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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
ORGANISATIONAL DOWNSIZING  
AND  
WORKPLACE ATTITUDES**

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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## ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to explore the relationship between employees' experiences of organisational downsizing and their subsequent work related attitudes. Measures of work attitudes included affective and behavioural commitment, turnover cognitions, trust in management, job security perceptions, job and work involvement, instrumentalism, and the degree to which employees regarded their job as a central life interest. Ten hypotheses were formulated and tested, with the general expectation being that downsizing experiences would be negatively related to the work attitudes in question.

A secondary aim of the research was to explore the role of a wide range of possible moderating variables in any observed relationship between downsizing experiences and employee work related attitudes, including employee age, tenure, job satisfaction, exposure to high-commitment HR work practices, the way in which the last downsizing experienced was conducted, and the time elapsed since the last downsizing experienced.

Organisational downsizing was operationally defined, for the purposes of this study, as the intentional reduction by management of a firm's internal labour force by using voluntary or involuntary redundancies. Data collection was by means of a self-completion postal questionnaire sent late in 2002 to a random national sample of 2000 urban residents. Usable responses were obtained from 424 participants, who did not differ markedly from the survey population in terms of gender, ethnicity or age. Just over a third (33.9%) had never worked in an organisation that had downsized (a non-equivalent control group), 31.4% had experienced a downsizing (Survivors) and 34.7% had experienced a downsizing and lost a job through redundancy (Redundant).

Tests of the hypotheses found clear relationships between the experience of downsizing and job security perceptions, instrumentalism, affective commitment, and trust in management, although not always in the directions predicted. Few moderator effects were identified, the most notable being that job security perceptions moderated the relationship between downsizing and trust in management, as well as affective commitment. Implications of these findings are discussed, together with their limitations. A theoretical model of the downsizing-work attitude relationships is also presented.

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