

**THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG JOB INSECURITY, LOCUS  
OF CONTROL, SENSE OF COHERENCE AND ORGANISATIONAL  
COMMITMENT OF SURVIVORS OF DOWNSIZING**

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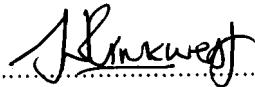
## ***DECLARATION***

“ I declare that *The Interrelationships among Job Insecurity, Locus of Control, Sense of Coherence and Organisational Commitment of Survivors of Downsizing* is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Shani Lucille Rinkwest

November 2003

Signed

  
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- To the memory of my parents, Esme Hilda Martinus and Ismail Alfred Appel. Love always.

## ***TABLE OF CONTENTS***

	<b><i>PAGE</i></b>
Abstract	
List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iv
Appendices	v
<b><i>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
1.1 Introduction	
1.2 The Context of the Study	4
1.3 Statement of the Problem	9
1.4 Aims of the Study	9
1.5 Hypotheses	9
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.7 Overview of Chapters	11
<b><i>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</i></b>	<b><i>12</i></b>
2.1 Definition of Terms	12
Locus of Control	12
2.1.1 Downsizing	12
Job Insecurity	12
Organisational Commitment	13
2.1.2 Sense of Coherence	14
2.2 Organisational Commitment	14



2.3	Job Insecurity	21
	The Need for Security Theory	23
2.4	Locus of Control	26
2.4.	Locus of Control in an Organisational Context	27
	Locus of Control and Expectancy Theory	28
2.5	Sense of Coherence	30
2.6	The Effects of Downsizing on Survivors	34
2.7	Summary	36
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b>		38
3.1	Sample	38
3.2	Measuring Instruments	39
	Job Insecurity Scale	39
	Work Locus of Control Scale	44
3.2.3	Sense of Coherence Scale	45
	Organisational Commitment Questionnaire	46
3.3	Procedure	47
3.4	Data Analysis	47
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS</b>		49
4.1	Demographic information regarding sample	49

4.2 Regression Analysis Results 50

Hypothesis 1 Regression hypothesis: Sense of Coherence,  
Job Insecurity and Locus of Control are valid predictors  
of Organisational Commitment. 50

4.3 Correlation Matrix of Variables 54

Hypothesis 2: Job insecurity is correlated with organisational  
commitment. The higher the job insecurity experienced,  
the lower the organisational commitment. 55

Hypothesis 3 Locus of control is correlated with job insecurity. The  
Degree to which locus of control is external, the higher  
the job insecurity. 55

Hypothesis 4: Locus of control is correlated with sense of coherence.  
The degree to which locus of control is external, the  
Weaker the person's sense of coherence. 55

Hypothesis 5: Locus of control is correlated with organisational  
commitment. The degree to which locus of control is  
external, the lower the organisational commitment 56

Hypothesis 6: Sense of coherence is correlated with job insecurity.  
A weaker sense of coherence is associated with higher

levels of job insecurity	56
Hypothesis 7 Sense of coherence is correlated with organisational commitment.	57
<b><i>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION</i></b>	58
5.1 Discussion of Findings: Regression Results	58
5.2 Correlation Analysis	61
5.3 Implications for Research and Practice	65
5.4 Limitations of the study	68
6. Recommendations and Conclusion	69
<b><i>REFERENCES</i></b>	72
<b><i>APPENDICES:</i></b>	81
Appendix	81
Appendix 2:	83

## *ABSTRACT*

Downsizing is one of the most common organisational reactions to organisational change. The effects of global competition, mergers, and the privatisation of public sector companies, among others, are forcing organisations in South Africa to resort to workforce reduction. The purpose of the present study was to address the lack of research on the impact of downsizing on survivors (i.e. employees who were not laid off). Specifically, the study examined the interactive effects of job insecurity, locus of control and sense of coherence on the organisational commitment of survivors. The sample included administrative staff members at the University of the Western Cape.

Four global measures including the job insecurity scale (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989), work locus of control scale (Spector, 1988), the sense of coherence scale (Antonovsky, 1984) and the organisational commitment questionnaire (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) were used to measure the above constructs.

The data analyses were statistically computed and analysed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Pearson product-moment correlation was used to assess the various bivariate relationships between the variables in the study. Hierarchical regression analyses were used to assess the main hypothesis which, not only focused at determining the multiple correlation among variables, but also at assessing the degree to which a linear combination of sense of coherence, job insecurity and work locus of control could explain the variance on organisational commitment.

The results of the regression analyses indicated a positive relationship between sense of coherence and organisational commitment. Internal work locus of control was found to be inversely associated with organisational commitment and job insecurity was not a significant predictor of organisational commitment. The correlation analyses revealed significant low correlations between job insecurity and organisational commitment, no relationship between work locus of control and job insecurity, a significant low negative correlation between internal work locus of control and sense of coherence, a negative correlation between work locus of control and organisational commitment, no significant relationship between sense of coherence and job insecurity and a low correlation between sense of coherence and organisational commitment.

The study concluded with recommendations to organisations regarding the effects of downsizing on survivors.

## ***LIST OF TABLES***

- Table 1      Model Summary of Regression Analyses: Sense of Coherence, Job Insecurity, and Work Locus of Control predicting Organisational Commitment.
- Table 2      Regression Models for Factors Influencing Organisational Commitment
- Table 3      Descriptive Statistics for the Predictors (Sense of Coherence, Job Insecurity, and Work Locus of Control) and Criterion Variable (Organisational Commitment).
- Table 4      Intercorrelations among Job Insecurity, Work Locus of Control, Sense of Coherence, and Organisational Commitment.

## ***LIST OF FIGURES***

Figure            The effects of Downsizing on Survivors

Figure 2        An integrative model of the impact of Downsizing on Survivors

## *APPENDICES*

Appendix 1 Covering letter

Appendix 2 Questionnaire



## *CHAPTER 1*

### *1.1 INTRODUCTION*

In the past decade, South African organisations have been forced to cope with major socio-political changes, prescriptive labour legislation, re-entry into global markets and the realities of a tightening and competitive economy. Furthermore, specific South African business trends such as unbundling, industry deregulation and the privatisation of public sector companies allowed new competitive forces in certain industries to develop, all of which necessitated organisational change (Vermeulen & Wiesner, 2000).

One of the most common reactions to organisational change has been to resort to some form of organisational restructuring, including downsizing, retrenchments, job loss, layoffs, right-sizing and re-engineering. According to Vermeulen and Wiesner (2000), these concepts all share “one common purpose, namely workforce reduction and job elimination” (p. 387). The terms downsizing, restructuring, job layoffs, and job loss will be used interchangeably in this study.

Employee downsizing has eliminated millions of jobs globally over the past three decades. In South African companies this process has been fairly prevalent since the beginning of the 1980's, taking its toll in 1997 and 1998 with a job loss of 104 000 during the first nine months of 1997 and 186 000 jobs during 1998 (Vermeulen & Wiesner, 2000). This escalation is likely to have a major impact

on worker morale, job performance and job security. Against this backdrop, the question of the effects of downsizing becomes more than of mere academic interest.

Downsizing can have a negative impact on both an individual and an organisational level. At the *individual level*, job loss impacts greatly on the emotional, social and psychological levels of both retrenched workers and the employees that are retained by the organisation. Common reactions include shock, denial, anger, depression, stress in coping, loss of self-esteem, etc. When organisations downsize, very little attention is given to those employees who remain with the organisation after downsizing (survivors), as the focus is mainly on those who lost their jobs. However, as with laid-off workers, the impact of downsizing on survivors are often more negative than positive. Robbins (1999, p. 32) calls this syndrome “layoff-survivor sickness”, which is defined as “the set of attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of employees who remain following involuntary employee reductions”. Common reactions of survivors include anger, low morale, decreased motivation, trust and job dissatisfaction, to name a few (Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly, & Greenberg, 2000). At the *organisational level*, these individual reactions in turn can have a negative effect on the performance and productivity levels of an organisation. Furthermore, many managers believe that downsizing can improve their financial performance, therefore downsizing remains invariably the first option for them.

Several research findings, however, have indicated that laying off workers in an attempt to improve financial performance and efficiencies, did not lead to desired or the intended outcomes (Cameron, 1994; Morris, 1998). Should employee commitment decline as a result of the downsizing, the organisation will experience a decline in productivity and profitability. Decreased levels of motivation and satisfaction among employees can result in a decreased willingness to exert more effort on behalf of the organisation (Peeverett, 1993; Greenhalg & Rosenblatt, cited in Borg & Elizure, 1992; Thornhill & Saunders, 1997).

Downsizing has been of great concern to organisations, students and practitioners, especially because of its impact on the work behaviours and attitudes of survivors notwithstanding the psychological and social impact on the laid off workers. A substantial amount of research has focused on the experience of job insecurity, organisational commitment and locus of control. Studies have indicated a relationship between job insecurity with reduced work effort, increased intention to leave the organisation and lower organisational commitment (Borg & Elizur, 1992). With regard to locus of control, studies indicated that people with different locus of control differed with regards to job insecurity (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). In light of the above, the purpose of the present study is to examine the interactive roles that job insecurity, locus of control, and sense of coherence play in affecting organisational commitment in an organisational context where job reduction (downsizing) has recently been experienced.

## **1.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

In South Africa, the Higher Education Sector is currently experiencing tough economic times. The decrease in student enrolments, the decrease in government funding and subsidies, resistance to increases in tuition and fees, all necessitate the control or reduction of discretionary costs in order to balance institutions' budgets and keep them functioning as viable businesses. At the University of the Western Cape (UWC) the decrease in student enrolments has had a negative impact on the subsidy. In 1996 the university's subsidy from the state was R155,18 million. In 1998 the subsidy decreased to R148,27 million (UWC Financial Reports, February 2001, p. 1). Despite the decreasing subsidy, the university's salary bill which consisted of 65% of the total income (R 158, 4 million) in 1996, increased to 70% of income (R 170,45 million) in 1997, with a further increase to 79% of income (R 176, million) in 1998 (UWC Financial Report, February 2001, p. 2). Since the payroll and fringe benefits comprise the largest line item in their budgets, institutions are looking more and more at staff cuts as cost containment efforts. Thus, many higher education institutions were and still are compelled to go through some form of change, including downsizing, dis-establishment of posts, freezing of posts, etc., all of which threaten the security of employees' jobs and their morale.

The present study investigates the effects of downsizing on survivors at the UWC, which has recently undergone major retrenchments. During 1999, the University faced serious financial difficulties.

The University of the Western Cape is a historically black national university, known for its struggle against oppression, discrimination and socio-political disadvantage. UWC purposefully positioned itself to assist the historically disadvantaged black communities partake fully “in the life of the nation” (Prospectus, 2002/3, p. 4). During 1980 four thousand one hundred and fifty-three (4153) students were enrolled at the university. Between 1980 and 1991 (with the exception of 1981 and 1986), there were sharp escalations in the number of student enrolments. During 1991, the student enrolment increased to 13 800 students (UWC, General Statistics, Workbook 1, 3 August 2001). Although many students from disadvantaged communities enrolled in increasing numbers, many were unable to pay the tuition fees. Given the university’s commitment to non-racialism and to the development of “Third World” communities in South Africa, a policy of leniency was adopted with those defaulting students who could not afford to pay their tuition fees, thus allowing students to pay off their debt and to continue their studies in an uninterrupted way.

Between 1996 and 1999, however, a drop in student enrolment occurred from 13 800 to 9 481 students. This translated in a decrease in student revenue from R 88,98 million in 1996 to R 73,6 million in 1999 with serious implications for the financial position of the university.

The financial position of the university was eroded by several factors:

- the drastic decrease in student enrolments, especially during the period from 1996 to 1998. This also had a negative impact on the subsidy; bad debts repayments. The students' inability to pay their fees resulted in an increase in bad debts. Coupled with this was the university's hardline reaction to outstanding fees, which resulted in a further decrease in student enrolments. The university was compelled to de-register students who were not able to settle their outstanding debts;
- the university's salary bill increased despite the decreasing subsidy

(Van der Schyff, 2000, personal communication).

While student enrolment was on the decrease, there were also an increase in staff. The staff complement of 1474 in 1995 increased to 2242 in 1997. This had major implications for the university, as well as for staff members. To cut costs, the university opted to downsize as a means to reduce the number of staff drastically. This had dire financial and psychological implications not only for those who were retrenched, but also for the staff members who were retained by the organisation. At that time, the university had a highly unionised labour force consisting of approximately 665 academic staff members and 1313 administrative staff members (Hollenbach, 2002, personal communication). Earlier in 1992 the university had signed a recognition agreement with the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), which was the representative body for the administrative staff members. The academic staff were represented by the University of the Western Cape Staff Union (UCASU). NEHAWU at UWC grew

into a strong union organising all levels of administrative staff. During 1998 NEHAWU entered into a substantive agreement with the university, which committed both parties to a consultation process of addressing the budget deficit. The 1998 downsizing process resulted in NEHAWU losing a significant portion of its membership and constituencies (Hollenbach, 2002, personal communication).

To be able to nurture and sustain its core business, which is the academic project, the long term financial viability of the university had to be protected. Therefore all Services, Administrative, Academic and Support positions had to be re-assessed to retain the necessary staff levels in a cost-effective way. As a result, the University's preferred approaches to handling the staffing situation included, among others:

- a radical proposal to outsource some of its support services;
- staff reduction in administrative departments; and
- offering voluntary severance packages to redundant staff members

(Van der Schyff, 2000, personal communication).

Several departments were outsourced namely Gardens and Grounds, Campus Protection Services, the Printing department, Food Service, the Transport Department, and Technical Services (partly).

Some Administrative departments were targeted for staff reductions. These departments included:

- Student Administration (vacant posts not filled);
- Finance Department ( dis-establishment of posts and freezing of posts);
- Human Resources Department (freezing of vacant posts)
- Library (dis-establishment of certain posts and freezing of posts)
- Residences (termination of contract and permanent posts);
- Information Technology Services (dis-establishment of post)
- Student Health Services (dispensing service was privatised);
- SAPSE Office ( termination of contract post); and
- Planning Unit (disbanded)

The voluntary severance package and retrenchment programme resulted in 456 employees leaving the university. The severance package costed the university R 29,6 million and it reduced the 1999 salary bill by R 27,9 million (UWC Financial Report, February 2001, p. 2)

The financial position of the University is, as yet, not stable. It appears more and more likely that further downsizing may be likely to take place in the future, if the financial position of the University does not improve drastically. Since employees are aware of this, and have access to information such as the number of student enrolments for each year, they are constantly aware of the tenuous position that the university finds itself in. This awareness, as well as the past downsizing exercise that took place, is likely to engender feelings of uncertainty regarding the security of their jobs. This uncertainty is likely to negatively impact



on job security, result in decreased levels of job satisfaction and motivation, and can generate distrust, and result in lower levels of organisational commitment. In summarising the existing literature in this area, most studies point toward a relationship between job insecurity, locus of control and organisational commitment. Whether this is the case for the participants of this study, will be the focus of the present investigation.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the interrelationships among job insecurity, locus of control, sense of coherence and how these variables relate to the organisational commitment of survivors (defined as employees who were not laid off) of downsizing. It is hypothesised that the recent downsizing in the organisation is likely to impact on these interrelations.

### **AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The specific aim of the present study is to determine how perceptions of job insecurity, employees' locus of control and sense of coherence, not only impact on each other, but also correlate with organisational commitment.

### **HYPOTHESES**

#### **(i) Regression Hypothesis:**

Sense of coherence, job insecurity, and locus of control are valid predictors of organisational commitment.

In addition, the following hypotheses were investigated:

Job insecurity is correlated with organisational commitment. The higher the job insecurity experienced, the lower the organisational commitment

Locus of control is correlated with job insecurity. The degree to which locus of control is external, the higher the job insecurity

Locus of control is correlated with sense of coherence. The degree to which locus of control is external, the weaker the person's sense of coherence.

(v) Locus of control is correlated with organisational commitment. The degree to which locus of control is external, the lower the organisational commitment.

(vi) Sense of coherence is correlated with job insecurity. A weaker SOC is associated with higher levels of job insecurity.

Sense of coherence is correlated with organisational commitment.

## ***1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY***

The importance of this study is to highlight the negative effects of downsizing on an individual and organisational level. The study can provide the organisation, workers and practitioners with an indepth understanding of how downsizing impact on survivors both psychologically and behaviourally. This understanding could enable the organisation to take active steps in helping employees to cope with the situation, by for example, the implementation of group counselling or workshops, as well as individual counselling sessions when necessary. Furthermore, the study could inform organisations about the broader

implications of downsizing on the morale, attitude and behaviour of surviving employees.

## **1.7 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter One has outlined the background to the study, the aims, significance and the hypotheses of the study. Chapter Two comprehensively defines the central constructs, and presents the literature review of the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study. Chapter Four describes the results and a discussion of the results and recommendations follows in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

The following definitions will be used in this study.

##### ***LOCUS OF CONTROL (LOC)***

According to Spector (1982), locus of control refers to the extent to which people attribute the cause or control of events either to themselves (internal), or to the external environment (external). Internal control refers to “individuals who believe that reinforcements are contingent upon their own behaviour, capacities or attributes” (Anderson, 1977, p. 446). These individuals are referred to as internals. External control refers to “individuals who believe that reinforcements are not under their personal control but rather are under the control of powerful others, luck, chance, fate, etc.” (Anderson, 1977, p. 446). These individuals are referred to as externals.

##### ***DOWNSIZING***

Downsizing is defined as the process of reducing an organisation’s workforce and idle assets in order to reduce costs and improve efficiency (Robbins, 1999)

##### ***JOB INSECURITY (JI)***

Job insecurity is defined as “the perception of the potential loss of continuity in a job situation that can range from permanent loss of the job itself, to loss of valued

job features. The loss must be involuntary, for if it is not, the individual is not powerless to maintain the continuity of the position and therefore true job insecurity would not be experienced” (Petzall, Parker, & Stoeberl, 2000, p. 595)

#### ***2.1.4 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT (OC)***

Organisational Commitment is defined as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organisation” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulain, cited in Cooke, 1997, p. 431). There are two approaches to commitment namely the attitudinal approach and the behavioural approach, as well as three types of commitment: affective, continuance and normative commitment.

**Attitudinal Commitment** “develops as a result of some combination of work experiences, perceptions of the organisation, and personal characteristics, which lead to positive feelings about an organisation which in turn becomes commitment” (Brown, 1996, pp. 230-231).

**Behavioural Commitment** refers to “a state or position of commitment that a person attains as a result of engaging in committing behaviours that, in effect, make it costly to subsequently reverse a position or disengage from some line of activity” (Brown, 1996, p. 231)

**Affective Commitment** refers to “a set of strong, positive attitudes toward the organisation manifested by dedication to goals and a shared sense of values” (Brown, 1996, p. 231)

**Continuance Commitment** is defined as “a member’s dedication to the survival or continuance of an organisation caused by requiring members to make investments and sacrifices such that it becomes difficult for them to leave or detach” (Kanter, cited in Brown, 1996, p. 231).

**Normative Commitment** refers to “a perceived obligation to remain with the organisation (i.e., individuals stay with the organisation because they feel they should)” (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997, p. 444).

### ***2.1.5 SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)***

Sense of coherence is “a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that

the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable;

the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli;  
and

these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement”

(Antonovsky, cited in Strumpfer, 1990, p. 268)

## ***2.2 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT (OC)***

Recent workforce trends such as downsizing have jeopardised employee commitment and morale in organisations to a large extent. Issues such as job insecurity, powerlessness, loyalty, trust in management, and identification, can all influence the commitment of a workforce. In the long run, the outcome of this

often has a negative impact on motivation and performance. In recent years, organisational commitment (OC) has become a well-known research topic especially because of the powerful “motivational implications of commitment” (Brown, 1996, p. 230). Although organisational commitment has been defined and measured in several different ways, these definitions all share a common theme; that is, organisational commitment is considered to be a bond or linking of the individual to the organisation (Furnham & Cooper, 1996). Two approaches to commitment have been identified namely, the attitudinal approach and the behavioural approach, as well as three types of commitment: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Combined, these concepts form a “typology” of OC, with “different types associated with various development factors and outcome implications” (Brown, 1996, p. 232). According to Brown (1996, pp.230-231), *the attitudinal approach* is based on the premise that commitment ‘develops as a result of some combination of work experiences, perceptions of the organisation, and personal characteristics, which leads to positive feelings about an organisation, which in turn becomes commitment’. This approach holds the view that people with positive attitudes are “predisposed” to give their commitment as an exchange for “anticipated” future rewards (Angle & Perry, cited in Brown, 1996). Affective, continuance and normative commitment have been linked to this particular approach and are also known as attitudinal commitment.

*The behavioural approach* holds the view that “a person attains a state or position of commitment as a result of engaging in committing behaviors that, in effect, make it costly to subsequently reverse a position or disengage from some line of activity” (Brown, 1996, p. 231). This “activity” involves staying with the organisation, and the perceived costs associated with discontinuing the activity such as leaving, might include the loss of attractive benefits and seniority, the disruption of personal relations created by moving to another location, the effort of seeking a new job, etc.

Within the attitudinal domain, *affective commitment* refers to “a set of strong, positive attitudes toward the organisation manifested by dedication to goals and a shared sense of values” (Brown, 1996, p. 23 Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, cited in Cooke, 1997, p. 43 Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989, p. 52) defined commitment as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organisation” Their organisational commitment questionnaire (OCQ) has become the most widely used operationalisation of OC. Affective commitment thus, stems from the kinds of positive experiences that come with the attitudinal process of development (Brown, 1996)

*Continuance commitment* has been described as “a member’s dedication to the survival or continuance of an organisation caused by requiring members to make investments and sacrifices such that it becomes difficult for them to leave or



detach” (Kanter, cited in Brown, 1996, p. 231). It refers to the costs involved by leaving the organisation (i.e., individuals stay with the organisation because they need to) (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997, p. 444).

Finally, *normative commitment* was described as “a perceived obligation to remain with the organisation (i.e., individuals stay with the organisation because they feel they should)” (Irving, Coleman, & Cooper, 1997, p. 444). A considerable amount of research has been conducted on OC over the past 15 years. With regard to reliability and validity, consistently high correlations have been obtained for commitment and measures of job satisfaction and withdrawal cognitions (which include behavioural intentions to quit or remain) (Cooke, 1997).

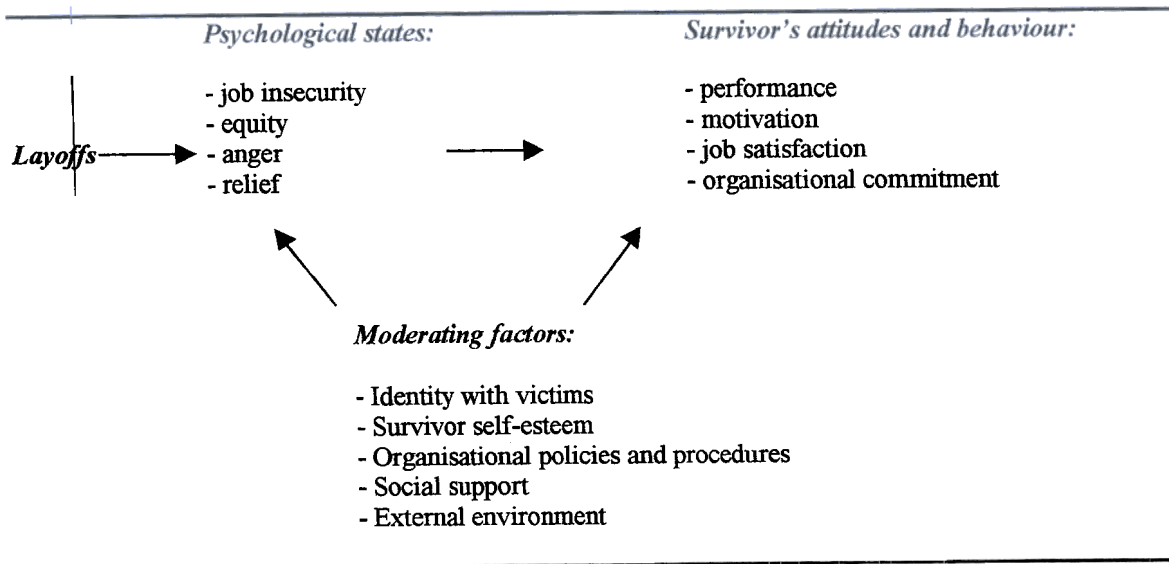
Past literature reviews have found the impact of downsizing on survivors to be more negative than positive (Kozlowski, Chao, Smith, & Hedlund, cited in Grunberg et al., 2000). It is common and understandable for survivors of downsizing to display negative reactions such as less job involvement, decreased job satisfaction, reduced work effort and reduced organisational commitment. These negative reactions may lead to a decrease in productivity and quality, and an increase in the turnover of the most valued employees. Research has indicated that the affective and attitudinal attachments to organisations that employees develop, which show up as high levels of commitment, satisfaction and trust, are often threatened by feelings of job insecurity. Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989)

hypothesized that job insecurity is negatively related to employees' commitment and trust in an organisation. They argued that these relationships are primarily the result of insecure employees who lose faith in the dependability of the organisation, and as a result, their attachment to the organisation may decrease. Their findings indicated that job insecurity is associated with a decrease in organisational commitment, trust in an organisation, and job satisfaction, and with an increase in intentions to quit. However, research findings of Brockner and his associates (1985, 1987, 1992) indicated that survivors' reactions to downsizing may vary according to:

- how close survivors are to those who have left,
- how they assessed the fairness of the organisation's behaviour during the downsizing process,
- the survivors' prior level of identification with the organisation,
- their level of self-esteem, and  
their sense of job insecurity

(cited in Grunberg et al., 2000; Robbins, 1999)

**Figure 1 The Effect of Downsizing on Survivors**



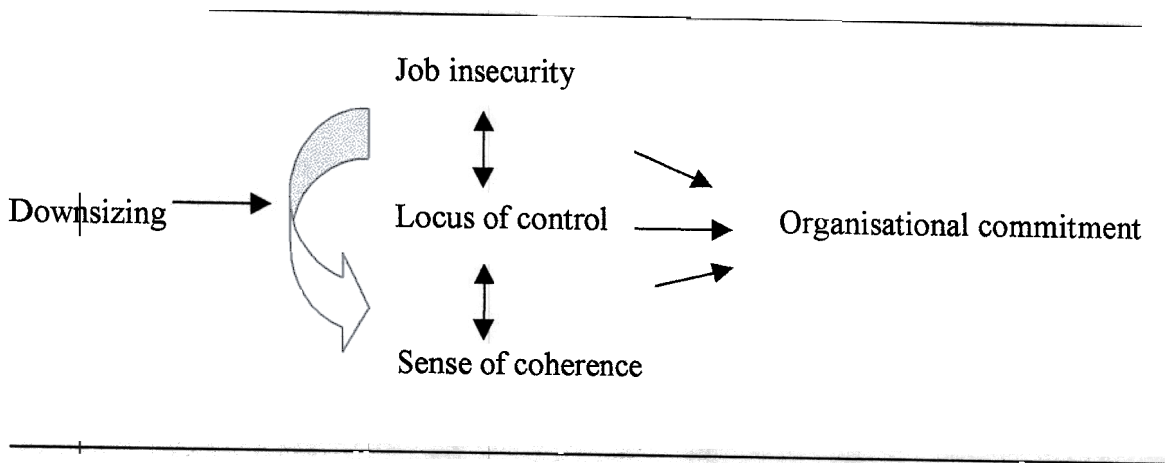
*(Brockner, cited in Robbins, 1999).*

In a model depicting the effects of downsizing on survivors, Robbins (1999) indicated that downsizing has the potential to create psychological states within survivors such as feelings of job insecurity, being over-rewarded, anger, and/or relief among survivors and that these psychological states in turn have the potential to affect survivors' attitudes and behaviour such as their work performance, motivation levels, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. He further argued that whether layoffs actually lead to those psychological states and work outcomes depend on a number of moderating factors such as identity with the dismissed employees, the degree of survivor self-esteem, organisational policies and procedures, social support and other external conditions such as alternative job opportunities for victims, etc. (cited in Robbins, 1999). See Figure 1 for a diagram of the model.

Grunberg, Anderson-Connolly and Greenberg (2000) also studied the variations in how layoffs are experienced by survivors. They hypothesised that the effects of downsizing on survivors' level of organisational commitment and job performance will vary according to (a) how close employees are to layoffs, (b) their perceptions of the fairness of the layoffs and (c) their position in the organisation hierarchy. Their results indicated that, although perceptions of layoff unfairness were associated with lower commitment regardless of employee position, close contact with layoffs was associated with the greater use of sick hours by surviving managers and professionals, but with lower use of sick hours and higher work effort by employees in lower positions.

It is thus clear that, with regards to the effect of downsizing on organisational commitment, the outcome of various studies has indicated a variety of different results in the past. Although there are a number of previous research studies on the impact of JI and LOC on organisational commitment, little studies exist that examined the inter-relationships among job insecurity, locus of control and sense of coherence with organisational commitment. The present study supports the model developed by Brockner (1988) as outlined in Figure 1 above, which describes how downsizing has the potential to create psychological states and these in turn, may affect survivors' attitudes and behaviour. The primary aim/objective is to examine how the above correlated variables impact on organisational commitment as outlined in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2** An integrative model of the impact of downsizing on survivors



### 2.3 *JOB INSECURITY (JI)*

A major shift has occurred over the past decade involving the assumptions that underlie organisational performance, efficiency and effectiveness. This shift in assumptions has resulted in downsizing becoming a popular organisation-wide intervention for improving effectiveness (Luthans & Sommer, 1999). One of the major consequences of this is a shift away from secure employment towards increased job insecurity (Baruch & Hind, 1999). Job insecurity (JI) has been defined by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984, p. 438) as “powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation.”

It is argued that JI is the most common reaction/outcome of downsizing among employees who are retained in organisations (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). The term “survivor syndrome” was developed to refer to those people that are left in the organisation after major downsizing or job lay-offs. These people often experience the adverse effects of change as profoundly as those who have left.

Survivor syndrome has a number of negative consequences that can be destructive on survivors. These include dysfunctional impacts on commitment, loyalty and performance as well as JI and fear of further restructuring, among others (Baruch & Hind, 1999).

According to research on JI, employees and organisations enter into a psychological contract in which both parties has certain expectations of what each will receive and give (Van Rensburg, 1994) These contracts provide both parties with “a sense of mastery- a sense that they can reasonably control (or failing that, at least predict) events in their personal worlds” (Ashford et al 1989, p. 805). Ashford et al 1989, p. 805) further argued that “given the importance of this sense of control or predictability in people’s lives, organisational, job or personal characteristics that threaten such control should induce strong reactions, one of which is feelings of insecurity Organizational change, including downsizing/retrenchments, mergers, reorganisations, new technologies and new physical dangers were often reported to be major threats to employees’ sense of control (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) Brockner, cited in Ashford, Lee and Bobko (1989, p. 806), argued that retrenchments are direct causes of JI among employees that survive staff cuts. These changes revoke employees’ psychological contract, and cause them to experience lack of control and attendant anxiety Such changes also threaten contracts because jobs can either suddenly change or become redundant. Finally, even rumors in change situations can cause feelings of insecurity or unwarranted insecurity, since such information are often

inaccurate and inconsistent (Schweiger & Ivancevich, 1985 cited in Ashford et al., 1989, p. 806). It was thus argued that major organisational changes should lead to an increase in JI (Ashford et al., 1989).

In the study conducted by Ashford et al (1989) to assess the causes and consequences of JI, the JI measure's reliability and construct validity were compared to those of two existing global measures of JI. The results revealed that "personal, job, and organisational realities associated with a perceived lack of control were correlated with measured JI" (Ashford et al. 1989, p. 803). In their

Ashford et al (1989) hypothesised that organisational change, role ambiguity, role conflict and LOC were causes of JI. Their results revealed that, although role conflict was not related to JI, organisational change, role ambiguity and external LOC were associated with increased JI and were therefore consistent with the arguments that those elements engender a feeling of lack of predictability and control" (Ashford et al 1989, p. 817). Ashford et al (1989) also hypothesised that JI leads to intentions to quit, and lowered organisational commitment, -trust, and -job satisfaction. Their results indicated that JI was associated with decreased commitment, trust in an organisation and job satisfaction, and with increased intentions to quit (Ashford et al. 1989).

### *The need for security theory*

A sense of security, as highlighted by Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs, is a physiological as well as a social need that serves as a basic human

motivating factor. When that need is not met, people focus their efforts primarily on gaining a sense of security (Carrell, Elbert, Hatfield, Grobler, Marx & Van der Schyff 1998). Downsizing obviously threatens the survivors' feelings of security. They do not know how to protect themselves and this sense of powerlessness of being unable to secure their futures, intensifies the insecurity they experience as survivors of downsizing. As a result, JI can have a profound impact on the performance of survivors. In an organisational setting, job security is an important motivating force for employees. The underlying basis of need theories is that employees are motivated to increase their job performance by their individual striving to satisfy certain needs (Arnolds & Boshoff, 2000). Thus, once survivors are unsure of the status of their positions, the insecurity they experience can negatively affect their job performance and productivity (Dunlap 1994).

The level of job insecurity experienced may depend on two things namely perceived threat and perceived control (Greenhalg & Rosenblatt, 1984). Perceived threat is affected by issues such as estimated likelihood of losing one's job, whereas perceived control is affected by survivors' belief that they or the organisation can do something to remedy the negative consequences of job loss (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, cited in Dunlap, 1994). This two component model suggests that survivors' level of job insecurity should be

- highest when perceived threat is high and perceived control is low
- lowest when perceived threat is low and perceived control is high; and



- moderate when both threat and control are high or low

Thus, high levels of job insecurity are likely to be an indication that survivors are unmotivated because of their belief that more layoffs are likely and that they or the organisation can do very little to remedy the negative consequences of being laid off. According to Greenhalg and Rosenblatt (1984), these perceptions are likely to lead to feelings of helplessness, which in turn affect motivation (cited in Dunlap, 1996). In order to counter their feelings of insecurity, survivors spend their time concentrating on how they can protect themselves or their positions, rather than focusing on their performance or on being productive. According to Dunlap (1996), the need for security therefore has an impact on employees' level of effort after a downsizing exercise. However, Brockner, Grover, Reed and De Witt (1992) examined the argument of Greenhalg et al. (1984) by studying the relationship between job insecurity and work effort of survivors after a downsizing exercise. They, however, found a positive correlation between high job insecurity and a low level of effort displayed by survivors. Survivors may be too concerned about their jobs, that they focus their attention and energies on politicking and protecting their jobs, rather than on performing their duties and responsibilities or producing a product. Individuals with a high economic need to work however, may counter their feelings of insecurity by doing whatever they feel is necessary to secure their futures with the company (Dunlap, 1994). Research outcomes on job insecurity have indicated a negative relationship between job insecurity and employee commitment and motivation (Borg & Dvornik, 1992).

In conclusion, downsizing thus creates feelings of job insecurity (psychological state) within survivors. As was indicated by Brockner (1988), job insecurity is mainly brought about by the fact that survivors are now constantly worried whether additional layoffs will occur, and whether they will be included in the next round of layoffs (cited in Robbins, 1999). Job insecurity in turn, affects the organisational commitment of survivors.

Job insecurity also has a significant impact on employees' LOC. How severe that impact is, will depend largely on whether the person has an internal or external locus of control. Higher levels of JI are associated with external locus of control. Since LOC relates directly to the perceived powerlessness dimension of job insecurity, externals are more likely to experience high levels of powerlessness as a result of the downsizing. They will therefore feel that they can do little to remedy the negative effects of downsizing.

#### **2.4 *LOCUS OF CONTROL (LOC)***

The concept of LOC was derived from Rotter's (1954) social learning theory and has been defined as a generalised expectancy variable concerning reinforcement (Goodstadt & Hjelle, 1973; Rotter, 1966). The concept posits two characteristic views namely, that "people attribute the cause or control of events either to themselves, or to the external environment" (Spector, 1982, p. 482). Individuals who attribute control of events to themselves have an internal LOC and are referred to as "internals", and those who attribute control of events to outside

forces such as luck, chance, fate or powerful others are said to have an external LOC and are referred to as “externals” (Spector, 1982; Furnham & Steele, 1982). Internal-external LOC thus refers to the extent to which an individual attributes success and failure as being contingent upon personal initiative (Andrisani & Nestel, 1976).

With regard to the validity of the LOC concept, a number of studies that has been conducted indicated that internals perceive more often than externals that events are due to their own actions and that they have more choices in situations (Roak; Hammer & Vardi; Harvey, Barnes, Sperry, & Harris, cited in Spector, 1982). Studies also indicated that internals do not only perceive greater control, but they may have the tendency to seek situations that they can control. there appeared to be an interactive relationship between LOC and experience, that is, LOC may influence behaviour and the consequences of behaviour may in turn influence LOC (Spector, 1982)

#### ***2.4.1 Locus of control in an organisational context***

According to Spector (1982), the basic distinguishing characteristic between internals and externals' belief in personal control, should have direct and powerful effects on organisations in several ways. First, because of the tendency of internals' to believe that they can control the work setting through their behaviour, they should strive to exercise more control than would externals, on condition that control is perceived to lead to desired outcome and rewards

(Spector 1982). If a situation cannot provide desired outcomes, the internal should not differ from the external in attempts at control. Attempts of internals to control the work setting might be apparent in a number of ways; e.g., work flow task accomplishment, operating procedures, work assignments, relationships with supervisors and subordinates, working conditions, goal setting, work scheduling and organisational policy (Spector, 1982, p. 485). According to Spector (1982) 'the factors on which control attempts focused would be determined by the potential rewards each carried and by the constraints within the organisational setting' p. 485).

### *Locus of Control and Expectancy theory*

According to Spector (1982), most studies of job motivation involving LOC, have been attempts to validate expectancy theory hypotheses. The theory posits two types of expectancies, namely, that "effort will lead to good performance and that good performance will lead to rewards" (Spector, 1982, p. 487). The first expectancy is more a belief in personal effectiveness, i.e., the person can perform well if he/she makes the effort. This belief is similar to self-esteem, in terms of self-perceived ability on the job. The second expectancy is the belief that good performance will be rewarded, i.e., good performers will be rewarded (Spector,

Spector (1982) argued that this is similar to a "belief in justice in the work world that is much like the concept of equity - the person who provides more inputs (good performance) receives more outcomes (rewards)" (p. 487). Thus, individuals who hold both expectations strongly, will experience high job

motivation and will, “(within limits of ability and organisational constraints)”, perform well (Spector, 1982, p. 487). Thus, taking the above theory into account internals should have higher expectancies of both varieties than externals, that is, internals should be more likely to believe that their efforts will result in good performance, and they should have stronger beliefs in their own competence. Thus, they should display greater self-esteem and should also hold greater expectancies that good performance leads to rewards and they would be more likely to perceive the job situation as more equitable than externals do (Spector,

Studies conducted that involved expectancy theory and the LOC variable, all showed consistencies in demonstrating the hypothesised relation that internals have higher expectancies that effort will result in good performance and that performance in turn will lead to rewards (Spector, 1982)

Since locus of control is a personal factor, it is argued that it should directly relate to the perceived powerlessness dimension of job insecurity. According to Ashford et al., (1989), internals generally see environmental events as having less impact and believe that they have the power to counteract whatever threats their environment may pose. Anderson, for example, found that internals took more active steps to directly tackle the threats of a business loss (cited in Ashford et al.

Thus, since internals have higher expectancies that their efforts will result in good performance, and that performance will lead to rewards, their experience of job insecurity should be minimal, because the “rewards” may be construed as a belief that they will be retained by the organisation in the event of future layoffs

They will also therefore not experience a decrease in organisational commitment and should have a strong SOC.

## 2.5 ***SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC)***

Sense of Coherence (SOC) is a psychological construct that forms part of the paradigm of salutogenesis which attempts to explain the origins of health or wellness (Strumpfer & Mlonzi, 2001). Sense of Coherence is defined as “*a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that*

- *the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predicatable and explicable,*
- *the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli;*  
*and*
- *these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement”*

(Antonovsky, cited in Strumpfer, 1990, p. 268).

The concept includes three components namely, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

***Comprehensibility*** refers to “the extent to which individuals perceive stimuli that confront them as making cognitive sense, as information that is ordered, consistent, structured and clear-and hence, regarding the future, as predictable” (Antonovsky, 1984, p. 18).

*Manageability* refers to “the extent to which people perceive that resources are at their disposal that are adequate to meet the demands posed by stimuli” (Antonovsky, 1984, p. 118). According to Strumpfer (1990), the available resources may either be under the individual’s own control, or under the control of legitimate others who have the power to resolve matters in the person’s interest, for example a spouse, relatives, friends, etc. The resources, generalised or specific, are only potentially available; it depends entirely on the person to make use of those resources in order to cope with stressors. Through repeated experience of the availability of the resources, a strong sense of coherence develops. The SOC is a dispositional orientation that allows people to choose appropriate ways of dealing with stressors. People with a stronger SOC tend to show a “readiness and willingness to exploit the resources that they have at their potential disposal” (Strumpfer & Mlonzi, 2001, p. 30). Cohen made a notable point that the mere perception that help is available may operate, without any actual support being provided (cited in Strumpfer, 1990, p. 269).

*Meaningfulness* can be seen as the emotional counterpart to comprehensibility (Antonovsky, 1984). It refers to “the extent to which the person feels that life makes sense emotionally, rather than cognitively. At least some of the problems and demands of living are felt to be welcome challenges motivating one to invest energy” (Strumpfer, 1990, p. 269).

According to Strumpfer (1990, p. 269), a person with a weak sense of coherence in terms of the above constructs “would perceive internal and external stimuli as

noise, not information, as inexplicable disorder and chaos, and as unpredictable in future; the person would experience the events of life as unfortunate things that happen to him/her and victimise him/her unfairly; and the person would feel that nothing in life mattered much or worse, are unwelcome demands and wearisome burdens” However, Strumpfer (1990) noted that having a strong SOC does not necessarily mean that the person would view his/her entire world as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful, but that the person can maintain a strong SOC by setting certain boundaries (some narrow and some wide) for him/herself. What happens outside these boundaries does not matter much. For some, the scope may be very wide, and for others, it might be relatively narrow (Antonovsky, 1984). Some people may for example have less interest in national government or international politics, etc. and still have a strong SOC (Strumpfer, 1990). However, there are four spheres that must be taken into account to maintain a strong SOC, namely:

feelings;

- immediate interpersonal relations;
- the major sphere of activity (work); and
- the existential issues of death, inevitable failures, shortcomings, conflict and isolation.

Antonovsky further expressed the view that “flexibility about those life areas included within the boundaries may be an effective way of maintaining a coherent view of one’s world, by temporarily or permanently contracting from an area



whose demands are becoming less comprehensible or manageable, or by including new areas within the boundaries” (cited in Strumpfer, 1990, p. 269).

While Antonovsky’s references to work are in the context of work experiences that strengthen the SOC, it seems evident that the SOC must also impact significantly on how work is approached and performed (Strumpfer, 1990).

According to Strumpfer, a strong SOC would result in the person:

- *‘making cognitive sense of the workplace, perceiving its stimulation as clear, ordered, structured, consistent and predictable information;*
- *perceiving his/her work as consisting of experiences that are bearable, with which the person can cope, and as challenges that the person can meet by availing him/herself of personal resources or resources under the control of legitimate others; and*
- *making emotional and motivational sense of work demands, as welcome challenges, worthy of engaging in and investing his/her energies” (in Strumpfer, 1990, p. 270).*

An orientation to work as outlined above, will lead to productive performance, recognition, reward and promotion. Furthermore, these experiences will become work-related generalised resistance resources (GRR’s) that will strengthen the SOC even further (Strumpfer, 1990).

Studies that were conducted using the SOC scale, indicated clear relationships to both health-related and work-related variables (Strumpfer & Louw; Danana, cited in Strumpfer, 1990; Strumpfer et al., 2001). However, little literature exists on the relationship of SOC with LOC and JI. Also little studies exist in relation to downsizing. When relating SOC to the context of the present study, it could be argued that, since SOC is a disposition which allows individuals to select appropriate strategies to deal with stressors, therefore confronting them, downsizing can be viewed as a major organisational stressor that survivors must confront and deal with. Therefore, how survivors experience downsizing will depend on the strength of their SOC. Thus, a stronger SOC should be associated with an internal LOC, lower levels of JI experienced and with higher levels of organisational commitment.

## **2.6 THE EFFECTS OF DOWNSIZING ON SURVIVORS**

Research on downsizing has indicated a number of negative consequences for both individuals and organisations. The term survivor syndrome which was coined to refer to the effects of downsizing on survivors, involves a decrease in organisational commitment, loss of morale, reduced trust and increased levels of job insecurity, anger, job stress and resistance to change. Survivors may respond in the above ways due to the organisation breaking its psychological contract with them (West, 2002). The psychological contract – what employees and employers expect to give and receive from each other- “changes dramatically in the new

environment, the most significant change being the lack of job security offered to survivors” (Brewster, Dowling, Grobler, Holland, & Warnich, 2000, p. 7).

Vermeulen and Wiesner (2000) studied the effects of downsizing on survivors in the South African public sector (n=158) and private sector (n=71). Their analysis of the effects indicated decreased levels of employee morale (75.4% of cases), commitment (68.8% of cases), and motivation (70% of cases). Horsted and Doherty also found in their survey of 170 Financial Service personnel, who went through large scale involuntary redundancy programmes, “decreased motivation, morale, confidence and loyalty, and increased stress, skepticism, anger and bitterness, which they called survivor syndrome” (cited in Burchell, 1999, p. 4)

The job insecurity experienced as a result of downsizing is another factor adding to the stress and anxiety of survivors. Burchell (1999), for example, found a direct causal link between job insecurity and psychological well-being, which includes anxiety, depression and stress. Research also indicated that job insecurity caused social and individual problems. Hughes and Galinsky found job insecurity to be linked with quality of marital interactions, Larsen et al. with family dysfunction and Lampard with marital breakdown (cited in Burchell, 1999).

In recent developments on job insecurity research, it was found that job insecurity does not affect all individuals equally. Roskies et al. found Canadian employees

with positive attributes, were harder to job insecurity than those with a generally more negative outlook on life (cited in Burchell, 1999, p. 1).

Ashford et al. (1989) operationalised Greenhalgh et al.'s (1984) model of job insecurity mentioned in 2.4.1 above. In their research on the causes and consequences of job insecurity, they found that personal, job and organisational realities associated with a perceived lack of control are correlated with measured job insecurity. Job insecurity in turn leads to attitudinal reactions – intentions to quit, reduced commitment, and reduced satisfaction.

## 2.7 SUMMARY

The present study specifically examines the impact of job insecurity, locus of control and sense of coherence (psychological states) on organisational commitment (work attitude) of survivors at an organisation that had experienced downsizing recently. The present study is based on Brockner's (1988) model, which describes how downsizing has the potential to create psychological states within survivors such as feelings of job insecurity, being over-rewarded, anger and/or relief among survivors and that these psychological states in turn have the potential to affect survivors' attitudes and behaviour such as their work performance, motivation levels, job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

As the literature indicated, downsizing has become increasingly prevalent in today's work environment - the primary objective being to increase the efficiency,

effectiveness and productivity levels of organisations with fewer employees. However, the literature in the present study presented evidence that many organisations found that downsizing did not lead to the desired outcomes mainly due to the effects that downsizing has on survivors. These include increased levels of job insecurity and a decrease in organisational commitment, motivation, trust, and morale.

As the literature indicated, negative relationships between JI and employee commitment are mainly due to survivors fearing additional layoffs. LOC is perceived as a personal factor that relates directly to the perceived powerlessness dimension of JI. As the research indicated, downsizing often threaten employees/survivors' sense of control. In turn, perceived control is affected by survivors' belief that they or the organisation can do something to remedy the negative consequences of job loss. When perceived threat is high and perceived control is low, then survivors experience high levels of job insecurity. This, in turn, affects organisational commitment.

Finally, the literature indicated that SOC is a disposition, which allows individuals to select appropriate strategies to deal with stressors, confronting them. Downsizing is viewed as a major organisational stressor that can influence the strength of survivors' SOC, which in turn may affect their commitment to the organisation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes how this research study was conducted. It will define the participants involved in the study, the measuring instruments used, procedures followed to obtain the necessary data and the statistical techniques used to analyse the data.

#### **3.1 SAMPLE**

The sample for this study consisted of 156 employees of the University of the Western Cape classified as Administrative Support employees who were on the payroll during the 1998 downsizing process. Questionnaires were distributed to 264 employees randomly selected to participate in the study. One hundred and fifty six questionnaires were returned giving a return rate of 59.47%.

The gender composition of the sample consisted of seventy-one (45.8%) male workers and eighty-four (54.2%) female workers. The majority of respondents (94%) were permanent staff members. While the years of employment ranged from 1 to 31 years, the average length of employment was 13.6 years (SD = 6.9 years). Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were married. Fifty-two percent (n = 81) of the respondents had a degree or diploma qualification, with 35 % (n = 54) a matriculation certificate and 11% (n = 17) less than matriculation. The majority of respondents (73%) were members of the NEHAWU

### **3.2 MEASURING INSTRUMENTS**

Five instruments were used to obtain data regarding the variables in the study. The instruments included a self-designed demographic questionnaire (Appendix 2) consisting of 28 items, to obtain the biographical data of the sample. The Job Insecurity Scale (JI) developed by Ashford, Lee, and Bobko (1989) was used to measure job insecurity. The Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS), developed by Spector (1988), was used to measure respondents' generalised control beliefs in the work setting. The Sense of Coherence (SOC) Scale developed by Antonovsky (1987) was used to assess sense of coherence. Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian's (1974) Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was used to measure the relative strength of individuals' identification with and involvement in the organisation.

#### **3.2.1 THE JOB INSECURITY (JI) SCALE**

The original Job Insecurity Scale (JI) was developed by Ashford et al. (1989) to measure job insecurity. The scale is based on Greenhalgh et al.'s (1984) theory on job insecurity in which job insecurity was defined as "powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation. This threat may relate to various features of a job or to the entire job. Ashford et al. (1989) operationalised this model and successfully confirmed its construct validity. Their job insecurity scale consisted of the following components

- **Job features** (*looking at the importance of job features*). Items concern for example, promotion opportunities, freedom to schedule work, quality of supervision, etc.
- **Total job** (*looking at the importance of the total job and the likelihood of losing a given dimension of the total job*). Examples of items include “how important to you personally is the possibility that you may be moved to a lower level job in the organisation?” and “how likely is it that you might be laid off for a short while?”
- **Powerlessness** (to prevent a loss). Items include for example “I have enough power in this organisation to control events that might affect my job” (Ashford et al., 1989, p. 810).

In Greenhalgh et al.’s (1984) model, JI is viewed as a multidimensional construct that consists of five components (Wagner, 1998). The first four components are labeled by Greenhalgh et al. (1984, p. 440) as “the severity of threat” or “the degree of perceived threat to continuity in a job situation”. This “threat” may have reference to various characteristics or features of a job or to the job as a whole.

The **first component** of the JI scale consists of perceived threat to the various job features of characteristics such as promotion opportunities and freedom to schedule work. According to Ashford et al. (1989, p. 804), “the more features that an individual perceives to be threatened, the greater the JI”. However, the



**second component** of JI – “the perceived importance of each feature – weights the first dimension” (Ashford et al., 1989, p. 804) This weighting is achieved by multiplying the perceived threat to each feature by its importance and then summing the score for each feature to obtain an overall severity rating” (Ashford et al 1989, p. 804). According to Ashford et al. (1989, p. 804), “this operation relies on the assumption that a threat to an important job feature will contribute more to JI reactions than will a threat to a minor feature” The **third component** consists of “the perceived threat of the occurrence of various events that would negatively affect an individual’s total job; being fired or laid off for a short while are examples” (Ashford et al., 1989, p. 805). The **fourth component** consists of the importance that is attached to each of these potentialities. Both the third and fourth components are also multiplied and summed to get a weighted rating of the severity of the threat to the entire job (Ashford et al., 1989) Finally, the **fifth component**, powerlessness, consist of “an individual’s ability to counteract the threats identified in the first four components” Ashford et al 1989, p. 805). Thus, although a threat to jobs or job features is perceived, “people who have the power to counteract threats – those who are low in powerlessness – should not experience much JI” (Ashford et al 1989, p. 805) In order to get a measure of overall perceptions of JI, powerlessness scores are multiplied by the perceived severity of a threat.

The JI components outlined above, should thus combine as follow

(  $\sum$  importance of job feature X likelihood of losing job feature) +  $\sum$  importance of job loss X likelihood of job loss ) ] X perceived powerlessness to resist threat” (Ashford et al., 1989, p. 805). Items are rated on a 5-point response format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The JI measure has undergone a number of preliminary steps and pretesting in order to increase its psychometric qualities. The results of these preliminary tests led to the modified questionnaire that Ashford et al. (1989) used in their study on the causes and consequences of JI. According to Ashford et al. (1989), each insecurity component of this modified questionnaire had an adequate reliability estimate, with alphas ranging from .74 to .92.

To test the construct validity of the JI measure, correlational analysis was first performed to assess the covariance among the components of the JIS and the measure’s association with the Caplan and Johnson scales (Ashford et al., 1989, p.

Secondly, the utility of the scale was assessed, by “comparing the predictive capacities of the three JI measures and their relationships with the antecedent variables in Ashford et al.’s study using regression analysis” (Ashford 1989, p. 813). The results revealed that the scale demonstrated construct validity with a correlation of .48 ( $p < .01$ ) with the Caplan scale and .35 ( $p < .01$ ) with the Johnson scale (Ashford et al., 1989)

In a study on the effects of JI on work attitudes and performance among Israeli teachers, Rosenblatt and Ruvio (1996) adapted the JI scale of Ashford et al (1989) to the Israeli population. During a two-stage pre-test that they conducted, some items were developed and added to Ashford et al.'s (1989) original scale and distributed among 60 teachers. The final scale consisted of the following:

- (a) Job Features sub-scale, 21 items;
- (b) Total Job sub-scale, 5 items; and
- (c) Powerlessness sub-scale, 3 items

During the final analysis of the study's results, the Powerlessness sub-scale was dropped. Following on the work of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) and Ashford et al. (1989), the final JI scale score was determined by the following formula

$$JI = \text{Average (importance of job feature)} + \text{Average (importance of total job} \times \text{likelihood of total job)}$$

The final JI score could range from 2 – 50 (Rosenblatt et al., 1996, p. 10)

The original JI scale of Ashford et al. (1989) was used in the present study. The final multiplicative index for this study was arrived at using the following formula

$\Pi = [(Average: importance of job feature (17) \times Average likelihood of losing job feature) + (Average: importance of job loss (10) \times Average: likelihood of job loss (10))] \times powerlessness.$

### ***3.2.2 THE WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL SCALE (WLCS)***

The Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS) was used to assess how people feel about control of reinforcement specifically in the workplace. The questionnaire consists of a 16-item summated rating WLCS. In the development of the scale, an initial item pool for the scale was used, consisting of 49 items on a sample of 1151 Business Administration and Industrial Psychology undergraduate students (Spector, 1988).

Items were produced from a conceptual analysis of the locus of control construct and its relation to work behaviour (Spector, 1988). Three criteria were used to choose items, namely –“acceptable item- total correlations, lack of correlation with social desirability, and that the scale should be balanced with an equal number of internally and externally worded items” (Spector, 1988, p. 336). The item-totals ranged from 0.24 to 0.67, with a mean inter-item correlation of 0.25. To be consistent with the Rotter I-E scale, low scores represent internality on this measure (Spector, 1988)

The study investigated how the Work Locus of Control scale correlated with a number of organisational variables, such as job satisfaction, commitment,

intention, autonomy, influence, role stress, tenure, consideration, etc. The outcomes provided evidence for the validity of the scale. Work locus of control correlated significantly and consistently with all variables (except tenure) in most of the samples. Furthermore, alpha coefficients between .75 and .85 were obtained in five samples indicating good reliability of the WLCS. Thus, the overall results of the study indicated that the WLCS was a viable scale (Spector,

### ***SENSE OF COHERENCE (SOC) SCALE***

The Sense of Coherence (SOC) scale measures three components of SOC, namely comprehensibility (e.g. “Do you have the feeling that you are in an unfamiliar situation and don’t know what to do?”), manageability (e.g. “Do you think that there will always be people whom you’ll be able to count on in the future?”), and meaningfulness (e.g. “Life is 1 full of interest. 7: completely routine”) (Strumpfer & Mlonzi, 2001, p. 31). Strumpfer et al. (2001) argue that these components should not be viewed as sub-scales. Not only were the items constructed using a facet analysis design so as to vary the content systematically along a number of dimensions, but Antonovsky (1993) also concluded from his review of studies that factor analysis of the scale is likely to produce a single factor solution which will not reflect the three components” (cited in Strumpfer et al., 2001, p. 31). Responses are recorded on a 7-point semantic differentials anchored by wordings related to the contents of each item (Strumpfer et al.,

2001). Internal consistency reliability indications (Cronbach alpha = .79) have been reported for the SOC scale (Diraz, Ortlepp, & Greyling, 2003)

### ***3.2.4 ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (OCQ)***

The Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) consists of 15 items.

questionnaire assesses “the extent to which the respondent intends to remain with or leave the organisation, feels motivated to perform, and strongly accepts the organisation’s goals and values’ (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, cited in Cooke, 1997, p. 431). Several items were negatively phrased and reverse scored in order to reduce bias (Mowday et al., 1979). The scale can also be used in its 9-item positive statement form, which was reported as having an equal internal consistency to the full scale (Strumpfer, 2001; Brierley, 1996). According to Strumpfer (2001), these items exclude the items about which concern has been raised that they measure intent to quit. Meta-analytical confirmation was also reported (Tett & Meyer, 1993, cited in Strumpfer, 2001). Examples of the items include: *“I find that my values and this organisation’s values are very similar”* and *“I really care about the fate of this organisation”*. Responses are recorded on a 7-point Likert-scale (*1 = strongly disagree..... 7 = strongly agree*)

In item 2, *“I talk up”* was reworded to, *“I promote”* (Strumpfer, 2001, p.

The OCQ is the most widely used measure of organisational commitment. Test-retest reliabilities and internal consistency reliabilities were found in a number of studies involving 2563 employees from nine divergent organisations.

Furthermore, cross-validated evidence for predictive, convergent and discriminant validity were indicated (Mowday et al., 1979, p. 224).

### **3.3 PROCEDURE**

The researcher obtained permission from the Registrar to conduct the study at University of the Western Cape. The sample was randomly selected from the Administrative Support employees. The researcher approached all participants personally and informed them about the purpose and goal of the research being conducted. The questionnaire and a cover letter were given to participants who volunteered to participate in the study. A cover letter (Appendix 1) explained in detail what the study entailed, the anonymous and voluntary nature of each participant's involvement and that the information would be used only for the purpose of the study. The participants were given a week to complete the questionnaire. Participants were given a choice to either hand the questionnaires back to the researcher in person, or to post it via the internal mail to the Industrial Psychology Department for the researcher's attention.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data were statistically computed and analysed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Pearson Moment Correlation was used to assess the various bivariate relationships between the variables in the study as indicated by hypotheses 2-7. Hierarchical regression analysis was used

to assess the main hypothesis which not only focused at determining the multiple correlation among the variables, but also at assessing the degree to which a linear combination of sense of coherence, job insecurity, and work locus of control could explain the variance in organisational commitment. Hierarchical regression is a multivariate statistical method in which predictors are sequentially regressed onto an independent variable. The predictors are entered into the model based on theorised relationships (Field, 2000). Known predictors, that is, predictors that were used in past research, are entered first into the model in terms of their importance in predicting the outcome. Thereafter, new predictors of significance to the study are added into the model. New predictors may either all be added simultaneously, or in a stepwise manner, or they may be added in a hierarchical manner in which the most important new predictor is entered first (Field, 2000). In the ensuing regression analysis, sense of coherence, job insecurity, and work locus of control were entered into the equation in an hierarchical manner to determine their multiple correlational and relative impact on explaining the organisational commitment of survivors of retrenchment.

The demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and measures of central tendency and variability. These distributions indicate the frequency of responses and the percentages for each of the items in the questionnaire.

The full results of the study are reported in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

The results relating to the present study will be presented in this chapter. Multiple hierarchical regression was used to analyse the regression hypothesis, i.e., the degree to which sense of coherence, job insecurity, and locus of control predict organisational commitment. Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships among the different variables specified in hypotheses 2 to 7. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and their ranges) for the predictors and outcome variables were generated and are summarised in Table 3.

#### **4.1 Demographic Information Regarding Sample**

This section presents analyses of the demographic data gathered from Administrative Support staff (n=156) who participated in the research two years after the downsizing took place

The sample consisted of permanent administrative staff members who were retained after the 1998/1999 downsizing exercise. While the years of employment ranged from 1 to 31 years, the average length of employment was 13.6 years. Sixty-seven (67%) of the respondents were married. The male/female ratio of the sample was 46% to 54%. Several broad indicators of job insecurity were obtained. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the respondents felt that they were very dependent on their jobs (strongly to extremely). Sixty-one percent (61%) of the respondents indicated that they felt moderately to

extremely threatened by the downsizing. Although 56% of the respondents felt their job security was affected in a moderate to extreme degree at the time that the downsizing took place, only 38.5% of the respondents indicated that they currently feel secure in their

With regards to commitment, 47.7% percent of the respondents felt that their commitment to the organisation was impacted on in a moderate to extreme degree. In addition, 61.7% indicated that they had looked for alternative employment after the downsizing process.

## **Regression Analysis Results**

### **Hypothesis 1**

The degree to which organisational commitment could be explained by the three predictors of interest, sense of coherence, job insecurity, and work locus of control, was assessed using a standard linear regression analysis. The model summary of the regression analysis is presented in Table 1. In this model the dependent variable was the scores of the respondents on the Organisational Commitment Scale, and the independent factors or predictors were overall scores on Sense of Coherence Scale, the multiplicative index score of the Job Insecurity Scale, and the scores on the Work Locus of Control

Acceptable reliability co-efficients (alpha) were obtained for the respective measures in the analysis- .79 for the occupational commitment questionnaire; .81 for the Sense of Coherence Scale; .83 for the Job Insecurity Index, and .71 for the Work Locus of Control Scale.

**Table 1. Model Summary of Regression Analysis: Sense of Coherence, Job Insecurity and Work Locus of Control predicting Organisational Commitment**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	SE of Estimate
1	.472	.223	.2	

The multiple correlation coefficient (R) between the predictors and the outcome is 0.47. The R<sup>2</sup> indicates that sense of coherence, job insecurity and work locus of control together account for 22.3% of the variation in organisational commitment. The associated ANOVA yielded an F-ratio of 12.72 (p<0.001) indicating that the model is significantly better at predicting the outcome than using the mean as a “good guess” (Field, 2000).

The parameters of the model are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Regression Model for Factors Influencing Organisational Commitment**

Variable	$\beta$	SE	Standardised $\beta$	Significance	% of variance explained	
Sense of Coherence	.220	.057	.321	3.89	.002	16.88
Job Insecurity	-.005	.003	-.139	-1.80	.075	9
Locus of Control	.224	.094	-.196	-2.39	.018	3.6

The regression analysis revealed that sense of coherence accounted for 16.9% of the variance on organisational commitment, while work locus of control for 3.6% and job

insecurity for .9% of the variance. Sense of coherence provided the greater predictive weighting to the model. Together the three predictors explained 22.3% of the variance on organisational commitment. Sense of coherence ( $t(156) = 3.89, p < 0.01$ ) and work locus of control ( $t(156) = -2.39, p < 0.05$ ) were found to be significant predictors of organisational commitment for survivors of retrenchment

The multiple regression equation defined by the model is as follows

$$\text{Org Com} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Sense of Coherence} + \beta_2 \text{ Work Locus of Control} + \beta_3 \text{ Job Insecurity}$$

$$= 52.86 + (.220 \text{ SOC}) + (-.224 \text{ WLOC}) + (-.005 \text{ JIS})$$

For the significant predictors, sense of coherence was found to have a positive relationship with organisational commitment. As sense of coherence increases, organisational commitment also increases. The negative beta value for work locus of control reflects that an internal locus of control is inversely associated with organisational commitment. The stronger the respondents' internal locus of control, the higher the organisational commitment. Similarly, an inverse relationship was obtained for job insecurity indicating that a decrease in job insecurity was associated with an increase in organisational commitment

A comparison of the standardised beta coefficients gives insight into the relative contribution of the predictors. The standardised beta values for sense of coherence and work locus of control are 0.32 and 0.20 respectively confirming that sense of coherence

has greater predictive importance in the model, explaining a greater percentage of the variance in organisational commitment.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Predictors (Sense of Coherence, Job Insecurity and Work Locus of Control) and Criterion Variable (Organisational Commitment)**

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Sense of Coherence	155	141.10	
Job Insecurity	152	191.35	
Work Locus of Control	149	44.23	12.07
Organisational Commitment	147	70.31	

The bivariate correlations between the variables theorised to have an influence on organisational commitment are summarised in the correlation matrix in Table 4

### 4.3 CORRELATION MATRIX OF VARIABLES

**Table 4: Intercorrelations among Job Insecurity, Work Locus of Control, Sense of Coherence and Organisational Commitment.**

		MI-JI	WLOC	SOC	OC
<b>MI-JI</b>	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.079	-.093	-.195*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.351	.259	.020
	N	150	143	149	143
<b>WLOC</b>	Pearson Correlation	.079	1.000	-.289**	-.326**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.351		.000	.000
	N	143	149	148	142
<b>SOC</b>	Pearson Correlation	.093	-.289	1.000	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.259	.000		.000
	N	149	148	155	146
<b>OC</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.195*	-.326**	.376**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.000	.000	
	N	143	142	146	147

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**MI-JI** = **Multiplicative Index for Job Insecurity**

**WLOC** = **Work Locus of Control**

**SOC** = **Sense of Coherence**

**OC** = **Organisation Commitment**

#### 4.3.1 Hypothesis 2

*Job insecurity is not correlated with organisational commitment*

*Job insecurity is correlated with organisational commitment. The higher the job insecurity experienced, the lower the organisational commitment.*

The Pearson correlation coefficient between job insecurity and organisational commitment indicates a low, negative correlation ( $r = -.195$ ,  $p < .05$ ). An increase in job insecurity was found to be correlated with a decrease in organisational commitment. Only 3.8 % of the variance in organisational commitment is explained by job insecurity.

#### Hypothesis 3

*Work locus of control is not correlated with job insecurity*

*Work locus of control is correlated with job insecurity. The degree to which locus of control is external, the higher the job insecurity*

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for the relationship between work locus of control and job insecurity is .079,  $p < .01$ . The findings indicated no relationship between work locus of control and job insecurity.

#### 4.3.3 Hypothesis 4

*Work locus of control is not correlated with sense of coherence*

*Work locus of control is correlated with sense of coherence. The degree to which work locus of control is external, the weaker the person's sense of coherence.*

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for work locus of control and sense of coherence indicates a low, negative correlation ( $r=-.289$ ,  $p<.01$ ). An increase in internal work locus of control is likely to be associated with an increase in sense of coherence, explaining 8.4% of the variation on sense of coherence.

### **Hypothesis 5**

*Locus of control is not correlated with organisational commitment.*

*Locus of control is correlated with organisational commitment. The degree to which locus of control is external, the lower the organisational commitment.*

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for LOC and OC is  $-.326$ ,  $p<.01$ . This indicates a low, negative correlation. Internal locus of control is correlated with organisational commitment. The eta statistic, which is the square of the correlation ( $-.326$ ), indicates that 10.6% of the variance on organisational commitment is explained by locus of control.

### **4.3.5 Hypothesis 6**

*Sense of coherence is not correlated with job insecurity.*

*Sense of coherence is correlated with job insecurity. A weak sense of coherence is associated with high levels of job insecurity.*



The findings indicated that the Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for sense of coherence and job insecurity is  $-0.093$ ,  $p < .01$ . The relationship is not significant. This indicates that there is no correlation between sense of coherence and job insecurity.

#### **4.3.6 Hypothesis 7**

*Sense of coherence is not correlated with organisational commitment.*

*Sense of coherence is correlated with organisational commitment.*

The Pearson correlation coefficient obtained for sense of coherence and organisational commitment indicates a low, positive correlation ( $r = 0.376$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Sense of coherence is correlated with organisational commitment, explaining 14% of its variance.

## *CHAPTER 5*

### *DISCUSSION*

The results will be discussed in relation to the hypotheses, as well as in terms of previous research conducted to see whether or not they are consistent with previous studies.

The present study investigated the degree to which organisational commitment could be explained by the three predictors, sense of coherence, work locus of control and job insecurity, based on the Brockner (1988) model on the effects of downsizing on survivors

#### *5.1 REGRESSION RESULTS*

*HYPOTHESIS 1: Sense of coherence, job insecurity and locus of control are valid predictors of organisational commitment.*

The regression results indicated that sense of coherence and work locus of control were significant predictors of organisational commitment. Results indicated a positive relationship between sense of coherence, internal locus of control and organisational commitment, i.e., an increase in sense of coherence and internal locus of control was associated with an increase in organisational commitment. Respondents with a strong sense of coherence and internal locus of control experienced increased levels of organisational commitment, thus supporting the research hypotheses.

Work locus of control was found to be inversely associated with organisational commitment. The findings thus suggest that the degree to which the respondents' work locus of control is internal, the higher their organisational commitment. Both predictors (work locus of control and sense of coherence) were in accordance with the Brockner (1988) model. It appears that workers with internal locus of control and sense of coherence would likely display greater organisational commitment.

With regard to job insecurity, the results surprisingly indicated that job insecurity was not a significant predictor of organisational commitment. At the time of the investigation, workers may no longer have experienced undue job insecurity. Yousef (1998) found that satisfaction with job security was positively correlated with organisational commitment indicating that the more satisfied employees are with the security of their jobs, the more they are committed to their organisations. A survey item of the present study also supported the above outcome. Although 56% of the respondents felt that the downsizing impacted on their job insecurity in a "moderate" to "extreme" degree, 52.3% felt that their job commitment was only minimally affected. Thus, although the respondents experienced a certain degree of job insecurity, most of them did not experience a decrease in their commitment to the institution.

A comparison in terms of the relative contribution of the three predictors indicated that sense of coherence explained more of the variance (16.9%) on organisational commitment than work locus of control (3.6%) and job insecurity (1.9%), thus confirming that sense of coherence has greater predictive importance in the model.

Sense of coherence had a greater impact on organisational commitment than job insecurity and work locus of control.

That job insecurity was not a major predictor of organisational commitment may be explained in terms of the fact that the study was conducted nearly three years after the actual downsizing took place. Survivors have since adapted to and/or accepted their new circumstances. Furthermore, after the downsizing exercise, consultations between the NEHAWU and the UWC resulted in moratoriums being placed on further downsizing for the following periods:

- 23 September 1999 to December 2000;
- 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001; and
- 15 May 2002 to 28 February 2003

(Substantive Agreements, UWC/NEHAWU, 1999, 2001, & 2002).

This temporary stability may explain why job insecurity is not a current predictor of organisational commitment. As a result, survivors might have felt a “sense of security” in terms of their ‘current employment status’, that is, guaranteed employment for the duration of the above periods.

In his model, Brockner (1988) described how layoffs have the potential to create psychological states, and the psychological states, in turn, have the potential to influence survivors’ work attitudes and behaviour. In terms of the above model, support was found for the psychological factors – sense of coherence and work locus of control – which appeared to be of greater importance than the external job-related variables. Although no

moderating factors, as outlined by Brockner (1988), were proposed initially in this study, job insecurity could now be viewed as a moderating variable. This may be explained in terms of the “renewed psychological contract” that both parties entered into. The survivors are committed to work for UWC, and UWC is committed to provide guaranteed employment for the period of time that was stipulated by the moratoriums placed on further retrenchments.

## 5.2 CORRELATION ANALYSES

*Hypothesis 2: Job insecurity is correlated with organisational commitment. The higher the job insecurity experienced, the lower the organisational commitment.*

The present study found that there was a significant low correlation between job insecurity and organisational commitment. In support of Hypothesis 2, Table 4 indicates that an increase in job insecurity is associated with declines in organisational commitment. The findings are in support of the Ashford et al.’s (1989) outcomes, which explained these in terms of the psychological contract that governs employee commitment. If employees decide to give their commitment and/or continued efforts in return for what the organisation provides them, a breach of this contract, “manifested in perceived job insecurity”, may decrease their sense of attachment and responsibility to the organisation (Ashford et al., 1989, p. 819). However, the regression results reflect that job insecurity explained a small proportion (1.9%) of the variance on organisational commitment, thus indicating that job insecurity was not a substantive predictor of organisational commitment.

*Hypothesis 3: Locus of control is correlated with job insecurity. The degree to which locus of control is external, the higher the job insecurity.*

The results support the null hypothesis. The present study found no relationship between work locus of control and job insecurity. Work locus of control was not associated with increased job insecurity. This is not consistent with previous research outcomes.

Ashford et al. (1989) found that external locus of control was associated with increased job insecurity. The results are thus not consistent with the argument that external locus of control (among other organisational variables) engenders a feeling of lack of predictability and control. However, in their study, Ashford et al. (1989) used an eight-item scale developed by Levenson and Miller (1976) whereas in the present study the work locus of control scale of Spector (1988) was used. In his study, Spector (1988) found that the work locus of control scale correlated with a number of organisational variables. He argued that, although the work locus of control scale correlated with general locus of control measures, many of the relationships between locus of control and the organisational variables that was described in the study were found to be considerably stronger than those found with the more general locus of control scales (Spector, 1988). The expectation of a correlation between locus of control and job insecurity was, however, not supported in the present study.

*Hypothesis 4: Locus of control is correlated with sense of coherence. The degree to which locus of control is external, the weaker the person's sense of coherence.*

For the present study, a significant low negative correlation was found between internal work locus of control and sense of coherence. Studies that were conducted on sense of coherence, indicated clear relationships to work-related variables (Strumpfer & Louw, 1989; Danana cited in Strumpfer, 1990; Strumpfer & Mlonzi, 2001). However, very little literature exists on the relationship of sense of coherence with work locus of control. Sense of coherence and locus of control can be seen as both psychological constructs influencing individuals' abilities to respond to environmental stressors and threats, therefore one can argue that a strong sense of coherence should be associated with an internal locus of control.

***Hypothesis 5: Locus of control is correlated with organisational commitment. The degree to which locus of control is external, the lower the organisational commitment.***

The results obtained supported Hypothesis 5. In the present study a significant low negative correlation between work locus of control and organisational commitment was found. The regression results also support this outcome, indicating an inverse relationship between work locus of control and organisational commitment. This result of the present study is also supported by the findings of Spector (1988) in which work locus of control correlated significantly with commitment. Thus, the degree to which respondents' work locus of control is internal, the higher their organisational commitment.

*Hypothesis 6: Sense of coherence is correlated with job insecurity. A weaker SOC is associated with higher levels of job insecurity.*

The results obtained supported the null hypothesis. There is no significant relationship between sense of coherence and job insecurity. Sense of coherence was not associated with increased job insecurity. As was mentioned in the regression results, this might be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted some time after the downsizing took place during which time moratoriums were placed on further downsizing exercises by the UWC

*Hypothesis 7: Sense of coherence is correlated with organisational commitment.*

For the present study, the findings indicated a significant, low correlation between sense of coherence and organisational commitment. The findings support hypothesis 7 in that sense of coherence is associated with organisational commitment with 14% of the variation on organisational commitment being explained by sense of coherence. The findings are also consistent with the regression results, which indicated a positive relationship between the two variables, i.e., respondents with a strong sense of coherence experienced an increase in their organisational commitment. Previous research done by Strumpfer and Mlonzi (2001) revealed significant relations of sense of coherence with commitment using both correlation analyses and stepwise multiple regression analyses.



### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

#### **5.3.1 Implications for Research**

A moderate level of support was obtained in this study for some of the hypotheses. The results of the correlation analyses, however, did not support the relationship between work locus of control and job insecurity and the relationship between sense of coherence and job insecurity. There is a lack of research in which sense of coherence and work locus of control were used as predictors of job insecurity. This relationship needs further investigation. It could well be that sense of coherence may assist in warding off feelings of job insecurity, in that one's sense of coherence level could be reduced temporarily as a result of downsizing, but due to specific circumstances such as favourable work environments and conditions (job redesign, job enrichment, etc.), the individual can recover from it and return to his or her normal level. Furthermore, factors that may impact on an individual's sense of control, such as the person's dependency on his or her job as a result of being the breadwinner, labour market demands for a specific job, individual skills and qualifications to name a few, may also impact on feelings of job insecurity. Additional research should therefore examine such circumstances and factors as mentioned above.

It would also appear that internal factors such as sense of coherence play an important role in adjusting to downsizing. Organisational commitment for example, which is an indication of an individual's attitude toward his/her work, focus on a more global, longer-term attachment to the organisation as a whole

and the emphasis is on the congruence between the goals of the individual and those of the organisation. Downsizing clearly threatens the workers' sense of coherence and individuals can experience diminished commitment because they no longer perceive a long-term relationship between themselves and the organisation. Since sense of coherence is a dispositional orientation which is facilitated by general resistance resources (GRRs -which can facilitate effective tension management in any situation of demand), it is an important factor in coping with and/or adapting to downsizing and consequently the ability to assure physical and psychological health (Strumpfer, 1990).

Finally, the present study was conducted on only one organisation focusing on Administrative Support staff. Further replication research is needed in other organisational settings and occupations, using larger samples and preferably during the downsizing occurrence.

### 5|3.2 *Implications for Practice*

Organisations need to seriously consider whether downsizing is the appropriate strategy to effect organisational change. Downsizing to cut cost does not always lead to the intended results and as a result has implications for the organisation's culture. The findings in the present study, particularly the relationship between sense of coherence, work locus of control and organisational commitment support most theories that major changes, downsizing and restructurings undertaken by organisations, can adversely impact on organisational effectiveness. Low morale,

decreased commitment, feelings of job insecurity to name a few, are often experienced by survivors, which in turn, may impact on productivity levels. It is imperative for organisations to understand how downsizing is experienced by employees. Organisations need to consider their objectives, appropriateness and potential impact on employees and the attitudes and behaviours that may develop in such threatening environments. Management needs to take proactive steps to ensure that employees do not develop negative attitudes and behaviour. Employee assistance programmes, such as workplace forums, counselling and coaching, can be offered to bolster employee sense of coherence and job insecurity. Open communication and involving employees in the downsizing process can play an important role in proactively assisting survivors to understand the situation and to gain their commitment to change. This may restore their sense of control which is often negatively affected during and after a downsizing exercise. During a time of downsizing employees are always in need of information. Managers must keep employees well informed and be up front with employees so that they can prepare themselves for the changes that they will be facing. By not providing information, employees normally “fill in the blanks with beliefs damaging to the organisation” (Brockner (1992, p. 20). Information pertaining to the assistance on offer to the layoff victims is also important during the communication stage. It may help to counter feelings of distrust against managers and it might also alleviate feelings of guilt among survivors. Finally, management can proactively embark on training and development initiatives for survivors so that they can update and learn new skills. After the downsizing, there is the inevitable

redesigning of work-processes and workload, since survivors must now do the work of those who were laid off as well as their own work and new tasks.

Proactively redesigning work to make it more interesting and enriching, i.e. giving employees more decision making powers and autonomy with regards to their work may help to restore their sense of control over their own life and bolster a sense of belonging and meaning- psychological states that are normally threatened during downsizing. This is especially imperative at the UWC where the financial status of the institution is still not stable.

#### **5.4 *LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY***

The study was conducted retrospectively on only one organisation focusing on administrative support staff. The results are thus not generalisable to other organisations and occupational groups. Also, no comparison can be made between administrative staff and the academic staff at the university. A major limitation in the current study was that the investigation was conducted retrospectively nearly three years after the actual downsizing took place. Respondents may feel differently now than they felt during the downsizing process. This could have impacted on the accurateness of their responses and feelings. Finally, the moratoriums that were placed on further retrenchments could have resulted in respondents having some sense of security in their jobs.

## 6 | *RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS*

It is evident from the present study that downsizing can have a debilitating affect on the workers who are retained after a downsizing restructuring of an organisation. The findings in the literature indicate that organisations do not always accomplish the desired results, but instead experience more negative consequences. Downsizing to cut cost often results in management underestimating the cost of downsizing. Therefore the desired financial results are often not obtained. In a downsizing environment, managers must attempt to retain the organisations most valued employees, minimise the experience of job insecurity and job stress and ensure that performance and productivity improve. Management needs to focus attention and energies on the adverse effect that downsizing has on survivors, rather than focusing just on the people who were dismissed. Survivors must be assisted, through training and development, to function effectively after the downsizing, to ensure that they adapt to changes in their new work setting and perform their new tasks effectively. An unanticipated finding in the present study was that when workers have good sense of coherence and some degree of control over their work environment and the organisation proactively seeks to allay job insecurity, the impact of job insecurity can be addressed.

Often managers neglect to take into account the core competencies of staff before downsizing. This may result in many professionally skilled and competent people

leaving the organisation voluntarily due to job insecurity. Since organisations cannot guarantee lifetime employment, they can foster a culture of becoming a learning organisation to assist employees to become employable and marketable for the broader labour market.

With regard to the decreased commitment of employees, management needs to be aware of employees' concerns and their consequent reactions. Survivors' commitment are affected if they perceive that the downsizing was done in an unfair manner. Managers must ensure that the downsizing process is handled fairly and that the best alternative cost-saving strategies are implemented to protect the core work force.

The study underscores the importance of promoting employees' sense of coherence and locus of control especially in a period of job insecurity. Both these psychological states, sense of coherence and locus of control, play an important role in the experience of organisational commitment. These attributes can assist in diminishing the debilitating effects of job insecurity. Effective communication prior, during and after the downsizing experience is crucial to ensure that employees understand what is happening. Survivors must at all times be treated with dignity and respect and management must ensure their active participation in any activities and decisions related to their new work environment. In this way their sense of control and the ability to adapt to the changing circumstances, which was threatened as a result of the downsizing, can be restored. New

psychological contracts must be entered into. Employee commitment will increase if employees perceive that management is committed towards post-downsizing support.

The impact of downsizing on the retained workforce needs to be carefully considered by organisations. As research indicated, the impact of downsizing on survivors is immense. When employees' job security, morale and overall commitment are threatened due to downsizing, the organisation is likely to experience a decrease in productivity and profitability. A properly implemented downsizing programme should aim to deal with employee job insecurity and enhance employee commitment, and commitment in turn should lead to better work performance.

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## *APPENDIX 1*

Department of Industrial Psychology  
University of the Western Cape  
Private Bag X17  
**BELLVILLE**  
7535

Dear Participant

I am a student in the Industrial Psychology department and I am currently conducting a research study at the University, in partial fulfillment of my Masters degree. My research project examines the impact of downsizing on survivors (employees not laid off). As we all know, downsizing stirr-up a number of strong reactions among employees, including anxiety, stress, feelings of insecurity regarding their jobs, etc. To date, little research has focused on survivors of downsizing. It is for this reason that I have decided to conduct my research in this area and to focus on issues such as employees' sense of their job security, locus of control, their sense of coherence and the level of commitment to the organisation following a downsizing exercise.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could participate in this study. Your participation will involve completing one set of questionnaires, which will take up approximately 15 minutes of your time. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationships at work or with the organisation as a whole in any way. Thus, there are no risks involved from participating in this study and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The questionnaires that you will be required to complete will remain confidential and will be reported without names or other personal identifiers. The only persons that will have access to the questionnaires are my supervisor, Dr. A. V. Naidoo and myself.

I hope that you will participate in this study. Since this is a research study, some benefits in this field may be obtained. I do expect to gain a better understanding of how downsizing affect employees left behind in organisations, and hopefully the results will enable me to make recommendations to organisations regarding the necessity of implementing employee assistance programs to help counter the negative effects of downsizing.

Attached is the questionnaire that you are requested to complete. It consists of 5 sections. I understand that you are very busy, but I do trust that for the sake of advancing scientific knowledge, you will participate. There are no right or wrong answers. Should you have any questions or desire further information please contact me at 551 8044 or 082 9589698.

Kindly return the questionnaire, sealed in the envelope provided, within one week to the Industrial Psychology Department for my attention.

I take this opportunity to thank you in advance for your participation and support.

**Researcher:**

Shani Rinkwest  
Department of Industrial Psychology  
University of the Western Cape

**Research Supervisor:**

Department of Psychology  
University of Stellenbosch

**(Adapted from Leedy, (1997))**

**APPENDIX 2**

**SECTION 1:  
RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Please answer the following questions directly on to the questionnaire by checking the appropriate block or filling in the relevant information. Please note that your name is not required on any of the answer sheets.**

Sex:

Male	Female
------	--------

Age:

Less than 25 years	25 – 29 years	30 – 34 years	35 – 39 years	40 – 44 years	45 – 49 years	50years +
-----------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	------------------	--------------

Marital status:

Single	Married	Divorce	Other
--------	---------	---------	-------

4. Number of dependents?

Wife/Husband/Partner	No. Of children	Brothers/sisters/other family members	Other
----------------------	-----------------	--	-------

Please state your qualifications:

Less than Matric	Matric	Technicon / college qualification/ Diploma/certificate/university degree	Other
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6. Please state the department you are employed in

7. Please state your job title:

8. Employment status:

Permanent Position	Temporary Position	Contract Position

9. Number of years at the institution:

10. Number of years in current position:

Were you employed at the University during the 1998 downsizing process?

Yes	No

To what degree did you feel personally threatened by the downsizing process at the institution?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely

13. To what degree did the downsizing process affect your job at the time?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely

14. To what degree did the downsizing process affect your physical health?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely

To what degree did the downsizing process affect your self esteem?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely

16. To what degree did the downsizing affect your sense of job security?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

17. To what degree did the downsizing process affect your commitment to the organisation?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

18. To what degree did you feel that organisation could have done something to lessen the effects of the downsizing process?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

To what degree did the downsizing affect your job performance negatively?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

20. To what degree did the downsizing affect your level of motivation?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

21. To what degree are you dependent on your job at the institution?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely
------------	----------	------------	----------	-----------

22. Did you ever consider, after the downsizing took place, to look for employment in elsewhere?

Yes	No
-----	----

23. To what degree are you satisfied with your job at the institution?

Not at all satisfied	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely Satisfied
----------------------	----------	------------	----------	---------------------

24. Were you a member of NEHAWU at the time of the downsizing process?

Yes	No

25. To what degree did your membership give you a sense of security during the downsizing process?

Not at all	slightly	Moderately	Strongly	Extremely

26. Do you believe that more retrenchments will take place in the near future?

Yes	Not sure	No

27. Do you currently feel secure in your job?

Yes	Not sure	No

28. Any other comments that you might want to add in relation to how the past downsizing exercise affected you?

**SECTION 2:**

***RESPONDENT'S JOB INSECURITY***

The questions in this section measures the degree to which you perceive various job characteristics or features to be threatened. Please answer all the questions in this section.

**JOB FEATURES**

**Importance of job features:**

In your worklife, how important are each of the following features to you personally?

1	2	3	4	5
very unimportant	unimportant	neither important nor unimportant	important	very important

Please indicate your choice by encircling the appropriate number.

1. Geographic location?

1      2      3      4      5

2. Having promotion opportunities?

1      2      3      4      5

Maintaining your current pay?

1      2      3      4      5

4. Maintaining opportunities to receive periodic pay increases?

1      2      3      4      5

5. The status that comes with your position in the organisation?

1      2      3      4      5

6. The freedom to schedule your own work?

1      2      3      4      5

7. The freedom to perform your work in the manner you see fit?  
1      2      3      4      5
8. Access to resources (people, materials, information) in the organisation?  
1      2      3      4      5
9. A sense of community in working with good coworkers?  
1      2      3      4      5
10. The feedback you receive from your supervisor about your performance?  
1      2      3      4      5
- The quality of the supervision you receive?  
1      2      3      4      5
12. The physical demands your job places on you?  
1      2      3      4      5
13. The opportunity to interact with the public?  
1      2      3      4      5
14. A job where you do a variety of tasks?  
1      2      3      4      5
15. A job where you do an entire piece of work from start to finish?  
1      2      3      4      5
16. A job that has significant impact on others?  
1      2      3      4      5
17. A job in which you can tell how well you are doing as you do it?  
1      2      3      4      5



**Perceived threat to job features:**

**Looking to the future, what is the probability that changes could occur - changes you don't want or might disagree with – that would *negatively* affect each of these features?**

	1	2	3	4	5
	negative change very unlikely	negative change unlikely	negative change neither likely nor unlikely	negative change likely	negative change very likely

**Please indicate your choice by encircling the appropriate number.**

Your geographic location?

1      2      3      4      5

2. Your potential to get ahead in the organisation?

1      2      3      4      5

Your potential to maintain your current pay?

1      2      3      4      5

Your potential to attain pay increase?

1      2      3      4      5

5. The status that comes with your position in the company?

1      2      3      4      5

6. Your current freedom to schedule your own work?

1      2      3      4      5

Your current freedom to perform your work in the manner you see fit?

1      2      3      4      5

8. Your current access to resources (people, materials, information) in the organisation?

1      2      3      4      5

9. Your current sense of community in working with good coworkers?  
1 2 3 4 5
10. The amount of feedback you currently receive from your supervisor?  
1 2 3 4 5
11. The supervision you receive?  
1 2 3 4 5
12. The physical demands your job places on you?  
1 2 3 4 5
13. The opportunity to interact with the public?  
1 2 3 4 5
14. The variety of tasks you perform?  
1 2 3 4 5
15. The opportunity to do an entire piece of work from start to finish?  
1 2 3 4 5
16. The significance of your job?  
1 2 3 4 5
17. The extent to which you can tell how well you are doing your job as you do it?  
1 2 3 4 5

## TOTAL JOB

### Importance of possible change to total job:

Assume for a moment that each of the following events could happen to you: how important to you personally is the possibility that:

1	2	3	4	5
very unimportant	unimportant	neither important nor unimportant	important	very important

Please indicate your choice by encircling the appropriate number.

You may lose your job and be moved to a lower level within the organisation?

1      2      3      4      5

|2. You may lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organisation?

1      2      3      4      5

|3 The number of work hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day?

1      2      3      4      5

|4 You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in your current location?

1      2      3      4      5

|5. You may be moved to a different job at a higher position in another geographic location?

1      2      3      4      5

|6. You may be laid off for a short while?

1      2      3      4      5

You may be laid off permanently?

1      2      3      4      5

|8. Your department or division's future may be uncertain?

1      2      3      4      5

9. You may be fired?  
2 3 4 5

10. You may be pressured to accept early retirement?  
1 2 3 4 5

**Perceived threat to a total job:**

Again, thinking about the future, how likely is it that each of these events might actually occur to you in your current job?

1 very unlikely	2 unlikely	3 neither likely nor unlikely	4 likely	5 very likely
--------------------	---------------	-------------------------------------	-------------	------------------

**Please indicate your choice by encircling the appropriate number.**

Lose your job and be moved to a lower level job within the organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

2. Lose your job and be moved to another job at the same level within the organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

Find that the number of hours the company can offer you to work may fluctuate from day to day?

1 2 3 4 5

4. Be moved to a higher position within your current location?

1 2 3 4 5

5. Be moved to a higher position in another geographic location?

1 2 3 4 5

Lose your job and be laid off for a short while?

1 2 3 4 5

7. Lose your job and be laid off permanently?

1 2 3 4 5

- |8. Find your department or division's future uncertain?  
1      2      3      4      5
- |9. Lose your job by being fired?  
1      2      3      4
10. Lose your job by being pressured to accept early retirement?  
1      2      3      4      5

### **|POWERLESSNESS**

|Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements

**|Please indicate your choice by encircling the appropriate word.**

I have enough power in this organisation to control events that might affect my job.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

|2 In this organisation, I can prevent negative things from affecting my work situation

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

|3 I understand this organisation well enough to be able to control things that affect me.

Agree \_\_\_\_\_

Disagree \_\_\_\_\_

**(Ashford, Lee & Bobko, 1989)**

**SECTION 3:**

***RESPONDENT'S WORK LOCUS OF CONTROL***

**For each of the following items please record your responses by encircling the appropriate number.**

	2	3	4	5	6
disagree very	disagree	disagree slightly	agree slightly	agree moderately	agree very much
much	moderately				

A job is what you make of it.

2      3      4      5      6

2      On most jobs, people can pretty much accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish.

2                      4      5      6

3      If you know what you want out of a job, you can find a job that gives it to you.

2                      4                      6

4      If employees are unhappy with a decision made by their boss, they should do something about it.

2      3      4      5      6

5      Getting the job you want is mostly a matter of luck.

2      3      4      5      6

6.      Making money is primarily a matter of good fortune.

4      5      6

Most people are capable of doing their jobs well if they make the effort.

2 3 4 5 6

8. In order to get a really good job you need to have family members or friends in high places.

2 3 4 5 6

9. Promotions are usually a matter of good fortune.

1 2 3 4 5 6

10. When it comes to landing a really good job, who you know is more important than what you know.

1 2 3 4 5 6

11. Promotions are given to employees who perform well on the job.

3 4 5 6

12. To make a lot of money you have to know the right people.

2 3 4 5 6

13. It takes a lot of luck to be an outstanding employee on most jobs.

1 2 3 4 5 6

14. People who perform their jobs well generally get rewarded for it.

2 3 4 5 6

15. Most employees have more influence on their supervisors than they think they do.

1 2 3 4 5 6

16. The main difference between people who make a lot of money and people who make a little money is luck.

1      2      3      4      5      6

**(Spector, 1988)**



**SECTION 4:**

**RESPONDENT'S SENSE OF COHERENCE**

Below are a series of questions relating to various aspects of our lives. Each question has seven possible answers. Please mark the number which expresses your answer, with numbers 1 and 7 being the extreme answers. If the words under 7 is right for you, circle 7. If you feel differently, circle the number which best expresses your feeling. Circle one number for each of the following scales:

When you talk to people, do you have the feeling that they don't understand you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never have this feeling						always have this feeling

2. In the past, when you had to do something which depended upon cooperation with others, did you have the feeling that it:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
surely wouldn't get done						surely would get done

3. Think of the people with whom you come into contact daily, aside from the ones to whom you feel closest. How well do you know most of them?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
you feel that they're strangers						you know them very well

Do you have the feeling that you don't really care about what goes on around you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very seldom or never						very often

5. Has it happened in the past that you were surprised by the behaviour of other people whom you thought you knew well?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
never happened							always happened

6. Has it happened that people whom you counted on disappointed you?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
never happened							always happened

7. Life is:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
full of interest							completely unroutine

8. Until now your life has had:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
no clear goals or purpose at all							very clear goals and purpose

9. Do you have the feeling that you're being treated unfairly?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
very often							very seldom

10. In the past ten years your life has been

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
full of changes without your knowing what will happen next							completely consistent and clear

11. Most of the things you do in the future will probably be:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
completely fascinating							deadly boring

12. So you have the feeling that you are in an unfamiliar situation and don't know what to do?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
very often							very seldom or never

13. What best describes how you see life:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
one can always find a solution to painful things in life							there is no solution to painful things in life

14. When you think about your life, you very often:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
feel how good it is to be alive							ask yourself why you exist at all

15. When you face difficult problem, the choice of a solution is:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
always confusing and hard to find							always completely clear

16. Doing the things you do every day is

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
a source of deep pleasure and satisfaction							a source of pain and boredom

17. Your life in the future will probably be:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
full of changes without your knowing what will happen next							completely consistent and clear

18. When something unpleasant happened in the past your tendency was:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
to feel very upset about it						to say "ok, that's that. I have to live with it," and go on

19. So you have very mixed-up feelings and ideas?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very often						very seldom or never

20. When you do something that gives you a good feeling:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
it's certain that you'll go on feeling good						it's certain that something will happen to spoil that feeling?

21. Does it happen that you have feelings inside that you would rather not feel?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very often						very seldom or never

22. You anticipate that your personal life in the future will be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
totally without meaning and purpose						full of meaning and purpose

23. Do you think that there will always be people whom you'll be able to count on in the future?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
you're certain there will be						you doubt there will be

24. Does it happen that you have the feeling that you don't know exactly what's about to happen?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
very often							very seldom or never

25. Many people – even those with a strong character – sometimes feel like losers (“sad sacks”) or blunderers in certain situations. How often have you felt this way in the past?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
never							very often

26. When something happened, have you generally found that:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
you overestimated or underestimated its importance							you saw things in the right proportion

27. When you think of difficulties you are likely to face in important aspects of your life, do you have the feeling that:

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
you always succeed in overcoming the difficulties							you won't succeed in overcoming the difficulties

28. How often do you have the feeling that there's little meaning in the things you do in your daily life?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
never							very often

29. How often do you have the feeling that you're not sure you can keep under control?

1		2	3	4	5	6	7
never							very often

(Antonovsky, 1984)

**SECTION 5:**  
***RESPONDENT'S ORGANISATIONAL COMMITMENT***

Listed below are a series of statements that represent possible feelings that you might have about your company. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
strongly disagree	moderately disagree	slightly disagree	neither agree or disagree	slightly agree	moderately agree	strongly agree

I am willing to put in a great effort beyond that is normally expected in order to help the company be successful.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

2. I talk up this company to my friends as a great place to work for

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

3. I feel very little loyalty to this organisation.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4. I would accept any kind of job assignment in order to keep working for the company

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

5. I find that my values and the values of the company are very similar.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

6. I am proud to tell others that I am part of this company.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

I could just as well be working for a different organisation as long as the type of work was similar.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

8. This company really inspires the very best in me in the way of job performance.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
9. It would take very little change in my present circumstances to cause me to leave this company.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
10. I am extremely glad that I chose this company, than to work for other organisations was considering at the time I joined.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- There's not too much to be gained by sticking with this company indefinitely.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
12. Often, I find it difficult to agree with this company's policies on important matters relating to its employees.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
13. I really care about the fate of this company.  
1      2      3      4      5      6
14. For me this is the best of all possible organisations for which to work.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
15. Deciding to work for this company was a definite mistake on my part.  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**(Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979)**