

Networking Social Security:
The Effects of Prolonged Uncertainty in Restructuring Programs on Reconstruction of
Employees' Work Experience

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Abstract

Employees at Deutsche Telekom/T-Systems were undergoing prolonged periods (several months) of job insecurity after having preliminarily been selected into groups with quotas for retrenchment during annual waves of mass-layoffs. Prolonged uncertainty, owing to organizational and legal constraints, placed considerable strain on the emotional experience and mental well-being of the employees and limited their perceived options to structure, attributing primarily externally with almost no perception of agency (contingency).

Hierarchies have been found as a central element that dominates the individual reconstruction of the workplace experience after being notified of the preliminary selection, limiting both cognitive experience and execution of agency. Advanced epistemological constructions of self (independent-event, homeostatic or morphogenetic thinking) have either been absent, or have been dependent on increased levels of individual social security. Networked, interdependent approaches at social security may alleviate mental well-being on the level of societies.

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Introduction

IT-Departments at Deutsche Telekom/T-Systems, an industry-leading German telecommunications company with international operations, are currently undergoing multi-year restructuring programs including several waves of mass-layoffs. Deutsche Telekom's programs are subject to reconciliation of interests with its worker's council. The retrenchment program is therefore centrally organized and reduction performed on counts of abstract roles that are broken down on team level. Personal references must not be made in the initial selection process. Out of the total number of people that maintain a common role within the team, a certain percentage of full-time equivalents (FTE) will be reduced. All owners of that particular role within a selected team are from this point forward in organizational limbo with quotas for competitive retrenchment. This preselection has to be immediately announced to the employees. Subsequently, a final selection is made among all preliminarily selected role owners within their teams to determine those who are actually retrenched offering benefits to those who quit voluntarily. This process spans several months, exposing people to prolonged periods of existential uncertainty and supposedly severe mental strain.

Research Question

This selection process consumes a considerable amount of time spanning several months where people are unsure about their future within the company. At the same time project requirements and daily business proceed as usual and people are expected to fulfil their duties. This uncertainty poses considerable psychological pressures on employees that affect their social behavior towards their colleagues as well as their general workplace situation. According to Heider (1982) people stereotype on their observations and these

stereotypes in turn influence their behavior and situational as well as affective experience. Particularly, (a) attributions of the events are expected to be made by employees, (b) their outlook and regulatory focus may have an impact on their emotional trajectory and decisions, (c) the personal involvement of their peer groups that are relevant in decision making may create additional dissonances, (d) the prevailing leadership style (or changes therein) may affect the climate and work attitude, and (e) their cognitive mindscape may generally affect their evaluation of the experience.

It is therefore interesting for future planning of restructuring programs and their accompanying measures to assist people during times of uncertainty by answering the question: “How do people reconstruct their work experience during prolonged periods of uncertainty being ‘partially affected’ by mass layoffs?”

Motivation

Basing on Heider’s (1982) work, it is to be expected that differences exist with regard to the attribution of the cause for the layoffs. These restructuring programs claim to be centrally regulated and anonymous. The anonymity of the programs may be doubted by a considerable amount of people and a bias for pre-selection within dominant networks and in-groups thought to be in place (Daley, 1998, pp. 101-102). Thus an attribution of the impending job loss can be made by employees to internal or external factors, either accepting or rejecting responsibility. Additionally, people may assume or reject control over the subsequent selection process and thus actively engage in trying to stay aboard or take a passive, withdrawing attitude. Situations of uncertainty directly challenge attributions of stability. Some people may construct their selves on internally based values and thus maintain a relatively stable self-image during the period, whereas externally motivated people are subject suffer from destabilization of their identities. (Myers, & Myers, 1980, “Effect of the EI Preference”)

Higgins (1987) distinguishes promotional and prevention behavior in self-discrepancy theory (SDT). Higgins defines promotional behavior as a function of matching own behavior with one's ideals, and places its dysfunction on the depressive spectrum. Prevention behavior, on the other hand, is engaged to relieve a discrepancy between own behavior and social norms, one's oughts, trying to avoid harm. As the avoidance of harm is omnidirectional, Higgins observed heightened vigilance in prevention behavior, with its dysfunction on the anxiety spectrum. Employees are expected to exhibit different behavior based on their regulatory style. The subsequent reconstruction of their work experience is expected to be withdrawing with difficulties to focus and a tendency for depressive symptoms or outgoing, hyper-vigilant, with a tendency for symptoms of anxiety. (Higgins, 1987, pp. 319-340)

Dissonance and Uncertainty

Situations of uncertainty require people to make choices. Employees who are "partially affected" have to choose between voluntarily leaving the company and receive a substantial amount of money from their severance package and opting to try to stay within the company with uncertain outcome. In the latter case, their ability to maintain a positive outlook may play a significant role in constructing a positive self-image of their future role within the organization. (Davidson, & Begley, 2012, ch. 3, "The Outlook Dimension") According to Festinger (1954), people in situations of uncertainty "evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison [...] with the opinions and abilities of others." (p. 118) People have several peer groups to look for assistance, for example, friends and family, colleagues, and superiors, some of which are co-affected and play different roles in the process. Based on preferred peer groups used to stabilize a valid alternative better assistance may be given to the affected employees.

Lewin (1939) examined the behavioral differences in groups with authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles. Members in authoritarian groups "developed a pattern of aggressive domination toward one another" (p. 277). Although there are attempts at

modernizing leadership styles and structure within Deutsche Telekom, as a traditionally large, formerly federal organization hierarchical leadership structures can be observed throughout the organization. Furthermore, in times of crisis, organizations tend to revert towards more hierarchical management styles with military metaphors, as the agreed-upon measures have to be executed. Similarly, employees under stress tend to revert to more primal, associative, hierarchical cognitive styles (Kahnemann, 2011, p. 75, pp. 127-128; Maruyama, 1980; p. 589-594). Thus, behavioral consequences among employees and their peers are expected that may also affect the above-described assistance seeking behavior in situations of uncertainty.

Following Maruyama, interviewees may experience relevance dissonance with regard to this study. As the study is outside the scope of the company, people may not believe in a direct benefit on their own or subsequent similar situations. Additionally, they may doubt the scientific rationality of business decisions. Although the study assures anonymity, employees may experience criticality dissonance and be reluctant to provide particular information. It may be possible that criticality dissonance differs dependent on people's tendency to promotion or prevention behavior. Particularly, people with prevention behavior are expected to be prone to criticality dissonance. Additionally, the metaphors and expressions of the employees may give hints to their cognitive style, or mindscape as termed by Maruyama (1980, p. 589). Maruyama distinguishes hierarchical, independent-event, homeostatic and morphogenetic mindscapes. Finding out about people's epistemological mindscape may permit conclusions on the severity of the above-discussed, hierarchy-dependent phenomena on employee experience.

With continuing pressures from globalization and financial optimization, workplace situations have become increasingly competitive. As the gap between the rich and the poor increases, the availability of well-paid jobs (or employment at all) has been steadily decreasing. This increased uncertainty affects people's attributional styles, their outlook, their way of decision making, the prevalence of leadership styles, and people's cognitive

evaluation of their workplace experience. Following a period of mechanistic automation that was intended to alleviate the work of human beings, accelerated by the availability of digital infrastructures and services, the need for many types of work has continuously decreased. However, the societal consensus for contribution and its reward, providing meaning to the life of people, has not yet been adjusted to the situation. Therefore people are experiencing increasing pressures from restructuring programs that appear to be a steady companion in modern business life. This study investigates employees' experience when being directly affected by restructuring programs and understands itself as initial science to explore new strategies to assist people in an organizational environment of increasing financial and social pressures.

Literature Study

Industrialization and automation were targeted at the well-being of people. Physically straining work could subsequently be carried out by machines. However, automation also goes hand in hand with the loss of manual labor. To cope, Otto von Bismarck, in the early 20th century, introduced a variety of instruments and is thus considered the father of Social Security (cf. Kotlikoff, 2011, p. 415). Financial optimization has compromised many early instruments, producing a substantial number of people without adequate jobs and related income. The Digital Age has accelerated and extended this development to include formerly qualified labor, increasing widespread job insecurity. The social consensus for reward has not been adequately adapted. Therefore a negative impact of job insecurity on health has been well-established.

Individual and Social Variability

The comprehensive body of literature on the relation of job loss or job insecurity on mental health discusses a variety of mediating factors. Individually, the sense of personal control on mental health benefit produces diminished returns for people threatened with job

loss. Glavin, & Schieman (2014) thus suggested an influence of uncertain role contexts on well-being. Although emphasizing the mediating role of personality characteristics, Näswall, Sverke, & Hellgren (2005) found job insecurity to negatively affect mental well-being, “even after controlling for individual characteristics” (p. 37). This finding promotes the importance to investigate health-related effects in times of high economic pressure cherishing individual diversity. Vander Elst, Näswall, Bernhard-Oettel, De Witte, & Sverke (2015) confirmed “threats to both manifest [...] and latent benefits” as mediating factors to well-being. Financial resources, contrary to expectations, aggravated physical health effects when manifest benefits were being threatened, suggesting a complex, individual etiology of job-related health in situations of social or existential uncertainty.

Marchand, Durand, Haines, & Harvey (2014) examined social and individual factors on distress, depression and exhaustion and found significant relationships between contextual factors all examined effects on psychological health in situations of job insecurity including skill utilization, relationships, family conflicts and social support. Marchand et al. thus suggested holistic studies that honor the complexity of work-related health related issues. Höge, Sora, Wever, Peiró, & Caballer (2015) compared the relationship between job insecurity and somatic complaints in two different cultural contexts (Spain and Austria). Somatic complaints proved to be higher in Austria, whereas they were expected to be higher in Spain. Spain’s job insecurity was significantly higher, suggesting cultural, mediating effects.

Socio-Individual Feedback

Green (2011) emphasized the role of employability in regulating life satisfaction and mental health in situations of job insecurity, linking both personal and social factors. Positive employability was able to reduce “the detrimental effect of job insecurity by more than half” (p. 265). Nuttman-Shwartz & Gadot (2012) found a difference in distress responses between people who experienced job loss multiple times or only once. Never-married women were

found “particularly vulnerable for mental health symptoms and to multiple job loss”, suggesting culturally and individually recurrent influences on the threat of unemployment. Thus, individual factors do not only influence the consequences of job insecurity, they also feed back to its threat. Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, & Jolley (2013) investigated job loss and its consequences on mental health as a function of structure and agency, identifying “stress, changes to perceived control, loss of self-esteem, shame and loss of status, experiencing a grieving process, and financial strain” as main motives that impact mental well-being (p. 1). This suggests a complex feed-back between structure and agency in the etiology of psychological distress.

Literature Summary

Job insecurity and contextual, individual and social factors form a complex, recurrent network that produces individual developmental trajectories. Small changes in corporate practices and their embedded social systems may largely impact the threatened workforce. To beat legal systems, modern companies frequently invent new instruments to retrench unwanted workforce. They optimize financial penalties and take little care about the psychological effects on the retrenched workforce. The impact of these individual instruments on mental health has to be examined as they become available to stabilize the scientific consensus on the impact of existential uncertainty and threat of job loss on mental health as a whole. Therefore, this qualitative study examines the impact of prolonged uncertainty in situations of impending job loss.

Results

Summary

IT-Departments at Deutsche Telekom/T-Systems, an industry-leading German telecommunications company with international operations, are currently undergoing multi-year restructuring programs including several waves of mass-layoffs. These waves force a

substantial amount of employees into prolonged periods (several months) of job insecurity after having preliminarily been selected into groups of organizational limbo with quotas for competitive retrenchment. To deal with legal restrictions, retrenchment processes are centrally managed and conducted impersonally based on organizational roles, limiting personal influence on organizational decisions. Prolonged uncertainty considerably promoted negative affect and aggravated the well-being of the employees. The enormous number of ten situational attributions has been brought up by only two interviewed individuals with almost no perception of agency within their current, organizational context. It was found that hierarchical thinking played a central role in dominating individual reconstructions of the workplace experience. Hierarchies limited cognitive experiences and hindered the execution of agency. Thus, advanced epistemological mindscapes were not observed in the cognitive reconstruction of the workplace experience in prolonged situations of job insecurity, supposedly forcing substantial parts of the workforce into primal, reactive behavioral patterns with implications on society as a whole (Maruyama, 1980).

Findings

The study identified three fundamental, recurring themes for employees that have been selected for possible retrenchment and are undergoing prolonged periods of uncertainty: negative affective states, external attributions, and limitation to hierarchical epistemologies.

With regard to negative affect, six major themes were identified: (a) focus (hypervigilance, problems concentrating or general distraction), (b) anxiety (worrying or existential fears), (c) repression (avoidance or procrastination to face situations that produce negative affective states), (d) depression (experience of anhedonia or hopelessness), (e) demotivation (negative emotional judgment of work-related action with elevated activation-threshold), and (f) resignation (giving up trying to improve the personal situation due to perceived lack of agency within the given environment).

As the retrenchment process was announced to be impersonal, attributions by both interviewees were primarily situational. Situational factors identified were (a) competition among colleagues, (b) the managerial desire to satisfy shareholders and produce shareholder value, (c) defiance (external attribution with a desire but inability to punish the organization for its behavior), (d) tall hierarchies where employees and employers lose their thematic causality, (e) statutory processes, (f) gender, (g) selection by superiors, (h) part-time work relationships, (i) the age of employees, and (j) personal health status. Both employees emphasized the hierarchical role of their direct superior in the selection process. Although attributing primarily external, one interviewee additionally worried about dispositional contributions that may have promoted the selection. Despite the emotionally challenging situation, both employees appeared extroverted and exhibited ongoing commitment to their direct colleagues.

Both interviewees endorsed binary decisions that reduce uncertainty. However, the perceived impact was dependent on the options of appeal within the organizational hierarchy and other dispositional and individual social factors, for example, prospective employability, family support and overall financial situation. Colleagues played a minor role as peers to reduce uncertainty due to reasons of competition. In both cases, the primary party to address in situations of uncertainty was the respective partner or family.

Evaluation

The questionnaire did an astonishingly good job at exploring the general affective situation of the employees and attributional styles. It was however tough getting through to the epistemological or cognitive questions of hierarchy and participation that the questionnaire aimed to exploit. It appears that in situations of uncertainty, people do not only revert to their peers (in this example their family), but people are also reduced to viewing themselves, their immediate environment and their prospective future in terms of concrete actions. Even though both people emphasized the role of their superiors in the selection

process, attributions differed, as did recommendations for improvement. It is thus difficult to proceed directly to quantitative evaluation. Further, qualitative studies will be required, particularly focusing on the role of hierarchies with regard to cognitive dissonance in uncertainty.

Discussion

The overwhelming prevalence of negative emotional content and situational attribution highlight one substantial link in contemporary Western societies: the perceived inability to influence not only society as a whole but even individual prospects and the related emotional aggravation on working members who are existentially dependent on employment. This corresponds to Blavin & Schieman (2014), who found a curvilinear relation between sense of personal control and mental health with diminished returns when people are facing job loss. The surprising amount of ten different, external attributions that have been made by only two interviewees suggests that employees in prolonged situations of job uncertainty are positioned at the steep end of this curve with rapid decline in mental health. Both interviewees felt unable to change their personal situation within the retrenchment process. This finding is backed up by a variety of statements that have been linked to anxiety, repression, depression, demotivation, and resignation with the complete absence of positive, emotional content. Both interviewees exclusively reported negative emotions, although they differed substantially in their personal situations and existential security. Sharing an extroverted nature, both employees developed fundamentally different expectations on their individual future. This supports Näswall, Sverke, & Hellgren's (2005) findings that job insecurity negatively affects mental well-being "even after controlling for individual characteristics" (p. 37; cf. also Myers, & Myers, 1980, "Effect of the EI Preference").

Hierarchies appeared as a central motive in various occasions. The role of superiors within the selection process has been emphasized by both employees along with uncertain and inscrutable selection criteria. Hierarchies were found to be too tall, precluding personal

contributions from influence on managerial decisions and alienating decision makers from the workforce. Thus, goal-driven behavior no longer appears possible with detrimental effects on motivation. Following self-discrepancy theory and its derived concept of regulatory focus, people thus operate in omnidirectional avoidance behavior with heightened vigilance and increased anxiety, alternating to depressive states when faced with limited future options (Higgins, 1987, pp. 319-340; Higgins, 1997). This relationship contradicts Höge, Sora, Wever, Peiroá, & Caballer (2015) who suggested that somatic complaints are culturally mediated instead of bound to perceived job insecurity. The hierarchical nature of many organizations appears to limit the cognitive experience to hierarchical epistemologies with regard to existential questions, promoting the applicability of Higgins' theories. In turn, this cognitive limitation may be culturally mediated. Green (2011) and Nuttman-Shwartz & Gadot (2012) also found mediating effects of positive employability and social security on the detrimental effects of job insecurity on mental health, operating well within hierarchical cognition. These findings also conform with Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation, as job insecurity today poses a direct threat to existential human physiological and safety needs. The prevalence of hierarchical thinking in both individuals, independent of the level of personal, social security, however, questions the validity of higher constructions within Maslow's hierarchy (pp. 370-396).

Therefore, levels of hierarchy in organizations appear to serve as a normative factor to form pre-selection bias of in-groups in the sense of Allport (1954), promoting emotional judgment of higher, cognitive constructions and thus prejudice (pp. 29-46; Daley, 1998, pp. 101-102). The influence of financial and social security on the participant's future prospective (one handicapped, 51 year-old providing for a family with financial liabilities and one younger married technician working part-time in addition to the spouse) exposes hierarchical influence on society's distribution of chances via the allocation of financial resources. The hierarchical nature of organizations both aggravates the mental effects of job

insecurity by limiting cognitive experience and feeds back on individual realities via the normative nature of financial power on social security and execution of agency. Thus, models of structure and agency are applicable to situations of prolonged uncertainty with regard to job insecurity, where structure represents hierarchical models with low variability and agency complex phenomena with high contingency (cf. Anaf, Baum, Newman, Ziersch, & Jolley, 2013). Hierarchies appear as a cause as well as a consequence of external attribution: Within hierarchical epistemologies, external attribution is promoted by limiting personal contingency (agency), and external attribution limits epistemological advance to independent-event or homeostatic thinking by promoting stereotyping and in-/out-group biases. Hierarchies in connection with job insecurity thus degrade dispositional attribution and personal responsibility. Given the volatile nature of modern business environments and their implicit uncertainties, hierarchical organizations seem unfit to promote responsible behavior and organizational contingency. Taken to the level of societies, the deconstruction of primarily financial hierarchies and promotion of social security may increase overall well-being and mental health. Thus, hierarchies together with their predominantly negative emotional experience for most of their members limit the continuous, cognitive reconstruction of personal experience and thus counteract the perpetual resolution of cognitive dissonances in the absence of permanent growth (cf. *différance*; Derrida, 1982; Higgins, 1997).

From a two-person or family perspective, the impact of social backup within families and the role of families in the stabilizing of alternatives in situations of occupational uncertainty need sophisticated consideration. The importance of marital success on well-being has been established by Veenhoven (1983, p. 49). In the early 2000s, “one third of all western Europeans were living alone” (MarketWatch, 2003, p. 39). With a growing number of single people in Western societies and increased volatility of digital markets, the social impact of mass retrenchments in hierarchical organizations is expected to substantially impair mental well-being on the level of societies. Therefore, alternative forms of organizations have to be

exploited that go beyond hierarchical settings and provide individuals with a network of financial ties, reducing effective and perceived existential threats and in turn promoting mental health.

Research and Coding Method

The two interviewees have been selected on a “first come first serve” basis from a list of probable subjects that had prior been tentatively selected for retrenchment. Semi-structured interviews have been performed with both subjects using the questionnaire supplied in the appendix. The interviews in this study have been transcribed by the interviewer and color-coded manually during thematic analysis. Software that assists qualitative data analysis (QDA), such as NVivo or University of Pittsburgh’s Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT), assists in multi-user settings with a multitude of shared codes. Additionally, QDA software facilitates comparing and reviewing text passages from different sources that match common themes, adding notes and tracking changes (Gope, 2014). As this initial study has been conducted by one individual and featured only two interviews, software assistance was considered but did not exhibit substantial benefits. The short span available for evaluation and the overall simplicity of the thematic analyses outweighed the selection process and learning curves required for tool assisted QDA.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the particular situation of prolonged uncertainty in workplace situations. Particularly, the study aimed at exploring a classification of the workplace experience with regard to Maruyama’s (1980) epistemological styles, that is, the impact of hierarchical, independent-event, homeostatic or morphogenetic thinking on the individual reconstruction or experience. The results suggest that employees in retrenchment situations experience hierarchical structures and processes as given environmental factors within organizations, limiting further epistemological evaluation and perceived options.

Employees were found to be primarily concerned with managing the discrepancy between self-worth and the affective evaluation of their prospective future whose dynamics they attributed externally to hierarchies, feeling unable to positively influence their environment (cf. Festinger, 1957). Hierarchies appeared both as a reason for perceived inability to influence environmental factors and distortion of information along levels of hierarchy, undermining the recognition of individual contribution by the organization and its impact on organizational decisions.

Accompanying measures should therefore focus on alleviating the affective consequences for employees and act as enabler for future employment options for retrenched workforce. On a societal level, prolonged existential uncertainty should be avoided in situations where people are likely to attribute consequences to situational factors as the related affective content promotes symptoms of demotivation, depression, and anxiety. From an epistemological perspective and social well-being, the suitability of hierarchies and abstract role-models for volatile workplace environments has to be questioned. Modern societies ask for modern approaches at social security that transcend Taylor's protectionism or Bismarck's traditional social security. Single-source dependency of financial income in hierarchical dependency no longer appears suitable in globalized, networked societies with volatile market situations. Accordingly, the networking of social security appears as a feasible resolution to alleviate the negative effects of job insecurity and promote mental well-being even in situations of economic turbulence. Independent thinker and social critic Noam Chomsky (2014) emphasized that substantial change in our devastating societal trajectories may technically be feasible, but is improbable if the decisional contingency remains limited to hierarchical institutions of imperial states and private economic power.

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Appendix A - Codes

During the evaluation the thematic content of the interviews, the following color code has been developed. Each code has been related to interview questions according to its relevance.

Two major code blocks, affective symptoms and external attributions, have been structured hierarchically to investigate further details.

Table 1 - Themes and Color Codes

Code	Theme	Related Questions
Affective Symtoms (AS)	Subjects (Ss) express or exhibit negative affective symptoms, not otherwise specified.	1,4,5,7
AS/Focus	Ss. exhibit problems focusing or concentrating and appear generally distracted.	1,4,5
AS/Anxiety	Ss. appear anxious and worry about the future.	1,7
AS/Repression	Ss. ignore the circumstances they find themselves in, focusing on other events instead, without facing (and thus dealing with) the emotional consequences. Ss. procrastinate facing their situation.	1,4,5,7
AS/Depression	Ss. mention symptoms of anhedonia and depression.	1,7
AS/Demotivation	Ss. report symptoms of negative emotional judgment and demotivation.	1,4,5,7
AS/Resignation	Ss. have given up trying to improve their situation due to a lack of energy, demotivation or perceived inability to enhance their situation.	1,4,5,7
External	Ss. generally attribute to situational factors being	2,3,8,9

Attribution (EA)	indifferent about motivation and judgment, not otherwise specified.	
EA/Competition	Ss. attribute externally due to perceived competition among colleagues.	2,3,6,8,9
EA/Shareholder-Value	Ss. attribute to situational factors, putting the blame on the organization satisfying shareholder value.	2,3,8,9
EA/Defiance	Ss. attribute externally and feel a need to punish the organization for its behavior, to show consequences.	2,3,4,8,9
EA/Hierarchy	Ss. attribute externally, claiming that the organization lacks insight in the work of employees due to too many levels and structures of hierarchy.	2,3,8,9
EA/Process	Ss. attribute externally, blaming compliance to impersonal processes and roles for their situation.	2,3,8,9
EA/Gender	Ss. attribute externally, putting the blame on their gender.	2,3,8,9
EA/Sympathy	Ss. attribute externally, putting the blame on sympathy between supervisors and single employees.	2,3,8,9
EA/Part-Time	Ss attribute externally, putting the blame on their part-time employment.	2,3,8,9
EA/Age	Ss attribute externally, putting the blame on the age of the employees age	2,3,8,9
EA/Health	Ss attribute externally, putting the blame on their health status.	2,3,7,9
Internal Attribution (IA)	Ss. attribute internally, questioning their own contributions to their situation	2,3,9

IA/Worrying	Ss. attribute internally, asking what they may be doing wrong.	2,3,4,5,9
Team-Commitment	Ss. show commitment towards their team although being selected for possible retrenchment.	4,5
Partner-Focus	Ss. revert to their partner to stabilize consensus between alternatives concerning their future careers.	6
Binary Decisions	Ss. prefer binary (either/or-) decisions to prolonged situations of uncertainty.	9

Appendix B - Questionnaire

Table 2 - Questionnaire

Nr	Question
1	<p>What did being “partially affected” by the restructuring program mean to you?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them to relate experiences in the first weeks with the announcement. How did it affect them and their colleagues, friends, etc.?</p> <p>Prompt: How did they feel knowing that they are affected?</p>
2	<p>How do you think you were chosen to be affected?</p> <p>Probe: What or who they think was responsible for putting you on the list of partially affected people</p> <p>Prompt: Why they think the decision was made the way they stated</p>
3	<p>How do you think you can influence being fully affected?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them whether they have taken or intend to take specific measures to influence the selection process.</p> <p>Prompt: Why do they think their measure works or they cannot influence the process?</p>
4	<p>How did being affected change your style of working?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them, whether they pursue goals, stand out or avoid attracting attention, avoid experience difficulties concentrate, withdraw or get bustling in activity, etc.</p> <p>Prompt: Why do they think it is important that they act the way they do or what caused the change?</p>
5	<p>What changes in your work situation did you notice in the weeks following the announcement?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them whether they experienced changes in mood, the amount of work done, sleep patterns, etc.</p> <p>Prompt: Why do they think the symptoms they reported relate to being affected?</p>
6	<p>How do you go about deciding on your future employment?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them who they consult with?</p>

	<p>Prompt: Why do they think it is important that the consult with the person or group they reported?</p>
7	<p>How do you judge your future perspectives?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them whether they think they will easily find an adequate job if they become fully affected, or whether they count on staying within the company.</p> <p>Probe: Why do they pursue the alternative they proposed?</p>
8	<p>How do you think the company's leadership style contributes to the situation?</p> <p>Probe: Ask them whether they experience hierarchical or consensual decision-making processes and how they think they are affected by that type of decision making.</p> <p>Prompt: Why do they think the type of leaderships them in the way they suggested?</p>
9	<p>What do you think could be done to improve the situation?</p> <p>Probe: Do you know of any measures that are already in place? How could they be expanded?</p>
10	<p>Do you have anything to add?</p>