and Saunders (2014) when they say “It is in both countries’ interests that their future relations remain as friendly and close as possible” (p.178).

The Namibian fishing industry is a particularly unique context of study as it is one of the largest industries in Namibia but has suffered from various pressures ranging from over-regulation by the government, wide-spread industrial action, increased international competition and a weakened financial position caused by scandals in the various linked SADC countries (Abankwah, 2013; Aryani et al, 2016; Boyer, & Boyer, 2005; Collins, 2016; Hartman, 2016). As a result, the employees in this industry frequently face the possibility of retrenchment with no information on how this affects them in the longer term.

As there have been no previous studies on this particular context, it is important to explore the experiences of these Namibian employees and to examine whether the findings are congruent with those of other international studies. Therefore there is a unique opportunity for qualitative research to explore and adapt these previous existing findings to the Namibian context, as well as create a basis for future quantitative studies to build upon.

To summarise, this study aims to explore the ways in which the employees from various companies in the Namibian fishing industry experience perceived organisational support, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and organisational commitment after surviving a layoff event.

## **Research questions**

### *Secondary research questions for article 1*

- How are layoff survivors' subjective well-being and psychological well-being conceptualised in literature?
- How do layoff survivors experience their own psychological well-being?
- How do layoff survivors experience their own subjective well-being?
- What recommendations can be made to management and future research?

### *Secondary research questions for article 2*

- How is commitment and perceived organisational support conceptualised in literature?
- How do Namibian employees experience organisational support after surviving layoffs?
- How do Namibian employees experience their commitment after surviving a layoff process?
- What recommendations can be made to management and future research?

## **Expected contribution of the study**

### *Contribution for literature*

The present study aims to expand upon the already existing body of knowledge on the subject matter, and theoretically can create new knowledge that has not previously been established. This study may also assist with the validation of scientific theory to the Namibian context.

### *Contribution for the individuals*

The study aims to provide findings which can be used to improve and maintain the welfare of the Namibian post-layoff workforce by improving the well-being of these employees through organisational support following periods of restructuring.

### *Contribution for the organisation*

This study may provide findings which can allow for organisations to facilitate the spiritual and emotional resilience of the workers through strengthening their well-being and organisational support, which may then in turn reinforce organisational commitment. This may help to counter the negative effects of layoff survival and may help to maintain business performance after periods of organisational restructuring.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **General objective**

The general objective of this study is to explore the experiences of Namibian employees in various companies within the fishing industry in terms of their perceived organisational support, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and commitment following layoff survival.

### **Specific objectives**

The specific objectives for article 1 (An exploration of the psychological and subjective well-being of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies) are the following:

- To conceptualise in literature layoff survivors' subjective well-being and psychological well-being;
- To explore how Namibian layoff survivors experience their psychological well-being;
- To explore how Namibian layoff survivors experience their subjective well-being;
- To provide recommendations for both management and future research.

The specific objectives for article 2 (An exploration of employee-organisational interactions of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies) are the following:

- To conceptualise in literature organisational commitment and perceived organisational support;
- To explore how Namibian layoff survivors experience their self-perceived organisational support;
- To explore how Namibian layoff survivors experience their commitment;
- To provide recommendations to management and future.

# RESEARCH DESIGN

## Research Approach

A **qualitative**, descriptive research approach will be used in this study. Qualitative research attempts to study phenomena in their natural settings by using specific naturalistic approaches which allows for “phenomenon of interest to unfold naturally” (Golafshani, 2003, p.600). This is appropriate as it allows for layoff survivors to provide rich descriptions of their experiences of organisational support, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and their organisational commitment.

The study is grounded in a social constructivist research tradition. Social constructivism places emphasis on the important role which context and culture provides in understanding the functioning of a society and assists in developing or constructing knowledge from this understanding (Kim, 2001, p.2). Social constructivists view a close interconnection between individuals and the social society in which these individuals operate. Learning can therefore only take place if an individual is socially active within the society from which they operate (Woo, 2007). Some key assumptions of social constructivism are provided by Kim (2001, p.3):

- **Reality:** Reality is constructed through human activity, as only through societal interaction can the properties of the world be established (Kukla, 2000). Social constructivists thus believe that reality cannot be discovered as it does not pre-exist; it is the product of social invention (Kim, 2001).
- **Knowledge:** “To social constructivists, knowledge is also a human product, and is socially and culturally constructed” (Kim, 2001, p.3). The context and the individual play equally important roles in establishing the meaning associated to information, and in turn knowledge.
- **Learning:** For social constructivists, the process of learning is a social process that can only take place through social activities and social exposure (Kim, 2001, p.3). Learning does not simply occur within the individual and cannot be passively developed as a result of external forces in isolation.

Social constructivism is particularly appropriate for the present study as it places an emphasis on the importance which context has on the learning/experience process. Given the uniqueness of the context for the present study, social constructivism allows for personal accounts of obscure or underdeveloped phenomena.

Post-modernistic methods will be used to obtain information based on the experiences of the layoff survivors, while the interview process will be kept as objective as possible. Emphasis will be

placed on removing any personal judgement or subjectivity on the part of the researcher, in order to ensure that the gathered information reflects the layoff survivor's personal accounts as truthfully as possible. This method is in line with social constructivist perspective.

## **Research strategy**

Data will be gathered by means of a case-study strategy. A case study strategy adopts an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. Yin (2003) explains that case studies comprise an all-encompassing method, covering the logic of design, data collection techniques, as well as data analysis approaches, and that case studies are not only used to formulate theory, but also to test theory.

Initially, an instrumental (pilot) case study will be conducted in order to refine constructs or highlight any issues. Following this, a collective multiple case study will be used as an extension of the instrumental case study in order to learn more about the phenomena.

Interviews produce quality case study data which align well with the current study's goal of developing a rich description of the experiences of layoff survivors.

The unit of analysis will be employees from the Namibian fishing industry who have recently survived a layoff process.

## **Research method**

### **Literature review**

The literature review provides the basis for the empirical study and helps to develop the research questions of this study. The literature review is comprised of theoretical studies as a basis to provide definitions, describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify the various related terms and past findings. These definitions and explanations will cover topics such as layoff survivors, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, organisational commitment and perceived organisational support and any related aspects of these terms, as well as any relevant related findings to these topics which are related to the topic of study. The literature review also serves to identify and articulate the relationships between the varying findings and the relevancy of these findings to the HRM field of study. The databases used to conduct the literature study were Google Scholar, Lexis Nexis, SA ePublications, EbscoHost, SAJHRM, International magazines, journals and textbooks and other documents obtained from the Ferdinand Postma Library of the NWU, Potchefstroom Campus. Some of the journals used for the literature review consisted of: *Journal*

*of Management Development; Journal of Occupational Psychology; Career Development Quarterly; Career Development International; International Journal of Human Resources; Journal of Managerial Psychology; Academy of Management Journal; Human Resource Management; Journal of Social Psychology and Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, among many more. Other relevant data will be obtained from academic literature and books, such as *The Downsizing of America; Organizational Change and Redesign: Ideas and Insights for Improving Performance; Employee—Organization Linkages: The Psychology of commitment, absenteeism, and turnover; The Impact of Downsizing on the Long-term Employees' Self-concept; The Psychology of Quality of Life: Hedonic Well-being, Life Satisfaction, and Eudemonia; Poverty and Inequality after Apartheid; and Healing the Wounds: Overcoming the Trauma of Layoffs and Revitalizing Downsized Organizations*.

### **Research setting**

The setting of the research will be in the Namibian fishing industry and will focus on layoff survivors who are currently employed within the fishing industry. The layoff survivors may be from various organisations and varying job levels within their organisation and will provide a wide range of different instances, facets and viewpoints with regards to how they perceive their organisational support, well-being and commitment.

While there has not been any previous studies which explore these specific aspects within the Namibian fishing industry, a previous study by Marques (2013) stated that Namibian employees experience a unique interplay between antecedent variables, work environment and well-being (psychological in particular), this may indicate that further exploratory research is necessary on the Namibian workforce.

### **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

Access to the participants will be gained through personal contacts within the fishing industry, and consequently, through communications with these initial participants, new sets of participants may be found. Informal agreements with participants for pilot interviews have already been established.

According to Fink (2000), the role of the researcher in interviews is to help facilitate the participants through establishing personal relations and to let the participant feel at ease in order for natural and honest storytelling to take place. These stories should be actively encouraged by the researcher without influencing the actual story in order to gain the true thoughts, feelings,

experiences or views of the participant. Where necessary, the researcher may need to manage the interview process to gain additional depth in the participant's answers, however, without influencing the actual views of the participant. (Fink, 2000; de Vos, Delpont, Fouché, & Strydom, 2013). Another important aspect to account for is the influence of the researcher's subjectivity. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in order to ensure fairness by truthfully reflecting the views, perspectives, values and claims of the participant, the bias of subjectivity or inquirer blindness must be controlled for. It is important that the researcher understands his/her own viewpoints and beliefs in order to correctly capture the data from the viewpoints of the participant through the processes of observation, interaction and interviewing.

### **Sampling**

In order to describe and understand the experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their well-being, commitment and perceived organisational support within the Namibian fishing industry, it is important to identify cases which are applicable and rich in information. For this study, purposive sampling will be used, as it allows the researcher to choose particular cases which characterise a feature which is important for the study (de Vos et al., 2013). The feature in this case will be employees who have survived a layoff within the previous three years in organisations which have laid-off at least 10% of their workforce during this period.

After a few initial cases are identified through the usage of purposive sampling, snowball sampling will then be used in order to increase the number of participants in the study. Snowball sampling refers to the process whereby single cases of interest of the phenomena are approached and from these cases contact information about additional members of the population are received, which then allows the researcher to expand the research population sample (de Vos et al., 2013). In order to reduce the possibility of bias during sampling, the participants approached through purposive sampling will be asked to provide four possible contacts for the study, from which only two will be included. Snowball sampling will be maintained until a satisfactory sample size is obtained, which is in line with similar studies, or until data saturation is reached.

### **Data collection method**

Before the actual data collection begins, the purpose of the research will be explained to the participants and both confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured to the participant along with a request for permission to record the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect data in order to explore and describe the layoff survivor's experiences. According to de Vos *et al.*, (2013) semi-structured interviews are used to capture a detailed picture of participants' beliefs or perceptions of particular topics. This method allows the researcher and participant much more flexibility, as the researcher is able to follow up particularly interesting avenues that emerge during the interview, while the participants are able to provide a much more vivid explanation in their responses. This approach is considerably more appropriate when the subject matter is personal or sensitive (De Vos et al., 2013). Due to the sensitivity of the layoff process and the importance for personal rapport to exist between the researcher and the participant, focus groups are not considered appropriate for the present study.

An interview schedule will be used to guide the entire data gathering process (De Vos et al., 2013). According to De Vos *et al.* (2013), the interview schedule provides a set of predetermined, open-ended questions which guide the narrative terrain and engage the participant. This helps to explicitly focus the researcher on exactly what he hopes to cover before the interviews take place and it forces the researcher to proactively consider any problems which may occur during the data gathering process (De Vos et al., 2013). Examples of some of the planned questions are the following:

- What are some of the ways the business can show that they value your contributions?
- What are some of the things which provide you with the most satisfaction in your life?
- In what ways can an organisation make you feel as if you are “part of the family”?
- If you were to leave your organisation, what are some of the benefits you think you may lose by joining another company?

Each interview should take approximately one hour, and one follow up session with each participant will be conducted in order to provide feedback and to ensure that the transcripts and answers provided by the participant accurately reflect their viewpoints and experiences provided during the interview.

### **Recording of data**

Data management is defined by Johnson (2012) as “the range of activities which ensure long-term access to data in a usable form. This includes selection, storage, organisation, preservation and provision of ongoing access to data” (p.2). The importance of proper data management is summarised by Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston (2013): “(Data) is likely to be highly rich in detail but unwieldy and intertwined in content. It is precisely for this reason that organised steps

to 'manage' the data are essential” (p.220). The researcher will exercise good data management as much as possible through-out the present study.

### **Recording**

The interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and then summaries and observed themes will be interpreted and recorded. Transcriptions of the interviews will also be conducted and corrected or edited where necessary.

While the official language of Namibia is English and all business in Namibia is supposed to be conducted in English, in the event that the participant responds to any of the questions in another language (such as Afrikaans or Oshiwambo), a qualified translator will be used to translate the answers into English in the transcripts. In order to ensure that the transcripts are ethical and accurately reflect the interview, a copy of each transcript will be provided to the respective participant, who will then have an opportunity to object in case of any inaccuracies.

### **Storage and retrieval**

To ensure that collected data is safe, all physical copies of data will be securely stored in a locked cupboard which is only accessible to the researcher. Backup electronic copies will be stored on physical media and will also be stored in a locked cupboard.

Some of the types of stored data may be raw data, partially processed data, coded data, reports, summaries, indices and all other related documentation not listed here.

### **Data analysis**

The data will be analysed manually by means of directed qualitative content analysis. Content analysis in qualitative research focuses on and gives attention to content or contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005) directed qualitative content analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. In this study, existing theory and research on the topics of organisational support, well-being and commitment are used to help create and focus the interview questions and may assist in determining the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes by providing predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationships among variables as indicated in previous research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

With regards to coding, the qualitative content analysis process, as described by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), will be closely followed. The successive steps of this process are the following:

Table 1

*Qualitative content analysis process (adapted from Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009)*

<p><b>Step 1 - Prepare the data</b></p> <p>Data must be transformed into written text. When interviews are being transcribed, it is important to ask: “(1) should all the questions of the interviewer or only the main questions from the interview guide be transcribed; (2) should the verbalizations be transcribed literally or only in a summary; and (3) should observations during the interview be included” (Zhang &amp; Wildemuth, 2009, p.3).</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 2 - Define the unit of analysis</b></p> <p>The unit of analysis refers to the unit of text that requires classification. Before anything can be coded, the text must be unitized. The manner in which the text is unitized can affect coding decisions and is therefore one of the most fundamental steps in data analysis. Themes are most often used as a unit for analysis rather than linguistic units such as words or paragraphs. Codes may be assigned to chunks of text of any size, as long as that chunk represents a theme.</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 3 - Develop categories and a coding scheme</b></p> <p>Categories or coding schemes are derived from three sources, namely previous theories, related studies, or from the data gathered. A preliminary model or theory may be used upon which an inquiry may be based. Initial coding categories may be generated from a theory or from related studies and then may be modified or developed during the course of analysis as new categories emerge inductively.</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 4 - Test the coding scheme on a sample of text</b></p> <p>This helps to create a fairly standardized method of coding the data and will help to develop and validate the coding scheme early in the process. The researcher will carry out this step during the pilot interviews. The initial coding scheme will effectively create a coding manual for the data analysis.</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 5 - Code all the text</b></p> <p>If sufficient consistency is achieved, the coding rules can be applied to the corpus of text. Coding must be consistently checked in order to ensure that “drifting into an idiosyncratic sense of what the codes mean” is prevented (Schilling, 2006 in Zhang &amp; Wildemuth, 2009, p.4). Because coding will proceed while new data continues to be collected, it is likely that new themes and concepts will emerge and will need to be added to the coding manual.</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 6 - Assess your coding consistency</b></p> <p>After all the data has been coded, it is important that it is rechecked in order to ensure consistency. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) make note that it is simply not enough to assume that, if a sample was coded in a consistent and reliable manner, the coding of the whole corpus of text is also consistent. Fatigue is likely to cause mistakes as the coding continues.</p>
↓
<p><b>Step 7 - Draw conclusions from the coded data</b></p> <p>The researcher must make inferences and create reconstructions of meanings derived from the data in order to make sense from the themes and categories previously identified. This stage is characterized by exploration of the properties and dimensions of categories, identifying possible relationships, uncovering patterns and testing categories against the full range of data. This is considered to be one of the most critical steps in the analysis process and is very dependent on the reasoning abilities of the researcher.</p>



## **Step 8 - Report your methods and findings**

In order for the study to be replicable, the analytical procedures and processes must be presented and reported completely and honestly. This report must include all aspects such as decisions and practices concerning the coding process, as well as the methods used to establish the trustworthiness of the study. As qualitative research is primarily interpretive, the researcher must exhibit a personal and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in the study.

The researcher of this study also plans to make use of ATLAS.ti. The program is designed to assist researchers in organizing, managing and coding qualitative data in an efficient manner. The software also has a visual presentation function which assists the researcher to see any relationships between categories in a more vivid manner (Barry, 1998; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Additionally to the data analysis, an assessment of literature will be conducted in order to compare and contrast the findings of the research with any similar studies which were explored in the literature review.

The researcher acknowledges that no matter how objective the study is, there will be an influence on the data analysis by the process of data collection, as according to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), these two processes cannot be applied in isolation from one-another. In order to minimise inaccuracy, member validation will be done, whereby participants will be given the opportunity to reflect on their personal contributions to the findings of the study as well as how the findings were interpreted by the researcher.

### **Strategies employed to ensure quality data**

It is important that the study is of topmost quality. Phillimore and Goodson (2004) provided a list with descriptions of “canons” which all good qualitative research subscribes to and this study will strive to contain these canons:

- **Credibility** (associated with validity): This aspect refers to how truthful findings are. The researcher will ensure that the presented findings truthfully and accurately reflect the gathered data of the study.
- **Transferability** (associated with generalisability): This is concerned with how applicable findings of the study are to other settings. Rich descriptions of findings and themes in data, which are fully developed allow for findings to become applicable to other contexts.
- **Dependability** (associated with reliability): Dependability concerns the consistency or reproducibility of the findings. Post-positivism states that reality can never be fully known but instead can only be approximated. Each context which the study takes place in may have an influence on the findings, however, in order to ensure that the findings of this study

accurately reflects its context, detailed descriptions of the context will be used in order to understand the rooting of the opinions and interactions of the layoff survivors. Additionally, descriptions of the data collection and analyses methods will be provided.

- **Conformability** (associated with objectivity): This pertains to how neutral findings are. Conformability will be guaranteed by ensuring that appropriate and unbiased data analysis techniques will be utilized.

## **Reporting**

Good qualitative research must make use of a writing style which is both scientific and realistic. Maxwell (2004) proposed a viewpoint of “scientific realism” in reporting, that combines the realms of scientific and realistic writing styles.

Amonson (1977) stated that classical scientific writing is characterised by the usage of logical, and where possible, mathematical relation, in order to reasonably derive conclusions from apparent observations, and that ultimately, the researcher “must be convinced that they do not know what they mean until they can say what they mean” (p.12), i.e. conclusions must be clearly and logically derived from the observations of participants.

Alternatively, Alvesson stated that realistic writing seeks to instil “a maximum, transparent research process characterised by objectivity and neutrality” (in Symon, & Cassell, 2012, p.20). That the reporting process is viewed as a pipeline for transmitting information and that the bias of the author should be removed in order to create true and accurate accounts from the participants of the study. The author should take care to not let personal viewpoints influence the reports of the participants. Wherever possible, the same phrases, words and key terms used by the participants will be incorporated into the final report.

According to De Vos *et al.*, (2013) the reporting style must self-evidently reflect the guiding paradigm in a simplistic manner and should evoke action on the part of the reader through education and reflective empowerment making use of the inclusion of detailed descriptions and vicarious experiences of the participants in order to draw inference.

## **Ethics**

All research projects are bound to raise contemplations with regard to moral values and ethical conduct. Consideration is and will be given to numerous ethical issues, including voluntary participation, informed consent, participant harm and confidentiality. Each participant will be provided the choice to voluntarily consent to the study and the participants' right to confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed through keeping the data safe from all unauthorised individuals. If a participant no longer wishes be a part of the study, the researcher will then immediately remove that participant and the participants' information or data from the study. A person may choose to protect their privacy by not answering or responding to the study. A person who waves their right to privacy by agreeing to the researcher's questions, has the right to expect that his/her answers and identity to remain confidential. If the subject willingly consents to participate, it is expected that he or she will provide truthful answers. All data will be kept safe and private so that they will not and cannot affect any of the participants' personal lives, careers or any other aspect of them or their families. Any identifying information which is disclosed by the participant during the study will be censored or amended in order to protect their privacy. Any uncertainty will be dealt with by the researchers as soon as it becomes apparent, and the researchers will also act in a manner which promotes integrity, honesty, accuracy, validity, legality, equality/non-discrimination, objectivity and care.

## **CHAPTER DIVISION**

The chapters in this proposal are presented as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Research article 1

Chapter 3: Research article 2

Chapter 4: Conclusion, limitations, and recommendations.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE 1**

# **An exploration of the psychological and subjective well-being of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Orientation:** Organisations and legislation fail to account for employees spared in the layoff process. These layoff survivors should also be provided care to deal with a restructured work environment, which can drastically impact their subjective and psychological well-being.

**Research purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the various experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their subjective well-being and psychological well-being within the context of the Namibian fishing industry.

**Motivation for the study:** To gain more knowledge and a better understanding of the experiences on both subjective and psychological well-being of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing-industry context to accommodate foreign findings on the topic and to provide recommendations, which may improve the well-being of these individuals.

**Research design, approach and method:** A qualitative research design with a descriptive approach was utilised throughout this study. The study was grounded in a social constructivist research tradition, with post-modernistic methods used to obtain information based on the experiences of the layoff survivors whilst maintaining an objective interview process. A voluntary sample of 14 ( $N=14$ ) layoff survivors employed within the Namibian fishing industry at the time formed the basis of the study, and data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Data analysis was manually performed by means of directed qualitative content analysis, with the coding process as described by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) closely followed.

**Main findings:** The results of this study indicate that layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry experience a variety of changes to the various aspects of their subjective and psychological well-being. While most of the results appear to correlate with findings of international studies, some disparity to these other findings were found. Overall layoff survivors experience a deteriorated subjective and psychological well-being following the survival of layoffs within the Namibian fishing industry.

**Practical/managerial implications:** If organisations wish to maintain satisfactory levels of well-being within their staff following layoffs, attempts at facilitating the employee's emotions, satisfaction at work and judgements should be made. Negative influences of the layoff survival

can also be pre-emptively blocked by creating open and clear communication, where survivors are provided with sufficient information regarding their future and a channel to express their own concerns and emotions to the organisation. Organisations should also take note of the subjective nature of employee's reactions as there may not be a one-size-fits-all solution to preventing negative effects of the layoff survival.

**Contribution/value-add:** The results of this study add value by localising and validating findings from foreign contexts to an African context, while also exploring a relatively unfamiliar area of research. This study also provides recommendations based on findings that can facilitate the well-being of layoff survivors, which in turn will maintain organisational performance following organisational restructuring. Both organisations and researchers will also be provided with a better understanding of the thoughts and feelings of layoff survivors within a turbulent industry. Additional areas of exploration that can assist in aiding employee well-being are also identified and recommended for future research.

**Keywords:** Fishing industry; Namibia; Employees; Layoff survivors; Psychological well-being; Subjective well-being; Positive psychology

## INTRODUCTION

Employee well-being is an increasingly growing point of interest that continually impacts business performance and functioning and provides an introspection of employee satisfaction with regards to their work environment (Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007). Well-being in turn impacts an employee's own subjective opinions surrounding their jobs and their employers (Cummings, & Worley, 2014), which can then influence their behaviour at work. Organisations that have recently undergone restructuring provide a basis for well-being to be negatively influenced, which can then have a long-lasting impact on their employees and on the organisation.

Organisational restructuring is a process that can drastically impact the lives of employees who are let go, with no specific interventions kept in place to help these laid-off employees deal with these changes (Cotter, & Fouad, 2012; Robbins, 1999). Organisational restructuring, sometimes referred to as downsizing, layoffs or retrenching (Greenglass, & Burke, 2002; Sronce, & McKinley, 2006) is a result of market, economic, political or natural pressures that place strain on entire industries and all the organisations operating in those industries (Burger, Berg, & Fintel,

2014; Magruder, 2012; Sinvula, 2014), and as a result companies frequently turn to organisational restructuring in order to protect their business interests from these pressures.

Organisational restructuring in turn attributes to an increase in unemployment within a country, especially during recessions or periods of economic downturn. The unemployment rate in Namibia is currently 34% (Trading Economics, 2017) and the fishing industry, which is the third largest contributor to the country's gross domestic product, has been made particularly vulnerable due to the exchange rate, introduction of fishing quotas, over-regulation by the government and liquidation of underperforming factories (Hartman, 2015). In the 2015-2016 alone, the fishing industry has had its workforce of 14 000 employees reduced by just under 3% in total (Finck, 2015; NAMPA, 2016; New Era, 2016) due to a series of layoffs that have occurred because of the Namibian fishing industry experiencing these severe pressures.

Layoffs are described by Makawatsakul and Kleiner (2003) as any processes of reduction in the labour force of an organisation with the intent of improving performance or for cutting costs. The term used varies in several countries, with redundancy used in the UK and retrenchment preferred in Southern African countries (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, etc.) As mentioned above, layoffs are often the result of logical business decisions for survival and competition (Freeman, & Cameron, 1993; Leung, & Chang, 2002). However, layoffs are not a simple process to implement when trying to improve organisational performance and must follow the prescribed process as stipulated in the labour legislation of the organisation's host country.

Legislation guiding the layoff process differs greatly from country to country. Before Namibia developed its own labour act, the layoff process was based on the pre-existing processes as established in older South African legislation from the time when Namibia had previously been under South African administration. However, over time, Namibia steadily developed its own system of laws independent from South Africa, while also observing the legislation from other countries as a guide to establishing its own law. This culminated in 2007 when Namibia released its new Labour Act (2007), which was officially gazetted on 31 December that same year, and aimed to overhaul all previously established labour legislations. The act had updated many aspects of labour law, however in terms of layoffs, the act is still fairly open and lenient to organisations. Section 34 of the act dictates the process that must be followed in the events of collective termination or redundancy. It merely states that organisations contemplating layoffs must inform the labour commissioner and any relevant trade union at least four weeks prior of the intended layoffs occurring, and that the organisation must disclose all relevant information to trade unions. The organisation must then negotiate in good faith with the unions regarding alternatives to

dismissal, the selection criteria to be implemented, ways to minimise dismissals, conditions of dismissals and any possible adverse effects of the dismissals. The four-week notice period before layoffs allows employees the opportunity to adjust their personal, professional and social lives prior to the prospect that they will lose their source of income (Namibian Labour Act, 2007; Venter, & Levy, 2011). If either party feels that negotiations are not held in good faith, they may then refer the dispute to the labour commissioner who will appoint a conciliator to the dispute. Lastly, the Labour Act warns organisations that failure to comply with these standards may result in a fine not exceeding N\$10,000 and/or imprisonment not exceeding a period of two years.

Certain precedents and codes of good practice have been established since the release of the new Namibian Labour Act in 2007, which many trade unions urge companies to follow when contemplating possible layoffs. These precedents urge several alternatives and guidelines to the layoff process and include the following: Reducing the number of subcontractors, consultants, or temporary employees; freezing new hires; decreasing work hours; gross salary reduction; and increasing staff involvement in finding production gains (Cascio, 2010). In terms of the layoff process, last-in-first-out (LIFO) is the gold-standard that companies most often use, but it is not prescribed by any law and can be replaced by any fair and transparent procedure which does not discriminate against any one group.

While the Namibian Labour Act is still relatively new and Namibia is a fairly young country, there are many shortcomings in the laws governing the layoff process. Nowhere in Namibian labour legislation are there any provisions established for maintaining the welfare of layoff survivors, and even those employees who are laid off are only afforded statutory severance of one week's salary for each completed year of service (Labour Act, 2007).

Layoff survivors are defined by Cotter and Fouad (2012, p.2) as "Workers who remain at an organisation after a period of organisational downsizing". These layoff survivors are expected to function with improved innovation, as well as being able to adjust to increased roles and duties while handling a wider range of work tasks all within a restructured working environment, which often lacks the social support from peers or colleagues and the job security from the past environment (Qureshi, & Wasti, 2014). Additional research on organisational performance following restructuring has found that productivity and profitability in general does not immediately increase and may even decrease for a short period (De Meuse, Bergmann, Vanderheiden, & Roraff, 2004). This failure to improve performance drastically may be due in part to the wide range of behavioural and emotional responses. These responses are exhibited by the layoff survivors, along with the general decrease of skills, expertise or innovative abilities,

which are lost when employees leave the organisation as a result of the layoffs (both directly and indirectly) (Edin, & Gustavsson, 2008; Erickson, 2007).

One study by Moore, Grunberg, and Greenberg (2004) found that exposure to layoffs results in higher role ambiguity, depression and other health problems among employees. These symptoms, accompanied with feelings of guilt about retention of employment and higher job insecurity, has an impact on the behaviour and attitudes of layoff survivors (Noer, 2009). This led researchers in coining the phrase “Layoff Survivors Sickness” to describe these phenomena. Layoff survivor sickness is described by Noer (2009) as a distinct pattern of emotions survivors may experience, which include anxiety, anger, depression, guilt, distrust and reduced motivation, among others. Doherty and Horsted (1995) concurred that layoff survivors were often faced with a mixed grouping of specific behaviours and emotions following an organisational downsizing. Kim (2007, p. 450) defined the sickness as “The social and psychological impact of downsizing on layoff survivors”. These negative experiences reduce the functioning and performance of layoff survivors, which then not only lowers the total performance of the organisation but can compound with the usual stressors or pressure that all employees face, and then in turn may have a serious impact on the healthy functioning of a person. While there are established outcomes that layoff survival may have on an employee, an aspect that has not been explored or analysed in-depth is how layoff survival may impact the well-being of an individual, especially when considering the context of the current study. There have been no similar studies to explore the personal accounts of these layoff survivors regarding their well-being or health.

Well-being is a widely researched and fluctuating concept, which covers the subjective, social and psychological dimensions of an individual, including all health-related behaviour (Seifert, 2005). Subjective well-being, along with psychological well-being, provides a good scientific indication for the general well-being of an individual as it reflects an individual’s emotional, affective and psychological wellness with life (Govindji, & Linley, 2007; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). This view states that subjective and psychological well-being can be combined for a broader understanding of overall well-being and has been implemented in studies by Govindji and Linley (2007) as well as Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002). By exploring the aspects of both subjective and psychological well-being, an indication of the overall mental health and life satisfaction, as experienced by employees impacted by layoff survival, may be analysed. If it is found that the well-being of these individuals is influenced in a negative way as indicated in international studies (Grunberg, Moore, & Greenberg, 2001; Kim, 2007; Noer, 2009), it may be crucial for organisations to implement employment standards to protect these remaining workers.

Subjective Well-being (SWB), as described by Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003), is a broad construct, which is concerned with how individuals evaluate their own lives, in terms of their emotional responses to events, their attitudes or judgments, their fulfilment, and their general satisfaction. SWB provides an alternative view of satisfaction or happiness for individuals and is just one indication of the quality of life for workers and individuals. Researchers tend to consider a positive SWB to be necessary for a good life (Govindji, & Linley, 2007), and therefore events that would negatively impact the SWB of an individual, would then also impact their general satisfaction.

SWB is an aspect that is frequently explored in the field of positive psychology (Seligman, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). There have been numerous studies that have concluded that there is an existing relationship between the aspects of life satisfaction, emotions, moods or optimism and good health (Diener, & Chan, 2011) as well as to that of certain personality traits (Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). SWB is comprised of two different components, namely life satisfaction and affect balance (Diener, & Biswas-Diener, 2011).

Life satisfaction is simply defined as “A cognitive, judgemental process” (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985, p.71) and covers any judgement concerning one’s own quality of life and the criteria by which an individual evaluates it against. Diener et al. (1985) noted that an individual’s satisfaction with their own life is subjective and not externally exposed, meaning that individuals who are exposed to the same environments may report differing levels of life satisfaction. Layoff survivors may also report varying levels of satisfaction in their workplace following the organisational restructuring. How an individual’s life satisfaction affects their subjective well-being and in turn their overall well-being is a concept that has not been explored in the unique context of the current study and thus requires a narrative of these layoff survivor’s perspectives and thoughts.

Affect balance refers to the balance of both positive and negative emotions, moods or feelings that a person may have. This may have a positive, negative or hedonic balance, which simply refers to a state of emotional equilibrium or overall balance (Larsen, 2000). A low negative affect balance is usually correlated with a high or positively-reported life satisfaction, but this is not always the case (Diener, 2000). The impact that affect may have on an employee is a very difficult aspect to completely understand, as factors such as personality traits, context or nature of the job may all impact the functioning of that individual. Exploration of these unique perspectives from layoff

survivors in this particular industry may provide a better understanding of these complex influences and pressures and may even result in findings that can be developed further.

While subjective well-being provides an excellent indication for the general satisfaction and emotional functioning of layoff survivors, it is also important to explore the psychological well-being of these individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

Psychological well-being can be defined as “A multidimensional construct representing an individual's subjective sense of emotional well-being and comfort” (Repetti, 1987, p.711). One model by Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed that psychological well-being is comprised of six distinct dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance.

Autonomy, which can be defined as the “Constellation of phenomena, centring on personal choice, self-agency and psychological independence” (Rothbaum, & Trommsdorff, 2007, p.462), refers to regulation of oneself by the self in pursuit of independence, the ability to follow one’s own standards and resist social pressure (Ryan, & Deci, 2006). Autonomy determines the self-reliance of an individual and may have a drastic effect on how that individual copes following the layoff event. Kim and Stoner (2008) found that higher levels of autonomy are associated with stress-coping mechanisms and recommended that places of work become more decentralised in order to encourage higher autonomy. Noer (2009) concurred this notion by suggesting that for layoff survivors to better function at work, an environment of strong, autonomous employees who do not need to rely on each other should be emphasised, as he feels that the majority of trauma is a result of friendships and social support structures being lost after the restructuring process. However, there is very little research supporting this notion, and positive psychology would suggest that social support plays an important role in coping or healing following any traumatic experience.

Environmental mastery was described by Jahoda (1958) as an individual’s ability to manipulate and control the environment to best suite their required conditions for psychological health and well-being. Environmental mastery is often seen as a skill rather than a dimension of personality or psychological well-being and can be associated closely with the amount of control an individual has on their context in terms of their workload or work structure. For example: A CEO would be able to control his environment much easier than a mail room clerk, as he has the power to alter his work context through delegating his tasks to other employees. Virick, Lilly, and Casper (2007) found that an increase in the workload of layoff survivors could result in a role overload and altered

work-life balance, which can then further impact an individual's life satisfaction. Environmental mastery may play a very interesting role in determining a layoff survivor's psychological well-being, especially when considered the amount of influence that individual may have in shaping his or her own environment. At the same time, it may be true that individuals with reduced environment mastery or control may perceive the layoff process to be beyond their scope of control and as such may not be as emotionally susceptible to feelings of guilt or wrongdoing often associated with layoff survival.

Personal growth can refer to any positive psychological alterations following any highly challenging life circumstances that the individual has recently experienced (Kraaij et al., 2008). It is important to analyse exactly how surviving a layoff event or the trauma associated with such an event may affect an individual or employee in terms of their personal growth. It is unclear whether this growth may occur over a short, medium or long term or even in what ways this growth may manifest itself in these employees. As previously mentioned, organisational performance generally decreases following a layoff event. However, this performance does eventually stabilise itself and this may be due to the personal growth exhibited by layoff survivors who realised that they are in a flight-or-fight scenario in the jobs against this restructured workplace. The term post-traumatic growth was established to explain any growth that may occur following exposure to traumatic events (Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 1996) and it would be important to explore whether posttraumatic growth is present in layoff survivors and how this growth may in turn affect the psychological well-being and functioning of that individual.

Ryff and Singer (2008) described positive relations as having the ability to trust another person through emphasising with them and sustaining constructive relationships. As organisational restructuring drastically alters the social support structure between the various remaining parties at the company (Gittel, Cameron, Lim, & Rivas, 2006), the relationships and relations between the various parties may also be altered. As social support and relationships with others plays an important role in the well-being of all people (Liu, Li, Xiao, & Feldman, 2014; Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jeswani, 2014), layoff survivors' positive relations may therefore play an important role in determining their well-being after the restructuring.

Purpose in life was referred to by Boyle, Barnes, Buchman, and Bennett (2009) as the sense that life has a meaning and direction and that an individual's goals and potential are attainable. An individual's purpose in life plays an important role in that person's determination and may affect

a wide range of aspects such as motivation, resilience or mental fortitude. Purpose in life was also shown to play an important role in determining psychological well-being by Ryff and Keyes (1995) by partly determining psychological well-being as well as influencing the other components of psychological well-being.

Lastly, self-acceptance, which has a broad range of definitions depending on the context, can simply denote to the acceptance of one's own personal identity (Coleman, 1987). As self-acceptance is considered by Ryff and Keyes (1995) as being a necessary component for psychological well-being, it may be that the role of self-acceptance of layoff survivors requires further exploration in order to properly understand how the layoff event affects the survivor's well-being.

Past research by Moore, Grunberg, and Greenberg (2004) revealed that an individual's mental resilience did not improve as the employee survived multiple layoff events and that the employee is equally susceptible to the strains and negative effects associated with each individual layoff event, regardless of the type of layoff or type of contact exposure in the layoffs.

While there have been studies on the psychological well-being of unemployed or recently laid-off individuals (Carroll, 2007; McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Vansteenkiste, Lens, Witte, & Feather, 2005) and on workers who have survived multiple cases of dissimilar layoffs (Moore, Grunberg, & Greenberg, 2004), there have been relatively few studies on how layoffs may affect an individual's psychological functioning and overall well-being. There are also no known studies in the context of the Namibian fishing industry.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design consists of the research approach, research strategy and research method.

### **Research approach**

This study followed a qualitative research design from a social constructivism approach. In this approach, the researcher was interested in studying the effects of surviving layoff/layoffs on the well-being (both subjective and psychological) on employees within the Namibian fishing industry, and how they experienced these related aspects by allowing the "Phenomenon of interest to unfold naturally" (Golafshani, 2003, p.600). These different thoughts, feelings and experiences

of the participants were explored to gain a proper understanding of the associated dynamics and how they are interpreted and viewed by the layoff survivors.

### **Research strategy**

The unit of analysis for the study was employees from various companies in the Namibian fishing industry that have recently survived a layoff process. The study was comprised of multiple case studies aimed at exploring the experiences and perspectives of layoff survivors with regard to their own self perceived subjective and psychological well-being.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research setting**

The interview was held in a neutral, comfortable setting away from the workplace of the interviewees. Attention was given to aspects such as the climate, temperature and atmosphere of the room. To ensure that the interview was not disturbed, the door to the room where the interview was conducted was locked. Ensuring that the participant was at ease, the researchers introduced themselves in a friendly and warm manner, offered each participant a bottled water and explained the context of the interview while also explaining the rights of the participant.

### **Entrée and research role**

Access to the participants was gained through personal contacts within the fishing industry. Consequently, through communications with these participants and the superiors at their companies, additional sets of participants were found.

As according to Fink (2000), the role of the researcher throughout the study was to help facilitate the participants through establishing personal relations and to allow the participant to feel at ease in order for natural and honest storytelling to take place. During the interviews, the researcher also managed the questions to gain additional depth in the participant's answers, without actually influencing the responses provided (Fink, 2000; de Vos, Delport, Fouché, & Strydom, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), to ensure fairness by truthfully reflecting the views, perspectives, values and claims of the participant, the bias of subjectivity or inquirer blindness must be controlled. The researcher maintained an understanding of his own viewpoints and beliefs to capture the data correctly from the viewpoints of the participant through the processes of observation, interaction and interviewing. The researcher tried to remain as objective as possible

throughout the interviews by maintaining subjectivity and encouraging fair and transparent answers from each participant.

## Sampling

A combination of both purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select particular cases that characterised a specific feature necessary to the study. This selection feature was employees who survived a layoff within the previous three years in organisations that have laid off at least 10% of their workforce during that period. After the initial purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used whereby participants asked to provide four possible contacts for the study, and only two of the provided four contacts were then contacted about the study. This step was implemented to remove any possibility of bias in the study.

The sample consisted of 14 employees ( $N=14$ ) from various companies within the Namibian fishing industry. A table detailing the various demographic and biographic differences of the sample with the study is provided below.

Table 1

*Characteristics of participants ( $N=14$ )*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	11	79
	Female	3	21
<b>Age</b>	18–29	8	57
	30–39	2	14
	40–49	4	28
	50+	0	0
<b>Race</b>	African	6	43
	Mixed	1	7
	White	7	50
<b>Qualification</b>	Grade 10	8	57
	Grade 12	4	28

	(Matriculated)		
	Technicon diploma	0	0
	Technical college	2	14
	University degree	0	0
<b>Home language</b>	Afrikaans	4	28
	English	4	28
	Oshiwambo	6	43
	Other	0	0
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	7	50
	Not married	7	50
<b>Parental status</b>	No children	5	36
	One child	5	36
	Two children	1	7
	Three or more children	3	21
<b>Tenure at current organisation</b>	Under 1 year	2	14
	1–3 years	6	43
	3–5 years	3	21
	5–10 years	1	7
	10+ years	2	14
<b>Type of job</b>	Blue collar (manual labour)	10	71
	White collar (office worker)	4	28

Table 1 shows that the majority of the interviewees were male (79%) and that 21% were female. 57% of the interviewees were between the ages of 18 to 29, and no interviewee was over the age of 50 years old. Furthermore, the interviewees were 50% white (Caucasian) and 43% ethnic African. The majority (57%) of interviewees held a grade 10 qualification, had one or more

children (64%) and were blue-collared workers (71%). Nearly half of all interviewees were at their organisation for 1 to 3 years (43%) and spoke Oshiwambo at home (43%), and all interviewees admitted to being comfortable with either Afrikaans or English as their work languages.

### **Data-collection method**

A semi-structured interview, based on the social constructivism paradigm, was used in this study. The researcher studied the phenomena without predetermined expectations of categories leading the research and allowed for exploratory narrative of the participant's perspectives to be established. The interview was held in an informal setting and was guided by several questions related to the varying aspects of the study. It was ensured that the participants understood each question before answering.

An initial pilot study was carried out to refine and increase the success of the study and subsequent interviews. The pilot study also aimed at testing and ensuring that the researcher did not use directive questioning during the interview process. The pilot study was conducted on two suitable candidates and showed that there were no demonstrable issues relating to the semi-structured questions used or the setting in which the interviews were conducted, therefore minimal changes were made to the interview schedule and further interviews followed shortly thereafter.

During the interviews, the researcher and participant were faced directly towards one another in a relaxed manner. The researcher maintained an open-body posture and maintained eye contact with the participant throughout the interview. Non-directive dialogue techniques such as minimal verbal responses, paraphrasing, clarification, reflection and summaries of responses were used to assist the participant in providing rich and accurate dialogue. Informal small talk and explanation of the research process and objective was conducted prior to the interview to establish rapport between the researcher and participant. Transcription was also done within a 48-hour window following each interview. Examples of interview questions included: "When you think back about the recent past, what are some of the emotions that you experience most at work and why do you think you're experiencing them?" and "In what ways do you think other people, such as your co-workers or friends, would describe you?"

### **Recording of data**

The interview was recorded simultaneously via an audio and video recorder. Permission from the participant to record the interview was obtained and it was also stressed that the identity and

information provided of the participant or their organisation would remain anonymous and that the participant could pull out from the study at any time.

## **Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted by means of directed qualitative content analysis and an eight-step process as created by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), directed qualitative content analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. In this study, research findings concerning the aspects of psychological well-being, subjective well-being and layoff survival were used to assist in determining the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes by providing predictions about the variables of interest.

The eight-step process created by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) consisted of the following steps:

### **Step 1 - Prepare the data**

Data from the interviews were transcribed into written text. Transcriptions were verbatim and once all the interviews were transcribed, they were combined into a single, large data set.

### **Step 2 - Define the unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis for the study was defined. This included unitising the text from transcripts by making use of themes and categories identified from previous research or studies. It was decided that codes could be applied to text of any size, if the text represented a theme.

### **Step 3 - Develop categories and a coding scheme**

Categories or coding schemes are developed from previous theories, related studies and from the primary data gathered in the present study. The categories developed from previous studies or existing theories were modified to suite the current data.

### **Step 4 - Test the coding scheme on a sample of text**

The coding scheme or categories are tested on sample text from the pilot study transcript. This helped to create a standardised method of coding the data as well as validate the coding scheme. The results of this step were then used to create a coding manual of sorts, which then guided the coding process for the other interview's data.

### **Step 5 - Code all the text**

Once sufficient coding consistency was achieved, the coding scheme was applied to the entire corpus of text. Coding was checked for consistency to prevent the possibility of “Drifting into an idiosyncratic sense of what the codes mean” as stated by Schilling (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Additional themes were added to the coding manual as they emerged during the coding process.

#### Step 6 - Assess your coding consistency

After all the data was coded, it was checked and rechecked for consistency in coding rules. The coding of each section was then compared to the coding of the entire corpus to ensure that consistency was achieved.

#### Step 7 - Draw conclusions from the coded data

Inferences and reconstructions of meanings were derived from the data in order to make sense of the themes and categories previously identified in the literature and previous studies. This stage was characterised by exploration of the properties and dimensions of categories, identifying possible relationships, uncovering patterns and testing categories against the full range of data.

#### Step 8 - Report your methods and findings

The analytical procedures and processes are presented to make the study replicable. A personal and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher is also presented, along with all aspects such as decisions and practices concerning the coding process, as well as the methods used in the study. Lastly, the findings, limitations and recommendations are discussed and reported.

### **Strategies to enhance quality of data**

It was important for this the study to maintain the topmost quality. Phillimore and Goodson (2004) provided a list with descriptions of ‘canons’ that all good qualitative research subscribes to and this study also strived to contain these canons:

- Credibility (associated with validity): This aspect referred to how truthful findings were. The researcher ensured that the findings were presented truthfully and accurately reflect the gathered data of the study.
- Transferability (associated with generalisability): This was concerned with how applicable the findings of the study are to other settings. Rich descriptions of findings and themes in

data, which were fully developed, allow for the findings to become applicable to other contexts if need be.

- Dependability (associated with reliability): Dependability was concerned with the consistency or reproducibility of the findings. Each context that the study takes place in may have an influence on the findings. However, in order to ensure that the findings of this study accurately reflected its context, detailed descriptions of the context were provided in order to understand the rooting of the opinions and interactions of the layoff survivors. Additionally, descriptions of the data collection and analyses methods were provided.
- Conformability (associated with objectivity): This pertained to how neutral findings were. Conformability was guaranteed by ensuring that appropriate and unbiased data analysis techniques were utilised.

### **Data recording**

The interviews were recorded by an electronic voice recorder. Thereafter, all recordings were transcribed into a word-processed document, first through the utilisation of narration software and then manually by the researcher. Each interview was assigned a code ranging from ‘Participant 1’ to ‘Participant 14’, and the dates, time and biographical information of the participant was recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim where possible in the forms of words, phrases or sentences. To minimise equipment failure, the researcher ensured that the recorder was adequately charged and functioning before each interview.

In order to ensure confidentiality, all of the collected data, including but not limited to voice recordings, transcription, field (personal) notes and hard-copy documentation were securely filed and stored in order to prevent other parties from accessing them. Back-up files of electronic documents were also made to prevent data loss. The following hard-copy documentation was filed for safekeeping:

- Informed consent forms signed and completed by participants
- Interview schedules used for each participant
- Field (personal) notes, any additional information gathered during the interview
- Notes made during the ‘data analysis’ process
- A blank copy of the participation thank-you letter

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical consideration was given to many issues, including voluntary participation, informed consent, participant harm and privacy. The researcher aimed to remain as transparent as possible

with participants by explaining the reasons for the study, the process to be followed as well as their rights as participants. Each participant was provided the choice of voluntarily consent to the study and the participants' right to confidentiality. Anonymity was assured by keeping the data safe from all unauthorised individuals. All participants were asked to sign and complete a voluntary consent form, which explained their rights, the purpose of the study and listed the contact details of the researcher. A copy of the consent form was then given to each participant. If a participant no longer desired to be a part of the study, the researcher immediately removed the participant and his or her information or data from the study. Any person or company was given the choice to protect their privacy by not answering or responding to the study. Any person who waived their right to privacy by agreeing to the researcher's questions, had and still has the right to expect that his or her answers and identity remain confidential. The researcher was always mindful of the time allocated to the interviews. Rapport was created with each participant to ensure that each participant felt comfortable during the interview. All data is and will be kept safe, private and anonymous so that it will not affect any of the participants' personal lives, careers or any other aspect of them or their families. Any uncertainty was dealt with by the researchers as soon as it became apparent and the researcher tried to maintain behaviour, which promoted integrity, honesty, accuracy, validity, legality, equality/non-discrimination, objectivity and care. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then summaries and observed themes were interpreted and recorded. Transcriptions of the interviews were conducted and corrected or edited where necessary. All participants provided consent to be recorded during the interviews.

## **RESULTS**

The findings of the study were organised into categories, major themes and sub-themes. These categories, themes and sub-themes are provided in various tables below.

### **Category 1: Subjective well-being**

The first category covers several aspects relating to the subjective well-being of the layoff survivors. Participants were asked to describe their satisfaction, emotions and thoughts both at work, home and with friends following the layoff survival. Participants also compared their current subject well-being to that of the past in order to determine if it had changed. It is clear that the subjective well-being of these layoff survivors decreased overall, with numerous participants describing themselves as being happier before the layoff events. However, it also seems that the subjective well-being of the participants slowly increased after the layoff event and as such, it can

be said to be slowly recovering. Several themes were discovered during the interviews, and the most prominent themes will be discussed below.

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews with the participants.

Table 2

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Theme</b>
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Work satisfaction
	Home and social satisfaction
<b>Emotions</b>	Fewer positive emotions
	Increased negative emotions
	Emotional work-home interference
	Variance in work, home and friendship interfaces
<b>Judgement on others</b>	Judgements on organisation
	Judgements on friends/family

### **Theme 1: Satisfaction**

Satisfaction among participants was found to vary between the work, home and social lives with participants often explaining that there was an active attempt at separating their work and personal lives (“Your personal life is your personal life. It can affect your work life but at the end of the day you must keep it separate”). This was not always possible (as explained below). Participants also never described themselves as having little or no satisfaction within both of their work and personal lives, and instead would only state that they are unsatisfied / have low satisfaction in either their work or personal life. Greater elaboration of this variance in satisfaction can be found below in the two sub-themes.

#### **Sub-theme: Work satisfaction**

The participants indicated that while work satisfaction was mostly determined by the job itself and the unique relationship that the participant has with the organisation, in general it decreased among the participants following the layoff event and thereafter slowly began recovering after an unspecified amount of time (“I'm happy where I am now, in the past I wasn't that happy”). Participants regularly inferred that the largest determinant in their satisfaction at work was linked to their actual jobs or the remuneration they received from the company. Participants with blue collar / manual labour jobs tended to exhibit lower work satisfaction, while white collar / office

workers seemed to have a higher satisfaction in their jobs at the organisation. Participants with very long tenures also seem to experience greater satisfaction in their jobs than other participants, with one participant stating with reference to the cause of the layoff event (“I am very happy at the work now. In the past everything has been okay, but about two years ago the company did very badly because another company opened up that was like ours and it took all of our clients but we carried on”). This same participant indicated that he is currently satisfied at work.

However, among almost all the participants within the study, reference was made to a decrease in work satisfaction following the downsizing. One white-collared participant explained that when he compares his current situation to his past prior to the layoffs (“I was happier at work. Currently, I am not very happy at all”). Participants often cited uncertainty in the organisation, decreased support, increased pressure and loss of co-workers as the largest causes of their dissatisfaction at work. It should also be noted that while participants often described a decrease in work satisfaction, no participant described a complete absence of satisfaction (i.e. dissatisfaction). Participants who described the company as assisting them during difficult times at home also tended to have higher levels of work satisfaction thereafter.

### **Sub-theme: Home and social satisfaction**

Home and social satisfaction among the participants was generally stable and participants mostly indicated that this form of satisfaction is determined by their own personal circumstances. Participants who indicated that they experienced decreased home satisfaction would also immediately explain that the cause was personal and had nothing to do with work (“I'm unhappy with family but my own happiness has nothing to do with work, it's all personal”). Participants also indicated that stress and unhappiness from work would occasionally influence aspects of their personal lives and satisfaction associated to their personal lives (“I was mad with everyone and yes it influenced my life outside of work, I pushed out that I'm anger on other people”). However, participants also frequently described trying to separate their personal and work lives from each other. The most commonly cited causes for dissatisfaction in the participants personal lives were deaths of family/friends, major changes to their personal lives and loss of wealth or remuneration.

### **Theme 2: Emotions**

The emotional balance of the participants was frequently described as being almost equal (“In general it's kind of like a 60/40% towards happiness”). However, all participants described experiencing at least some kind of negativity or negative emotion within the recent past associated to the layoff event (“Anger was the most regular one, definitely. Anger, unhappiness towards the

way you get treated at your work.”) Participants described their past situations as being more positive but due to the layoffs and the other pressures on the company, participants began experiencing more frequent negative emotions, with some these negative emotions then subsiding after a period (“I was happy most of the time except for those periods where there was a drama and then I was really mad... but now overall it's more happy than sad or angry”). Participants tended to describe happiness as the main positive emotion, but at the same time could name several negative emotions they experienced. The emotions experienced by participants will be discussed in the sub-themes below.

### **Sub-theme: Fewer positive emotions**

Participants generally reported little variance in the scope of positive emotions and it seems that these emotions are dependent on the individual's own unique situation at their workplace and personal lives. The most frequent positive emotions described among the participants was happiness and relief. One individual stated that he experienced relief because a promotion afforded him greater freedom in his job along with an increased salary (“I'm in a better position with better benefits. It makes you forget about the past”). Another individual simply stated that there are a few positive emotions in his recent past at work and that most of his positive emotions came from his personal/home life. Participants who stated that they experienced positive emotions stemming from their jobs associated these positive emotions either to improvements in their jobs (e.g. a salary increase or promotion) or to the relationships with management and co-workers. Participants who described themselves as being relieved also often stated that they do not want any more problems at the work place and instead only seek cooperation and fewer problems in the future (“To be honest it's better. In the past, I would have arguments but now everyone is happier. I know that now I have no problem with anyone... the only thing that I want from the company is cooperation”).

### **Sub-theme: Increased negative emotions**

In contrast to the few positive emotions, participants frequently explained experiencing an increase in the variance and amount of negative emotions when compared to the past prior to the layoffs. The most widely reported negative emotions tended to be anger, frustration, unhappiness and sadness. One participant stated, “Anger was the most regular one, definitely” out of all the emotions that he experienced in the recent past following the layoff survival, while other participants described a lack of happiness (rather than unhappiness) and even fear. Participants often explained that these negative emotions were due to a lack of communication or information,

a loss of job security, issues with remuneration and arguments/fighting at work. Participants also often differentiated between experiencing unhappiness as well as a lack of happiness (“I’m not unhappy because I know there are worse positions out there, but it can definitely improve”). Participants who had long tenures or who are in fairly isolated positions described noticeably fewer negative emotions than other participants, while participants who worked in social positions tended to describe more negative emotions.

### **Sub-theme: Emotional work-home interference**

As previously stated, the participants reported actively separating their home and work lives so that they do not affect each other. However, participants frequently reported instances of these emotions from one environment affecting their experience in the other environment. It appeared as if this interference primarily occurred in two ways. Firstly, the negative emotions of anger, sadness and frustration from work would occasionally affect their home lives, as one participant explained that he would “Bring this back home, and then I get stressed, and I take it out on other people”. Positive emotions from their personal lives would also be carried over to their work lives on occasion, as the same participant explained, “When you're happy at home it gives you drive to go through the day at the office”. In instances where participants expressed negative emotions at home, they would also state that it would occasionally affect their work lives. Despite the active separation of these two environments, interference seems to be commonplace in most cases.

### **Sub-theme: Variance in work, home and friendship interfaces**

As mentioned above, the emotions most frequently described by the participants in the study varied greatly between the individual’s different interfaces of work, home and social lives (and religion in one case). Intriguingly, while participants often described both positive and negative emotions within these different interfaces, no participant described completely negative or positive emotions within all three interfaces and would often state that their work-related emotional balance was the opposite of their home/friend interfaces. One participant described this as an ‘anchor’ by explaining that her decision not to find alternative employment was due to current uncertainty in her personal life (“I don't like that feeling of uncertainty unless I have a full-on anchor point in some place then and only then will I leave because... I don't like drifting”). Another participant explained that while he is not satisfied at work or with his friends, he finds comfort in his wife and child, and within his religion (“I would say from my spirit, I want to mean something to god. And I want to mean something to my wife and child.”).

### **Theme 3: Judgements**

Participants inferred two distinct groups upon which they had judgements about. As the participant's judgements varied when based on either the organisation and their co-workers or their friends and family. Each group will be discussed in greater detail below.

#### **Sub-theme: Judgements on organisation**

Participants seemed to have an overall understanding of the difficult situation the organisation finds itself in ("If I see something is lost in the company then I feel bad for it"). Participants also stated that they would attempt to assist where possible ("You are always scared you're going to get retrenched or something or pushed you out so you try and ask if there something that I can help with"). However, in most cases participants stressed that they are only limited in their roles at the company. Lack of clear feedback and the perception that upper management receives disproportionate rewards were also negatively viewed by the participants ("Over the years the amounts of my income has increased, but not by as much as the bosses who are still making the most money. They get all the benefits and that it feels sometimes like its unfair because we are doing all the work"). Generally, the participants' judgements on the company seem to be more negative at present than in the past. However, there were also participants who described themselves as admiring and being thankful to upper management, especially if that participant has had a long tenure or has a good personal relationship to the manager (one participant described his manager as being a father ("The owner of the company is like my father I couldn't just leave him"; while another participant's skipper was his actual father).

Judgements on co-workers seemed dependent on the position of the participant and the personal relationship with the co-worker. Some participants stated that they do not have any feelings of friendliness and that their colleagues are nothing more than co-workers ("It doesn't matter if its two months or two days, we work together and that's it. There are people that feel bad for each other but that's up to them. At work you are my co-worker and that's it. Life isn't like that, my way isn't your way, if someone makes you mad then just leave him and ask him to apologize, it doesn't matter because work stays work. If someone makes me mad, I leave him and I go home and then the next day I come back, and I leave it at home"). This was surmised well by one participant when discussing issues with his subordinates ("I will not take their opinion into consideration. I will just steamroll them saying: this is how we handle this, this is the right way, and I don't care about your opinion"). While another participant described some of his co-workers as being 'nothing' to him, a few would still be considered friends or good relations. One participant

explained that his colleagues and subordinates would often not follow his instructions and would only do so when upper management was involved (“If I tell the people to do something like sweep the floors or pick this up or just do something, I just end up doing it myself. I think they should listen to me. If I approach a boss and I tell them that the other people won’t listen to me, then maybe he’ll tell them to listen but otherwise probably not”). One participant stated that her co-workers are an important factor in her staying with the company (“I need to have a connection with the people otherwise I couldn’t stay if I lost that that relationship the atmosphere the people”).

### **Sub-theme: Judgements on friends and family**

Participants stated that while they try to keep their work and personal lives separate, some also indicate that they have poorer relationships with friends and family following the layoffs. One participant indicated that she lost many friends and elaborated, “I wouldn’t say I have a lot of friends and I’m unhappy in that stage”, while another participant simply stated that he had lost friends recently and does not have many left, however he also attributed the loss of friends to his working fulltime. While participants did indicate that there is some influence of their work lives onto their personal lives, the participants’ judgements on their family or friends seemed largely dependent on each participant’s personal relationship with that family member or friend and where often described as simply being ‘personal’.

## **Category 2: Psychological well-being**

In this category, participants explored their psychological well-being and how the related aspects were influenced after the survival of the layoff event. From the participant accounts, it is evident that, while their personal and professional lives are kept independent from one-another (as previously stated), a relationship of influence still exists between the two settings. Furthermore, some aspects of psychological well-being tended to be only moderately reduced, indicating that participants may require a constant stimulus of change and not sudden, even such as with layoffs or downsizing. To better understand how the various aspects of psychological well-being were influenced, each aspect will be discussed in turn below.

Table 3 provides a detailed overview of the themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews with the participants.

Table 3

Theme	Sub-Theme
<b>Autonomy and environmental control</b>	Restricted autonomy at work
	Impact of team autonomy
	Limited environmental control
<b>Growth and purpose</b>	Decreased professional growth
	Unclear professional purpose
	Common personal purpose and maintained personal growth
<b>Relations with others</b>	Poor relationship with co-workers
	Independent relationship with friends and family
<b>Limited self-understanding</b>	N/A

### Theme 1: Autonomy and environmental control

Within the interviews, the theme of autonomy and environmental control was identified and furthermore the sub-themes of restricted autonomy at work; impact of team autonomy; and limited environmental control were also identified. Each sub-theme will be discussed below.

#### Sub-theme: Restricted autonomy at work

Participants described their autonomy as being restricted overall with each participant's job being described as the main factor in determining their levels of autonomy at work. Participants would often describe themselves as being subject to the instruction of an immediate manager and that the only autonomy or decision making they have is limited to the scope of how they carry out their jobs or these instructions. One participant with a sales job described being able to set his own targets in his job ("I feel bad if I don't hit my target. I set my own target, and if I do not reach it then I will lower my head"). However, his goal setting was still dictated by the purpose of his job and direction of management, and the goals he can set must still be above a minimum level as set by management.

### **Sub-theme: Impact of team autonomy**

Participants whose jobs are divided into independent or more autonomous teams (diesel mechanic teams, ship crews) within the company tended to be less responsive to the layoff event than highly dependent groups (store hands, secretaries, financial controllers, sales teams, etc.). One participant described his ship and its crew as being part of a five-ship fleet, however only the captains of these ships would interact with one another and despite being with the company for many years, he has rarely met the other crews. At the same time, participants who tend to rely on a wide range of people both inside and outside the organisation seem to be more sensitive to the layoff event, with these participants describing far less satisfaction and well-being at work.

### **Sub-theme: Limited environmental control**

Limited environmental control was almost universally shared between the participants, with only participants in management or officer positions being able to exercise control on their working environments, while other participants described themselves as having very little direct control on their work environments (“it's in this environment I'm working in, its negative and if I find a company like this then I try make it a positive environment”). One participant described the availability of quotas and illegal strikes as two major influences on his work environment to which he has no control over (“Our boat is a long line vessel so we should be fishing for long line all year but the availability of quotas varies and sometimes don't exist”). Participants who cite limited environmental control seem to be less affected on a personal level by the layoffs, while participants who are in positions with some environmental control seem to be more sensitive.

## **Theme 2: Growth and purpose**

Overall growth and purpose appears to be highly differentiated and independent between participant's personal and professional lives with these two settings developing independently from one another. Several sub-themes were identified and each will be discussed below.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased professional growth**

Self-perceived professional growth appeared to decline among participants when they compared their current situation to the past as these participants believed that they are provided fewer training opportunities or opportunities to work. Participants would also frequently describe their professional goals in vague manners simply stating that they want to “Open their own place one day” or be a manager at any company, and rather focused on increased remuneration packages as their main goals for the immediate futures.

### **Sub-theme: Unclear professional purpose**

Participants also frequently described their professional purpose as becoming less clear at present, with one participant stating, “To be honest it's kind of cloudy. Like some days I wake up and I'll be like, ok I know my purpose, but then a little while later I'll be like ok, maybe that's not my purpose but what is?” and “I don't know what I want to achieve in 10 years” (from now) and another participant stating “I see myself doing this as well but at the same time I don't see myself doing it, as I'm still deciding. It still feels like I'm in high school trying to figure out what I'm trying to do. I just try get through the season and maybe next season”. So, I want to achieve as much as possible now so that in 10 years I will I know (my purpose), but at the same time I won't know”.

### **Sub-theme: Common personal purpose and maintained personal growth**

Personal purpose was almost universally shared among the participants as either starting or growing their own families (with variation in this purpose associated with their own personal situations) and the rate of personal growth seemingly dependent on the participant's stage of life. One participant simply stated that his personal purpose is that he wants to “Mean something” to his wife and child. Participants also described a willingness to find alternative employment should the professional lives or income threaten their personal goals, as one participant surmised, “I would tend to go if I have to look after myself, my family, my house, or so on, then changes have to be made. I have to look out for my future”, while another participant who already has a large family stated that his personal goal now is to simply build a bigger house or to buy another car. Ultimately, participants underpinned that their professional decision making cannot threat their personal purpose or growth, and that if need be, they are willing to change companies to preserve their personal goals and growth.

## **Theme 3: Relations with others**

Relations with others were frequently discussed by interviewees as being affected by the layoff events. Interviewees would also differentiate between relations with co-workers and relations with friend or family as being highly differentiated and independent from one another. Each group will be discussed below.

### **Sub-theme: Poor relationship with co-workers**

At the workplace, participants described their relationships with their co-workers as poorer than before the layoffs and are often referred to as strictly professional with only a few close friends

remaining at the company (“Some of them are nothing, or just more reserved and work colleagues and others feel like family”). Interestingly, participants who described certain co-workers as close friends would often elaborate that they rarely spend time together outside the workplace. Other participants stressed that they would remain friendly with all co-workers and managers and would attempt to minimise conflict at the workplace, with one participant stating the following with regards to his co-workers (“It doesn't matter if it's two months or two days, we work together and that's it. There are people that feel bad for each other but that's up to them. At work, you are my co-worker and that's it. Life isn't like that, my way is your way, and if someone makes you mad then just leave him and ask him to apologise, but it doesn't matter because work stays work. If someone makes me mad, I'll leave him and I go home and then the next day I come back to work, and I leave it (anger) at home”).

### **Sub-theme: Independent relationship with friends and family**

Relationships with family members and friends appeared to be highly independent of the work environment or layoffs, with the quality and number of personal relationships being dependent on events within the participants' personal lives. Participants within the age range of early-to-middle twenties, did however all share a common feeling of reduced social support and lost friendship from leaving school and entering the workplace (“Right now I'm a bit disappointed with some of my friends. I wish I could have kept more contact with some of my friends but my work takes up a lot of my time and a lot of relationships with my friends broke down and I couldn't keep it up or I couldn't stay with them. I think my social situation went a bit down because of my work”), while older participants would describe themselves as being satisfied with their family and friends, often stating that they have no problems with those aspects. One participant explained that moving from her home town caused a great deal of conflict with family and friends, and subsequently she feels that she lost friends because of that decision (“It was not nice at all with my family because we had a lot of arguments with the moving and I lost a lot of my friends but that's why I moved here, to start a new family; to improve my friends and my work; to basically move away from my past”).

### **Theme 4: Limited self-understanding**

Overall, participants displayed limited self-understanding with most participants only being able to describe their personal strengths and very few weaknesses. The most frequent strengths participants used to describe themselves with were ‘hardworking’, ‘friendly’ and ‘cooperative’, while the most common weakness was described as having a limited emotional control and being

unable to control their anger. Participants were also frequently at a loss of words when asked to describe themselves from the viewpoint of their co-workers, which one participant encapsulated well by stating, “Wow, I really don’t know how to describe myself”. And another participant stating that, “I really wouldn’t know, I don’t think about what other people think about me”. It seemed that participants have a limited understanding or insight of the opinions that others have about them.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study attempted to address an important issue among survivors of organisational layoffs within the Namibian fishing industry, as there is little to no available findings on how the subjective and psychological well-being of this group is impacted by layoffs. While the topics of subjective and psychological well-being of layoff survivors have been examined in foreign contexts, their integration into non-western contexts and subsequent confirmation of validity is in great need. The general purpose of this study was therefore to explore the ways in which the employees from various companies in the Namibian fishing industry experience their subjective well-being, and psychological well-being after surviving a layoff event, with particular reference to the specific objectives of conceptualising in literature layoff survivors’ subjective well-being and psychological well-being; exploring how Namibian layoff survivors experience their psychological well-being; exploring how Namibian layoff survivors experience their subjective well-being and by providing recommendations for both management and future research.

As found in the present study’s results, the subjective well-being of layoff survivors seemed to have decreased following periods of downsizing, as both life satisfaction decreased and the emotional balance of layoff survivors appeared to be less positive overall and was instead negative.

As noted by Diener et al. (1985), an individual’s satisfaction with their own life is subjective and the not externally exposed. Thus, individuals who are exposed to the same environments may report differing levels of life satisfaction and this principle appears to be confirmed within the present study as a wide range of differing levels for both personal and work-related satisfaction were explored. In response to the question “How would you describe your general satisfaction with your life at present when compared to past points in your life?” it appeared that layoff survivors have a far lower work satisfaction following the downsizing and a slightly decreased personal satisfaction. In terms of work satisfaction, layoff survivors appear to be stuck in a state of limbo, as this study found that they are neither fully satisfied nor wholly unsatisfied. They have rather experienced a decrease in work satisfaction, yet are content with their own situation as they

know that other individuals (such as the laid-off staff) may be worse off. It may be that this vagueness can cause further ambiguity to the layoff survivor's perceptions to how satisfied they are with their work environment and situation. Layoff survivors also appeared to recover work satisfaction at different rates following the layoffs, however it is unclear as to which factors influence this recovery. Possible factors may include personality traits of layoff survivors, the amount of time passed, the scale of downsizing, how the layoffs were handled or post-layoff care offered by the organisation, as the layoff survivors in this present study originated from several different organisations and varying positions within each of these organisations. Home satisfaction and social satisfaction with individuals outside work presented an interesting result, as layoff survivors tended to also have a lower overall satisfaction within their personal lives, however survivors would stress that their personal circumstances are not caused by their work situations in any way. It is highly improbable that the majority of participants simultaneously experienced negative events within their personal lives, and it may be that personal satisfaction is indirectly influenced through the emotional work-home interface (as discussed below); a general negativity of the industry or organisation or that other indirect influences such as stress/burnout, poor management, feeling underpaid, etc. can have a further unaccounted influence on the manner in which personal satisfaction is internalised. Layoff survivors who perceived their organisation as caring about their personal satisfaction also seemed to perceive themselves as being well supported and in turn seemed to have a slightly increased work satisfaction than when compared to other participants. This is in line with the work done by Allen (2001) who found that family-supportive organisational policies had significant influences on work-family conflict, affective commitment, supervisor support and job satisfaction. It may be that these policies blur the barrier between the work-home interface and allow these layoff survivors to use their personal support structures to reinforce their work satisfaction or vice versa.

In respond to the question "When you think back about the recent past, what are some of the emotions which you experienced most at work and why do you think you're experiencing them?", it seemed that the emotions experienced by layoff survivors also varied both in terms of positive and negative emotions and it further appeared that positive and negative emotions were independent of one another. The fewer positive emotions experienced by layoff survivors did not necessarily constitute a complete lack of positive emotions, rather a decrease in variance and overall frequency of these positive emotions. The present study also found that layoff survivors tended to experience an increase in the variance and frequency of negative emotions with anger, sadness, fear and worry/anxiety being the most common negative emotions experienced. While the overall emotional balance did not necessarily appear to be negative as with some layoff

survivors, there is however a discernible overall increase in negativity and in some cases seemed to be almost depressive in description. Layoff survivors described themselves as being far more positive before the period of downsizing. However, thereafter they often described themselves as having both positive and negative emotions, almost to an equal degree in some cases. Thus, the layoff survival appears to shift the survivors' emotional balance as becoming less positive, and in some cases negative overall. The results of the present study therefore seemed to confirm past research and the presence of layoff survivors' sickness (Doherty, & Horsted 1995; Kim, 2007; Noer, 2009) within survivors in the Namibian fishing industry. Survivors within the present study explained uncertainty over their futures, lack of information/communication and poor organisational support as being the most common causes for their negative emotions at work, while adverse events within the survivor's personal lives (e.g. death of a family member) also attributed a strong source of negative emotions. It could also be that some of the emotions are less intense due to the survivors understanding the overall situation which led to the layoffs and how these dismissals are generally viewed as 'no-fault'. Interestingly, survivors in the present study frequently described an intentional separation of their work and home emotions and in turn created a strong separate work-home emotional interference. It may be that survivors actively separate these two interfaces to limit the influence of the negative emotions from one interface on the other or that due to the fact that the fishing industry is characterised by frequent layoffs and dramatic events that survivors prepare themselves subconsciously well in advanced. This separation of the varying emotions of the survivor's home and work lives may also account for the large variance of emotions within work and home interfaces as described in the results, as the survivors attempted to minimise work-life conflict or the effects of the layoffs on their families, friends or other aspects of their personal lives. It is clear that by actively separating these two dimensions of work and life that survivors protect their own satisfaction and well-being to far greater extents that what would have otherwise been possible.

Layoff survivors' judgements on other parties seemed to become negative following layoffs, especially on the organisation and the parties within the organisation. These judgements on other parties became apparent during the questions that followed after the candidate's satisfaction with life was explained and then subdivided into the home, work and social dimensions. Judgements on the organisation seems to be directly impacted following the layoffs in a negative manner, while judgement on family and friends may be indirectly impacted through the increased negative emotions and low work satisfaction brought home. On a fundamental level, survivors understood the cause and effect of the entire layoff process, and as such had no issue with the substantive reasoning behind the decision. However, it may be that the procedure implemented by the

organisation, both during and after the layoffs, had a drastic impact on the perceived fairness and justice of the event. Survivors who perceived the process as being unfair may have had a more negative reaction to the organisation than those who perceive the organisation as being fair. Loi, Hang-yue, and Foley (2006) showed that both procedural and distributive justice contributed to the growth or improvement of perceived organisational support, which then had a mediating effect on organisational commitment and turn-over intention, and it may very well be the case that procedural justice of the layoff event can have a similar impact on survivor judgements and subjective well-being. The role which frustration with the layoff process or the inability to effectively handle the associated negative emotions may also be reflected on how the survivors view those parties around them at work as it is these parties who are directly discernible when these adverse feelings are experienced.

Despite its large influence on subjective well-being, it seemed as if downsizing had a more limited direct influence on the psychological well-being of the layoff survivors as this study found that survivors only experienced a reduction in certain aspects of their own psychological well-being, and that not all the aspects usually attributed to psychological well-being were affected. It also seemed that psychological well-being may require a more persistent source of change, rather than a once-off event such as with downsizing. However, when downsizing is drawn out, survivor sickness manifests, or if the organisation fails to adapt to change, it may be that psychological well-being can be more directly influenced. The influence of events outside the workplace also seemed to have an impact on the psychological well-being of layoff survivors.

While autonomy and environmental control of survivors were found to be relatively low, it also appeared that these aspects were already low prior to when the layoff event occurred. When candidates faced the question of “What role does your personality play in letting you take charge of a situation?”, it was made clear that the largest determinant of autonomy and environmental control at work tended to be subject to the actual jobs of the survivors and not their personalities, especially as those survivors in higher positions (management, officers etc.) were afforded far greater control over their work behaviour and environment while those individuals in lower positions were still subject to the control of management. This was in line with the findings of Harley (1999) who found that occupational hierarchies had a clear relationship to job control and that organisational power resides primarily in organisational structures. It may be owing to the fact that the fishing industry frequently sees dramatic changes and shifts to organisational structures because of seasonal employment, legislative changes or the layoffs themselves that organisations prefer to create rigid and structured jobs which in turn limits autonomy between employees and

allows new workers to quickly fill these vacancies where needed. While layoff survivors indicated that there was a larger focus on the requirements or duties of their jobs, no survivors designated this focus as being a management-driven decision and instead attributed it to their own low job involvement or depersonalisation of work. Essentially, the survivors would only do what is required in their job description so that they will be remunerated. Interestingly, layoff survivors made no indication of decreased control or autonomy within their personal lives, which may indicate that the effects of downsizing on control and autonomy is completely restricted to the work environment. It seems that autonomy and environmental control were significantly influenced by the layoffs, and that it would rather require a conscientious decision by both management and the employee or possibly a persistent series of events that could shape the organisation's culture or job requirements in order for the survivor's autonomy to be greatly altered. Furthermore, survivors who are afforded higher levels of autonomy and environmental control may experience a reduced impact on their psychological well-being. This corresponds with the work of Brockner, Spreitzer, Mishra, Hochwarter, Pepper, and Weinberg, (2004, p.96) as autonomy and environmental control were found to attribute to greater psychological well-being.

The personal growth of layoff survivors appears to be somewhat mixed as survivors acknowledged a stagnant professional growth, while growth within the survivor's home life remained relatively unaffected. These findings came fourth after candidates were asked "Why do you think it is important to have new and challenging experiences?", and it appears that the stagnant professional growth may be due to the decrease in training and an overall restricted organisational structure, which limits the possibility for career advancement for the survivors. Ironically, some layoff survivors may also experience the opposite as they are promoted to more senior positions when they are to replace laid-off managers or supervisors. However, this is uncommon and only occurred once in the present study. The possibility of posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 1996) is a concept that most layoff survivors are open to, and in some cases firmly believe in. However, none of the layoff survivors in the present study described themselves as experiencing such growth. It may be that while the possibility of professional growth is immediately reduced in the short term, posttraumatic personal growth may only manifest itself after a number of years in a discrete manner. Survivors within this present study made indications of a general belief that any major event, be it negative or positive, could be considered as point of growth or development but that this growth cannot be noticed within the shorter term. Layoff survivors with longer tenures and who are protected by the LIFO principle, may also experience higher posttraumatic growth as they are more likely to survive multiple cases of dissimilar layoffs or other traumatic events, but it should also again be noted that this selection criteria. As stated by Levison (as cited in Appelbaum,

Gandell, Yortis, Proper, & Jobin, 2000, p.655), personal growth manifests itself through the interactions and relationships with people and places, and when change occurs, these ties are broken, which in turn prohibits personal growth. The present study confirms this concept, especially when examining career-centred professional growth. However, it does not seem that there is a complete stagnation of the survivor's personal growth, only a reduction in the rate of growth as the survivor's personal growth may also be influenced by events outside of the workplace, such as the birth of a child or enrolling in further education, as was the case within this study. Personal growth may also continue due to relationships outside of work or relationships which endure after the layoff process has been experienced and other individuals are already laid off, as there is absolutely no requirement that any of these relationships must be ended once the work-connection is severed by the layoffs, and instead survivors may incorporate these work-relationships into personal-relationships.

The question of "How much do you feel as part of the family with your company?" showed that the layoff survivor's positive relations with others both inside and outside the workplace appeared to be difficult to fully explain, with only positive relations with parties inside the workplace being directly influenced by the downsizing and a possible indirect influence on parties outside the workplace existing through the emotional work-home interface. While it seems that layoff survivors do not experience a lower level of trust with co-workers or managers, they do experience a diminished level of co-worker and management support. As previously stated, it appears that most layoff survivors experience a less friendly but still professional working environment, especially when dealing with their co-workers. However, relations with external parties still seem to be mostly affected by stimuli outside of the company such as moving to a different town, leaving school or college or simply arguing with these parties. The indirect influence of emotions may again have an impact on the relations with external parties, although it is unclear as to how powerful this effect is, especially given the fact that many layoff survivors attempt to separate their work and home lives. The results of the present study therefore only partially correlate with the findings of Shah (2000) as only relationships within the workplace are directly influenced and not with external parties such as with friends or family. It is likely that layoff survivors fully understand that the workplace has demands which must be met despite any changes to support and this may in-part explain the continual professionalism in workplace interactions between layoff survivors and their peers.

The purpose in life of layoff survivors seemed to be the most unaffected aspect of psychological well-being within the present study. After being questioned with "How much do you feel that you

have a clear purpose in life?” survivors explained that while they do see the downsizing as a temporary setback, ultimately their purpose and goals in life remain static, especially when this goal or purpose was focused on something outside of the workplace such as family or religion. Even survivors who strongly attributed their purpose in life to a business-orientated goal felt that the goal remained unchanged, albeit harder to reach. Survivors within the present study also elaborated that they view the downsizing as unfortunate, but also possibly an opportunity from which they can learn from and even improve upon. It may be that the temporary impact of downsizing on the survivor’s purpose or goals is mostly financial and emotional and that it may have no real influence in the longer term. Layoff survivors within the present study were also very open to completely changing their organisation or industry if they perceive their purpose in life as being directly affected by the recent events and situation, which could also help to explain why their purpose in life remains largely unchanged as they see their current jobs as a means to achieve their purpose of goals. This readiness to completely change careers may be attributed to low industry and organisational commitment or as a reaction to any major and perceivable threat to long-term goals. An alternative suggestion of why this focus on an external purpose to life may be so important was presented by Harrison-Walker (2008, p.4), who found in an abundance of literature that when struggling to find understanding and purpose in life events or cope with problems, people often turn to spirituality. He also found that strong evidence suggests that spirituality plays a significant role in controlling the negative effects of perceived stress on various psychological and behavioural outcomes regardless of the source of the stress. Workplace spirituality is described by Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) as involving the effort to find one’s ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to co-workers and other people associated with work and to have consistency (or alignment) between one’s core beliefs and the values of their organisation. This may also be the case within the present study, however because the source of frustration and stress is the workplace itself, the closest alternative in which to find a purpose in life would be the home environment, especially if that survivor actively separated the two environments from one another prior to the layoff event.

The question of “In what ways do you think other people, such as your co-workers or friends, would describe you?” showed that self-understanding was difficult to explain as survivors had difficulty describing themselves both from their own perspectives and from the perspectives of others and often stated that they do not know how others see them. This lack of understanding does not necessarily mean that survivors are ignorant of their apparent strengths or weaknesses but may rather infer that the survivors simply do not have strong enough relationships with the remaining co-workers to accurately understand their thoughts or judgements. It could also simply

mean that the survivors have not spent any significant time thinking about their strong or weak points. While layoff survivors seemed capable of explaining their strengths to a moderate extent, they were however incapable of criticising themselves by exploring their own weaknesses to a certain degree. It may be that the self-acceptance of strengths and weaknesses of an individual directly ties into that individual's organisational worth and organisational based self-esteem, which is a manner of reflecting the self-perceived value individuals have of themselves as organisational members acting within an organisational context, as stated by Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham (as cited in Stark, 2003). Layoff survivors may subconsciously limit their own understanding or acceptance of the self to protect their self-perceived values, confidence or overall worth – particularly if they identify this worth as being based on their professional performance, growth or development. Alternatively it may simply be that the layoff survivors in the fishing industry do not spend the time contemplating how others may view them or what their own strength or weakness are due to the high levels of demands and limiting factors to individual identities within such a large industry.

As this study found that layoff survivors perceive both their subjective well-being and psychological well-being as decreasing following the layoff survival, the precedent as set by both Govindji and Linley (2007) as well as Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002) states that it may be reasoned that overall well-being of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry surely decreased after the layoff event. However, this decrease did not appear to be as drastic as often described in the literature but rather seems more moderate in its affect. Besides the various possible explanations as provided above, it may simply be that because the Namibian fishing industry has a reputation for being difficult due to its frequent strikes, downsizing, corruption and bureaucratic interference through quotas and legislation, layoff survivors understand the inherent challenges they may be faced with and as such are not completely caught off-guard once the layoff process begins. Alternatively the reduced effects of the layoff survival may be attributed to the character of Namibians or Africans in general as the majority of other studies done on layoff survival focus on developed countries and their layoff survivors, with these foreign countries often drastically varying in how emotions, support and well-being are displayed and perceived.

### **Practical implications**

There are several practical implications for organisations, which can be derived from the results of the present study.

While it is clear that subjective well-being and psychological well-being are both impacted by the layoffs, it appears that subjective well-being is far more susceptible to layoff survival as the satisfaction, emotions and judgements experienced by the survivors dictate their overall “happiness”. Psychological well-being seemed to be more affected by a longer term and persistent threat to the layoff survivors, both at work and at home. Organisations should therefore attempt to treat the negative aspects associated with layoff survival proactively by looking for the above-discussed indications and by focusing on improving the survivor’s satisfaction, emotions and judgements. By increasing the survivor’s happiness, subjective well-being should remain positive for the most part and will in turn protect the psychological well-being and functioning.

Organisations should take note of the subjective nature of well-being as survivors may react differently to the same environments and contexts. This entails that while organisations should exercise equal standards of treatment on all employees, special care may still be required based on the individual’s needs – especially if there are symptoms of layoff survivor sickness, burnout or trauma within their layoff survivors. One way in which organisations can attempt to account for the subjective and varying natures of layoff survivors is to have individual-focused interventions wherein layoff survivors are given an open and safe space to express themselves without fear or embarrassment.

Organisations can attempt to reinforce overall well-being by attempting to facilitate survivor satisfaction in allowing opportunities for open and clear communication, where survivors are provided with details as to the future of the organisation following the layoffs and for allowing survivors to express their own emotions and ideas. Organisations should also push layoff survivors to take a more active role within the organisation, especially one that increases autonomy and allows the employees to take better control of their own environments. Layoff survivors who also perceive their employers as caring about their personal lives are also far more satisfied at the workplace. Therefore, organisations can assist by providing advice, small loans or time off where needed. Team building exercises between remaining employees, especially between those employees who have not already developed relationships with one another can also prove greatly beneficial for increasing productivity, social support and co-operation between the staff.

Organisations that prioritise the well-being of layoff survivors both prior and after organisational restructuring are sure to have a more capable and motivated workforce that can impact the productivity of the organisation directly, and are less likely to suffer from depression, cynicism or layoff survivor sickness.

## **Limitations and recommendations**

There were several limitations within the current study and subsequently several recommendations, which may enhance future similar studies, can be made.

The first and most prominent limitation to the research on subjective and psychological well-being stems from the fact that the study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is designed to be exploratory while quantitative research is confirmatory (Neuman, & Robson, 2012). While various aspects of foreign studies appear to be validated within the experiences of the current study's participants, there is still a need to further confirm the possible relationships of the aspects through quantitative research. However, it should be important to note that future studies may be hard pressed in finding a sufficient sample of layoff survivors who are willing to explore their well-being following the traumatic restructuring process given the sensitive nature of their situation.

Secondly, while the study explored the possible impact of layoff survival on the subjective and psychological well-being of layoff survivors, the impact of events within the layoff survivors' personal lives also seemed to have a large influence on these aspects. Both work-family conflict and family-work conflict are two widely studied aspects (e.g. Boles, Howard, & Donofrio, 2001; Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996) shown to have a wide range of significant influences on various aspects of employees' professional and personal lives. Consequently, there is a need to address this significant aspect of layoff survival.

The role of the layoff survivor's personality also remains unaccounted for, as traits such as extroversion, negative affectivity or pessimism may act as an unseen influence on both forms of well-being. Past research (e.g. Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Felfe, & Schyns, 2006; Vázquez-Carrasco, & Foxall, 2006) has shown that personality traits can influence various work-related aspects of employees significantly, and it may also be the case that layoff survivors' own perceptions of the aspects associated with their subjective and psychological are amplified by their personalities. This may also help to explain the variance in some of the responses that the current study's survivors provided.

Future research can therefore expand and improve upon the current study by taking note of the abovementioned limitations and incorporating the following recommendations.

Given the exploratory nature of the present study, the first recommendation would be to carry a follow-up confirmatory study, which should be quantitative in nature. By making use of already established scales and measures, the potential quantitative statistics would allow for data which

can be compared to multiple similar and dissimilar cases, and may shed light on the subject-matter even more. Future researchers may also wish to compare organisations, industries or even countries to determine whether any significant differences exist in terms of their subjective and psychological well-being.

Additionally, while the study referred to the potential impact that interventions may have on protecting the well-being of layoff survivors, none of the participants described experiencing any such intervention implemented by their organisation specifically designed to maintain their well-being. Consequently, there is a need to compare the effects of well-being-focused interventions and the possible effect it may have in mitigating the negative effects of the subjective and psychological well-being of layoff survivors in organisations choosing not to have any interventions. If it is found that interventions can play a crucial role in protecting well-being, it may shape future procedure when restructuring the workplace or protecting layoff survivors.

Lastly, future studies should seek to compare employee well-being both prior to and post layoffs. While it may be difficult to identify and find participants and organisations willing to include external parties in such a sensitive issue, it would also allow findings that accurately track and explore the survivor's well-being as it actively changes and is influenced during the entire restructuring process. It may also be that by being involved in research where survivors can express their innermost thoughts and perceptions; the same survivors may improve their own well-being and all of the associated variables as it can act as a simple form of expression.

### **Final remark**

This study explored the thoughts and experiences of layoff survivor's well-being within the Namibian fishing industry. Because there are no other similar studies focusing on the same sample as in the current research, this study played an important role in adapting foreign studies to an African context. While many findings from foreign studies were confirmed, other findings could not be confirmed and in some cases the opposite results were found. It is clear that the subjective well-being and psychological well-being of layoff survivors are affected in a negative manner. However, it also seems that the industry in itself has a subtle influence on the severity of the layoff process.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE 2**

# **An exploration of employee-organisational interactions of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Orientation:** Employee commitment and perceived organisational support are both reduced following periods of layoffs or organisational restructuring. The effect of this reduced commitment and perceived support further influences the employees' future at the organisation and the organisations' future where they are employed in various ways.

**Research purpose:** The purpose of the study was to explore the various experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their perceived organisational support and the reciprocated commitment towards their organisations within the context of the Namibian fishing-industry.

**Motivation for the study:** To gain more knowledge and a better understanding of the experiences in terms of perceived organisational support and reciprocated commitment of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing-industry context.

**Research design, approach and method:** A qualitative research design with a descriptive approach was utilised throughout this study. The study was grounded in a social constructivist research tradition, with post-modernistic methods used to obtain information based on the experiences of the layoff survivors whilst maintaining an objective interview process. A voluntary sample of 14 ( $N=14$ ) layoff survivors employed within the Namibian fishing industry at the time formed the basis of the study, and data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Data analysis was manually performed by means of directed qualitative content analysis, with the coding process as described by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) closely followed.

**Main findings:** The results of this study indicated that perceived organisational support, continuance commitment and normative commitment seemed to be most reduced among layoff survivors, while affective commitment appeared to be less affected especially when strong emotional identification exists between the layoff survivors and other parties in the organisation. Organisational support was perceived by layoff survivors as originating from the organisation itself as an entity, management and co-workers and that each source of support was affected by the layoff process in a different, albeit negative, manner.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Organisations and management should focus on improving support to directly improve how support is perceived by layoff survivors as well as improving the commitment of layoff survivors to the organisation. Layoff survivors indicated that support in monetary terms was not as important as frequent communication and involved decision making, especially during difficult financial periods. However, layoff survivors also indicated that they would appreciate increased remuneration. Support can also be increased prior to layoffs to moderate the intensity of the negative perceptions associated with the layoff process.

**Contribution/value-add:** This study adds value to both human resources as an academic field and towards organisations in understanding the effects of their interactions with layoff survivors both prior to and post layoffs. By comparing the study's results to findings of foreign research, inference can be drawn on the applicability and accuracy of these findings to the Namibian context. This study further adds value by condensing and exploring the common thoughts and experiences of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry.

**Keywords:** Fishing industry; Namibia; Layoff survivors; Perceived organisational support; Commitment; Interactions.

## INTRODUCTION

The Namibian fishing industry is one of the largest and most important sectors in Namibia, both in terms of employment capacity and revenue generation. The fishing industry employs around 14,000 permanent workers (Sumaila, 2004), and many more temporary workers and workers in the supporting industries. Within the previous decade, the fishing industry has been rocked by frequent, large-scale layoffs due to economic pressure, corruption in quota allocation and various other related influences. These layoffs have had drastic effects on both the employed and unemployed citizens of Namibia, and at present there have been no exploration done on how these layoff survivors cope within their context.

Layoff survivors are defined by Cotter and Fouad (2012, p.2) as “workers who remain at an organisation after a period of organisational downsizing”. Layoff survivors are expected to operate with improved innovation, as well as being able to adapt to amplified duties and responsibilities, while handling a wider range of work tasks, all within a reorganised working environment which often lacks the social support from peers or colleagues and job security from the past environment (Qureshi & Wasti, 2014).

In terms of revenue, the Namibian Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Bernard Esau, reported that the Namibian fishing industry generated around N\$10 billion in export revenue during the 2015/2016 season, which was an increase of over 43% when compared to the N\$7 billion generated in the 2014/2015 financial year (New Era, 2016). The minister attributed this rapid growth to the favourable exchange rates, improved value addition and better prices in some markets. This would mean that the Namibian fishing industry alone attributes to just under 6% of Namibia's total yearly gross domestic product; however, this 6% does not consider all of the gross domestic product created by the support industries that are closely associated with the fishing industry.

According to Amukwa (2016), before Namibia's independence in 1990, the country's marine resources were being harvested by foreign fleets due to the lack of regulation and control over the waters by the previous administration. Thereafter, the newly formed Namibian government introduced policies that were aimed at localising the fishing fleet and encouraging on-shore processing in order to create employment and economic prosperity. The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources maintain that Namibia's fish resources are considered public property and should benefit the Namibian public as much as possible (Amukwa, 2016). The fishing industry continually functions as one of the underpinning sectors of employment and growth for the Namibian people.

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources oversees the governing aspects of the industry, and has divided the fishing industry into three subsectors: Marine capture fishery, Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture (FOA, 2007). Additionally, through the Namibian Marine Resources Act No. 27 of 2000, the ministry maintains the ability to implement fishing rights and industry quotas. A fishing right refers to a right to harvest marine resources as granted under section 33 of the act, and can only be acquired once a detailed business proposal is submitted and approved by the minister (FOA, 2007). These industry quotas place a limit of the amount of fish that a company may catch within a financial year, and vary in limits to the different companies. The quotas have been a controversial issue in the recent past, as the larger and more established companies have seen their limits reduced and subsequently allocated to newer companies (Immanuel, 2014). This in turn has caused tension in the industry and an increase in unemployment as many of these newer companies cannot maintain a profit due to the lack of expertise, experience and development.

There have also been reports that politics have been influencing the allocation of fishing rights (Immanuel, 2014), which has placed additional strain on the industry.

The upper limit for fishing in the entire industry is referred to as the total allowable catch (TAC), and stood at 528,696 tonnes for 2015/2016, which compared to 605,450 tonnes during the 2014/2015 financial year, which showed a decrease of 12.7% (New Era, 2016). Currently, there are about 150 rights holders in Namibia and 38 factories in the fishing industry, with the overwhelming majority located in Walvis Bay (NAMP, 2013). It should also be noted that many of the factories and rights holders are owned by several parent/holding companies.

The potential effects of the decrease in TAC places extreme pressure on existing organisational structures and may lead to further industry-wide organisational restructuring.

Organisational structure refers to “The way employees are organised into teams (informal and formal), and interact within teams, the set of roles and goals of each team, and how it is being related to organisational strategy”. (Monavvarian, & Kasaei, 2007, p.350). An organisation’s overall structure then considers the different roles of all the various teams or groups of an organisation and how these teams collaborate or differentiate depending on their tasks. One of the ways in which these teams may be identified is by associating each team to a ‘department’, which focuses on one aspect of the organisation, such as fish sales or human resources. Jacobides (2007, p. 455) explained that an organisation’s structure and hierarchy influences the manner “In shaping search behaviour and defining how problems are framed, and by providing a dynamic conception of organizational design”. In explanation, the structure an organisation comprises not only of dictating the way the organisation’s processes are framed but also determining aspects such as decision making and autonomy in the organisation. Organisations that have a classical, hierarchical structure are more likely to have less autonomy and decision making among its various department, and thus limiting the employee involvement available. Many of the fishing companies in Namibia maintain a classical, hierarchical structure where a strict chain of command is adhered to and autonomy is limited to the upper levels of the organisation.

However, all organisations are naturally susceptible to change over time and these changes may influence all the varying organisational aspects. Organisational change refers to “A difference, from any point in time to another later point in time, in the nature of the organization, its operations, or its character” (Krell, & Gale, 2005, p.123), and hence incorporates any change that may

influence the structures of autonomy, decision making, departmental layout or even the goals and objectives of the organisation. In order to maximise effectiveness while minimising resistance or upsetting the status quo, organisations go through periods of change naturally. However, during times of economic necessity or other external business pressure, organisations may change more frequently or more severely. These changes may range from simple policy changes to wide-scale downsizing and layoffs. Organisational restructuring or layoffs in particular refer to “Suspension of employment for reasons unrelated to an individual employee's job performance or behaviour” (Saltzman, 2008) and is usually characterised by mass dismissals in the form of redundant or downsized departments or work teams. Economic and socio-political forces have been a particularly influential source for organisational change within the Namibian fishing industry. While the fishing industry has grown in revenue generation, it has also seen its workforce reduced by just under 3% in total (Finck, 2015; NAMPA, 2016; New Era, 2016) due to restructuring and layoffs.

An important aspect associated with any organisation's structure or restructuring is the support element that the company has for its employees. This perceived organisational support (POS) refers to the degree to which workers feel that the organisation supports their undertakings and cares about their well-being (Dawson, 1996). POS plays an important role in determining the affective and behavioural state of employees. It has been found that individuals who experience higher levels of support experience higher levels of both physical and mental health among various other benefits (Klineberg et al., 2006; Uchino, 2006). These benefits are substantiated by organisational support theory.

Organisational support theory, as described by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli and Lynch (1997), states that employees have an inborn wish to feel supported and that this support is necessary for employees to commit and remain devoted to the company (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Tumwesigye, 2010). Employees who perceive that they are well supported by the organisation feel as if they need to ‘pay back’ their organisation in the form of ongoing loyalty and high performance (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This principle, as stated by Erickson (2007), is grounded in social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) through which perceived support from the organisation is reciprocated back towards the organisation. This idea was demonstrated by Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (2001) when they showed in their study that it is essential for employees to have an identification with the organisation to achieve high productivity.

For this principle to be established in a company, the organisation must instil the perception among employees that the organisation supports them through constructive and positive communication as well as support programmes. It may be difficult for organisations to create these beliefs after stages of restructuring or layoffs, especially when employees have low levels of trust or confidence in the organisation or their supervisors.

While there is no clearly agreed upon criteria to examine POS, there have been several attempts to establish specific dimensions which are said to be part of POS. The dimensions of POS as established by Van Schalkwyk, Els, and Rothmann (2011) are role clarity, job information, participation in decision making, support from co-workers and supervisory support.

Role clarity refers to the adequacy and providing of information about roles in the organisation in order for the workers to understand what is required of them (Cooper, & Marshall, 2013). Job information, which is very similar to role clarity, refers to information about particular job attributes, such as job title, job description, type of work to be performed, pay levels and promotion opportunities (Powell, 1984; Powell, 1991; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). While these two dimensions are very similar, role clarity focuses on the exact processes that need to be performed by the individual and how these processes affect others, whereas job information describes the overt job characteristics and attributes; participation in decision making simply refers to the ability to have an influence in organisational-related matters (Wallace, 1995). Support from co-workers represents the emotional, spiritual or physical support the employee may receive from co-workers during difficult times (Haynes, Wall, Bolden, Stride, & Rick, 1999). Lastly, supervisory support, according to House (as cited in Hee Yoon, Hyun Seo, & Seog Yoon, 2004), refers to the degree of socio-emotional concerns of the supervisor, through a facilitative climate of psychological support, mutual trust, friendliness and helpfulness.

Past research has shown that workers develop a general belief that their employer supports them to a certain extent (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Shanock, & Eisenberger, 2006; Thompson, & Prottas, 2006) and that this perceived support positively influences the employees' commitment to their organisation (Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990; Meyer, & Maltin, 2010; Panaccio, & Vandenberghe, 2009). It may be that layoff survivors who experience higher levels of support from their organisations perform better, are more committed to their jobs and companies and have an overall improved well-being. Increasing the

levels of organisational support may also counter employee turnover by affecting the commitment levels that the employees have directly.

Following the survival of the layoff event, employees may find that their commitment towards the organisation can be impacted. Organisational commitment was defined by Chen, Tsui and Farh (2002, p.339) as “The psychological attachment that workers have to their organisations”. Iverson (1996) proposed that commitment can only be fostered through the process of identification with the organisation, through which the individual must observe an extension of himself. This identification would be based on the objectives and procedures and overall behaviour that the organisation is perceived to have. However, organisational commitment does not simply refer to simple loyalty or to the exchange relationship that exists between an employee and employer, but instead refers to a more active relationship between the employee and his organisation. Here, the employee actively makes personal effort for the organisation to thrive and achieve its objectives without the guarantee of personal gratification or rewards.

Organisational commitment has emerged as one of the most studied dimensions of employee attachment at work in recent times (Selepe, 2004) and has resulted in a wide range of antecedents and outcomes associated with organisational commitment. One such study by Imran, Arif, Cheema, and Azeem (2014) found a strong relationship between organisational commitment and an individual's job satisfaction, job performance and their attitude towards work. Another study by Mathieu and Zajac (1990) conducted a complete meta-analysis of various papers, which compiled and explained the effects of organisational commitment, and found strong correlations between commitment and aspects such as motivation, autonomy, stress, job involvement, cohesiveness, etc. It is clear that organisational commitment may have many important effects on a layoff survivor at their work and it is important to explore these layoff survivors' experiences regarding the matter. Kashefi et al. (2013) suggested that the best time to explore or assess the commitment levels of employees was during or directly following periods of difficulty at the organisation, as this would then allow for the most accurate findings.

While there are several competing models explaining the components of organisational commitment, the most popular model was designed by Allen and Meyer (1990), who proposed a three-component model of organisational commitment aimed at integrating the various conceptualisations and definitions of organisational commitment. This in turn helped to establish three distinct forms of commitment, namely affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment.

Affective commitment refers to the emotional identification that the individual has with the organisation (Meyer, & Allen, 1984), and is the 'desire' element that a person feels towards the organisation. Employees who have a strong emotional bond with an organisation are said to want to be part of the organisation, and identify the organisational goals and objectives as their own. Affective commitment can therefore also be more enduring and may be the most important form of commitment in coping with organisational change.

Continuance commitment simply denotes the commitment derived from material rewards or benefits and the associated costs that will be incurred if the individual leaves the organisation (Meyer, & Allen, 1984). Continuance commitment thus dictates an individual's need to remain with their organisation, and individuals may find that their continuance commitment is higher at their organisation when they do not have alternative options of employment available to them. This may be especially true during times of economic recession or in areas with a high unemployment rate and limited job opportunities.

Normative commitment refers to the sense of responsibility to remain with the organisation (Allen, & Meyer, 1990), which is formed prior to and post socialisation (Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003). Therefore, an employee's normative commitment may be formed if the employee undergoes induction training and feels a need to repay this training through good performance or an improved commitment. Normative commitment is similar to the aspects of social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) as explained previously. Organisations that are seen as more caring to their employees by providing training, counselling or similar services, may find that their employees can feel more obligated to stay at the company, even following periods of restructuring.

The changes that the Namibian fishing industry is currently going through, will continue and it is not clear how these changes will affect the employees who remain at their organisations. Therefore, the aim of the study will be to explore the experiences of perceived support and commitment of layoff survivors in the Namibian fishing industry.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design consists of the research approach, research strategy and research method.

## **Research approach**

This study followed a qualitative research design from a social constructivism approach. In this approach, the researcher was interested in studying the effects of surviving layoff/layoffs on the interactions between an employee and his organisation through the employee's commitment and perceived organisational support that he receives within the Namibian fishing industry and how they experienced these related aspects by allowing the "Phenomenon of interest to unfold naturally" (Golafshani, 2003, p.600). These different thoughts, feelings and experiences of the participants were explored to gain a proper understanding of the associated dynamics and how they are interpreted and viewed by the layoff survivors.

## **Research strategy**

The unit of analysis for the study was employees from various companies in the Namibian fishing industry that have recently survived a layoff process. The study was comprised of multiple case studies aimed at exploring the experiences and perspectives of layoff survivors with regard to their own self perceived organisational support and commitment.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research setting**

The interviews were held in a neutral, relaxed environment away from the workplace of the interviewees. Attention was given to aspects such as the climate, temperature and environment of the room. To ensure that the interview was not disturbed, the door to the room where the interview was conducted was locked. Ensuring that the participant was at ease, the researcher introduced himself in a pleasant and warm manner, offered each participant a bottled water and explained the context of the interview while also explaining the rights of the participant.

### **Entrée and research role**

Access to the participants was gained through personal contacts within the fishing industry. Consequently through communications with these participants and the superiors at their companies, additional sets of participants were found.

As according to Fink (2000) the role of the researcher throughout the study was to help facilitate the participants through establishing personal relations and to allow the participant to feel at ease in order for natural and honest storytelling to take place. During the interviews, the researcher also

managed the questions to gain additional depth in the participant's answers, without actually influencing the responses provided (Fink, 2000; de Vos, Delport, Fouché, & Strydom, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), to ensure fairness by truthfully reflecting the views, perspectives, values and claims of the participant, the bias of subjectivity or inquirer blindness must be controlled. The researcher maintained an understanding of his own viewpoints and beliefs to capture the data correctly from the viewpoints of the participant through the processes of observation, interaction and interviewing. The researcher tried to remain as objective as possible throughout the interviews by maintaining subjectivity and encouraging fair and transparent answers from each participant.

## Sampling

A combination of both purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling was used to select particular cases that characterised a specific feature necessary to the study. This selection feature was employees who survived a layoff within the previous three years in organisations that have laid off at least 10% of their workforce during that period. After the initial purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used whereby participants asked to provide four possible contacts for the study, and only two of the provided four contacts were then contacted about the study. This step was implemented to remove any possibility of bias in the study.

The sample consisted of 14 employees ( $N=14$ ) from four companies within the Namibian fishing industry. These four companies consisted of two small (under 100 employees), one medium-sized (between 100 and 999 employees) and one large company (over 999 employees).

Table 1: Characteristics of participants ( $N=14$ )

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	11	79
	Female	3	21
Age	18–29	8	57
	30–39	2	14
	40–49	4	28
	50+	0	0

<b>Race</b>	African	6	43
	Mixed	1	7
	White	7	50
<b>Qualification</b>	Grade 10	8	57
	Grade 12 (Matriculated)	4	28
	Technicon diploma	0	0
	Technical college	2	14
	University degree	0	0
<b>Home language</b>	Afrikaans	4	28
	English	4	28
	Oshiwambo	6	43
	Other	0	0
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	7	50
	Not married	7	50
<b>Parental status</b>	No children	5	36
	One child	5	36
	Two children	1	7
	Three or more children	3	21
<b>Tenure at current organisation</b>	Under 1 year	2	14
	1–3 years	6	43
	3–5 years	3	21
	5–10 years	1	7
	10+ years	2	14
<b>Type of job</b>	Blue collar (manual labour)	10	71

White collar (office worker)	4	28
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Table 1 shows that the majority of the interviewees were male (79%) and that 21% were female. 57% of the interviewees were between the ages of 18 to 29, and no interviewee was over the age of 50 years old. Furthermore, the interviewees were 50% white (Caucasian) and 43% African. The majority (57%) of interviewees held a grade 10 qualification, had one or more children (64%) and were blue-collared workers (71%). Nearly half of all interviewees were at their organisation for 1 to 3 years (43%) and spoke Oshiwambo at home (43%), and all interviewees admitted to being comfortable with either Afrikaans or English as their work languages.

### **Data-collection method**

Semi-structured interviews, based on the social constructivism paradigm were used in this study. The researcher studied the phenomena without predetermined expectations of categories leading the research and allowed for exploratory narrative of the participant's perspectives to be established. The interview was held in an informal setting and was guided by several questions related to the varying aspects of the study. It was ensured that the participants understood each question before answering.

An initial pilot study was carried out to refine and increase the success of the study and subsequent interviews. The pilot study also aimed at testing and ensuring that the researcher did not use directive questioning during the interview process. The pilot study was conducted on two suitable candidates and showed that there were no demonstrable issues relating to the semi-structured questions used or the setting in which the interviews were conducted, therefore minimal changes were made to the interview schedule and further interviews followed shortly thereafter.

During the interviews, the researcher and participant were faced squarely towards one another in a relaxed manner. The researcher maintained an open-body posture and maintained eye contact with the participant throughout the interview. Non-directive dialogue techniques such as minimal verbal responses, paraphrasing, clarification, reflection and summaries of responses were used to assist the participant in providing rich and accurate dialogue. Informal small talk and explanation of the research process and objective was conducted prior to the interview to establish rapport between the researcher and participant. Transcription was also done within a 48-hour window following each interview. Examples of some of the planned questions are the following:

- “Do you feel that your company supports you well at this present stage when compared it to the support of the past?”
- “Do you feel less committed to your company at this present stage than in the past? Why so?”
- “In terms of the benefits you receive from your company, what are some of the things you would need to sacrifice if you were to leave the organisation?”

### **Recording of data**

The interview was recorded simultaneously via an audio and video recorder. Permission from the participant to record the interview was obtained and it was also emphasised that the identity and information provided of the participant or their organisation would remain anonymous and that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis was conducted by means of directed qualitative content analysis and an eight-step process as created by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), directed qualitative content analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. In this study, research findings concerning the aspects of psychological well-being, subjective well-being and layoff survival were used to assist in determining the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes by providing predictions about the variables of interest.

The eight-step process created by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) consisted of the following steps:

#### **Step 1 - Prepare the data**

Data from the interviews were transcribed into written text. Transcriptions were verbatim and once all the interviews were transcribed, they were combined into a single, large data set.

#### **Step 2 - Define the unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis for the study was defined. This included unitising the text from transcripts by making use of themes and categories identified from previous research or studies. It was decided that codes could be applied to text of any size, if the text represented a theme.

#### **Step 3 - Develop categories and a coding scheme**

Categories or coding schemes are developed from previous theories, related studies and from the primary data gathered in the present study. The categories developed from previous studies or existing theories were modified to suite the current data.

#### Step 4 - Test the coding scheme on a sample of text

The coding scheme or categories are tested on sample text from the pilot study transcript. This helped to create a standardised method of coding the data as well as validate the coding scheme. The results of this step were then used to create a coding manual of sorts, which then guided the coding process for the other interview's data.

#### Step 5 - Code all the text

Once sufficient coding consistency was achieved, the coding scheme was applied to the entire corpus of text. Coding was checked for consistency to prevent the possibility of “Drifting into an idiosyncratic sense of what the codes mean”, as stated by Schilling (as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Additional themes were added to the coding manual as they emerged during the coding process.

#### Step 6 - Assess your coding consistency

After all the data was coded, it was checked and rechecked for consistency in coding rules. The coding of each section was then compared to the coding of the entire corpus to ensure that consistency was achieved.

#### Step 7 - Draw conclusions from the coded data

Inferences and reconstructions of meanings were derived from the data in order to make sense from the themes and categories previously identified in the literature and previous studies. This stage was characterised by exploration of the properties and dimensions of categories, identifying possible relationships, uncovering patterns and testing categories against the full range of data.

#### Step 8 - Report your methods and findings

The analytical procedures and processes are presented to make the study replicable. A personal and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher is also presented, along with all aspects such as decisions and practices concerning the coding process, as well as the methods used in the study. Lastly, the findings, limitations and recommendations are discussed and reported.

## **Strategies to enhance quality of data**

It was important for this the study to maintain the topmost quality. Phillimore and Goodson (2004) provided a list with descriptions of ‘canons’ that all good qualitative research subscribes to and this study strived to also contain these canons:

- **Credibility** (associated with validity): This aspect referred to how truthful findings were. The researcher ensured that the findings were presented truthfully and accurately reflect the gathered data of the study.
- **Transferability** (associated with generalisability): This was concerned with how applicable the findings of the study are to other settings. Rich descriptions of findings and themes in data, which were fully developed allow for the findings to become applicable to other contexts if need be.
- **Dependability** (associated with reliability): Dependability was concerned with the consistency or reproducibility of the findings. Each context which the study takes place in may have an influence on the findings, however, in order to ensure that the findings of this study accurately reflected its context, detailed descriptions of the context were provided in order to understand the rooting of the opinions and interactions of the layoff survivors. Additionally, descriptions of the data collection and analyses methods were provided.
- **Conformability** (associated with objectivity): This pertained to how neutral findings were. Conformability was guaranteed by ensuring that appropriate and unbiased data analysis techniques were utilised.

## **Data recording**

The interviews were recorded by an electronic voice recorder. Thereafter all recordings were transcribed into a word-processed document, first through the utilisation of narration software and then manually by the researcher. Each interview was assigned a code ranging from ‘Participant 1’ to ‘Participant 14’, and the dates, time and biographical information of the participant was recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim where possible in the forms of words, phrases or sentences. To minimise equipment failure, the researcher ensured that the recorder was adequately charged and functioning before each interview.

In order to ensure confidentiality, all of the collected data, including but not limited to: voice recordings, transcription, field (personal) notes and hard-copy documentation were securely filed and stored in order to prevent other parties from accessing them. Back-up files of electronic

documents were also made to prevent data loss. The following hard-copy documentation was filed for safekeeping:

- Informed consent forms signed and completed by participants
- Interview schedules used for each participant
- Field (personal) notes, any additional information gathered during the interview
- Notes made during the ‘data analysis’ process
- A blank copy of the participation thank-you letter

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical consideration was given to many issues, including voluntary participation, informed consent, participant harm and privacy. The researcher aimed to remain as transparent as possible with participants by explaining the reasons for the study, the process to be followed, as well as their rights as participants. Each participant was provided the option to voluntarily consent to the study and the participants’ right to confidentiality. Anonymity was assured through keeping the data safe from all unauthorised persons. All participants were asked to sign and complete a voluntary consent form, which explained their rights and the purpose of the study. It also listed the contact details of the researcher. A copy of the consent form was then given to each participant. If a participant no longer desired to be a part of the study, the researcher immediately removed the participant and his or her information or data from the study. Any person or company was given the choice to protect their privacy by not answering or responding to the study. Any person who waived their right to privacy by agreeing to the researcher’s questions, had and still has the right to expect that his or her answers and identity remain confidential. The researcher was always mindful of the time allocated to the interviews. Rapport was created with each participant to ensure that he or she felt comfortable during the interview. All data is and will be kept safe, private and anonymous so that it will not and cannot affect any of the participants’ personal lives, careers or any other aspect of them or their families. Any uncertainty was dealt with by the researchers as soon as it became apparent and the researcher tried to maintain behaviour, which promoted integrity, honesty, accuracy, validity, legality, equality/non-discrimination, objectivity and care. The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then summaries and observed themes were interpreted and recorded. Transcriptions of the interviews were conducted and corrected or edited where necessary. All participants provided consent to be recorded during the interviews.

## RESULTS

The findings of the interviews were organised into two categories (perceived organisational support and commitment), and each category was further divided into themes and sub-themes. These categories, themes, sub-themes and example responses are provided below in-text and in tables. Themes and sub-themes were identified from previous studies as well as from the responses provided by the participants.

### Category 1: Perceived organisational support

In this category, participants discussed the various aspects relating to their jobs, their roles within their company and the support that they perceive themselves as receiving from the various parties within their company. It is evident that while every participant's own job and unique context has a substantial effect on their own perspectives, most participants all seemed to view their perceived organisational support as needing improvement in varying ways, and only one participant stated that he currently felt well-supported and had no problems with the organisation. Many participants frequently complained about the lack of decision making or control over their own jobs. Other participants described a lack of communication or information, which they experienced as if they are equivalent to organisational outsiders. Perceived organisational support also seemed to differ greatly from organisation to organisation within the current sample.

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews with the participants.

Table 2

Theme	Sub-Theme
<b>Layoff survivor's altered role in the organisation</b>	Increased role clarity
	Decreased role conflict
	Poor communication in job
<b>Reduced employee support</b>	Decreased cohesion in team decision making
	Decreased co-worker support
	Decreased managerial support
	Decreased organisational support

## **Theme 1: Layoff survivor's altered role within the organisation**

Participants in the study frequently discussed their role in the organisation as both an individual employee and as part of a larger team. Participants also discussed their role in a manner akin to corporate citizenship, and indicated that there is a decreased focus on the team's role and rather an increase on the individual's role within the organisation. Further elaboration on the identified sub-themes of this role, which include role clarity, role conflict, communication and team decision making are provided below:

### **Sub-theme: Increased role clarity**

Participants in the study indicated that they perceived their role clarity as improving. They frequently explained that following the layoff event, they experienced a basic employment relationship where they are able to perform their duties and responsibilities and tend not to exceed these responsibilities within the company ("Where in the past I would always go the extra mile, and stay late and make sure my work is up to standard and finished. Now I feel I just get paid from 8 to 5, and if I leave and it's not done - then it's not done"). Participants further reported that they are more aware of the purpose, requirements and responsibilities associated to their jobs. There were frequent referrals to the idea that participants understood their roles within the organisations better when compared to the past, and that these participant's actions are bound by their role requirements. One employee in a sales position stated that while he feels bad for the company when creditors do not pay what is owed to the company, he cannot do anything to help as it is not his job to follow up on payments ("If they don't pay, then there isn't anything I can do"). One participant explained that while his standard of work has decreased, he still ensures that he completes the tasks assigned to him. Another participant stated that he tries to give his all to the company and feels that he does the work given to him despite feeling that he does not "Get anything back" from the company.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased role conflict**

Participants described decreased role conflict in their jobs especially between themselves and their colleagues at work. It would frequently be described that in the past, prior to the layoffs, workers would frequently assist each other where possible, even if their own work was not completed. However, since the layoffs, participants have described their work lives as being "Every man for himself" and that employees would only focus on their own work. This in turn led to job tasks and

roles becoming more defined for each employee and in employees overlapping less into each other's roles, even if it may have been beneficial to both parties. Participants also frequently described certain tasks as not being part of the responsibilities and as such, have no duty to assist in the tasks, even if it can affect them. Another participant described herself as doing what she can to help, but would only do so once instructed by her superior.

### **Sub-theme: Poor communication in job**

Poor communication was frequently mentioned by participants as one of the most recognisable aspects following the layoff event. Participants stated that communication tended to be poor with both co-workers and supervisors, but even more so with top management. Numerous participants stated that while they believe management listens to them, only certain people receive feedback ("If certain people complained then they would do something, but if others did then there would be nothing done"; "Some issues will get like, the small issues will suddenly get dealt with immediately and it'll get immediate actions, but then you get something that's an ongoing thing and it's a big issue but then that just kind of gets sidestepped"). One participant described communication problems with his team mates as they would "Speak in their own language" and that they would only speak in Afrikaans or English when speaking to managers or supervisors. Another participant stated that when he gives instructions to his subordinates, they will often not listen and it would result in the participant needing to carry out the instructions himself.

One participant described in length his perception of major communication issues between different managers and departments in his company ("I must say there is a big gap between top management and with us. There is a big gap because they have a totally different way of communicating in the way that we communicate. Inter department relations is really bad at the company I'm working at now. A lot of departments or (subsidiary) companies try to stab each other in the back because if something happens when a company doesn't do good in that part, then they give it all to each other"). Another participant also stated that while communication with management has remained consistently poor, it is only co-worker communication which has become less friendly since the layoffs and that his relationship with superiors remained professional.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased cohesion in team decision making**

Decision making on a team level decreased as participants stated that they tended to focus more on their own work and what is required from them. Group cohesion in group-problem solving also appeared to have decreased as one participant explained that, "I do not take other people's opinions

into consideration and it's something I've tried to work on", while another participant also underpinned this by stating, "I would first listen to them but then I'd still stay with my own opinion, like I'd want to see what they're saying but I still stay with my opinion". Other participants stated that while not always possible, they try to take others' thoughts into consideration and then try to compromise. Participants also explained that they perceive their co-workers as being in different groups, e.g. some co-workers are friendly with each other, while others tend to stick to themselves ("The more this is happening, that people are growing apart and giving up working together as a team and we are not a family working together.").

## **Theme 2: Reduced employee support**

Support from the various stakeholders in the organisation was reported as decreased among participants following the layoffs, however some participants stated that support has since partially returned. Participants frequently separated the support of management and the organisation based on the personal relationships with management and the financial/non-financial support received from the organisation. A more in-depth explanation of these support sub-themes are provided below.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased co-worker support**

Participants indicated that there is an overall sense of decreased support among their co-workers at their organisation, and due to the overall decreased support, some employees at one participant's organisation have attempted to 'fill' this gap by organising informal gathering outside of the company. To boost morale, other staff members stated, "It got to a point where we the people who are currently working there said let's have a braai, but we'll pay out of our own pockets and it's got nothing to do with the company". Another participant explained while some employees also tend to keep to themselves, "Some of the guys definitely try to work together," especially "The artisans and tool boys". It should be noted that co-worker support seemed to vary greatly between the different departments, teams and participants themselves. Participants would also frequently state that while they attempt to remain friendly with colleagues, many of these co-workers would not be considered friends and are strictly professional relationships.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased managerial support**

Participants reported that there has been a notable decrease in support from managers and also indicated that they understood the positions managers are in as they must make difficult decisions for the sake of the company. However, at the same time, these decisions damaged the relationship

of the layoff survivors with their manager. One participant indicated that following the layoffs, he now believes that he is just another ‘number’ in the company and further stated, “I understand the pressures the company and their management goes through” but simultaneously, “It feels like we get hammered on the stuff that you do or that you do wrong... I can’t afford to make a mistake because they’ll fire us or get rid of us”. Prior to the layoffs, this participant considered himself as appreciated by his managers and well-supported. Other participants further reported that while they communicate well with management, they want to feel appreciated (“It needs to be something to show that you are appreciated”). Another participant indicated that while he ‘likes’ his managers, he will find alternative employment if he does not receive better support in the future. Interestingly, the two participants with the longest tenure stated that they feel that they have always had a good relationship with management and always feel well-supported by management and the company, and that only co-workers’ support was poor. Another participant indicated that he sees his manager as a ‘father’ because of the support he has received over the past few years.

### **Sub-theme: Decreased organisational support**

Organisational support was reported as being decreased among participants, especially in the forms of remuneration and rewards. Participants stated that in the past, rewards would be provided frequently and organisational support would focus on the performance of individuals and teams. However, following the layoffs, organisational support has drastically decreased with fewer rewards being provided to the layoff survivors or to the teams in general (“the only problem is with the salary, I just want to discuss the salary with the manager so that it can be improved.”). One participant indicated that pre-layoffs, he received an annual financial bonus as well as team rewards. This same participant further explained that following the layoffs, he no longer receives financial bonuses and the company can no longer afford to provide team-based rewards (“We do not get incentives because there is no funds available to even send employees for a braai. That is completely gone”). Another employee stated that while he feels that he gives everything to the company, he does not feel well-supported by the company (“I feel like I give everything but I don’t get anything back. So, some days I feel bad, but I kick myself so that I can carry on with work”). One participant explained that while he has not received a reward since the layoffs, he also understands that rewards are not guaranteed and can only be given when they are available. As such, he does not have any issue with not receiving bonuses or other rewards, and instead only has an issue with his salary.

## Category 2: Commitment

In this category, participants were asked to describe their current commitment towards their organisation. Direct quotes from participants are also associated within each explanation of results were possible in order to substantiate these results.

Table 3 provides a detailed overview of the themes and sub-themes extracted from the interviews with the participants.

Table 3

Theme	Sub-Theme
<b>Slightly reduced affective commitment</b>	Emotional identification
	Loyalty to organisation/Desire to stay
<b>Decreased continuance commitment</b>	Rewards
	Rewards offered by other companies
	Cost of leaving
<b>Low normative commitment</b>	N/A

### Theme 1: Slightly reduced affective commitment

Participants explained a slightly decreased affective commitment, but also provided mixed descriptions following the layoff event. Affective commitment seems to be highly dependent on the personal relationship and history that each participant has with their organisation and management. Under the participants' affective commitment, the sub-themes of emotional identification and loyalty to the organisation were explored and reported as following:

#### Sub-theme: Emotional identification

Emotional identification was commonly described among the research participants, especially when discussing the human elements of the organisation. In terms of emotional identification with the organisation, some participants indicated that while they understand the pressures the organisation is under due to the processes within industry as a whole, they still expressed that they have a diminished emotional identification to the organisation and the organisation's problems ("I identify with it but I feel more can be done"), while other participants indicated that they feel bad when the company does not perform well because they know that it may affect them in turn ("I do identify the issues. Recently we just went through that slump and that would affect me personally"). Another participant indicated that he does not view the organisation as its own entity,

but rather as a composition of managers dealing with people and employees. He then elaborated that he emotionally identifies with those people who have to manage the company and make the difficult organisational decisions (“It is management that deals with people. So basically, I understand the pressures the company and their management goes through”).

### **Sub-theme: Loyalty to the organisation/Desire to stay**

Participants’ loyalty to their organisation tended to fall within three categories and was described to be very similar to continuance commitment (as discussed below). The first category of employees explained that they are actively looking for alternative employment and would leave as soon as a ‘better’ situation becomes available. One employee stated, “I would first consider it... and if it is really better at the end of the day, then I would decide to go”. The second category stated that while they are not actively looking for alternative employment, if they received an offer from another organisation, they would compare the offer to their current situation and discuss it with management in order to see whether management could match the offer. The third category of participants stated that they would outright reject any offer because they genuinely want to stay at the company and would only tell management to keep them informed (“To be honest I wouldn't even think about it I would go straight to my boss. I couldn't just go because I don't know anything about the other company that's approaching me” and “The thing is as long as I'm happy then I'll stay because I don't have a problem anymore, so as long as you're happy then don't go”). The participants’ descriptions of their loyalty and desire to stay at the organisation, appeared to be distributed similarly to a bell-curve, with the majority of participants falling into the second category, and the first and third categories receiving almost equal participant descriptions. Overall, the survivor’s loyalty to the organisation seems negligible and more based on what organisation can support them better (“If the company said that it cannot look after us or that they would reduce our salaries, then yes... I have to look out for my future in that sense”).

### **Theme 2: Decreased continuance commitment**

Continuance commitment seemed to decrease somewhat following the layoffs and was often associated to the remuneration they receive from the organisation (and the rewards offered by alternative employment) and the associated cost of leaving. However, continuance commitment remained highly rated for most of the participants as one of the most important underpinning factors to their continued stay at their organisation. In-depth discussions of the most frequent sub-themes are discussed below.

### **Sub-theme: Rewards**

Rewards were described by participants as falling into two categories, financial and non-financial. The majority of participants described receiving numerous non-financial rewards in the terms of performance appraisals, congratulations or thank-you messages. Many of the employees stated that they appreciate the recognition they receive from their organisation and managers. One employee explained that these appraisals were very motivational to her future performance (“Whenever I do something big... he (her manager) will then kind of say it right there and then, and for a while after he'd be like that was a good, good job and it really motivates me”). Another participant at the same company explained that while he also receives frequent verbal appraisals, he receives no other rewards (“Thank you, I hear frequently, but that's all that I get”) and later stated that he would want to improve it in some financial way.

Additional financial rewards were almost universally desired by the participants in the study, with only two participants stating that they are currently content with the yearly bonuses they receive. One participant stated that in terms of financial rewards, he would like to receive “A house or a car allowance or a salary increase”, while another participant stated that “Any person would want an increase in salary but it depends on how hard you work and what work you do at the company”. Participants also tended to agree that financial rewards should only be given to hardworking employees, however all the participants in the study also firmly believed that they themselves qualify as hardworking employees. Participants who stated that they had their salaries or bonuses reduced also explained that they are unhappy with the financial reward systems as they often only looked at company or team performance and rarely considered the participant's individual performance. One participant explained his company's reward system in detail (“If the company doesn't do well then we will go without a bonus. Say, every person has a KPI, kontinuous performance index, where you fill in forms and you get rated on that and the company gets rated how we do financially and they say your KPI has a great deal of it (How rewards are distributed) but 75% is just the company's performance”). The same participant explained that he disliked the system as his rewards would often be based on the financial position of the company, while his job is that of a ship mechanic and cannot directly influence the company's finances.

### **Sub-theme: Rewards offered by other companies**

Possible rewards offered by other companies were often difficult for participants to explain or even speculate about, with most participants simply stating that they are not sure what other companies could possibly offer them besides a better salary. One participant stated that he was aware of

another company that offers bonuses for ships that economically manage their fuel reserves while fishing and stated that he thinks his company should follow suit. Participants that have longer tenures at their respective companies frequently stated that they have been approached by several competitors in the past, often with offers of higher salaries. However, these offers were rejected due to uncertainty or ambiguity of the other company. The participants also stated that because competitors are in the same industry, they would consider leaving the industry in its entirety (“For the industry to go on the same track as it has now, I’d probably decide to leave in order try something new”). Participants frequently stated that if they were approached by a competitor with a better reward or remuneration system in place, they would provide their current company with the opportunity to match or improve their current offer.

### **Sub-theme: Cost of leaving**

The cost of leaving for participants was identified as another major influence on their continuance commitment and loyalty and they often associated the cost of leaving to the potential lost financial remuneration and company relationships/knowledge. Financial remuneration was identified by the participants as consisting of the salary at their present company, which would be lost if they resign without another job already lined up. Another issue was a possible lower salary offered at other organisations (“I don't think other companies really offer what our company offers now”). One participant stated that with the current situation, employees cannot afford to leave their job and income without an alternative (“No, especially in today’s times. You must be sure before you can make a move”), while another employee stated that he would even move to a lower paying company as long as he knew that it was stable (“I would even go for less, but not a lot less, but if I know it's a stable company I would leave for less”). It is important to note that most participants stated that they would not leave their organisation without securing an alternative source of income.

The lost relationships and knowledge of the organisation was almost universally identified as a major cost of leaving by the participants, with one participant explaining, “If I leave this company and I go to a new company- I don't know this (new) company, I don't know the people there, I don't know their manners, or how they work. So, if I leave, I lose all of that over here and everything I built up over here”. Participants therefore described the current relationships and knowledge of their organisation as factors that prevent them from leaving (“Yeah in a way I feel like, not stuck, but I’m comfortable and I don’t really want to leave yet.”).

### **Theme 3: Low normative commitment**

Despite instances where companies funded training and education or where participants had family members and close friends in their company, most participants indicated a fairly low normative commitment or obligation to stay at the company. Most participants simply stated that they do not have any obligation to stay and that they are only staying because they want to. Only one participant stated that he felt obligated to stay as his father was a ship's captain. Several other participants identified the training and opportunities they received from the company and said that it creates a feeling that they owe the company. One participant further stated that he lost that feeling of owing the company after surviving the layoffs ("No. I don't owe them anything. I used to feel that way, that I would do everything for my company because we are a team working together and they look after me financially so I feel obligated in a financial sense and because it's a nice team to work with, but lately there is no obligation. I would just leave.").

## **DISCUSSION**

Despite the emphasis on employee support and retention within larger companies and modern HR practices, surprisingly little is done to maintain support following major traumatic episodes such as layoff survival, which can directly impact the satisfaction, commitment, loyalty and functioning of these employees. The fishing industry, despite its importance to Namibia in terms of employment and production capacity, is an industry that is frequently characterised by almost annual, large-scale retrenchments, casual labour, wildcat strikes, unpredictable catches and widespread corruption over the distribution of commercial fishing licenses. Yet, these same organisations within the fishing industry maintain the status quo in terms of support despite diminishing returns regarding commitment.

The objective of this study was to explore the various experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their perceived organisational support and their own commitment towards the organisation within the context of the Namibian fishing industry and to assess how these experiences match the conceptualisations as found in the literature. Therefore, it was important to explore how the survival of a layoff event may have influenced the perceived support these layoff survivors received from their organisations and how the reciprocated commitment may have changed because of the lower perceived support and the layoff event itself.

Layoff survivors in the present study indicated that perceived organisational support consisted of two distinct themes, namely their roles within the organisation and the direct support they receive from the various organisational insiders. Participants described their roles within the organisation

most vividly when discussing their own role clarity, decision making and communication they receive in the organisation, and described direct support as manager support, organisation financial support and co-worker support. As established by Van Schalkwyk, Els, & Rothmann, (2011) perceived organisational support consists of role clarity, job information, participation in decision making, support from co-workers and supervisory support. Within the present study, each aspect was identified during the exploration of the layoff survivors' experiences of their own perceived organisational support. However, job information, support from co-workers and supervisory support were most frequently identified and survivors also explained that there is a definite separation of supervisor support in management support (relationships) and financial support from the organisation, which participants often referred to as 'organisational support'. Layoff survivors within this present study attributed their financial support to their organisation while simultaneously removing the human-element from their organisation by viewing their managers within a personal and relationship capacity and this may be a coping mechanism for these survivors to attribute such a negative event to someone or something which they have no control or direct interaction with.

Interestingly, the findings of the present study did not correlate with the study by Moore, Grunberg and Greenberg (2004), which described layoff survivors as experiencing higher role ambiguity. Instead, participants in the present study described either stable levels of role clarity or in some cases an improved, albeit more cynical, understanding of their role within the company. These responses were recorded after the survivors were asked "How strongly do you identify with the issues that the company faces?" and "Do you think people change companies too often?" as well as follow up questions to their roles within these issues and how they are handled. It may be that because layoffs are such a shocking event, that it can cause employees to re-examine their functions or purpose within the organisation. If in doubt, the employee, can then fall back to the basic requirements and duties as stated in their job description or contract of employment while also reducing additional duties, which may have been taken on voluntarily in the past. The present study's survivors also indicated that while they understand the issues which the company faces, they would often limit their reactions as these larger issues are either outside their control or simply outside of their job requirements. The current study indicated that while the layoff survivors cite the relationships within the organisation as being underpinning to their happiness and commitment, they ultimately understand that it is a job and that they must carry out what is required of them as per their job description. However, the layoff survivors also seemed hesitant when discussing the possibility of taking on additional non-role requirements, even to help the organisation, unless they are appropriately remunerated for the effort. This indicates a definite

decrease in organisational citizenship. Organisational citizenship was defined by Organ (In Christ, Dick, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2003, p.330) as “Individual behaviour that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognised by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organisation”. It is unclear as to whether these low levels of organisational citizenship was established prior to the layoff event or as a reaction to surviving the layoffs however it may also be that the low levels of organisational citizenship acts as an additional barrier to the negative emotional effects which are attributed to the events themselves.

The decrease in the layoff survivor’s perceived organisational support was further demonstrated in group decision making as it shifted from a group-orientated focus to that of the individual. Layoff survivors in the current study responded to the question of “If your opinions go against the general consensus, how does that affect it?” and they seemed to be less interested in the opinions and thoughts of others and instead believe that what they think is best in most cases. While this shift does not necessarily indicate an increase in group conflict, it indicates a reduced effectiveness of the team very clearly. Past research (Cameron, 1994; Shaw, & Barret-Power, 1997) has found that organisational restructuring reduces team effectiveness, and therefore, results of the current study correlate with past findings. This breakdown in the team effectiveness of layoff survivors may also have further implications on work-group effectiveness or social responsibility within the organisation in the long term. It may be that this reduction in team effectiveness is due to the negative emotions or frustrations which remain after a traumatic event or that new teams are formed after previously established teams are broken up by the layoff events, and therefore require significant periods of team building and shared efforts.

It also appeared that the capacity of communication within each organisation forms a crucial mechanism to the coping and recovery of layoff survivors. In response to being asked “If you were to lodge a complaint or grievance in your company, how do you think your company would react?” all the participants who mentioned having open and clear channels of communication to management and co-workers also described fewer issues regarding their perceived support and maintained an overall high level of affective and mostly steady level of continuance commitment, while those survivors who perceived inequality between communication levels provided or overall restricted communication viewed the organisation as being less supportive. In correlation, the participants who mentioned that they feel their communication within the company was lacking in some way or could be improved, also tended to appear to be less committed and loyal to the company. As communication forms part and parcel of organisational support, these findings correlate with the findings of Butts, Vandenberg, DeJoy, and Wilson (2006) who showed that

management communication helped to predict and improve employee commitment. It may be that communication plays a crucial role in determining the levels of commitment and loyalty among layoff survivors following the restructuring period. Furthermore, survivors who are provided frequent information of the company's performance, actual dates of retrenchments and the severity of the situation may feel that they were also afforded an opportunity to understand the situation and to prepare. This opportunity for preparation may be crucial to the recovery and overall resilience to the layoff event and corroborates with the findings of Masten and Obradović (2008), which stated that effective preparation for and response to the looming threats require substantial knowledge and information (from various interdependent systems). It is only when survivors are given very little notice, such as the statutory 30 days' notice as stated within the Namibian Labour Act 2007, that their commitment, loyalty or perceptions of support may be reduced critically. Survivors may also see communication as a free and effective tool in enduring the layoffs and when organisations choose to limit communication the reasons therefore are not discernable or understandable from a rational standpoint.

As previously stated, management support is perceived as consisting almost entirely of the relationship that each employee had with their respective manager and the praise/criticism he or she received from their manager and this relationship became prevalent when candidates were questioned with "What are some of the ways that the company encourages extra effort or show that they care about you?". Participants who described poor relationships with their managers or feeling unappreciated also described poorer management support, while survivors who explained that they had deep and meaningful relationships with their managers also indicated a much higher commitment (affective and continuance), higher satisfaction in their jobs, lower turn-over intentions and an overall better perceived organisational support. The findings of the current study correspond with the findings of Dawley, Houghton, and Bucklew (2010) who constructed a theoretical model which confirmed that positive organisational support (management support included) reduced turn-over intention. The results from the present study suggested that long and healthy relationships with management may attribute to a maintained perceived organisational support. However, numerous other aspects such as past exposure to layoffs; the characteristics of the relationship; and the layoff survivor's own personality could also greatly influence this possibility. It seems that for a meaningful relationship to exist between survivors and their managers, there needs to be a relatively long-time frame for that relationship to develop and organisations that experience frequent downsizing may prevent these relationships from forming. The present study also made it clear that smaller organisations which often enjoy close and more direct channels of communication and relationships between management and survivors tended to

report higher levels of management support especially when compared to organisations too large that survivors would rarely meet top-level managers or directors.

It became clear that organisational support was seen by layoff survivors as consisting almost entirely of financial support in the forms of salaries and bonuses/rewards (remuneration) and not other forms of emotional support when candidates were asked “How can your company improve the support that they provide to you at present?”. As previously mentioned, the Namibian Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Bernard Esau, stated that the Namibian fishing industry has seen a 43% growth in revenue in the 2015/2016 year (New Era, 2016). However, the layoff survivors have not received equivalent increases in salaries, and as indicated by the present study, layoff survivors often experienced decreases in terms of the benefits and rewards received. The almost universal displeasure with current salary levels among layoff survivors indicates an industry-wide issue, especially in firms where it is known that upper level management have high salaries or where shareholders receive high profits. While younger survivors indicated that they are content with their current salary levels, which may be due to them being new at the organisation, other layoff survivors with longer tenures or who were older felt that they deserved higher salary levels. Interestingly, only a few participants indicated that they would immediately leave their organisation for a higher salary, with the majority rather stating that they would first try to get an increase from their current company. While survivors understand that bonuses or rewards are not guaranteed and are rather based on personal and/or company performance, it also seemed that survivors who received frequent rewards also exhibited a much higher level of perceived organisational support. It may be that while the absence of rewards does not decrease perceived organisational support because layoff survivors are aware of the organisation’s pressures and situation, the inclusion of rewards create a sense of appreciation during the difficult times. It should also be mentioned that survivors who did not receive any bonuses also voiced more displeasure with their base salaries when compared to survivors whose rewards were maintained and this may be due to expectations of bonuses or salary increases as being a guarantee when often provided in the past.

Co-worker support was explained to have decreased among layoff survivors because of lost relationships with those individuals who were laid off; poorer relationships with other co-workers who remained at the organisation and a low morale among employees, due to the tense and negative perceived work environment. These aspects were explained when survivors were asked “How much do you feel as part of the family with your company?” as well as follow up questions regarding the support received from co-workers after the layoffs. These results correlate with the

findings of Armstrong-Strassen, Cameron, and Horsburgh (2001) who suggested that when employees are transferred due to restructuring, they perceived less organisational and co-worker support and were generally less satisfied than non-transferred employees. As stated in the results, co-worker support varied greatly between the different departments, teams and participants themselves, and this may be because of the different relationships between the co-workers before the layoff event, the cultures in the different organisations and departments and which co-workers were laid off (e.g. social versus non-social employees). Often times during the present study the layoff survivors indicated that they did not want to discuss their co-workers in detail or the make-up of these relationships, and this may be due to a coping mechanism in which the survivors focus more on their own situation instead of being empathic towards their peers and recognising that they have similar experiences, emotions and reduced support structure.

Results of the current study correspond with those of Armstrong-Stassen (2004) who found that the various forms of commitment of layoff survivors tend to be negatively affected (to different degrees) after the downsizing. The present study found that overall commitment of layoff survivors to the organisation seemed to be influenced heavily by the survival of a layoff event itself and the support that they received from the organisation both before and after restructuring. As noted by Greenglass and Burke (2002), prior commitment to downsizing has an effect on commitment thereafter, and this principle was further displayed in the present study as the survivors who are relatively new to the company (less than 3 years in the present study) or who have been at the company for a greater amount of time (over 20 years in the present study) explained that their commitment remained relatively stable or was overall only slightly reduced for a short period of time and soon recovered following the layoffs. The low tenure survivors may have a less affected commitment as Sirota, Mischkind, and Meltzer (2005) explained that newer employees (especially first year employees) tend to have generally higher levels of enthusiasm, while their commitment may not be as full-broadened due to underdeveloped relationships with co-workers. The layoff survivors with the longest tenures may have a relatively stable commitment because they are the most protected group by the Last-in-First-Out (LIFO) principle, which is usually used in downsizing procedures, and because their previous exposure to layoffs or similar events may reduce the overall impact of layoffs.

Affective commitment of the layoff survivors seemed to be reduced slightly as even though the jobs themselves were not changed, the associated aspects and contexts to the jobs have been altered, which decreased the affection that layoff survivors have for their jobs. An emotional identification to the organisation was discovered following the questions of “How much personal

meaning does your company have for you?” and “How strongly do you identify with the issues that the company faces?” especially to those survivors who manage the organisation, and remained among participants following the layoffs. This may be due to simple empathy among the layoff survivors as they understand that the downsizing was not brought on by choice but rather as a calculated decision in response to industry and economic demands. This empathy was further illustrated as survivors also understood the difficulty in carrying out the layoff process, and in that sense felt bad for the company. The present study found that survivors’ loyalty and desire to remain at the organisation was described in three categories. For the most part however, survivors indicated that their desire to remain at the organisation was mostly based on what best advantages themselves, as they are open to changing organisations or industries entirely if it means a higher remuneration package. It may be that because the industry is understood as being highly fluid in terms of employment at the various organisations, loyalty is not given the opportunity or environment to flourish and grow. It also seems highly unlikely that it can be a coincidence that the survivors with the longest tenures at their organisations also described having very high levels of loyalty and a strong desire to remain, while those survivors with shorter tenures often described as being open to change, and therefore the relationship between affective commitment and what is seen as loyalty are interlinked for survivors within this present study.

Continuance commitment seemed to have decreased among the survivors, as most of the participants tended to believe that they would not lose any benefits if they were to change companies after being questioned with “In terms of the benefits which you receive from your company, what are some of the things you would need to sacrifice if you were to leave the organisation?”. Some survivors indicated a willingness to even accept jobs with lower salaries if they were more secure, while others felt that better jobs may exist within other industries. For the most part, it seemed that survivors would remain at their company because they are ‘comfortable’ in their present situation with the already-established relationships with co-workers and developed knowledge of the organisation. Only once these relationships were damaged and knowledge was lost, did the cost of leaving the organisation drastically decrease. The role of rewards also seemed to influence survivors’ continuance commitment greatly, especially when it is perceived that other companies offer better remuneration packages. This may be because while better offers from other companies are already attractive to many employees, layoff survivors may understand that these pressures are industry wide so a change of company would at least result in a possibly better salary or bonus structure. It also seems that relationship which continuance commitment has with financial support is a major factor in long-term commitment and survivor retention as a decreased

continuance commitment may force these survivors to contemplate joining other industries in order to secure a longer term stability to income.

Normative commitment seemed to be very low among layoff survivors as they felt no real obligation to remain at the company when questioned with “In what ways do you feel obligated to stay at your organisation?” and that their only ‘obligation’ to the company is to perform the requirements of their jobs. This seems to be a natural response to the pressures of the industry and the organisation on the survivors and appeared to cause a breakdown of the employment relationship to its most basic form. Obligations to stay because of past training was for the most part forgotten among the layoff survivors, with the only other form of obligation to remain at the organisation seemingly based on whether the survivor has family or close friends at the organisation. Normative commitment therefore, seemed to be highly based on whether or not the survivor feels that he or she ‘owes’ the company anything or feels that leaving would betray a close relationship at the company. The layoffs seem to negate these feelings in survivors. It may be that the low obligation to remain at the organisation is again due to low organisational citizenship or due to the fact that the survivors within this present study view themselves as an interchangeable component to a larger organisational structure and that this lack of identity makes them feel easily replaceable or unappreciated. Alternatively it may be that a low Normative commitment is due to a wider national, social or cultural issue which exists outside of the scope of the present study.

Because the fishing industry is such a large and complex trade, it is in many ways self-sustaining and as such, can support a wide variety of different job types. One organisation can have its own financial, logistics, sales, repairs, processing, fishing and purchasing departments, with each of the jobs within the various departments being further specialised as required. This variety in the different types of jobs available in the industry, along with a multitude of other personal and organisational factors, constitutes a large scope in variance of responses to layoff survival. It is clear that the POS and commitment of survivors is reduced following layoff survival, especially when close sources of support are lost during the downsizing. These findings correspond well with organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and on the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), The perceptions of poor organisational support, which survivors have from their organisation, are returned in the forms of reduced commitment, also found in other past research (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Tumwesigye, 2010).

## **Practical implications**

There are several practical implications for organisations that can be derived from the results of the present study.

As stated by Armstrong-Stassen (2004, p.46), “There exists fairly compelling empirical evidence that downsizing is associated with reduced organisational commitment” and this also seems to be the case in the present study. One possible way in which organisations can prevent decreased commitment following layoffs is to act on social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) by increasing the support that they offer to the layoff survivors after the layoff event. These layoff survivors may then reciprocate the support back to the organisation through increased commitment and loyalty.

Affective commitment can be facilitated in layoff survivors by increasing the emotional attachment, identification and involvement to the organisation, and may be improved by simply incorporating the survivors and their opinions into organisation’s processes such as the layoff process. This can also be done by facilitating emotional identification with management at the organisation by creating an open environment where managers are provided a platform to express their own emotions of the events, and by attempting to minimise employee turnover in order to create a workforce with a longer tenure at the organisation.

Continuance commitment will always be based on the material rewards or benefits and the associated costs that will be experienced if the individual leaves the organisation (Meyer, & Allen, 1984). The organisation can facilitate continuance commitment by either maintaining the current remuneration packages of layoff survivors or by increasing the cost of leaving by facilitating stronger relationships among layoff survivors and their peers.

Ultimately, by focusing on keeping employees satisfied and well-supported, organisations can improve commitment and reduce turnover. Layoff survivors are a special category of employees who require additional care due to the sudden changes within the organisation, which they must now adjust to. If organisations fail to maintain survivor commitment, they not only risk the financial costs associated with replacing employees, but also risk losing the deeply entrenched skills, knowledge and relationships that these layoff survivors have accrued over their past tenures.

## **Limitations and recommendations**

As with any study, there were several limitations, which constricted the present research and thus provide opportunities of improvement for future studies.

The first limitation of the study is that it was only possible to explore the thoughts and experiences of employees after they survived the layoffs and as such it is difficult to establish the levels of the employees' POS and commitment prior to the layoff event. It may be that in some cases, survivors perceived low support both before and after the layoffs and their subsequent commitment also remained relatively low. While the self-reporting style of the interviews allows for survivors to explore their own thoughts and feelings regarding the situation, it remains relatively subjective and open to that survivor's own perceptions.

Another limitation is that the experiences of layoff survivors were not compared to other groups in the same or similar industries such as the mining or shipping industries. This could help to indicate whether the employees within the Namibian fishing industry have a unique or a typical response to downsizing. By not comparing the results to other Namibian industries, it is difficult to anticipate whether the findings are unique to the industry or to all Namibian industries. Furthermore, because participants were not recruited from a single organisation, it is difficult to establish the different manners in which the organisations handled the layoffs and how they affected the layoff survivors. Differing support strategies and cultures between the various participant organisations may also have a significant influence on the findings of the study and given the fact that the present study explored the survivors' experiences rather than the strategies employed by the organisation, this may then influence the results.

There are also several recommendations to the present study, which can be carried out in future research. Because the study was qualitative in design, a second confirmatory quantitative study should be carried out to understand the relationship between POS and employee commitment properly. There also seems to be no established and accepted intervention that aims at maintaining POS and commitment of the layoff survivors, and future development of such an intervention may prove greatly beneficial to both the organisation and to the individual. Further research into possible demographic and multicultural differences should also be carried out in layoff survivors' reactions and coping processes. Some past studies suggested that certain intrinsic aspects such as age or gender can influence survivors' reactions (Armstrong-Stassen, 1994; Cotter, & Fouad, 2012; Probst, & Lawler, 2006; Westman, 2001) and this should be examined in future research.

Future studies may also wish to explore how other aspects such as administrative and procedural justice may influence survivor commitment, as these and other related aspects may have a

significant influence of employee retention, turnover and loyalty. Given the lack of research done on Namibian layoff survivors, there is a plethora of foreign findings, which may require confirmation and exploration within the Namibian context.

Lastly, future studies may wish to follow a longitudinal approach rather than cross-sectional as the study can then follow up on the commitment of layoff survivors and whether they changed organisations following the layoff survival. While many survivors indicate an intention to find alternative employment, whether these intentions are followed through is unclear and follow up studies may be required to confirm and explore the experiences of survivors who decided against turning over or with survivors who found alternative employment.

### **Final remark**

This study explored the thoughts and experiences of layoff survivors regarding their perceived organisational support and commitment within the Namibian fishing industry. While many findings from foreign studies were confirmed, there were also findings that could not be confirmed. Organisations that fail to maintain support or implement best HR practices risk the commitment of their employees, and can suffer from decreased performance and high turn-over, which can have further effects on the organisation.

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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter briefly discusses the conclusions of the objectives of the two articles in the study. In addition, limitations to the entire study and subsequent recommendations to correct the mentioned limitations as well as possible avenues for future research will be outlined.

#### **Article 1: An exploration of the psychological and subjective well-being of layoff survivors within various fishing organisations in Namibia**

The first objective of this article was to explore how layoff survivors' subjective well-being and psychological well-being is conceptualised in literature. Subjective well-being was described by Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) as a broad construct that is concerned with how individuals evaluate their own lives, in terms of their emotional responses to events, their moods or judgments they make about their life, their fulfilment and their general satisfaction. Psychological well-being was defined as a multidimensional concept representing an individual's subjective sense of emotional well-being and comfort (Repetti, 1987, p.711). Subjective well-being and psychological well-being have been used in conjunction as a broader indicator for an individual's overall well-being (Govindji, & Linley, 2007; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Subjective well-being consists of two components, namely life satisfaction and affect balance (Diener, & Biswas-Diener, 2011), while psychological well-being is proposed to be comprised of six dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Personal growth, Positive relations with others, Purpose in life and Self-acceptance (Ryff, & Keyes, 1995).

From past research, it was established that layoff survivors tended to suffer from a broad range of negative work-related conditions ranging from increased role ambiguity, depression and other health problems (Moore, Grunberg, & Greenberg, 2004) to increased negative emotions of anxiety, anger, depression, guilt, distrust or reduced motivation. These broad range of negative work-related conditions were labelled 'Layoff Survivors Sickness' (Noer, 2009). Doherty and Horsted (1995) further found that layoff survivors were often faced with a mixed grouping of specific behaviours and emotions following an organisational downsizing, with Kim (2007, p.450) adding that the negative conditions originate from "The social and psychological impact of downsizing on layoff survivors". However, it was found that the majority of past research on the effects of layoffs on subjective well-being and psychological well-being tended to focus on those individuals who are laid off instead of on those individuals who survived the layoffs. In addition, there were

no previous studies on layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry, which is an industry that is characterised by frequent waves of downsizing.

The second objective of this article was to explore the experienced psychological well-being of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. Psychological well-being was found to have been detrimentally affected by the layoffs and that layoff survivors were in a worse position following the layoff event. Four themes were identified within the results, namely: Autonomy and environmental control; Growth and purpose; Relations with others; and Limited self-understanding. In most cases, various sub-themes were identified within the themes. Autonomy and environmental control was divided into three sub-themes of restricted autonomy at work, the impact of team autonomy and limited environmental control. Layoff survivors indicated that they experienced an overall restricted autonomy at work and that they had no control over their work environment. They also stated that certain aspects such as fishing quotas or the layoffs limit their control within the organisation. Highly autonomous work teams such as ship crews, seemed to react better to the layoffs and often stated that they had almost no relations with laid-off staff, despite being included as a layoff possibility. These findings of autonomy seem to correspond with Noer's (2009) suggestion that highly autonomous teams may experience less trauma than teams with lower autonomy. It was not found that the layoff process directly changed the survivor's autonomy, which was in line with the findings of Harley (1999). Growth and purpose was divided into three sub-themes of decreased professional growth, unclear professional purpose and common personal purpose and maintained personal growth. Layoff survivors described experiencing a standstill in terms of their professional development as they received far less training following the layoffs compared to the past and that the majority described their professional goals as being unclear. The stunted professional growth of this study's candidates seem to not correspond with the principle of "post-traumatic growth" as originally identified by Tedeschi, and Calhoun (1996). Almost all the layoff survivors shared a common goal of establishing or growing their families, and stated that the layoffs did not change this goal at all; instead only slightly delayed it. Relations with others was divided into two sub-sections of poor relationships with co-workers and independent relationships with friends and family. Layoff survivors indicated that they perceive their co-workers as being nothing more than a professional relationship, while relationships with friends and family members appeared to be highly independent of the work situation and was dependent on external factors instead. However, certain trends which may impact the severity of the layoff survival regarding external relationships was found within the sample. The intricate facet of the impact which these various relationships has on personal growth seems to relate with Levison's findings (as cited in Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper, & Jobin, 2000, p.655). Lastly,

the theme of limited self-understanding was described by layoff survivors as being difficult to explore as the survivors did not fully comprehend their own strengths or weaknesses, and in many cases could not describe how their organisation or co-workers see them.

The third objective of this article was to explore the experienced subjective well-being of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. Subjective well-being was found to have decreased to a large extent within the study population. Three themes were identified from the subjective well-being of layoff survivors, namely: satisfaction, emotions and judgements on others. The theme of satisfaction was further divided into the sub-themes of work satisfaction and home and social satisfaction. Layoff survivors in the study described their work satisfaction as decreasing following the layoffs, but then also slowly recovering as more time passed from the actual layoff event. Layoff survivors also attributed their work satisfaction as mostly originating from their actual jobs or the remuneration they received, while they classified other aspects such as support or increased pressures as secondary influences. Home and social satisfaction remained relatively stable for layoff survivors within the present study with most participants stressing that this form of satisfaction was determined by their own personal circumstances. The theme of emotions had four sub-themes of reduced positive emotions, increased negative emotions, emotional work-home interference and variance in work, home and friendship interfaces. Layoff survivors frequently described an overall reduction in positive emotions such as happiness while simultaneously experiencing an increase of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, etc. This discovery parallels with Noer's (2009) distinct pattern of emotions which partly make up "Layoff Survivors Sickness" and as what has been found in past research (Grunberg, Moore, & Greenberg, 2001; Kim, 2007). It is also evident that while layoff survivors attempted to keep their work emotions and home emotions separate, there would still be instances of interference. Interestingly, it was also found that no participant tended to experience negative emotions in all three dimensions of work, home and friendship (as the three most described) and instead always tended to experience some positive emotions from at least one source. The theme of judgements on others was sub-divided into judgements based on the organisation and judgements on friends or family. Judgements based on the organisation tended to be understanding the difficulty in the situation whilst also becoming increasingly depersonalised to the organisation. The relationships of layoff survivors with co-workers and managers also seemed to be highly influential on judgements on the organisation. However, overall, it tended to be more negative at present when compared to the past. Lastly, judgements on friends or family found that layoff survivors tended to be separated actively from the influences of the layoffs but that on occasion, some layoff

survivors “pushed away” friends or family. Judgements on friends or family seemed to be mostly dependent on the layoff survivors’ personal lives.

The fourth objective of this article was to provide recommendations to management and future research on the psychological well-being and subjective well-being of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. For management, it can be recommended that increased opportunities for open and positive communication should be stressed while providing as much information to layoff survivors as possible regarding the position of the organisation both before and after layoffs to avoid leaving them in the dark, as this study found that including employees in the layoff process limits the possible negative repercussions of the layoff survival. Management can also seek to increase autonomy within teams before layoffs in order to limit the growth of social networks between employees, as directed by Noer (2009). Additionally, organisations that tended to assist employees when they experienced problems within their personal lives also had workers who coped better subjectively and psychologically with the layoffs. Management should also note that there are no one-size-fits-all solution to dealing with layoff survivors and that each employee should be an individual and not merely seen as part of a larger group when attempting to assist these employees. For future research, it is recommended to further explore the impact of the survivor’s various relationships, home-work balance and the impact of emotions on the survivor’s motivation and performance. In addition, exploring the variation that demographic differences such as tenure, job type or age may have on the psychological and subjective well-being of layoff survivors is recommended.

## **Article 2: An exploration of employee-organisational interactions of layoff survivors within various Namibian fishing companies**

The first objective of this article was to explore how layoff survivors’ commitment and perceived organisational support is conceptualised in literature. Commitment was defined by Chen, Tsui, and Farh (2002, p.339) as “The psychological attachment that workers have to their organisations” and Iverson (1996) proposed that commitment can only be fostered through the process of identification with the organisation, through which the individual must observe an extension of himself. Allen and Meyer (1990) proposed a three-component model of organisational commitment, which aimed at integrating the various conceptualisations and explanations of organisational commitment. These three components of commitment were named affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to the emotional identification that the individual has with the organisation (Meyer, & Allen, 1984), and is the ‘desire’ element a person feels towards the organisation. Continuance

commitment simply represents the commitment resulting from material rewards or benefits and the associated costs, which could be incurred if the individual leaves the organisation (Meyer, & Allen, 1984). Lastly, normative commitment denotes to the feeling of responsibility to remain with the organisation (Allen, & Meyer, 1990), which is formed prior to and after socialisation (Abdul, Rashid, Sambasivan, & Johari, 2003). Commitment was found to have strong relationships with an individual's job satisfaction, job performance, their attitude towards work, motivation, autonomy, stress, job involvement, cohesiveness, etc. (Imran, Arif, Cheema, & Azeem, 2014; Mathieu, & Zajac, 1990).

Perceived organisational support is defined as the degree in which the employees feel that the organisation supports their endeavours and cares about their well-being (Dawson, 1996). Organisational support theory, as described by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997), states that employees have an inherent desire to feel supported and that this support is necessary for employees to commit and remain loyal to their organisation (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003; Tumwesigye, 2010). Employees who perceive that they are supported by the organisation feel that they need to 'pay back' their organisation in the form of continuing loyalty and high performance (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). This principle, as stated by Erickson (2007), is grounded in social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Van Schalkwyk, Els, and Rothmann, (2011) established perceived organisational support as consisting of the following dimensions: role clarity, job information, participation in decision making, support from co-workers and supervisory support. Role clarity refers to the adequacy and provision of information about roles in the organisation in order for the employee to understand what is required of them (Cooper, & Marshall, 2013). Job information refers to the information about specific job attributes, such as job title, job description, type of work to be performed, pay levels and promotion opportunities (Powell, 1984; Powell, 1991; Turban, Campion, & Eyring, 1995). Role clarity focuses on the exact processes that need to be performed by the individual and how these processes affect others, whereas job information describes the overt job characteristics and attributes. Participation in decision making simply refers to the ability to have an impact in organisational-related matters (Wallace, 1995). Support from co-workers represents the emotional, spiritual, or physical support that the employee may receive from co-workers during difficult times (Haynes, Wall, Bolden, Stride, & Rick, 1999). Lastly, supervisory support, according to House (as cited in Hee Yoon, Hyun Seo, & Seog Yoon, 2004), refers to the degree of socio-emotional concerns of the supervisor, through a facilitative climate of psychological support, mutual trust, friendliness and helpfulness.

The second objective of this article was to explore the experienced organisational support of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. Two themes were identified within the perceived organisational support of layoff survivors within the current study, namely layoff survivor's altered role in the organisation and an overall reduced employee support. Four sub-themes were identified within the layoff survivor's altered role in the organisation: increased role clarity; decreased role conflict; poor communication in job and decreased cohesion in team decision making. Layoff survivors experienced an increase in their role clarity at their organisation as they explained that the layoffs had the effect of reducing all the additional requirements or expectations that accumulated over the years of employment and instead reduced the employment relationship back to its most basic elements. Layoff survivors also explained that this increased role clarity and decreased amount of staff resulted in a decrease in role conflict between the remaining employees, although there is also far less cohesion in team decision making and that they perceive communication within the organisation as being poor overall. The second theme of reduced employee support was further divided into three sub-themes of decreased co-worker support, decreased managerial support and decreased organisational support. While layoff survivors experienced reduced support from the various stakeholders at their organisations, each group was characterised in a different manner. Organisational support was equated to the reduced salaries, limited training or development and restricted reward structures. Managerial support was identified as being comprised of the relationships between management and the layoff survivors and was described as feeling unappreciated by managers or being reduced to being just a number at the company. Lastly, reduced co-worker support was described as existing due to the lower number of co-workers and low motivation among remaining staff. However, on several occasions layoff survivors explained that they were actively trying to facilitate co-worker support. Past research has shown that employees develop a widespread belief that their organisation supports them to a certain extent (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986) and that this perceived support positively impacts the employees' commitment to their organisation (Meyer, Allen, & Gellatly, 1990). This support then strongly influences productivity and both physical and mental health among various other benefits (Klineberg et al., 2006; Uchino, 2006; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001).

The third objective of this article was to explore the experienced organisational commitment of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. Commitment was divided into three themes of slightly reduced affective commitment, decreased continuance commitment and a low normative commitment. Affective commitment provided mixed accounts and was divided into the sub-themes of emotional identification and loyalty to the organisation or desire to stay. Layoff

survivors indicated that while they understood what the organisation is going through and why the layoffs occurred, nonetheless they do not feel bad for the organisation and also do not identify with it emotionally. Emotional identification was rather associated with the organisation's managers and the difficulty of handling the layoff process as well as the knock-on effect that poor organisational performance can have on the layoff survivors in the future. Loyalty to the organisation or desire to stay of layoff survivors tended to fall into three categories with the majority explaining that while they are not actively seeking alternative employment, if a better offer was received, they would consider it. The other two categories of intentions received equal indications that either layoff survivors were actively seeking alternative employment or that any alternative offer of employment would be outright rejected as the survivor wants to remain at the organisation. Continuance commitment had the sub-themes of rewards offered by current organisation, rewards offered by other companies and cost of leaving identified. The first sub-theme of rewards was described by participants as being comprised by numerous appraisals by management but also almost a unanimous discontent with the lack of financial rewards, even though it was understood that financial rewards are not guaranteed and instead rely on organisational performance. While layoff survivors had some trouble explaining their thoughts on the rewards offered by other companies, it was understood that knowledge of the other company and the industry itself were two major influences in the appeal of those rewards. The cost of leaving seemed to be the most influential sub-theme on continuance commitment as layoff survivors attributed the cost of leaving not only to the possible financial loss but also to the lost relationships and knowledge that will be accrued when changing companies. Lastly, the theme of low normative commitment was identified within layoff survivors as even though there were frequent instances of organisations providing training, education or where family members were involved in the organisation, it was still found that most layoff survivors felt that they are not obligated to stay at the organisation and that the layoff survival removed any feelings of obligation that existed in the past. It is clear that three-component model of organisational commitment by Allen and Meyer (1990) not only exists within this sample but also functions as an extremely useful tool in exploring and explaining the various facets of commitment for layoff survivors including the reciprocated commitment to support as theorised by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armeli, and Lynch (1997).

The fourth objective of this article was to provide recommendations to management and future research on the perceived organisational support and organisational commitment of layoff survivors within the Namibian fishing industry. Recommendations to management emphasised the importance of increasing communication and the provision of layoff survivors both before and after the layoff event as it may help to minimise any anxiety or fear and will instead let layoff

survivors feel well-supported. Management should also attempt to inform layoff survivors of the potential layoffs far ahead of the minimum statutory requirements of 30 days as it will then allow all employees to prepare for the upcoming changes. Management should also attempt to minimise employee turnover as survivors who have long relationships with their organisations tend to react better to the layoffs. In addition, management should attempt to maintain reward patterns across the organisations and must avoid rewarding top management when lower level employees will not be able to receive any rewards, as this inequality in remuneration seems to lower perceived support. Above all, management should subscribe to social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) and invest in supporting employees. In return, the layoff survivors should exhibit higher levels of commitment to the organisation while also being less affected by the layoffs. Recommendations to future research should focus on expanding upon the respective differences found within the present research, especially when based on tenure, the types of relationships between employees and management and the influence of past support on layoff survivor reactions. Moreover, research should establish possible interventions that organisations can implement in order to maintain perceived organisational support and commitment. Lastly, a larger qualitative study should also be carried out to validate the findings of the present study on the relationship between perceived organisational support and commitment of Namibian layoff survivors within the fishing industry.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

As with all research, several limitations were found in the present study. The first set of limitations concern the framework of research. As qualitative research extracts information from a relatively small sample size, it may be that the answers that the participants provided may be highly personalised to their own contexts and may not be true to the majority of other layoff survivors. Additionally, despite the guarantee of anonymity, some participants appeared hesitant when discussing their managers or superiors and would often prefer to describe their own roles at the organisation. Therefore, this made some of the participants sensitive to the research. Participants were also apprehensive that the interviews were recorded for the purposes of transcribing at a later period and seemed conscious of the recorder's presence for the first few minutes, and would only become more comfortable after the first few questions would be answered. However, after the purpose of the recording was explained and anonymity was again guaranteed, participants then tended to feel more comfortable. Despite this, the actual presence of recording devices may have made the participants far more conscience of their own responses and in turn may have limited these responses, while also limiting the accuracy of the responses to the first few questions. Despite

the purpose and process of the interviews being explained to participants, some participants were more hesitant to openly communicate or to build rapport with the interviewer. Possible reasons for participants being more hesitant in the interviews may be due to their organisational cultures or own personalities. However, the interviewer tried to maintain a safe and open environment where the participant could feel comfortable

As briefly mentioned above, the study was limited by the sample size as willing participants within sensitive or vulnerable populations can often be difficult to find. Additionally, following a management decision, a fifth organisation exercised its right to withdraw from the study shortly before the interview process was to commence. The study was further limited by the time frame in which the interviews took place. As the study was cross-sectional, the participants were not interviewed prior to experiencing the layoffs, and the variance in time between the layoff events and the interviews taking place differed from organisation to organisation. Additionally, because the interview process required the exploration of topics for two separate articles, a deeper exploration of the subjective and psychological well-being was prevented, especially once participants began feeling fatigued with the entire interview process.

There were also limitations with regard to the nature of the research. Firstly, the focus on a homogenous sample, “Layoff survivors from a few companies within the Namibian fishing industry”, may have limited the findings to that particular group and restricts the usefulness of the findings on similar groups such as layoff survivors within the Namibian mining industry or marine industry. While inferences can still be extrapolated and applied to other similar groups, the very nature of the sample limits the accuracy of possible findings. Additionally, while the study was not designed for a particular group, gender or race, there was not a completely equal composition of participants as the majority were male, blue collar and Caucasian (white).

As with any qualitative study, there was rarely a set consensus of experiences between the layoff survivors, which may mean that individual factors can have a potential impact on the perceptions and reactions to layoffs and the various foci in the present research. It is possible that biographic and demographic variances such as age, tenure, education or gender among other groupings can have a drastic impact on the layoff survivor. At the same time, organisational-based differences could also account for some of the variation as there was no set standard or procedure that all the organisations followed in unison. Rather, the organisations all aimed to satisfy the statutory requirements while proceeding in a manner best suited to their unique situation and context.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite the various limitations as discussed above, several recommendations to future research and to practice can be made.

### **Recommendations for future research**

There are several possible recommendations that may improve the accuracy of the findings within future studies.

Due to foreign studies, often being haphazardly applied to African organisations, future studies may wish to examine other contexts such as the different sectors or even countries in order to determine whether the findings of the present study are accurate in other contexts (and if the findings are truly transferrable). Possible alternative industries within Namibia can be the mining, tourism, manufacturing or infrastructure industries as they represent the other largest industries within Namibia. Alternative countries of study, which may provide varying results as found within the present study, would be either Botswana or Angola as the two neighbouring countries share many similarities with Namibia in terms of economy and culture.

Future studies may also look at changing the research design from qualitative to that of quantitative to measure the trends related to these findings on a much larger sample size. The present study can then also be used as a pseudo-pilot study for a much larger and complex investigation on the entire industry. Future studies can also carry out quantitative research on the layoff survivors of several large fishing companies to compare the various approaches, outcomes and subsequent lasting effects associated with organisational restructuring accurately.

Ideally, a longitudinal approach of employees before and after a layoff event would provide the best findings. This would also allow the research to record the thoughts, feelings or behaviours of layoff survivors regarding their well-being, commitment or perceived organisational support as they are developing instead of being summarised after the event transpired as in the present research. Additionally, findings would not be affected by events following the layoffs and could instead focus on the impact of the layoffs and the possible influence of any prior events. However, it would be extremely difficult to find organisations willing to allow external research on a highly sensitive subject and to find willing participants in such a study.

Futures studies should strive to find larger samples from a wider variety of organisations as it can enhance the accuracy of findings. Also, while the present study included representation of both

men and women as well as from three different ethnic groups, future studies should attempt to find a more equal balance between the participants and should explore whether demographic and biographic differences can have any significant impact on the survivors' reactions. It is also recommended that future studies explore the impact of the survivors' various relationships, home-work balance and the impact of emotions on the survivors' motivation and performance as these aspects seemed to be most prevalent and influential within the present study.

Several aspects that seemed to have an influence on the experiences of layoff survivors within the present study should also be explored in future studies. These aspects include, but are not limited to, justice (procedural and administrative) during the layoff event and how it is handled, organisational citizenship, home-work interference/balance, an investigation of the relationships between the remaining survivors, burnout of layoff survivors and the different coping strategies and their effectiveness as used by layoff survivors. Fortunately for future researchers, layoff survivors is a group with relatively little research done on them and as such a plethora of possible studies exist.

Lastly, the organisations' capabilities to handle the layoffs seemed to vary depending on its size and financial position, as larger companies were more capable of maintaining financial incentives during difficult economic times. Smaller companies tended to have far richer channels of communication and better relationships between survivors and managers instead of financial reward structures. Future research may wish to explore the different handling styles of various organisations and then compare the outcomes of these handling styles in order to establish a best practice.

### **Recommendations for practice**

As the current study aimed at exploring the experiences of layoff survivors in terms of their perceived organisational support, commitment and well-being, there are several recommendations for practice, which can be used to improve upon these aspects.

As organisational support seems to enact the largest determining role within the layoff survivor's commitment and subsequent well-being, organisations should therefore focus on improving the perceived support shortly before and long after the layoff event as it is during those periods that survivors will shape their viewpoints and perceptions to the way they feel supported. Several past studies have developed upon the relationship that organisational support has on employee commitment (Burke, & Greenglass, 2001; Gould-Williams, 2003). It is disappointing that none of the organisations within the present study implemented any special interventions on the layoff

survivors following the periods of restructuring, and furthermore, that only two organisations could maintain the levels of support they exhibited before the layoffs. While it is understandable that financial support would decrease during difficult economic periods, alternative support structures and strategies can still be implemented and maintained by organisations. Three recommended methods through which organisations can improve the perceived support are improving the supply of information, monitoring stress and workloads and maintaining professional training and development.

Improving the supply of information both before and after layoffs may be the most effective proactive strategy that organisations can implement as Sutcliffe (2001) found that using information to shape identities and manage environmental interdependencies attributed to organisational effectiveness and legitimacy. Additionally, the HR practice of information sharing was among others found to moderate employee trust in the organisation (Dirks, & Ferrin, 2001; Gould-Williams, 2003). Employees who are afforded information may feel that they are a part of the restructuring process rather than being reduced to a number. In turn, the employees may have perceived this involvement into the restructuring process as the organisation looking at the individual and focusing discretionary effort into supporting him or her. The information that should be shared with the employees and layoff survivors can include the organisation's financial position, selection policies and predicted performance.

The second way through which organisations can improve their support of layoff survivors is to monitor stress and workloads actively. As workloads increase due to fewer employees available at the organisation to carry out work (Burke, 2003; Greenglass, Burke, & Moore, 2003; Qureshi, & Wasti, 2014), the associated stress of these workloads will inevitably also increase. As indicated in the present study, layoff survivors perceive themselves as working hard, yet often feel under-supported for the work they perform in their roles at the organisation. By actively monitoring the workloads of layoff survivors, organisations not only prohibit excessive stress and burnout in the remaining workforce, but also create a far less pressured working environment for the layoff survivors. Organisations can monitor workloads by analysing the number of working hours for layoff survivors each week; frequently meeting with layoff survivors to discuss their duties and the associated workloads and ensuring that the layoff survivors have the means to actually perform their duties.

The third manner through which organisations can improve the perceived support is by maintaining professional training and development throughout and after the restructuring period. As indicated in the present study, layoff survivors perceived their career development, professional

goals and purpose as slowing down. While it did not directly equate to survivors finding alternative employment in order to address these issues, as soon as their professional purpose influences their personal goals, survivors indicated that they are willing to make changes within their professional lives. In research, professional development has been shown to influence perceived organisational support, commitment, job satisfaction, improved resilience and workplace well-being in addition to reduced turnover, depression and stress (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009; Hart, & Rotem, 1995; Paré, & Tremblay, 2007; Rhoades, & Eisenberger, 2002). While it is understandable that organisations halt training and development to cut costs during periods of restructuring, the associated decrease in perceived support has a further impact in lowering all the above-mentioned aspects, among many others. Management may wish to maintain training and development as the direct costs of these programmes should be far less than the cost of turnover, recruiting new employees and then training the new employees up to a sufficient level.

Furthermore, it is recommended that organisations do not act in an authoritative position over layoff survivors by simply instructing them when the layoffs would occur and expect the survivors to simply cope afterwards. Instead, organisations should foster an environment of open communication and consultation with both layoff survivors and non-threatened employees to discover possible solutions to unique organisational issues. Organisations must also recognise that employees do not live in a vacuum and that events from work will influence their personal lives and vice versa. It was found that employees who perceived their organisations as taking an interest into their personal lives tended to feel better supported than other employees. Therefore, the key to flourishing after layoff survival may not be determined by how organisations treat employees at work but rather how organisations assist employees outside of work.

Given the importance of tenure and deeply developed relationships, organisations can deploy the last-in-first-out model when contemplating any organisational restructuring. Organisations should however contemplate reducing high salaries as a higher amount of low-income layoff survivors could be more beneficial than only a few high-earning layoff survivors, especially given the propensity for survivors to find alternative employment soon after the layoff event. Contrarily, the study also found that very new employees reacted more favourably than employees who had been at the organisation for a few years. It may be advisable that voluntary retrenchments should be offered to middle-tenured staff and retention of short- and long-tenured employees be emphasised by the organisation.

Layoff procedure followed by organisations can also be heavily improved upon, especially in cases where organisations aim to satisfy minimum statutory requirements instead of far surpassing them.

Any dismissal due to operational requirements only requires one month's notice. However, organisations can improve upon this notice but continually provide feedback to employees on the company's financial position and productivity, even in times when layoffs are not necessarily considered. Furthermore, by allowing employees to provide alternative suggestions or ideas, organisations encourage autonomy and control within their employees, which have both been found to have an impact on layoff survival reactions.

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## APPENDIX A – ETHICAL CLEARANCE



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28 March 2017

Mr C Paulsen  
53 Borchardt street  
POTCHEFSTROOM  
2531

Dear Mr Paulsen

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE

This letter serves to confirm that the research project of Carl Paulsen, with the title *"Exploring layoff survivors' experiences of organisational support, wellbeing and commitment in various Namibian fishing companies"* has undergone ethical review. The proposal was presented at a Faculty Research Meeting and accepted. The Faculty Research Meeting assigned the project number **EMSMHW16/09/21-01/01**. This acceptance deems the proposed research as being of minimal risk, granted that all requirements of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent are met. This letter should form part of your dissertation manuscript submitted for examination purposes.

Yours sincerely

Pieter Buys

Digitally signed by Pieter Buys  
DN: cn=Pieter Buys, o, ou=WorkWell  
Research Unit,  
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Date: 2017.03.28 11:29:18 +02'00'

Prof PW Buys  
Director: WorkWell Research Unit

CC: Dr M Jacobs

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28 March 2017

File reference: 2.2.2.20

## **APPENDIX B – INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

An exploration of layoff survivors' experiences on organisational support, well-being and commitment in various organisations within the Namibian fishing industry  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place from September, 2016 to March, 2017. This form details the purpose of this study, a description of the involvement required and your rights as a participant.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of layoff survivors of various organisations in the Namibian fishing industry, in terms of their subjective well-being, psychological well-being, organizational commitment and perceived organizational support.

The benefits of the research will be:

- To better understand the experiences of layoff survivors.
- To identify significant components that could help in maintaining the welfare of these individuals.
- To identify significant components that could help in maintaining the welfare of organisations following periods of restructuring.

The methods that will be used to meet this purpose will be through semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study or the methods I am using. Please contact me at any time at the e-mail address or telephone number listed on the following page.

Our discussion will be audio/video taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time.

You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In the event you choose to withdraw from the study all information you provide (including tapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

Insights gathered by you and other participants will be used in writing a qualitative research report, which will be read by my professor and other academics at the North-West University: Potchefstroom Campus. Though direct quotes from you may be used in the paper, your name and other identifying information will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent form I certify that I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to the terms of this agreement.

Subject's Understanding and Points of Agreement.

- I agree to participate in this study that I understand will be submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Magister Commercii* in Human Resources Management at North-West University: Potchefstroom Campus.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that all data collected will be limited to this use or other research-related usage as authorized by North-West University: Potchefstroom Campus.
- I understand that I will not be identified by name in the final product.
- I am aware that all records will be kept confidential in the secure possession of the researcher.
- I acknowledge that the contact information of the researcher and his advisor have been made available to me along with a duplicate copy of this consent form.
- I understand that the data I will provide are not be used to evaluate my performance as an employee in any way.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse repercussions.

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(Signature)

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(Date)

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Contact details of researcher: Carl-Heinz Paulsen: 081 232 7663 - c.paulsen.1991@gmail.com

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## APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Guide: (For researcher)

The **opening** should always make the respondent/interviewee feel welcomed and relaxed. In addition, the opening should clearly indicate the objectives of the interview and make it clear what topic areas will be addressed. The interviewer should also provide some information to motivate the respondent to answer the questions. Motivating the respondent might involve offering an incentive for participating or an explanation for how the information will be valuable to society. Finally, the opening should indicate the expected length of the interview.

**Body:** Beginning interviewers often rely on a moderately scheduled interview that contains major questions and possible probing questions under each. This schedule still allows some freedom to probe into answers and adapt to the situation. In addition this type of schedule aids in recording answers and is easier to conduct.

The **closing** should maintain the tone set throughout the interview and should be brief but not abrupt. Interviewers should summarize the main issues discussed during the interview, discuss the next course of action to be taken, and thank the respondent for his or her time.

**Sampling strategy:** The sampling strategy used in this study is a combination of both purposive and snowball sampling. The feature identified for purposive sampling is: An employee of a company within the fishing industry who has survived a layoff event within the previous 3 years.

Snowball sampling will be conducted by having each interviewee provide up to 4 possible participants, whereby two will be contacted for study participation.

**Opening** (This is not a script, just a guideline to opening)

A. (*Establish Rapport*) [shake hands and greet] My name is Carl-Heinz Paulsen, thank you for making some time available for the interview today. I very much appreciate your help with my research and I think that together we can make some meaningful contributions to the industry

B. (*Purpose*) The purpose of this study is to explore your well-being and interactions with your company in an industry which is characterised by high retrenchment rates and staff turnover. Hopefully, the information which you provide today can help to improve the working environment for everyone in a similar situation.

C. (*Motivation*) I would like to ask you some questions about your background, your well-being, some experiences you have had concerning the support the company has provided you, and how everything has affected your commitment to your company. I hope to use this information to help people that are in the similar situations as yourself, and to expand on the research of the topics that we will cover today. The information that you provide will be kept confidential and anonymous, and I will ensure that all the data is kept safe and out of other people's possession.

D. (*Time Line*) The interview should take about 45 minutes to an hour. The questions are broken up into 4 sections.

*Transition: Let me begin by asking you some quick demographic questions about yourself (Some of these do not need to be asked)*

**A. (Topic) General demographic information (ADMIN; NOT PART OF STUDY)**

What is your full name? \_\_\_\_\_

What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your current education level? \_\_\_\_\_

Male/Female. \_\_\_\_\_

What is your marital status? \_\_\_\_\_

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Race: \_\_\_\_\_

What is your home language or preferred language? \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked at your company? \_\_\_\_\_

(Transition to the first topic: To begin the exploratory questions today, I'd like to have us first look at how you feel regarding the way that your company supports or treats you since the layoff occurred. The first few questions are aimed at exploring this support that you perceive from your organisation.)

## **B. (Topic) Organisational support**

1. Do you feel that your company supports you well at this present stage when compared it to the support of the past?
  - i. How often does the company recognise your efforts and show that it cares about you and your well-being?
  - ii. What are some of the ways that the company encourages extra effort or show that they care about you?
  - iii. If you were to lodge a complaint or grievance in your company, how do you think your company would react?
    - 1) Do you think that the company would react the same way to another employee?
2. How can you company improve the support that they provide to you at present?
  - i. Emotionally? Example?
  - ii. Financially? Example?

(Transition to the next topic: Thank you. The next few questions are aimed to explore the other side of this employment relationship, namely how you experience your own commitment towards your organisation.)

## **C. (Topic) Organisational Commitment**

1. How would you describe your commitment to your organisation at this current stage?

- i. Do you feel less committed to your company at this present stage than in the past? Why so?
  - ii. How much personal meaning does your company have for you?
  - iii. How strongly do you identify with the issues that the company faces?
  - iv. How much do you feel as part of the family with your company?
2. Lead by asking if the individual understands the difference between loyalty and commitment.

How much of an impact does your loyalty to your company affect your commitment to it?

- i. Does it prevent you from leaving?
  - ii. Do you think people change companies too often?
  - iii. If you were approached by another company with better benefits, would you consider leaving?
3. Would you consider leaving even if you didn't have another job lined up?
  - i. In terms of the benefits which you receive from your company, what are some of the things you would need to sacrifice if you were to leave the organisation?
  - ii. In what ways do you feel obligated to stay at your organisation?

(Transition to the next topic: The next few questions that I'm going to ask are intended to explore your overall well-being. Firstly we're going to discuss the more emotional aspects of your well-being

#### **D. (Topic) Subjective well-being**

1. How would you describe your general satisfaction with your life at present when compared to past points in your life?
  - i. At home?
  - ii. At work?
  - iii. With friends?
2. When you think back about the recent past, what are some of the emotions which you experience most at work and why do you think you're experiencing them?
  - i. Would you say there are more negative or positive emotions?
  - ii. How has this affected your behaviour at work?
  - iii. How has this impacted your life outside of work?

(Transition to the next topic: The last few questions are intended to explore your psychological well-being.)

**E. (Topic) Psychological well-being**

1. What role does your personality play in letting you take charge of a situation?
  - i. If your opinions go against the general consensus, how does that affect it?
  - ii. What aspects of your personality give you the most confidence?
2. Why do you think it is important to have new and challenging experiences?
  - i. What are some of the challenges that you have recently faced?
3. How much do you feel that you have a clear purpose in life?
  - i. What provides you with a purpose?
  - ii. How do these experiences shape yourself and your world?
4. In what ways do you think other people, such as your co-workers or friends, would describe you?
  - i. Personality?
  - ii. Work-ethic?
  - iii. Emotionality?

(Transition: Thank you for all the information you've provided today, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you.)

**III Closing**

A. (Summarize) Well-being overall + Support and commitment.

B (Maintain Rapport) I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know for my research?

C. (Action to be taken) I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you at if I have any more questions? Thank you again. I will of course give you the opportunity to go through my findings and provide feedback or your thoughts on what I write.

(Shake hands and give participation gift)