

**Maintaining employee engagement post
retrenchment in the PGM mining sector in
South Africa**

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ABSTRACT

Restructuring in the form of retrenchment has become a widely used strategy to save company costs however, it can result in psychological and physical strain on the surviving employees, leading to reduced morale, commitment and employee engagement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to delve into the lives of the surviving employees to comprehend retrenchment as a phenomenon and its impact on them. Furthermore, the study intended to explore the strategies or interventions required to rebuild and maintain employee engagement post retrenchments in the Platinum Group Metals mining sector in South Africa.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews of sixteen participants who survived the retrenchments. The study revealed how retrenchments affected the emotional, psychological and physical aspects of the surviving employees leading them to find alternative ways to cope and navigate through the change. It also revealed how retrenchments altered the workload of the surviving employees causing them to have more responsibilities and experience work intensity because of the increase in job demands and reduction in resources.

The study revealed that effective communication, consulting and involving the affected employees can play a significant role in negating the effects of retrenchments such as anxiety, job insecurity and increased workload. Furthermore, support and direction from leadership, continuous engagement with the surviving employees and provision of training to close the gaps that the laid off employees created were identified as job resources that can enhance employee engagement, directly improving organisational performance. This study therefore emphasises the need for organisations to integrate employee wellbeing in the restructuring process and implement interventions that minimise the effects of retrenchment on the surviving employees, thereby building a resilient team that can sustain required operational performance.

Keywords

Restructuring, retrenchments, employee engagement, job demands, job resources, personal resources, leadership support, Job Demands Resource Model (JD-R), effective communication

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research study is my own work. It has never been submitted before for any qualification at any university across the country. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Business Administration at the University of Pretoria, Gordon Institute of Business Science. I further declare that appropriate authorisation and permission were granted the researcher to conduct this research.

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List of Acronyms

PGMs Platinum Group Metals

HR Human Resources

DMRE Department of Mineral Resources and Energy

Chapter 1: Introduction of the research problem

1.1. Introduction

The decline in Platinum Group Metals (PGMs) price, higher operating costs and inconsistent demands experienced in the South African PGMs sector have resulted in a challenging economic era (Daily Maverick, 2024; Minerals Council South Africa, n.d.). Most employees found themselves being affected by these challenges, that prompted a strategic decision to retrench with the aim of reducing the operating costs and improving the bottom line (Daily Maverick, 2024; Minerals Council South Africa, n.d.).

Organisational retrenchment is referred to a process of reducing the headcount in an organisation to decrease expenditure costs, control cash flow and improve productivity (Casillas et al., 2019). This process usually takes place to respond to economic challenges, technological advancements or responding to competition from the market. Mujtaba and Senathip (2020) cited that although retrenchment can have immediate advantages of cost reduction and improving profits, it can cause the remaining employees to experience stress, anxiety and dismay.

The most challenging aspect about retrenchment is the effects it has on the remaining employees, posing emotional and psychological threats that are induced by the fear of job insecurity (Abildgaard et al., 2018). Furthermore, retrenchment can cause the remaining employees to experience an increase in workload and responsibility which can lead to work intensity, consequently impacting the employees' commitment and lowering the organisation's performance (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Langerak et al. (2022) also cited that retrenchments may induce fear of job insecurity and increase job demands for surviving employees, thereby affecting their engagement despite being seen as a necessary strategy to turn the company around. These experiences pose a threat to the organisation's long-term stability and performance, and employees may start looking for alternative employment if the environment is not conducive for them.

Employee engagement refers to an individual's behaviour driven by enthusiasm that amplifies the relationship and connection to work and the people in a company or organisation (Turner & Turner, 2020). Employee engagement is further emphasised as a fulfilling feeling towards work that is categorised by dedication, commitment and absorption (Turner & Turner, 2020). Employee engagement has been associated

with driving productivity in an organisation, consequently improving performance, according to Clack (2021).

Different leaders from the PGM sector implemented various strategies to navigate through the low PGM price era, and since they all reduced their workforce, their surviving employees are experiencing the impacts of retrenchments and interventions are needed to maintain employee engagement to sustainably drive the productivity and performance of their organisations. This study is based on maintaining employee engagement after retrenchments and was anchored on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. The JD-R model is a framework that looks at how the two categories, job demands and job resources, contribute to employee interest, welfare and performance (Bakker et al., 2023). This framework is suitable because of its inherent ability to integrate the predictors and consequences of employee engagement, which in turn enhances organisational performance, and it is relevant during crises such as retrenchment (Bakker et al., 2023).

1.2. Research Problem

According to Nienaber and Martins (2016), the goal of an organisation is to remain sustainable and live out their purpose, which comprises of providing services or products to their customers, creating wealth and adding value to the economy, environment and society at large. With the recent economic challenges, the PGM sector had been compromising improved profits due to high operating costs and low PGM prices and had opted to implement retrenchment as one of the strategies to preserve the future of the industry (Minerals Council South Africa, n.d.).

This strategy is deemed necessary however it comes with a lot of challenges such as contribution to unemployment, which affects the country's economic development negatively, according to Adu et al. (2019). Lower economic development can have a negative impact in a sense that there may be increased crime in the country that end up affecting the mining operations, and fluctuating commodity prices which may not help the industry to recover if the PGM prices do not recover. Unemployment is referred to as a measure of individuals who are seeking a job but are currently not employed (Adu et al., 2019). In South Africa, the official unemployment rate by the first quarter of 2025 was 32.9%, which is among the highest across the globe, showing a 1% increase from the last quarter of the year 2024 (Stats SA, 2025). There

were approximately 291,000 job reductions in the last quarter of 2024 in South Africa, with the mining industry accounting for a significant 35,000 (Stats SA, 2025). These statistics can further induce fear on the remaining employees, about job insecurity.

Usually, retrenchment processes take place when the firm is facing external or internal challenges that affect its bottom line, and leaders believe it is the quickest way to turn the business around since headcounts occupy a significant portion of the organisation's fixed costs (Casillas et al., 2019). However, for an industry that relies heavily on manual labour like mining, retrenchments can bring a different ball game that require organisations to have a different strategy and approach to mitigate its effects and keep the company profitable. Focusing on cost reduction and improving the bottom line while neglecting the remaining employees who are the primary producers of products can cripple the company instead of driving it to survival and continuity.

Many executives confidently believe that retrenchments contribute to saving the organisations from being liquidated and maintaining the organisation's market share in the long run, however its impact on surviving employees differs from these expectations because of the psychological, emotional and physical stresses they create (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021; Johnstone, 2024). Retrenchment is viewed as a major stressor that alters the surviving employees job demands (increase), and job resources (reduce) and these changes induce worry and anxiety and causes them to experience increased workload because of the increase in responsibilities (Abildgaard et al., 2018). Cregan et al. (2021) also supported that workforce reduction induces anxiety, panic and stress, causing employees to be disengaged.

Increased physical demands on surviving employees due to reduced resources, role ambiguity, and overall work exhaustion are consequences of retrenchment according to Frone and Blais (2020). These can delay reaching stability after restructuring, making it challenging for the organisation to execute their strategies and reach their goals. The remaining employees may end up going through the emotional continuum and finding it difficult to commit because of the increase in demands and lack of resources. Moreover, lack of resources is demotivating and reduces employee engagement because in most cases the surviving employees struggle to reach their goals and are required to go an extra mile to get results, which is not always

sustainable (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Parent and Lovelace (2018) also support the idea that a change such as retrenchment places more job demands on employees.

The other biggest risk that labour reduction could bring in the mining industry is the loss of skills and experience, especially with the acknowledged global skills shortage that already exists in the sector, according to the Impala Platinum Holdings Limited (2024). Now, with the mining industry being less automated and depending heavily on employees' skills and experience for production, the sector may delay achieving a turnaround or sustaining exceptional performance. The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE) also acknowledged that mining is one of the dangerous workplaces and has aspects that may cause accidents and fatalities, making it critical for employers to provide safe working conditions for employees (Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, n.d.). Now, the challenge that these retrenchments bring is organisations finding a way to improve the surviving employees' psychological presence and ensuring that they work safe because any incident may result in a loss of limb or life and money for both the affected employee/s and the organisation.

The recent study by Mthembu (2019) on the effects of retrenchment on existing staff in Durban Telkom in South Africa concluded that the retrenchment experience induced fear, worry and anger in the remaining employees and there was minimal support during the retrenchment process, leaving the employees to find their preferred ways of coping with the change. The challenge with employees finding their way to cope is that it can bring misalignment on goals and they can also go through emotional phases where they transition from fear to anger and struggle to recover. Although retrenchment is intended to improve organisational performance by reducing operating costs, its efficacy is still not clear (Mthembu, 2019). Surviving employees end up having reduced levels of job satisfaction, poor employee engagement, and lower job performance according to Dlouhy and Casper (2021). Clack (2021) further highlighted that disengaged employees increase the cost of a company due to high turnover, low productivity and absenteeism, and this may not be favourable for the PGM industry that depends on their employees to reach production goals for revenue generation.

Literature showed that one of the positive drivers of increased productivity and employees' overall commitment to the company is employee engagement (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Employee engagement is a "multi-dimensional construct, in the sense that employees are emotionally, cognitively or physically engaged in their work activities" and it has been studied for quite some time, considering its link with organisational behaviour (Nienaber & Martins, 2016, p. 5). When employees are engaged, they can add significant value to the organisation, however, employee engagement can be a challenge during turbulent times at work (Parent & Lovelace, 2018).

With the effects of retrenchment on employees highlighted there is an identified need to comprehend the factors that affect employee engagement post retrenchments in the PGM mining sector. The JD-R framework is a well-established theory that recommends that organisations must not despair because of retrenchments however realise that there are job resources that can negate the effects of retrenchments on the surviving employees and improve their morale (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). The framework assesses the combination of job demands and job resources' effect on work performance, taking an employee's welfare into consideration and is used to integrate motivation and work-related strain, as well as provide insight into employee well-being and employee output when exposed to increased pressure (Bakker et al., 2023). Its application is essential for organisations to enhance employee well-being and performance as it is not limited to certain study concepts only, but applicable to a wider range of work characteristics and outputs (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). This makes the JD-R framework relevant during retrenchments, and Harney et al. (2018) cited that the JD-R model can assist organisations to reduce the effects of workforce reduction on surviving employees if applied properly by looking at enhancing job resources.

Seeing that employee engagement drives organisational performance, the challenge remains in balancing the retrenchment with employee engagement to drive profits and business sustainability in a workplace that relies heavily on manual labour and has been deemed risky by the DMRE. With the application of the JD-R framework, the question of interest remains on identifying the organisational interventions in the form of job resources that are deemed critical to negate the effects of increased demand and promote employee engagement (Schweizer &

Nienhaus, 2017). Parent and Lovelace (2018) indicated that employee engagement is a definite challenge during a crisis at work, and Schaufeli (2017) highlighted the need for organisations to keep evaluating the psychological and social aspects at work aimed at improving employee engagement, which leads to productivity. This study, therefore, focused on unpacking the factors that affect employee engagement post-retrenchments and determining the critical interventions needed to maintain the remaining employees' engagement in the PGM mining sector in South Africa.

1.3. Research Purpose

This study focused on the comprehension of the key factors reducing employee engagement after retrenchments and determining the critical and effective interventions needed to maintain employee engagement.

The PGM mining industry has been experiencing many economic challenges and decided to restructure with retrenchments being part of the strategy to turn the industry's performance around and have sustainable businesses (Minerals Council South Africa, n.d.). Retrenchments result in a reduction of resources, and a reduction or lack of resources has been identified as one of the contributors to strategy implementation failure (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Since retrenchment causes anxiety and fear leading to job insecurity (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021; Cregan et al., 2021), the leadership of an organisation undergoing this process must ensure that they not only focus on turning the financial aspect of the business around but have a solid plan on keeping the employees engaged to sustainably deliver on the expectations. When employees are engaged and committed, they can contribute to attaining the overall goals of an organisation (Akpa et al., 2021).

Parent and Lovelace (2018) indicated that employee engagement drives productivity, and that retrenchment affects employee engagement. This study will contribute to the retrenchment and employee engagement knowledge base and provided practical recommendations that can be used by Human Resources (HR) practitioners and companies to minimise the impact of retrenchment on surviving employees by maintaining employee engagement using the JD-R framework.

1.4. Layout of the Research report

Chapter 1

This research report started with Chapter 1 that introduced the problem, provided context and reasons for conducting the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 covers the literature review, providing literature and theories that support this research problem. The review integrates various sources of information to establish the practical ways to maintain employee engagement post retrenchments in the PGM mining industry. This chapter reviews literature on retrenchments, employee engagement, procedural fairness, leadership, effective communication and the JD-R framework.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

Chapter 3 focuses on the key research questions the study aims to address. There are three research questions that were established from the literature review and the business context of the PGM mining sector in South Africa.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Chapter 4 covers the methodology of the research and substantiates the reasons for the chosen methods. This covers the type of study conducted, data collection and analysis and ensuring ethical collection throughout the process. Sample population, size, unit of analysis, interview questions and limitations of this study are all covered in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

Chapter 5 covers the results of the research study, examining the factors that affect employee engagement after retrenchments, the evaluation of support from leadership and the key interventions needed to enhance employee engagement after retrenchments.

Chapter 6: Discussions of Results

Chapter 6 discusses the research findings through linking them to the literature and the research questions in this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter 7 covers the summary of the results, highlights the study limitations and presents the recommendations for addressing the research problem as well as recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The PGM mining sector in South Africa has been experiencing various challenges such as low price of PGMs that led to organisational restructuring and retrenchments of some employees to save on operational costs. Retrenchments are believed to offer financial relief for organisations (Casillas et al., 2019); however, they come with significant repercussions that affect the remaining employees psychologically and physically (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Retrenchments come with reduction of resources and alter job demands such as workload, role ambiguity, job insecurity, production pressures that may lead to unsafe acts, and job resources such as supervisor support, training, and level of communication and engagement (Langerak et al., 2022). The increased job demands experienced by the surviving employees can affect their health, morale and level of engagement, consequently affecting the organisation's productivity.

The Job Demands-Resources model provides a framework that can be used to evaluate the combination of job demands and resources to establish their effects on employee's wellbeing and work engagement especially when organisations are going through a significant change like retrenchment (Bakker et al., 2023). This framework indicates that every task has both the demands (efforts needed) and resources that enables the execution and completion of the task, negating the effects of job demands and can lead to fulfilment if applied well (Harney et al., 2018). With increased job demands being a consequence of retrenchments, it is crucial for organisations undergoing a change to understand the JD-R model and apply its resources to negate the effects of job demands and maintain employee engagement.

Anxiety has also been highlighted as one of the effects of retrenchments and providing leadership and support during transition helps employees navigate the change with ease and trust the process (Harney et al., 2018). Leadership and supervisor support have been identified as key job resources critical to enable the transition without major negative effects (Keena et al., 2022). Equally, Tummers and Bakker (2021) indicated that transformational leadership style plays a critical role during uncertainty. When leaders and HR advisors provide platforms for consultation, communication and engagement, employees can see that the process is transparent and trust the outcome. This also provides the employees with opportunities, to ask for help and find ways of crafting their jobs to remain productive and manage the

effects of retrenchments. Furthermore, personal resources like resilience and self-awareness play a critical role in the framework and enable the surviving employees to cope with the strain retrenchments bring (Arthur et al., 2025). Literature indicates that organisations must take into consideration the wellbeing of their employees and assist them to remain engaged while undergoing retrenchments instead of focusing only on managing operational costs.

Chapter 2 starts by unpacking of the JD-R framework which is used as the anchor theory for this research followed by providing context of the organisational restructuring focusing on retrenchments as a phenomenon and its effects on the surviving employees. The Employee engagement which is the main aim of this research is unpacked to comprehend its characteristics and what influences it. The JD-R theory is integrated with the constructs to demonstrate connection.

2.2. Job Demand- Resources Theory

The JD-R theory looks at how the working environment an employee is exposed to, can affect employee well-being, engagement, and output (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). The theory classifies the risk features associated with work strain into job demands and job resources, and assesses their effect on work performance, taking an employee's overall well-being into consideration (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands are defined as a portion of a job that necessitates physical, psychological, and social efforts in a sustained way for a job to be executed, and may include extreme workload (Lesener et al., 2019). Job resources on the other hand, is defined as an aspect of the job that may promote or enhance goal achievements, such as supervisor support (Bakker et al., 2023). According to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022) the JD-R model enhances the integration of the two independent studies on stress and motivation and can be applied to various organisations and roles regardless of the demands or resources that are associated with that organisation.

Introduced in 2001, the JD-R model was initially derived to comprehend the main causes of the negative aspect of work called burnout. Burnout is defined as a constant job-related strain that is indicated by lack of motivation and employees experiencing low energy due to exhaustion according to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022). The model was further revised to incorporate the positive aspect of work such

as work engagement and it provides a comprehensive integration of job stress theories and work motivation theories according to Bakker et al. (2023). Work engagement is described as satisfaction at work that is distinguished by commitment, absorption, and stamina (Bakker et al., 2023). The theory has been proved to provide the best estimation of how work characteristics and employee wellbeing relate according to Bakker and Demerouti (2007), and it has also been appreciated for its heuristic ability making it attractive to both academic researchers and practitioners (Schaufeli et al., 2013). Schaufeli (2017) also stated that the JD-R model can be adopted for evaluating the work environment with the intention to improve employee work engagement and reduce burnout.

The JD-R model diagram by Bakker and Demerouti (2017), shown in figure 1 below indicates that an increase in job demands leads to strain (exhaustion, fatigue, anxiety), which ends up reducing employees' job performance. The diagram shows that strain may result in employees undermining themselves, putting more demands on an employee, which ties back to increased strain, decreased employee motivation, and decreased job performance.

Job resources, on the other hand, lead to an increase in motivation (employee work engagement, commitment), which improves job performance. Allowing job crafting, which is defined by Bakker and Demerouti (2017) as the modifications that employees can make to their job or tasks, is seen as providing a job resource that improves motivation and job performance. Job resources can minimise the outcomes of job demands, and when job demands and job resources are integrated properly, they can improve motivation, which leads to increased job performance.

Personal resources are defined as the individual's psychological ability or characteristics that enables coping with challenges and work environment effectively (Kotzé & Nel, 2019). They are often linked to resilience and self-efficacy, enabling an individual to understand their ability to fulfil requirements within different settings (Arthur et al., 2025). The diagram below shows that if a person has positive personal resources and there are increased job resources, there will be motivation which leads to increased job performance. When job demands increases and an individual has positive personal resources and gets job resources support, there will be

commitment as well. However, when personal resources are affected negatively and there is increased job demands, there will be stress which reduces job performance.

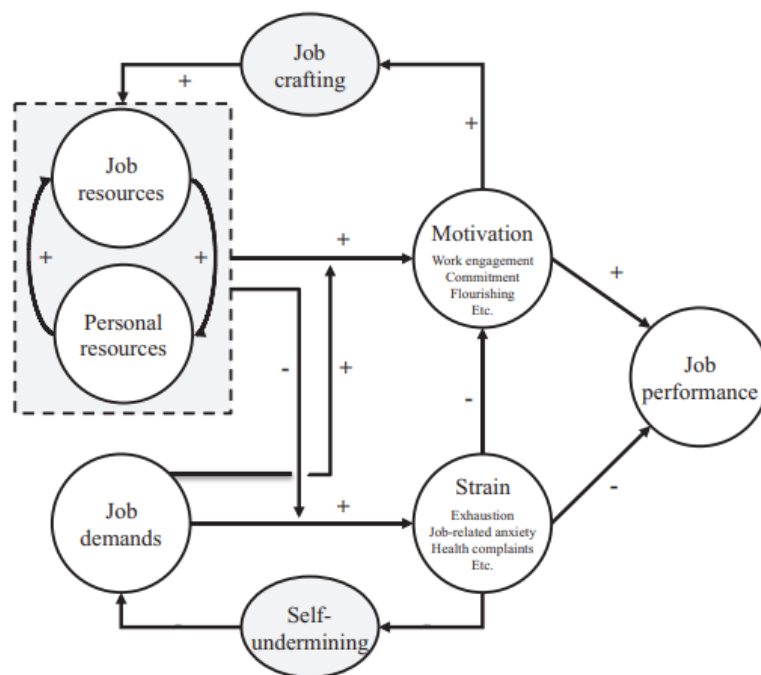


Figure 1 The job demands–resources model.

Figure 1: The JD-R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017)

2.2.1 Job Demands

Job demands can be physical, psychological or organisational and they come in the form of increased workload, increased work pressure, anxiety, conflict in expectations from managers, role ambiguity, work-life interferences etc, (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). These demands end up being stressors to employees if the requirements are continuous high efforts (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). They also promote burnout and can impact employees' health negatively (Lesener et al., 2019; Arthur et al., 2025).

Physical and psychological demands

Retrenchments leave the surviving employees expected to do their work together with the tasks that were carried out by the employees that have left the organisation. The increased frequency and severity of the tasks that sometimes doesn't allow employees to rest well enough, require energy and additional efforts to handle the

increased job requirements and can lead to energy depletion, exhaustion and burnout (Bakker et al., 2023; Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Bakker and De Vries (2021) cited that when the daily job demands surpass the personal or team capabilities and resources required for task or activity execution, the employees end up feeling exploited by the job they used to enjoy initially.

When demands are challenging, they tend to promote personal growth as they can be seen as opportunities for employees to learn; however, when demands are increased and overwhelming, they tend to be seen as constraints to achieving targets and this promotes employee disengagement (Lesener et al., 2019). This is also supported by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) who cited that lower employee engagement and high stress or strain on the surviving employees is expected because of the alteration that retrenchments make in their working conditions, reduced resources with increased work demands.

Demanding jobs increase emotional and cognitive requirements and can drain the mental resources of employees (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). Job demands are also seen as substantial forecasters of psychological stress and health deterioration according to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022). With surviving employees not having a proper balance between the demands and resources and not being able to control what is expected of them, they can end up experiencing anxiety, impaired cognitive ability and lack of satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Employees may struggle to concentrate and comprehend what is expected of them and end up making multiple mistakes that can affect the organisation negatively from a safety point of view (Bakker & De Vries, 2021).

The mining industry is already a physically and psychologically demanding industry due to lack of automation and working long hour shifts, and downsizing can have a negative impact on the employees, exacerbating fatigue and exhaustion. The other various pressures associated with the industry as well are safety hazards and production demands (Kotzé & Nel, 2019). Most managers put pressure on the employees to exceed production targets to get bonuses, and this can lead to teams taking shortcuts that end up compromising their safety (Chimamise et al., 2013). Niu et al. (2022) also indicated that the industry has dangerous working conditions associated with high labour intensity. They further support that human behaviour is

not always predictable and can be influenced by the environment they are exposed to leading to unsafe acts that causes safety incidents (Niu et al., 2022).

Safety incidents can lead to fatalities, incurred costs due to severe injuries and reputational damages (Chimamise et al., 2013). The serious injuries as well as fatalities can hinder production resulting in lost time (lost workdays) that affect the mining revenue stream (Aliabadi et al., 2019). Affecting the revenue stream is something that the PGM mining sector cannot afford currently as they restructured to save costs and improve profits amidst the low PGM prices era. It is therefore crucial that the industry put all efforts to ensure employees are always engaged and work safely to ensure zero harm after retrenchments.

Impact of increased job demands on organisational performance

Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022), cited that increased job demands may result in organisational poor performance. Organisations may end up experiencing high absenteeism due to prolonged stress and fatigue, with employees being dissatisfied (Janse van Rensburg et al., 2013). Absenteeism is costly because employees need to get paid while they are off and this may increase the workload on the employees that report to work. Dissatisfaction may lead to employee disengagement and high turnover which can put the mine operations at risk while they are on their recovery journey from high-cost low price period. Employees may also take time off due to sick leave because of stress, creating a gap that causes other employees to close that gap by working overtime, both coming at a cost that doesn't support the organisation's strategy during critical cost cutting periods.

Role ambiguity also comes to play after such major changes in the organisation according to Bakker and Demerouti (2007). Keena et al. (2022) also emphasised that lack of clarity on the expectation of each role causes ambiguity with survivors having to continue with their original jobs and carry the tasks that were carried out by those that have left the organisation. This ambiguity is seen as a hindrance that may obstruct the achievement of set goals. With the PGM mining industry's primary revenue source coming from selling the metals and production strategy aimed at meeting set production targets, role ambiguity can affect this goal consequently

impacting revenue. Without clear role redefinition after restructuring, employees end up not knowing what is really expected of them (Mthembu, 2019).

Increased job demands may also lead to employees undermining themselves and indulging in conflicts and poor communication that may end up compromising the expected job performance (Bakker et al., 2023). Self-undermining is referred to as any conduct that forms hindrances and can lead to poor performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). When employees are exhausted, they also tend to miss targets, creating workflow backlog that requires more resources and energy to catch up, creating the spiral effect (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This spiral effect needs to be addressed to ensure that the company remains sustainable post a major change such as restructuring. Although the main goal for retrenching was for the organisation to cut costs and maintain production with less resources, increased job demands may present a counterproductive outcome and call for organisations to address the impact before derailing from the goal (Vischer, 2018).

2.2.2 Job Resources

Job resources form a critical part of the JD-R model and can be useful to negate the effects of job demands on surviving employees according to Bakker and Demerouti (2007). Job resources can also be physical, psychological and organisational. Leadership and organisational support, job autonomy, job security, role redefinition, communication and growth opportunities are all examples of job resources and have been linked with promoting work engagement, stress reduction and promoting goal achievement (Tummers & Bakker, 2021; Lesener et al., 2019). Provision of these resources especially during restructuring which comes with a lot of uncertainty is critical to keep the employees engaged and enable the organisations to sustain its performance (Niu et al., 2022).

When the remaining employees experience the provision of job resources their needs are met, and they can be motivated which results in increased levels of engagement (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). The work engagement can even fuel creativity and enhance operational performance (Bakker et al., 2023). On the contrary, lack of resources can lead to reduced motivation and low employee engagement (Lesener et al., 2019). This highlights the need for organisations to

familiarise themselves with the job resources that can be applied to negate the effects of increased job demands to maintain productivity.

Leadership support

Leadership is conceptualised as a critical job resource that can influence the conditions of work, job resources and personal resources in the JD-R framework (Tummers & Bakker, 2021). As a result, leaders can influence how work can be prioritised, conducted differently and promote innovative ideas that moves employees from the old methods of conducting work. They can also support their teams with any financial justification for automation because during low-cost strategy era most finance managers do not grant capital with ease.

Leadership remains critical in all the organisations to provide guidance, clarity and direction during good and tough times. It is even more critical to maintain employees' morale and commitment during a significant organisational change or transition such as restructuring. When leaders are visible, accessible and take the employees along during the change, employees may feel supported and well directed, minimising the effects of stress and anxiety. According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), rational support provided by the leaders enable the employees to cope with the stressful change of restructuring. Furthermore, Rai (2018) cited that leadership support was found to be a moderating job resource between employee engagement and job demands.

There are different types of leadership styles and, Tummers and Bakker (2021) cited that transformational leadership enhanced work engagement when the employees were faced with increased job demands. Transformational leadership is defined as the leadership style that consists of inspirational motivation, stimulates intellectual conversations, sustains an inspiring vision and provide supports (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). These attributes are necessary when organisations are going through a transition. Taking people along, motivating them and providing support during difficult times can foster a sense of care and belonging consequentially leading employees to stability. With survivor syndrome believed to be experienced by the remaining employees, support from leadership can quickly help the

employees to refocus on the bigger picture. Survivor syndrome is referred to as the emotions related to stress and remorse experienced by the employees who survived retrenchments while other employees were laid off (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021).

Supervisor trust which is defined as the degree of confidence the employees have on their supervisor to be honest and deliver on their words is often experienced when front line managers support and involve their teams (Keena et al., 2022). They further highlighted that open communication enhances employee engagement even in working environments that are demanding (Keena et al., 2022). Mujtaba and Senathip (2020) indicated that leadership and the HR team play a significant role in managing the effects of retrenchment on employees, meaning that organisation ought to prioritise supporting their teams.

Support can also come in the form of consultation where employees are involved and consulted prior to any action. Consultation is seen as a job resource necessary to minimise the impact of retrenchment on surviving employees, as it may be perceived as a process of fostering trust and attracting employee buy-in to help the company reach its goals during crisis (Harney et al., 2018). During consultation, employees can form part of the solution formulation to current problems of high job demands, providing the organisation with practical solutions and information that can assist with prioritisation (Abildgaard et al., 2018).

These solutions coming from the leaders through consultation with the remaining employees can manifest in the form of redefining task descriptions, providing detailed procedures that incorporate changes in the tasks (Mthembu, 2019) and training and retraining to capacitate all the survivors because of loss of skills. Leave smoothing can also be implemented to minimise people working for long hours and overtime. When leaders and surviving employees actively listen to each other and implement the job resources from the JD-R model, the effects of retrenchments on the surviving employees will be minimised.

Job crafting and redesigning

Retrenchments or downsizing usually leave the remaining employees expected to continue with the tasks that the other employees who left the organisation were

carrying out and this can be overwhelming. Employees may end up having multiple roles that can cause conflicting priorities. Providing employees with the opportunity to alter and reshape their jobs especially after retrenchments can come with a lot of positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and work engagement. Job crafting and redesign are profoundly entrenched in the JD-R model according to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022). Job crafting which is defined as the alterations that employees can make to their job or tasks can assist employees to evaluate the significance of their jobs, look for better ways to automate and prioritise their tasks accordingly providing meaning to the employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Thomas et al. (2020) cited that job crafting had a positive impact on work engagement especially when organisations have just gone through a change. Bakker et al. (2023) further indicated that job crafting enables the employees to achieve a sense of purpose which negates the effects of retrenchments.

Redesigning the job and job crafting after retrenchments have also been identified as being critical job resources to negate the impact of retrenchments on surviving employees by Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022). Job redesign is a process where a supervisor modifies a job, balancing job demand and resources, intending to improve employee well-being, engagement, and performance (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). Providing the surviving employees with the opportunities to craft or redesign the jobs can result in an innovative team and an engaged workforce. It can also improve ownership where employees see work through until the end.

Effective Communication

Retrenchments have become more prevalent as they are believed to save company costs because of leaner structures however in most instances this process doesn't yield the desired results because of the negative effects it has on the surviving employees (De Jong et al., 2016). The employees who survive retrenchments often face multiple challenges such as anxiety, uncertainty, job insecurity and increased workload (Abildgaard et al., 2018). Furthermore, these employees lose their interest in their jobs because of the changes such as loss of trust and low morale that retrenchments bring into their work (Mthembu, 2019).

Considering that retrenchments bring about leaner structures and organisations rely on the surviving employees for performance, the effects of retrenchment must be managed and negated to enhance employee engagement according to Mthembu (2019). Abildgaard et al. (2018) cited that the way the retrenchment process is undertaken, plays a critical role in the lives of the surviving employees as it determines how these employees can relate to the organisation. As a result, effective communication becomes a highly important job resource in addressing the challenges that the remaining employees experience during and post the retrenchment process (Harney et al., 2018). Effective communication is identified as very critical when there is change that needs to be supported such as operating with leaner structures according to Beatty (2015).

To promote effective communication, organisations need to provide a psychologically safe environment and platforms where employees can be vulnerable and raise their concerns and obtain support in the form of feedback to ensure understanding and alignment. These platforms should promote transparent communication. By providing a psychological safe environment, communication platforms and supporting the teams, organisations will enable employees to go through retrenchments with resilience.

In their conversations, the retrenching organisation must provide reasons behind the initiation of the retrenchment process, how it will be implemented as well as well as clarity on the changes that are expected from the process (Beatty, 2015). Continuous feedback should also be provided to the surviving employees to ensure clarity, alignment and show of support. Effective communication has been seen to assist the organisation in managing uncertainty about the future better, making the remaining employees to understand the rationale behind the change according to Abildgaard et al. (2018).

According to the JD-R model, communication is often referred to as a form of job resource that can influence employee engagement and minimise burnout (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). This was further confirmed by Arthur et al. (2025) who cited that communication especially with leadership is one of the job resources that can negate the effects of retrenchments on the remaining employees especially fatigue and burnout. It is further argued that trust can be regained through effective

communication thereby dismissing the rumours that exacerbate fear and uncertainty (Mthembu, 2019)

Effective communication is also seen as support from the organisation and colleagues, promoting collaboration and enabling the remaining employees to craft their tasks thereby minimising fatigue and burnout (Thomas et al., 2020). Organisations need to prioritise effective communication to keep employees involved and satisfied as well as ensuring that the company continues to perform.

When challenges such as work overload, role confusion, lack of clarity about responsibilities, lack of communication or feedback and situations where there are competing obligations or expectations from employees surface, and there is a minimal support to equip the employees, a job can lose meaning for individuals or teams (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). However, when employees get constant feedback, have constant organisational support, supervisor support, and are given the freedom to have job autonomy, the negative effects of retrenchment can be reduced, resulting in better employee engagement (Bakker & De Vries, 2021).

2.2.3 Personal Resources

Personal resources which refer to an individual's psychological capability such as emotional intelligence, self-esteem and resilience is identified as a critical component in the JD-R model, enabling employees to cope and navigate through challenging circumstances (Bakker et al., (2023); Galanakis & Tsitouri, (2022)). Personal resources have been found to play a stronger role than job resources to mediate the relationship between increased job demands and engagement at work according to Kotzé and Nel (2019). Considering that these resources are internal, they enable employees to respond better to job demands and job resources according to Schaufeli (2017). With increased workload, role changes and the uncertainty that restructuring brings, having personal resources can assist the employees to overcome their challenges.

The JD-R Model in figure 1 above showed that when employees are experiencing increased job demands and have low personal resources, they may experience anxiety and stress related illnesses that may lead to employees undermining themselves. However, Bakker et al. (2023) stated that when employees tap into their

personal resources and believe that they can control their surrounding working environment the impact on their wellbeing can be negated. When employees are optimistic and have high emotional intelligence, they are likely to handle demanding tasks and will raise their hands for help when intervention is required according to Bakker and de Vries (2021). Encouraging employees to have strong personal resources by creating engagement platforms and psychologically safe environment will help employees recover from the impact of downsizing quicker.

Furthermore, personal resources assist employees to recognise when they are fatigued and address the fatigue timely before it can have negative long term health effects (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Lombard (2020) established that the relationship between personal resources and work engagement was significant emphasising the need for organisations to foster these traits in employees. Organisations can help their employees to develop these resources through training and sessions that focus on self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

2.3. Organisational restructuring (Retrenchment/ Downsizing)

Organisational restructuring is a process undertaken to reconfigure the structure of a company with the aim to reduce costs, obtain competitive advantage, increase productivity and enhance performance (Mthembu, 2019). The changes that restructuring brings are significant and can affect the entire company or other parts of the company in the form of merging, demerging, outsourcing, expansion or retrenchments (De Jong et al., 2016). When organisations face turbulent times or financial challenges either due to internal or external factors, they opt for restructuring to ensure business continuity and sustainability (Casillas et al., 2019). This study focuses on the retrenchments under organisational restructuring.

Retrenchment is defined by (Cheng & Deng, 2022) as the organisation's strategic process which involves the reduction of employees to respond to challenging external environments or economic challenges. Dloughy and Casper (2021) defined retrenchment as an organisational process where the employer terminates employees' employment contracts due to operational requirements. Kurebwa (2011) further supports that retrenchment is an intentional decision taken by the employer to reduce the number of employees with the aim of augmenting organisational performance, effectiveness and efficacy.

In most instances retrenchment is not because of what the employees have done according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020). However, it is a decision driven by the organisation's need to avoid bankruptcy during crisis such as economic downturn or recession, by managing operational costs (Kurebwa, 2011). Cheng and Deng (2022) further indicated that retrenchments occur when companies experience a decline in sales, mainly due to competition in the market or improved technology. In this case the PGM mining sector decided to retrench some of their employees to ensure that their businesses continue as they experienced high operating costs and low PGM prices (Daily Maverick, 2024).

When companies merge or demerge, they can also retrench or downsize leaning towards a leaner structure and some services may be outsourced to manage costs (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Most organisations retrench with the aim of improving the bottom line positioning the company for long term existence (Schenkel & Teichland, 2017). Investors want growth and profits, and they may also pressure companies to reduce costs by implementing headcount cuts. The advantages of retrenchments include profits enhancement, forming new networks, restructuring an organisation and removing disengaged workforce according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020). Valterra Platinum, previously known as Anglo American, which is one of the major PGM producers in South Africa, went through a demerger and retrenched employees as part of its organisational restructuring strategy (Anglo American Platinum Integrated Annual Report, 2024).

2.3.1 Retrenchments in South Africa

In South Africa, retrenchment is referred to as a process where employment of individuals is concluded due to organisational requirements such as budget cuts, decreasing profits, implementation of new technology, or company restructuring (LabourNet, 2025).

South Africa has been facing challenging economic times due to the weaker currency, persistent load shedding, repercussions of COVID-19 and the oil price that keeps increasing, negatively impacting the labour market. These challenges especially loadshedding, can hamper the stability of businesses that are forced to

restructure to survive like the PGM mining sector. Companies can also end up losing critical skills making them vulnerable to market changes.

Stats SA (2025) showed a significant decline of 291 000 jobs in the country in the first quarter of 2025, with the formal sector accounting for a significant portion of job losses. Figure 2 below shows the decrease in employment in the 2025, quarter one amplifying the serious challenge the country is facing with unemployment. The mining industry experienced 35 000 job cuts with the PGM sector contributing significantly to these cuts (Stats SA, 2025). These statistics can induce more fear and anxiety in the employees when they hear about retrenchments taking place in their organisations. The further decline can cripple the hope of the remaining employees even further causing them to experience more anxiety and uncertainty about their future in the sector as well the sector's future. Furthermore, organisations in the mining sector may experience loss of skills due to experienced employees relocating to look for more stability in their jobs.

Figure 1: Quarter-to-quarter changes in employment, Q1: 2020 to Q1: 2025

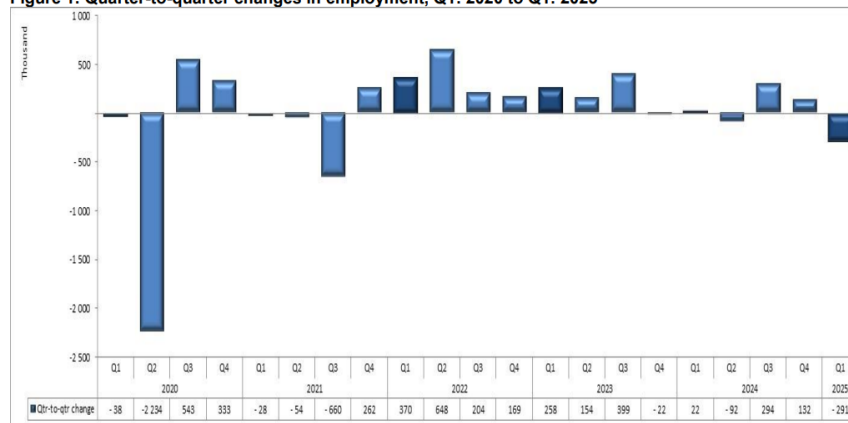


Figure 2: Changes in employment from Q1:2020 to Q1:2025 (Stats SA, 2025)

2.3.2 Effects of retrenchment on surviving employees

Increased job demands and reduced job resources

During retrenchments, the number of resources is reduced, and the remaining employees are left with increased responsibilities (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Retrenchment, which is a planned termination of workforce from their jobs in a company according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020), is widely believed to negatively

affect the remaining employees due to increased demands and fewer resources to execute the work (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). When companies undergo restructuring that results in retrenchments they expect improved performance through this strategy; however, the desired outcome is not always realised because of the negative reactions of the surviving employees (Mthembu, 2019). Many organisations leave employees to conduct tasks that were done by the laid off employees without redefining the role or even taking employees through the new way of doing things, increasing the job demands which can demoralise the remaining employees. Furthermore, the remaining employees may experience a disconnect because of lack of communication on what their roles entails and what the expected performance looks like (Kurebwa, 2011). This can result in employees experiencing role conflicts due to the reduced resources, which may impact productivity (Frone & Blais, 2020).

Kurebwa (2011), cited that organisations often ignore the impact of retrenchments on those that are still employed, with most survivors experiencing anxiety, frustrations and resistance to change. Stress induced ailments have been found to be higher in organisations that have undergone downsizing according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020). The surviving employees can also experience low morale and guilt as they had to watch some of their fellow employees get retrenched (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020) and this can also make them anxious about the future. Tsao et al. (2016) stated that retrenchments cause the surviving employees to lose trust and confidence in the company, leading to low commitment and productivity. These emotional experiences are categorised as job demands and require employees to go an extra mile to maintain their level of engagement. This is not good for the PGM sector as they need to remain productive to maintain their market share and when employees are disengaged and sick, organisations can experience increased sick leave and absenteeism defeating the cost management focus since employees have to be paid regardless of absenteeism or sick leave.

Retrenchment has also been seen to cause job insecurity, which creates fear among the surviving employees (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Moreover, employees may show low commitment at work, fearing potential job loss, and may start looking for alternatives (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Job insecurity (job demand) refers to a threat to stable and continuous employment and can be triggered by retrenchments, which indirectly give employees the impression that their jobs in the company are not

safe and may be reduced, (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Kurebwa (2011) also cited that most surviving employees are concerned about their future employment, constantly questioning how long they will keep their existing jobs.

The other critical aspect of work that is affected by retrenchment is the loss of skills which cause the remaining employees to perform tasks they are not familiar with, the tasks that were done by those who are retrenched (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). This can result in role ambiguity and employees experiencing frustration and undermining themselves as depicted by the JD-R model in figure 1, leading the employees to low morale. If employees are overwhelmed and don't know what to do because of an increase in job demands, they may get disengaged and also end up taking short cuts possibly injuring themselves considering that the mining industry has been indicated by DMRE as high risk (Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, n.d.) Loss of skills affect the company's competitive advantage and puts a financial requirement on the organisation to train the remaining employees (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Often at times the remaining employees may also request an increase in salary through their unions for applying the new acquired skills creating another challenge for an organisation that is focusing on operational cost management.

It has also been established that affective commitment declines, resulting in low job satisfaction in the remaining employees during and after a retrenchment process (Mthembu, 2019). Affective commitment is defined as an employee's commitment to the company according to Mercurio (2015). The job demands-resource (JD-R) framework confirmed that the remaining employees are negatively affected by the increased concentration of work after retrenchments, and this causes employees to be disengaged (Harney et al., 2018). When employees don't feel satisfied and are disengaged, they may end up looking for alternatives that end up affecting the overall performance of the organisation and compromise the intended goal of downsizing.

Organisations must also guard against impacting employee's psychological contract and prioritise employee's wellbeing while in the restructuring process. Psychological contract is defined as the unwritten obligation between an employee and an employer that comprise of expectations, and employees usually expect that their company will provide secure benefits for their involvement (Tsao et al., 2016). Mthembu (2019),

stated that psychological contract is influenced by employees' experiences and collaboration with the company. As a result, retrenchment may be seen by employees as a despoliation of the psychological contract, giving rise to low morale, absenteeism, and low commitment to the company (Tsao et al., 2016). Robinson and Morrison (2000) cited that employees may feel that their psychological contract is violated during retrenchments regardless of what the organisation is doing. Schenkel and Teigland (2017) also supports that retrenchment violates the psychological contract and may be a channel for negative energy to spread through the organisation, affecting the dynamic capabilities of an organisation and its overall performance.

Therefore, organisations must not just cut the cost by reducing the number of employees without putting systems in place to ensure its survival through people engagement, employee support and development. Human resource strategies and policies must be linked to the organisation's overall strategy to obtain results according to (Antony, 2018). This emphasises the need for a well-defined retrenchment process by the organisational leaders, which clarifies the critical roles needed to carry the organisation forward, improved communication and supporting employees through the change.

2.4. Employee engagement

Employee engagement is defined as “the extent to which the workforce is committed to the goal, mission and vision of an organisation” (Antony, 2018, p. 33). It is further defined as a process by which employees have a connection with the company they work for and are working with passion, consequently moving the organisation forward (Antony, 2018). Factors that have been identified to improve employee engagement are effective human resource policies and practices, enabling employee performance by providing adequate resources, effective leadership, and clear employee communication (Antony, 2018). These factors are similar to what the JD-R model identified as job resources that can negate the increase in job demands. Organisations must therefore foster a healthy relationship between the employer and employees to enhance employee engagement because of their inherent dependence on on employees to deliver the output.

Motyka (2018) cited that employees remain essential resources of a company; and they can be engaged when the environment enhances their development, supporting employee engagement. With retrenchments linked with loss of skills, organisations must prioritise training and development which is also identified as a job resource by (Bakker et al., 2023), to ensure that they stimulate employee growth and competence. This can also negate the effects of employees undermining themselves due to increased job demands. Engaged employees feel obligated to always go an extra mile for the company while striving for improved performance (Zahari & Kaliannan, 2023). This is crucial considering that the PGM price is still lower than historical highs and the mines are not mechanised yet, therefore these organisations must prioritise employee engagement. Parent and Lovelace (2018) also stated that engaged employees add significant value to their organisations through innovation, creativity, talent, competence, and the essential relationships they form.

Employee engagement has a definite influence on an organisation's performance, according to Antony (2018). Motyka (2018), indicated that there is a growing global concern about low employee engagement due to multiple challenges that organisations face such as restructuring, and this results in lower work performance. Literature has also shown that employee engagement influences organisations' productivity positively and has therefore become a top priority for companies that need high-performing teams to survive the global economic competition (Gollino et al., 2019). Antony (2018) further states that organisations that have engaged employees perform better with visible improved productivity, lower attrition rates, and loyalty towards the company.

It is therefore deduced that with people being the main resource for delivering results in most organisations, it is critical to keep them engaged and aligned with the company's objectives to reach the set targets. With retrenchments linked to low morale, fatigue and anxiety on the surviving employees, and employee engagement linked to productivity, organisations need ensure that they close the gaps created by retrenchment through driving employee engagement.

2.5. Procedural fairness

Retrenchments affect both the employees who leave and remain in the organisation and fairness of the process is often questioned. Procedural justice from the

organisational justice framework is a theory that can be utilised to establish the fairness of the process according to Harris (2000). It refers to how the process is perceived to be fair when reaching an outcome or decision, suggesting that a process should follow ethical standards (Mthembu, 2019). When the retrenchment process is fair, the remaining employees may be disappointed by the outcome of downsizing however they can trust the decision taken by the organisation. De Jong et al. (2016) further cited that procedural justice is positively related to the remaining employees' commitment to the organisation and overall wellbeing.

On the contrary, breaching procedural justice will impact how employees perceive fairness in the process (Harris, 2000). Unfairness can be seen when the organisation fails to provide rationale for the retrenchment as well as the selection criteria for employment. The JD-R model highlighted that retrenchments are often characterised by increased job demands and reduced resources impacting the surviving employees' morale and commitment negatively (Schweizer & Nienhaus, 2017). The retrenchment process is further characterised by violation of employees' psychological contracts and job insecurity resulting in lack of trust in the leadership of the organisation (Mthembu, 2019).

To ensure that the process is fair, employees need to be consulted as involving them can buffer the negative effects of retrenchments, facilitating sense making of the decisions taken by the organisation (Harney et al., 2018). When procedural justice is applied to select the people who stay and who get retrenched, employees will trust the integrity of the process (Truxillo et al., 2004). Harris (2000) cited that selection criteria should cover what the job entails, its requirements, the aspects used for selecting employees and providing justification for the decisions taken. Following these steps can address unethical opportunistic restructuring where managers exercise their powers to choose the people they prefer and let go of those they don't like. Those who are making decisions must ensure that there is no room for biasness and they can clearly share the information with the remaining employees, else the process will be perceived as being unfair (Mthembu, 2019). Although retrenchments have a negative effect on surviving employees, these effects can be negated through planned efforts such as transparent communication and fair processes according to Abildgaard et al. (2018).

2.6. Conclusion

Chapter 2 discussed the theory framework that this study is anchored on (JD-R Framework). The framework highlighted that retrenchment alters the job demands and job resources leaving the remaining employees with a lot to handle. When the increase in job demands is not addressed, the remaining employees may experience anxiety, stress, low morale and reduced engagement.

Employee engagement is crucial for organisational performance, it is therefore important for organisations to enhance this engagement through the adoption and application of effective job resources such as effective communication, employee consultation, job crafting and redesign, leadership support and providing training for skills lost and enhancing personal resources. The adoption of these job resources by organisations that went through retrenchment can negate the effects of labour reductions on the remaining employees.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

3.1. Introduction

Literature review provided the insight on retrenchment and how the JD-R model can be applied to negate the effects of job demands after restructuring to enhance employee engagement. This chapter covers the research questions of this study. The study is intended to explore the key factors that influence the engagement of the employees that remain in an organisation after retrenchment and determine the critical interventions required to maintain employee engagement. Marais (2011) cited that research questions provide guidance and clarity on the scope of the study and can assist with methods required for the study to take place. To reach this purpose, the following three questions, supported by information gathered from the literature review, will be explored. The consistency matrix showing the literature sources used to derive the questions is shown in the Appendix under Table 8.

3.2. Research Question 1:

What are the key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchments?

It was deduced that retrenchments impact surviving employees negatively due to increased demand and low resources, from the literature reviewed in this proposal. Parent and Lovelace (2018) also indicated that employee engagement is a challenge during a predicament such as retrenchment at work, with Schaufeli (2017) raising the need for organisations to keep evaluating the psychological and social aspects at work aimed at improving employee engagement, which leads to productivity. The main aim of this question is to investigate and comprehend the main factors that result in reduced employee engagement after retrenchment to form the base for problem-solving and identify key focus areas for recommendations on dealing with retrenchment.

3.3. Research Question 2:

What role do leadership and Human Resources Practices play in improving employee engagement and mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments?

The JD-R model identified leadership support as one of the key resources required to enable the employees to navigate through change with resilience. Literature also showed that how the retrenchment process is implemented influences the behaviour of surviving employees. Employee engagement has been positively linked to organisational performance. With the PGM mining sector navigating through its current challenge, organisational performance is a top priority to ensure business sustainability. This question is aimed at exploring the role that leadership and HR practices can play in mitigating the negative impacts of retrenchment and improving employee engagement.

3.4. Research Question 3:

What interventions are required in mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement post-retrenchments?

Dlouhy and Casper (2021) indicated that having job resource consultation after retrenchments showed that the negative effects of retrenchments, such as higher work intensity and employee fatigue, can be mitigated. Drawing from various sources of literature in this study, it was evident that job resources and personal resources can enable employees to cope with job demands and remain engaged even when they are going through challenges. With employee engagement being linked to operational performance, it is crucial to identify the key job resources that can be employed to maintain employee engagement after retrenchments.

3.5. Chapter Conclusion

This study built on the existing literature to establish the key factors that affect the engagement of the surviving employees after retrenchments. Although the effects are already established by the literature, the first research question formed a base to establish how the remaining employees in the PGM mining sector experienced retrenchments and how their experiences influenced their engagement.

Literature highlighted leadership support as a critical job resource to mitigate the effects of increased job demands and the second research question was aimed at establishing the role that leadership played in the process. The last question was focused mainly on identifying the key job resources that the surviving employees

deemed as critical interventions to promote their level of engagement after retrenchment.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology chosen to address the three main questions of this study shown under the research questions in Chapter 3. The study was anchored on the JD-R framework to understand how this framework can be applied to negate the effects of retrenchments on the surviving employees and maintain employee engagement which is necessary for organisational performance.

This study took a qualitative research approach to understand what the PGM mining sector in South Africa need to do to maintain employee engagement after retrenchments. The chapter covers the research design and philosophy chosen. The entire process followed for the collection of data and analysis as well as ensuring quality is outlined. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection, and the data was analysed using a thematic process to establish the themes that emerged and linking them to literature and the research objectives. The target population was employees that survived the retrenchments in the PGM mining sector.

4.2. Research Design

4.2.1 Purpose of the Research Design

Research design is defined by Dannels (2018) as the strategy to guide a research study, that renders data collection and results reliable and free from predisposition, holding the research project together. Exploratory research which is intended to gain new insights and dichotomise a topic in a new light according to Saunders and Lewis (2018) was undertaken in this study. Rahi (2017) supports the use of exploratory research to obtain new understanding of a current concern, and this was relevant in this study that was taking place in the PGM mining sector.

Retrenchment as a phenomenon was studied to comprehend the lived experience of surviving employees. This is supported by Moran (2002), who stated that phenomenology is aimed at understanding events as they appear to human beings without any interruptions of premeditated biases. Experiences were explained as

they are to human beings to uncover the truth (Moran, 2002). Establishing this formed a strong base for the objective of the research as it was aimed at maintaining employee engagement after retrenchments.

4.2.2 Philosophy

Tamminen and Poucher (2020) cited that research philosophy comprises of various sets of beliefs that guide how a research design is done and provides researchers different ways of comprehending the research. They further stated that research philosophy covers the researcher's assumptions of how he views the world (Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Researchers must be able to justify the choice of a philosophy according to Ryan (2018).

Interpretivism was the chosen philosophy to uncover the relative experiences of the surviving employees' post-retrenchment and not necessarily impose a theory (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Ryan (2018) supports the choice of interpretivism when the reality and comprehension are subjective to the person who experienced the event and unpacks their understanding of the event. Each surviving employee's experience is distinct, and it is informed by how they each interact with the organisation (Saunders et al., 2003). Understanding the voice and concerns of the surviving employees enabled the researcher to fully comprehend the real concerns to formulate or recommend suitable interventions to maintain employee engagement after retrenchments. The aim was not to develop a principle-based observation but to comprehend the reality of surviving employees after retrenchments through shared constructions (Myers, 2020). Rahi (2017) also cited that interpretivists believe authentic knowledge can be achieved through a profound understanding of a subject.

4.2.3 Approach Selected

Saunders and Lewis (2018) stated that "induction suggests a 'bottom-up' approach to theory development (p. 113). Theory was therefore inductively developed from the feedback received from the participants various experiences. Myers (2020) also supports that the inductive approach aids the development of theory from the collected data. Each feedback from the participants represented a data point, patterns and similar experiences were looked at and analysed further, feeding into

the development of theory (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The inductive approach is applicable where raw data is first consolidated and summarised, then patterns, connections, or trends are formulated between the findings and the research objectives according to Thomas (2006). Saunders et al. (2003) also support that the inductive approach is applicable when a researcher wants to explore and determine what certain events or experiences mean to individuals, and the patterns formed lead to theory development. Literature review in Chapter 2 formed a base of the existing theories and gaining insight from the people that were interviewed helped with theory development.

4.2.4 Methodological Choices

There are three methods which can be used for research which are mono, multi and mixed methods (Creswell, 2009). Multiple or mixed methods afford richer data according to Saunders and Lewis (2018); however, due to limited time constraints, the mono (single) method was chosen for this research. Qualitative research presents a researcher with an opportunity to comprehend the circumstantial decisions and actions taken by certain individuals, clarifying context that enables addressing the why question in research (Myers, 2020). It doesn't impose a theory onto a project but allows for a theory to be formed from the experiences of the people (Blumberg et al., 2014). Gathering information or data on how individuals interpret an event enables a researcher to gain more understanding of the meaning they associate with an event and explains why individuals respond in a certain way after a specific event (Myers, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative research is employed to study less understood phenomenon to gain more understanding (Tuffour, 2017). In this case the effect of retrenchment as a phenomenon on surviving employees was explored to establish ways to minimise its impact on employee engagement.

Pathak et al. (2013) also cited that the qualitative method is relevant when a researcher aims to explore and understand people's experiences, as it provides participants an opportunity to raise their views and concerns. Moreover, the qualitative approach is relevant when a detailed search of a phenomenon is required to comprehend how it affects human experience (Tuffour, 2017). Rahi (2017) further supported that qualitative method is followed when a researcher aims to comprehend

and interpret a specific topic or environment with the aim of developing a concept or theory.

Qualitative research was therefore suitable for this study to comprehend the effects of retrenchment as a phenomenon on employee engagement and determine appropriate interventions required to maintain engagement. Mthembu (2019), who recently conducted a study on the dynamic effects and implications of restructuring on existing staff at Telkom Durban, also chose a qualitative research method, indicating that it was relevant as it revealed the subjective experiences of the surviving employees. Insights gained from participants helped with the development of concepts in this qualitative research (Myers, 2020).

Semi-structured interviews aimed at the remaining employees from the PGM mining sector were conducted to gain insight following their recent retrenchments. The companies within the sector were anonymised as the focus was not on the companies but on the surviving employees. One of the limiting factors raised around semi-structured interviews is that some questions may be omitted due to certain organisational contexts or policies; however, themes were used to guide the questions so that patterns can be drawn from the feedback (Saunders et al., 2003). The interview sessions took approximately 40 minutes and were recorded upon request to ensure that no data is lost. Consent forms were issued to interviewees, and they were signed together with the researcher before undertaking the interview.

4.2.5 Strategy

Research strategy is primary as it is a process that enables researchers to collect and infer data with a clear objective (Rahi, 2017). The three main questions in Chapter 3 guided the research strategy. To conduct a case-by-case review to comprehend the effects of retrenchment on surviving employees' engagement, a multiple case study method was followed. Myers (2020) supports using case studies to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the context or phenomenon, and this helps the researcher to unpack the repercussions of retrenchments on surviving employees by actively listening to each case. Rashid et al. (2019) cited that case studies are relevant for researchers who are conducting qualitative studies. The

interview feedback from the participants was used to develop theory after identifying patterns (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Case studies aim to explore topics in detail and can be used to answer focused questions within a short time (Hays, 2003).

4.2.6 Time Horizon

This research could not follow the longitudinal approach due to time constraints, instead, a snapshot tactic was pursued to gain insight (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Saunders et al. (2003) recommend cross-sectional studies when there is not a lot of time provided for research. Interviews were conducted only once with the interviewees.

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis process

4.3.1 Population

Population, according to Rahi (2017), is defined as every person or item a researcher would like to study. If target population is not defined the study can be null and void. The targeted population for this study was employees who survived retrenchment from the PGM mining sector in South Africa. Employees at different levels of work with varying work experience in the sector were interviewed to gain insight into the key factors affecting employee engagement post-retrenchments and understand the critical interventions needed to negate the effects of retrenchment on the surviving employees. A sample of 16 was selected from the targeted population, as it is not possible to study the whole population, as advised by Saunders and Lewis (2018), who cited that a sample is selected from the population. The sample comprised of employees from various departments within the industry such as production, engineering, safety and laboratory. These participants were mainly from the Rustenburg and Limpopo regions which are PGM rich in South Africa.

4.3.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis must be linked to the objective of the research and is the critical part that provides direction in relation to the framework, sample size, and the methods used to collect data (Khan, 2014). It is explained by Kumar (2018) as the unit from which data will be collected, and it can be an individual, a group, or an

organisation. Since the aim of research was to maintain employee engagement post-retrenchment, the unit of analysis was the surviving employees remaining in the PGM mining sector in South Africa after retrenchments. Their experience and interpretation of the event, behaviour, and level of engagement were explored through semi-structured interviews to establish the effects of retrenchment and how companies can improve to maintain their engagement moving forward. The support from leadership was also evaluated through the interviews to support the second research question and recommendations asked to establish the interventions (job resources) required by employees to maintain employee engagement after retrenchment, supporting the third research question.

4.3.3 Sampling Method and Size

Due to time constraints, and the impractical nature of getting data from the entire population, a sub-group was chosen for data collection, and this is supported by Saunders and Lewis (2018). When research questions do not require generalisation, non-probability sampling techniques can be used (Saunders et al., 2003). Non-probability sampling is a sampling method that doesn't confirm or predict the chance of a unit being selected (Rahi, 2017). The limitation of having a list of the population before data collection also supports non-probability sampling to gain insight, and only individuals who are suitable to answer the questions related to the research objectives were chosen (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Mthembu (2019) selected a similar sampling method for a study at Telkom.

According to Saunders et al. (2003), a minimum of 12 interviews should be sufficient if a researcher is aiming to comprehend similarities in a homogeneous sample, and more interviews can take place if saturation is not reached or new insights are developing during interviews. Saturation is defined as the point in data collection where there no new insights, or new patterns and themes are developing, it helps with knowing when to stop collecting data (Guest et al., 2006). As a result, this research targeted a minimum of 16 employees at various levels of work with the following criteria followed to choose a representative sample:

- Employees that have undergone retrenchments and are still working for the company
- Employees who are able to narrate or explain their experience about the retrenchment and its effect on them
- Employees who signed the consent to participate in this study

Retrenchment survivors from various companies in the PGM sector were selected as the sample for this study.

4.3.4 Measurement Instrument

To gain insight on the experiences of retrenchments on the surviving employees and how it affected their engagement, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The measurement instrument that was used in this research was semi-structured interview guide. Myers (2020), refers to an interview as a mode of data collection that entails a person asking the selected sample questions about a topic being researched. The questions on the interview guide were derived from the literature study on employee engagement, retrenchments, and the JD-R framework. Table 1 below shows the list of questions asked during the interviews.

There were instances where follow-up questions were asked to gain further clarity on the answers they had provided. This helped to ensure that questions are well understood by the participants, and the provided answers are understood by the interviewer. This also helped to ensure that the interviews are not deviating from addressing the main research questions.

Table 1: Semi-structured interview questions

	Questions	Person asked/interviewed
1.	How did the recent retrenchment affect you on a personal level	Employee
2.	How has the retrenchment influenced your approach to work and motivation?	Employee
3.	How has the retrenchment affected your relationship with the organisation, colleagues, and your supervisor (Trust)	Employee
4.	Do you believe that the company was transparent and clear about their reason for retrenchment and future goals of the company?	Employee
5.	How did the recent retrenchments affect the resources required for work execution	Employee
6.	How has the retrenchment impacted your engagement at work?	Employee

7.	What type of support did you receive from the company leadership and HR during and after the process? Do you feel empowered to execute your work safely considering the high-risk industry you are working for?	Employee
8.	What did the company do well during this process and what did they not do well?	Employee
9	Looking back, what recommendations would you give the company to improve or maintain employee engagement and boost morale after retrenchment (learning from the recent experience)	Employee

4.3.5 Data Gathering Process

The primary data collection for this research was through semi-structured interviews, that involved a determined set of questions as shown in Table 1 above but also allowed for further probing if there was follow-up required, or new information arose (Myers, 2020). Semi-structured interviews allow for changing the order of questions and are effective when collecting data about a certain topic, intending to formulate theories from interviewees' experiences (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

The researcher went about sending emails, messages and calling people to source participants for the research data collection following the criteria outlined under sampling method and size. Approximately 60 people were contacted to get a sample of 16 participants. Upon agreement from surviving employees to participate in the study, a consent form was sent together with the scheduling of the interview. Most of the interviews took place virtually considering that the PGM sector operates in various geographies around the country. Only three interviews were conducted face to face.

During interviews, the researcher introduced herself and provided brief background of the study and asked background questions about each participant. This information was not recorded in all interviews as it was a step taken to allow participant to settle in and prepare for the main interview. In the main interview, the questions asked were in line with the interview guide and follow-up questions were directed by the participant's response. The interviews were recorded and transcribed

upon permission granted from the participants. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft Teams application. There was note taking by the researcher as well during interviews to help with data analysis in case the transcript captured the information incorrectly. The researcher ensured that participants' confidentiality is respected throughout the process as the intent was not to study an individual or any specific organisation, and data was reported without identifiers. The interviews varied in time with the average time being 40 minutes. The data collected is stored in the researcher's cloud account that prohibits access by anyone without the researcher's password and the password will not be shared with anyone.

4.3.6. Analysis Approach

Data analysis in qualitative research must be transcribed first, then analysed and coded to identify any developing themes or similarities according to Saunders and Lewis (2018). Myers (2020) defines coding as a process where a word or tag is associated with the summary of what has been found from data collection.

The six steps for thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun (2013) were used owing to its systematic way of identifying patterns and themes. This method was relevant because of the nature of the study that wants to establish how individuals experienced a phenomenon like retrenchment.

Data processing:

All the interviews including the face-to-face ones were recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft Teams application. Handwritten notes were also taken to ensure that meaning is not lost as the auto transcribers can often mis-capture the information.

The researcher went through each participant's recording, transcript and handwritten notes to ensure alignment and becoming familiar with the data. This step was followed by reviewing the data and highlighting the observed meanings and patterns that appeared. Irrelevant data was then removed.

Initial coding:

Data was classified through initial coding that represented initial meanings and interesting patterns observed. This process was done using the Atlas.ti software and it was more like building blocks for themes as explained by Byrne (2022). In this process a list of codes was created for the excerpts. Similar meanings observed in the participants transcripts were given the same code. When there were

commonalities, these excerpts were associated with a code. This process was concluded by organising all the codes. This was done in relevance to the objectives of the study as well as the three research questions.

Development of themes:

The codes that were related or shared similar underlying concepts were aggregated under groups or themes, for example stressful emotional experiences of participants were categorised under stress, anxiety and worry subtheme. Clarke and Braun (2013) define a theme as a pattern observed in the data, that has meaningful relevance to the main research question. This process went through various iterations to evaluate and ensure that the boundaries of grouping are adhered to.

Reviewing themes:

This process involved checking for coherence of the themes in relation to the codes. Followed by reviewing the relationships between themes and the entire data. This was done to ensure that the themes were aligned to the research questions and there are clear boundaries for each theme. Some themes were split further into subthemes, and some were combined to make one theme.

Naming the themes:

Each theme was then defined to ensure the meaning is distinctive, providing a clear identity that makes it easier for the reader to follow.

Results presentation:

There are diagrams and tables developed to demonstrate the relationships between the themes, subthemes and the research questions. This is covered under Chapter 5.

4.4 Quality Controls

Quality control plays a critical role in ensuring that the research findings are credible and reliable, yielding results that are meaningful to contribute to the body of knowledge (Fusch et al., 2018). Nowell et al. (2017) cited that qualitative research is a complex type of study that requires credible methods to obtain useful and trustworthy outcome.

Researchers bring about their own interpretation, values and perspectives to a qualitative study and this can result in biasness, therefore it is important to have

guidelines and methods that mitigate the biasness and enable the researcher to present the interpretations of the participants properly.

Credibility

Literature informed the semi-structured interview guide to ensure that the objective of the study is maintained, and reliable data is collected. Data was collected from various participants to gain perspective on how retrenchments as a phenomenon affected the surviving employees' engagement. These participants were from different departments and operations within the PGM sector in South Africa. This approach generated different perspectives and enhanced the validity of the data through triangulation (Myers, 2020).

The data collected was coded following an iterative process of the credible systematic six-phase method by Clarke and Braun (2013). Using well proven methods improves the reliability and validity of the data. During the process the researcher kept going through the data to ensure that all relevant data is coded properly and no meaning is lost in the process. Data saturation was reached when there were no new perspectives to gather from the data (Ahmed, 2025).

Transferability

Transferability is about generalising the research findings according to Nowell et al. (2017) and the findings from this study cannot be transferred to other inquiries as it was limited to the employees who survived retrenchments in the PGM mining sector. People across various organisations, sectors and geographies can have a different view on retrenchments, hence the limitation to transfer the findings.

Dependability

Insights from literature on conducting qualitative research guided the researcher in this study. The data collected can be traced through transcripts and recordings.

4.5 Research ethics

Research theories and methods from various credible authors guided the data collection and interpretation of this study. The researcher obtained ethical approval before data collection. Consent from the participants who were suitable for the study (employees who survived retrenchments) was also requested prior to the interviews. The participants and their organisations were treated with anonymity. The whole

process of data collection was guided by the objectives of the study, literature and the iterative process that ensured alignment to addressing the research questions.

4.6 Limitations

Although literature was sourced to guide this study, the limitations that could limit the reliability of the data collection and analysis are the lack of researcher's experience in conducting interviews and interpreting data from a qualitative study, sample size and time constraints. The researcher conducted few dry runs before commencing with real data collection to ensure proper preparation however lack of experience can bring subjectivity and biasness. The sample size for this study was limited to only 16 participants and may have not covered all the views of the employees who survived retrenchments, however, reaching data saturation is what guided the reliability of the data collected. Furthermore, the time frame for this study was limited to a year, proposing a possibility that a longitudinal study could yield more richer results.

4.7 Conclusion

The ability to collect and interpret data in qualitative studies is important because the process and methods followed determine the credibility and validity of the data given the subjective nature of qualitative studies (Fusch et al., 2018). This chapter covered the purpose of the research study, the approach and the methods followed. The rationale behind choosing the approach and the methods was also elaborated, demonstrating the confidence to maintain research ethics and upholding quality throughout the study.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

5.1. Introduction

Retrenchments bring about a lot of challenges that surviving employees face such as disengagement and when the workforce is disengaged, they can end up impacting the organisations' performance countering the initial intent of a firm's cost saving strategy through restructuring. Since employee engagement is linked to organisational performance according to Schenkel and Teigland (2017), it is crucial for firms to ensure that they maintain surviving employees' engagement post retrenchment to ensure business continuity and sustainability.

Having established the methodological approach in Chapter 4, the next chapter, Chapter 5 presents the qualitative findings from the data collection. The analysis was derived from semi-structured interviews of 16 participants who survived retrenchments in the PGM mining industry. This chapter covers the first-hand experiences of retrenchments on the employees that remained in the industry after the restructuring process. It provides a thorough comprehension of how retrenchments affected the surviving employees, the role that leadership played during and after the process. Furthermore, it provides insights on what the employees believe the organisations need to do (job resources) to maintain their engagement after retrenchments.

Multiple themes emerged from this study, uncovering the retrenchment as a phenomenon and its effect on surviving employees. Followed by linking the effects with employee engagement to establish better ways to maintain engagement considering its criticality on organisational performance after retrenchments. The findings highlighted that retrenchments affected surviving employees negatively because of increased demands and reduced resources while expected to deliver, thereby also affecting their engagement, making this study relevant for employers to find ways of maintaining employee engagement after restructuring since it is one of the strategies believed to save costs for a company that needs to survive economically.

5.2. Sample description

Prior to the presentation of results, it is essential to provide the background on the sample that was used for data collection. This provides a solid background for the sample chosen for this study and lays a foundation for the data analyses, making it

easier for the comprehension of the captured insights and perceptions. Table 2 below presents the characteristics of the 16 participants that were interviewed in this study. These participants worked in various operations in the PGM mining sector and had survived retrenchments in the sector.

Table 2 : Interview Participants attributes

Participant	Level of Work	Department within the sector	Nationality	Years of experience in the PGM mining sector
P1	Front line manager	Laboratory	South African	22
P2	Senior manager	Laboratory	South African	18
P3	Junior manager	Human resources	South African	10
P4	Planner	Engineering	South African	17
P5	Junior manager	Engineering	South African	30
P6	Senior manager	Production	South African	23
P7	Junior manager	Laboratory	South African	24
P8	Front line manager	Production	South African	19
P9	Union representative	Union (stakeholder)	South African	15
P10	Front line manager	Production	South African	17
P11	Front line manager	Engineering	South African	17
P12	Safety officer	Safety	South African	15
P13	Junior manager	Production	South African	31
P14	Front line manager	Production	South African	29
P15	Front line manager	Production	South African	13
P16	Quality officer	Safety	South African	18

Source: Compiled by author from the data collected from the participants

It can be noted from table 2 above that various departments including safety, production, engineering, laboratory and human resources were affected. Employees at different levels of work were affected, with some junior and senior positions impacted. This observation shows that there was no specific department or level of work targeted but the sector focused on reducing the number of employees across

various departments and positions to move towards leaner structures and save on costs. The participants' years of experience spans from 10 to 31 years indicating the richness of skills and experience in the industry. Losing employees with such experience and diversity in knowledge may affect the company's performance in future. These participants have been working for the sector for more than a decade, indicating why the retrenchment process could have been challenging as it threatened their stability.

5.3. Results analysis

All the 16 participants were asked similar open-ended questions from the semi-structured interview guide to establish the emerging themes from the experiences of the surviving employees after retrenchments. Nowell et al. (2017) cited that thematic analysis enables researchers identify, evaluate, arrange, depict and report the themes that are established within a set of data. Following this method enabled the grouping of codes of the surviving employees experience into themes that are addressing the three main research questions.

The findings presentation begins with a description of the total number of codes established in the study and the distribution of the codes per participant. Thereafter, the identified themes and subthemes are presented under each research question. Eight major themes were established, which are presented per research question. While addressing the first research question, three themes emerged with a total of nine subthemes. The second research question had three themes, and the last research question had two themes and four subthemes.

The thematic focus included key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchments. This was established to address the first research question which was aimed at addressing the key factors that influence the surviving employees' engagement after retrenchments.

Secondly, with leadership playing a critical role after retrenchments, the role of leadership in improving employee engagement and mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments was looked at to address the second research question.

Lastly, the proposed interventions (job resources) for mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement post-retrenchments was looked at with the aim of addressing the third research question.

Distribution of codes per participant

The thematic analysis yielded a total of 150 codes among the participants indicating a rich set of data. These codes were distributed among the 16 participants demonstrating a high level of engagement and depth across the sample. The distribution of codes per participant is presented in Figure 3 below:

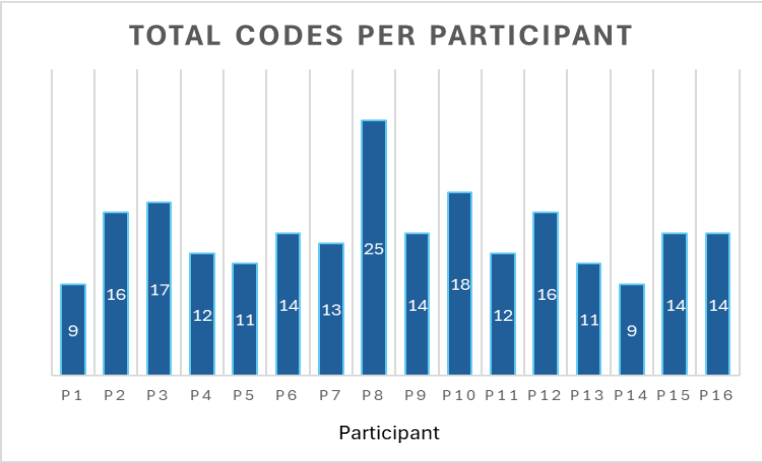


Figure 3 : Total codes per participant

Source: Compiled by author from the data collected

The distribution was noted to be consistent, with most of the participants (12) contributing between 10 and 16 codes each. The highest contributions were from participants P3 (17 codes), P10 (18 codes) and P8 (25 codes). The pattern of code distribution is a strong indicator that data saturation was reached. Data saturation, determined by the researcher, occurs when new interviews cease to yield new insights (Ahmed, 2024). Table 9 in the appendix show the codes assigned per participant in a table form.

5.3.1 The key factors that influence the surviving employees’ engagement post retrenchments

The first research question focused on identifying the key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchment. To address this question, three main themes emerged from the data collected. The themes that emerged are psychological and emotional impact, shifting workloads and job demands, and survivor’s perception on the organisation because of retrenchments. Figure 4 below show the schematic diagram of the themes and subthemes under the first research question.

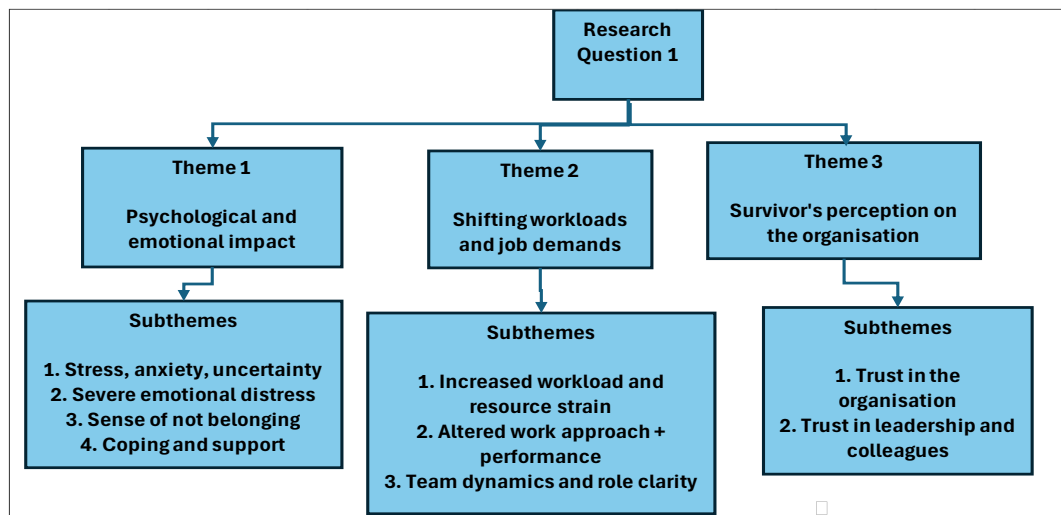


Figure 4: Themes and subthemes that emerged under the first research question

Source: Compiled by author using the collected data

5.3.1.1. Psychological and emotional impact

Retrenchments reduce the number of people that are required in an organisation, and this has been identified to bring a lot of anxiety and uncertainty to the remaining employees. The employees that have devoted themselves to an organisation have to now come to terms with the fact that they may lose their jobs. Fear of losing the source of income has been identified to induce psychological and emotional turmoil causing the affected employees to be emotionally exhausted. Literature has also identified job insecurity as a job demand, causing strain on the remaining employees (Dlouhy and Casper, 2021). When individuals are emotionally exhausted, they experience burnout which affects their level of focus and commitment to the organisation leading to lower level of employee engagement.

The findings from the study highlighted that the employees that remained after retrenchments experienced psychological and emotional trauma because of retrenchments. Table 3 below demonstrates the four subthemes that emerged from this theme namely: stress, anxiety and uncertainty, severe emotional distress, sense of not belonging and coping and support.

Table 3: Theme 1 code frequency (RQ1)

Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Stress, Anxiety and Uncertainty	16	47
Severe emotional distress	9	26
Sense of not belonging	4	12
Coping and Support	5	15

Source: Compiled by the author from the subthemes that emerged under the first theme.

It can be noted from table 3 above that the frequent codes experienced by the participants were stress, anxiety and uncertainty and severe emotional distress respectively. Coping and lack of support was the third highest subtheme and lastly, there were some participants who experienced the sense of not belonging because of the retrenchment process.

Stress, anxiety and uncertainty

There was a strong theme of retrenchments inducing stress, anxiety and uncertainty on the employees that survived. This was highlighted by 10 participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P9, P12, P13, P15). The experience was characterised by an initial period of intense fear and disorientation, which for some employees transitioned into a sense of job insecurity and anxiety. The remaining employees were highly concerned about their future in the organisation. Stress and anxiety affect the psychological well-being of individuals consequently affecting their level of commitment and engagement. For example, participants P1, P3 and P4 strongly supported this subtheme in the following comments:

"It was very strenuous. It was difficult because when we were first told about it, we didn't know whether we were going to survive or not... the stress comes from having no idea what's your next step." (P1)

"Personally... the restructuring... psychologically affected me... it took a toll on me. Hence, I'm saying I don't think I'm... performing to my optimum level. (P3)

"Even today... I'm still not at ease. I'm still not... comfortable with where I am. I'm not sure about what the future holds for me." (P4)

All these experiences highlight that stress, anxiety and uncertainty were experienced, and this demonstrated that the retrenchment event shattered the remaining employees' sense of stability especially because all of them had been in the industry for a decade and more.

Severe emotional distress

The second subtheme of severe emotional distress is closely related to the first subtheme of stress and anxiety. The participants reported experiencing severe emotional distress. Stress affects people in different ways; some people may not be able to cope and end up experiencing severe distress. These individuals saw retrenchment as a period of both worry and severe psychological trauma that led to emotional exhaustion, visible breakdown and a sense of demoralisation. The extreme emotional effect of retrenchment was described by five participants (P1, P4, P6, P10, P12) who articulated the overwhelming nature of the distress. This type of experience can affect the psychological health of individuals in a negative way potentially leading to long term effects and is associated with lack of focus and engagement. The emotional experience of the participants is highlighted in the following comments:

"It affected us mentally because... you have families back at home... So, the stress comes from you have no idea what's your next step." (P1)

"It was emotional... it was too much for me to handle, to be honest. There were times when I would break down, go into my car, break down, cry and then drive all the way home..."(P4)

"As a shift leader... I'm a bridge between senior management and the employees... their complaints... also stresses me out. Hence... from a psychological point of view it messed me up." (P10)

"I was one of the affected people... maybe I was a little bit affected... it's like, OK... I'm just demoralised..... we have numbed ourselves." (P12)

The evidence presented above highlighted that retrenchment was a traumatic event with far-reaching psychological effects on the surviving employees. The experiences ranged from overwhelming pressure and tearful breakdowns to the erosion of personal family dynamics. This level of distress indicates that many employees were

pushed beyond their coping capabilities, leading to states of demoralisation and emotional burdens that affected their capacity to remain engaged.

Sense of not belonging

The restructuring process made some of the surviving employees feel that they did not belong to the organisation. The participants indicated that witnessing their colleagues being retrenched made them shift their professional identity and their perception of their relationship with the organisation. Sense of not belonging alters how individuals engage with the organisation, driving lower motivation and commitment because they may not see their roles being meaningful at work. This experience was echoed by participants 3 and 13 in the following comments:

"At some point I was feeling like... I just don't know whether I belong or not". (P3)

"I was feeling like... the company is using it as a tool that I get whereas... I'm doing my best, but the companies don't see that I do my best."(P13)

There are a few participants who indicated that being excluded from losing their jobs brought some kind of relief, while the majority reported that they were left with a sense of betrayal that continues to affect their job security. When employees feel insecure, they feel that they are not important affecting their level of engagement which can result in poor performance. The sense of relief was shared by participants 5 and 7 in the following comments:

"After the process was completed... we felt that we were at least important to this company, or we were valued. That is why they did not retrench us... so we increased the morale." (P5)

It was a mixed feeling, but at the same time, I was happy that I still have a job... I will still be able to provide for my family." (P7)

The participants' experiences of feeling a sense of not belonging and relief highlight that the processes of retrenchment acted as a catalyst for re-assessment of the employee-organisational relationship. For most of the participants, the retrenchment left the surviving employees feeling shattered, while for a few, it was a moment of relief. This experience left some employees, experiencing a perception that the company did not have loyalty towards the employees. When employees feel that their trust is shattered, their affective commitment declines so as employee engagement.

Coping and support

Participants (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P11) mentioned that they had to find ways to cope with the challenges that the retrenchment process presented to them. Social support from the employees that were undergoing the same challenge and personal resilience were a buffer to the psychological trauma they faced. They associated this with a lack of support from their organisations. Lack of support can make the remaining employees feel undervalued and isolated, leading to employees being disengaged. This experience is illustrated by quotes from participants 8 and 4 respectively.

"During those periods, there's no time for negative conversations. You just have to pick the positive stuff, engage the team, then move forward." (P8)

"The one thing that motivated me was I still need to think about the person that is going to school, which is my daughter, that I need to build this future for her." (P4)

These perceptions show that survivors demonstrated resilience through peer support and personal resilience. These coping strategies where survivors relied on informal networks and individual mental strength, indicate that organisations don't have proper formal support systems. Such perceptions can affect employee engagement negatively long term. What is worth noting here is that personal resources kept the affected employees going supporting the theory from the JD-R framework.

5.3.1.2. Shifting workloads and job demands

The second theme that emerged from the collected data was shifting workloads and increased job demands. The theme explains the real physical or external challenges that surviving employees face after a retrenchment process. With some of the team members leaving the organisation, the workload increased resulting in less resources to carry out the tasks. The organisations still expected output and with less resources, the remaining employees experienced fatigue and role ambiguity that led to confusion and conflicts. The employees may also feel that the organisation is being unfair to them as increasing the demand without increasing resources can be perceived as lack of care. Increased demands and less resources demoralise employees, causing their level of motivation and engagement to reduce.

The three subthemes that emerged under the second theme were: increased workloads, altered work approach and performance that may affect safety of employees and role clarity and team dynamics. Table 4 below shows the subthemes under the second theme together with the frequency and percentage of each subtheme.

Table 4 : Subthemes under theme 2 code frequency (RQ1)

Theme 2: Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased workload and strain	16	47
Altered work approach and performance	9	26
Role clarity and team dynamics	4	12

It was established from the data collected that all participants experienced increased workload and physical strain because of downsizing. This is because the remaining employees are expected to continue with their normal tasks and take on the tasks that were carried out by the laid off employees. There are some participants who experienced altered work approach which accounted for 26% of the frequency under the second theme. Role ambiguity and change in team dynamics were also experienced however it wasn't very significant in this sample.

Increased workload and resource strain

With the quantity of work remaining consistent despite the reduction in resources, remaining employees experience increased workload. Their responsibilities and requirements to meet targets increased due to less resources and this was perceived as a challenge demand that led to physical strain, fatigue and exhaustion. When employees are exhausted, organisations may start experiencing low employee engagement and this can manifest in attendance challenges such as absenteeism or working overtime, defeating the initial purpose of cost saving.

This subtheme highlighted that the retrenchment process created an increase in demand for the remaining employees. Seven participants (P1, P6, P8, P10, P12, P15, P16) indicated that the workload increased substantially, causing a strain in their daily routines. This strain diminishes energy consequently affecting the level of

surviving employees' engagement. Participant 1 stated that *"workload affected us negatively in a big way because now there's more work and less people... I have to do my job and do someone else job... it affects you physically."* (P1).

Participant 1 highlighted that the increase in workload affected them negatively which means they need to find a way of managing it if the organisation does not direct them on how they must handle it. It was observed that participant 16 devised a strategy to manage her workload which is working in a hurry. Her comments were as follows: *"I'm always working... in a hurry because I want to cover all those sections... I would extend the time so that I make sure that I cover everything before I go home."*

The challenge with excessive workloads and working in a hurry is that they result in long term fatigue and the safety of employees can be compromised. This sentiment is shared by participant 6 who stated that *"Safety may be compromised. People are reporting to be fatigued and overworked. And we may incur some unnecessary overtime... there's been complaints of people being overworked."* Constant fatigue makes employees to lose focus and erodes the motivation and commitment of employees' overtime.

The other aspect that is critical is loss of skills when the organisations let go of experienced people, leaving the remaining employees with increased workload and less skills and experience. This was indicated by participant 8 who said *"We had more skilful employees, the experienced ones... those are most of the guys that have left... it's a loss of skill... It's a bit of a negative."* The remaining employees end up having to find ways of managing the increased requirements and responsibilities with limited knowledge. The limited knowledge coupled with lack of guidance on execution can leave the remaining employees feeling confused, angry and eventually disengaged.

The above evidence highlighted that the retrenchment resulted in more work for the surviving employees. This situation exposes them to even more physical stress and can compromise their safety. The findings show that the combination of fewer hands, loss of critical skills and pressure to maintain output, exposed the employees to work

overload, fatigue and heightened risk. These would affect the employees' engagement in a negative way.

Altered work approach and performance

With increased job demands and less resources to carry out the tasks, the remaining employees had to fundamentally alter how they approach their work. Five participants (P3, P6, P9, P15, P16) shared this subtheme, which made them to make uncomfortable adaptations to the work overload, such as being compelled to work differently, making conscious and unconscious trade-offs that had significant implications for long-term performance and organisational health. The challenge with this approach is that business sustainability may be compromised with no clear prioritisation and the remaining employees' may feel discouraged and demotivated consequently impacting their level of engagement at work.

Participant 3 reported that *"My motivation is lowered. I don't want to lie... it feels like I'm not performing to my optimum level."* Participant 15 also stated that *"It just means... we started prioritising now, some work that is deemed long term and low impact was shifted and the work that is urgent and high impact... was prioritised ... to make sure that we still push production through."* These comments show that employees may not have full confidence on the future of the organisation as there seems to be low motivation and changes in priorities that focus only on what is urgent. Focusing on what is urgent doesn't demonstrate an approach that is future focused.

Some participants indicated that the organisations need to develop a heightened business acumen and awareness of the financial challenges the firm is facing. This was strongly indicated by the following sentiments: *"There needs to be a better improvement on business acumen for... all levels of work... People should not be taken by surprise to say... the company is no longer profitable"* by participant 6. The level of surprise stated here highlights the lack of upfront engagement by the organisation, which can be seen as a negative for the employees that have been devoted, giving their all without being made aware of the performance and potential economic threats the organisation is facing.

The findings presented above indicated that the altered work approaches highlight an organisation trying to navigate a crisis created by retrenchments. While some employees disengaged or had reduced work performance, others adapted by developing a sharper business focus and implementing short-term survival strategies. The findings lead to a conclusion that, despite achieving short-term cost savings, retrenchment potentially has a long-term effect on the operational stability of the organisation.

Role clarity and team dynamics

Retrenchments can bring a lot of uncertainty with surviving employees experiencing role ambiguity and conflict. This is because some of the people that were working have now left the organisation and the remaining employees must see to it that the business continues running. When roles are not clear, employees may not understand what is expected of them and this can make remaining employees feel disconnected and disengaged. Role ambiguity and team dynamics subtheme was shared by three participants (P8, P11 and P16). These participants highlighted that the retrenchment impacted established team structures in the organisation such as individual role definitions. This disruption resulted in confusion, misalignment and resistance from other team members.

The participants indicated that they were often thrown into new situations with inadequate preparation or support. Participant 16 narrated that *"I was never told that my role is going to change. I was not even given the handover... I was just relying on the job description that I was hired for... and then figure out how am I going to make sure that I deliver."* (P16). This shows that the organisations didn't do much to ensure that surviving employees know what is expected of them, instead they allowed the remaining employees to navigate the increased workload or scope on their own.

Other employees like participant 8 reported experiencing "challenges of role transitions for moved employees" saying *"Some of the guys moved from one department to the other... it's something they didn't plan for... you need to be emotionally intelligent."*

Resistance to change was also identified as another significant challenge, with P16 reporting facing “stakeholder resistance” from colleagues who expected her to perform exactly as her predecessors. This resulted in tensions and strained engagements. Her comments were: *“The expectation from the stakeholders... would be that I do things the same way the other guys were doing... the engagement between me and them, sometimes we don't agree on things because they still refer to the old quality officers.”* These confusions and conflicts can often irritate and affect employee engagement at work.

The participants who didn't raise role ambiguity as a challenge highlighted that supervisor support which is seen as a job resource played a critical role in enabling them to know what was expected of them.

The findings indicate that there was no proper change management process to help employees transition in terms of role clarity and team dynamics after retrenchments. The data highlighted a lack of proper handovers and role definition. This created an environment of confusion and reduced team collaboration which negates employee engagement. Supervisor support negated role ambiguity for other participants, enabling them to carry out their tasks without confusion.

5.3.1.3. Survivors' changed perception of the organisation

When organisations downsize, they indirectly breach the psychological contract they have with employees, resulting in employees losing trust in the organisation. The increase in job demands and reduction in resources can make employees feel dissatisfied as they are expected to always go an extra mile to reach the set targets which is not sustainable. Employees who do not trust their organisations may end up not caring about the company and its performance, because loss of trust drives detachment, eroding both employee commitment and engagement. This theme of changed perception about the organisation was shared by six participants (P2, P3, P4, P10, P11, P12).

The theme had two subthemes: trust in the organisation and trust in leadership. Table 5 below shows the subthemes under the third theme together with the frequency and percentage of each subtheme.

Table 5: Subthemes under the third theme (RQ1)

Theme 3: Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Trust in the organisation	9	60
Trust in leaders and colleagues	6	40

Table 5 above highlighted that loss of trust in the organisation outweighed loss of trust in the leaders and colleagues. Loss of trust in the organisation accounted for 60% whereas loss of trust in the leaders and colleagues accounted for 40%.

Trust in the organisation

The overwhelming sentiment under this subtheme was that the process of retrenchment served as a critical test for the organisation's character in the eyes of the remaining employees. Most of the participants felt that the retrenchment triggered a moment of re-evaluation of their relationship with the organisation, resulting in the loss of trust in strategic leadership and the organisation. Trust is often associated with commitment and engagement and when trust is affected, employee engagement can decline.

The sentiment from participant 2 was as follows: *You start asking yourself what happened to the five-year plan?... Did they not see this coming?... Did the EXCO get it wrong?*". This question emerging from a senior manager when the organisation is already going through a retrenchment show that some employees are not made aware of the challenges the organisations are facing, indicating low levels of engagement and information sharing, pointing scepticism at the executives' ability to protect employees. Participant 12 also stated that *"It's like you just have to look out for yourself... I'm not too sure if I trust [the organisation] ... the perception is how this whole thing was handled."*

These comments expose the vulnerability of some surviving employees who feel betrayed by the organisation regardless of their commitment. The sentiments from participant 13 echoed the following: *"I was feeling like... the company is using it as a tool that I get whereas... I'm doing my best, but the companies don't see that I do my best."*(P13)

The perceptions from the employees regarding trusting the organisation and leadership highlighted that retrenchment affected institutional trust. They believe that executive leadership didn't show proper strategic planning and ethical fairness. When employees don't trust their organisation and the leadership they may have challenges with commitment and engagement.

Trust in leadership and colleagues

Since everyone was looking out for themselves, trust in leaders, supervisors and colleagues was also impacted. After the retrenchment exercise, the organisation became an environment where there is no trust between some fellow employees and the immediate leadership. The theme was shared by five participants (P4, P8, P 10, P11 and P13). They indicated that the retrenchment affected, interpersonal trust between colleagues and between employees and their leaders. The data indicated that several participants experienced deep suspicion and a sense of betrayal among colleagues. For example, participant 4 stated that *"It was painful for me to hear that there were those that were guaranteed their positions way before the interviews... I lost a lot of friends after that process... I don't have friends anymore... I have learned that you cannot trust anyone."* (P4).

With retrenchments bringing a lot of anxiety and uncertainty, having certain people being told that they must not worry about their future while others are struggling to cope shows poor leadership and may affect how surviving employees engage with the immediate leadership going forward. Retrenchment times require support from leaders to ensure that employees navigate through the change process with sufficient support and guidance. Participant 8 also stated that it was very toxic: *"The relationship became negative because now everyone is looking out for himself... we become sort of enemies... It was a bit toxic because everyone [was in] survival*

mode." The challenge with such experiences is that they can result in a decline in collaboration and engagement. With the mining industry being less mechanised, and resources reduced, teamwork and enhanced engagement are more critical for the success of the organisations. Not all participants shared a negative view of leaders and colleagues. Some didn't see any change to their relationships with their immediate leaders and colleagues.

The evidence from the data collected indicate that the retrenchment process acted as a test for the organisation's resilience. As the data showed, some of the employees lost trust in their colleagues and immediate leaders. The erosion of interpersonal trust suggests that rebuilding a collaborative work culture post retrenchment is a significant challenge.

5.3.2. The Role of leadership in mitigating the effects of retrenchments and improving employee engagement

The second research question sought to establish the role that leadership played in improving employee engagement and mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments. The findings established three major themes: leadership approach and support, communicating effectively, and enhancing perception of fairness and strategic alignment. Figure 5 below show the themes that emerged under the second research question.

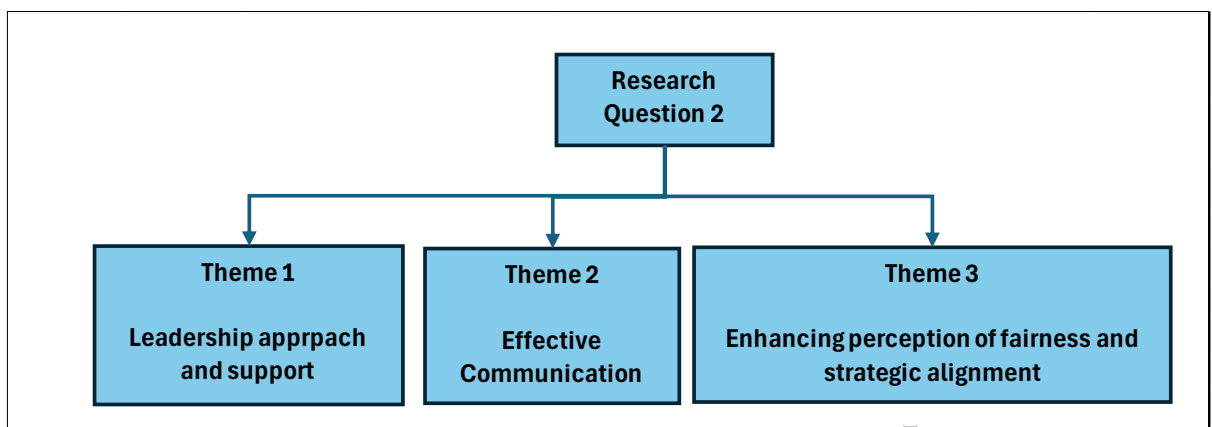


Figure 5: Themes that emerged from the second research question

A lot of participants resonated with the themes that emerged under the second research question. Table 6 below shows the themes and the participants frequency under each theme.

Table 6: Participant frequency on the themes under the second research question

Research Question 2		
Theme	Participant Frequency	Percentage (%)
Leadership approach and support	60	49
Effective Communication	46	37
Perception of fairness	17	14

(Compiled by author using the data gathered from the participants interviews)

It can be noted from Table 6 above that most participants resonated with leadership approach and support (frequency of 60), and effective communication (frequency of 46) the most. The theme of perception of fairness was also highlighted by other participants.

5.3.2.1. Leadership approach and support

The theme of leadership approach and support relates to how leaders navigated the retrenchment process and post-retrenchment period to provide direction and support to the surviving employees. Literature and data collected highlighted the negative effects of retrenchments such as stress, anxiety and fatigue, impacting the remaining employees' engagement. To maintain employee engagement post retrenchments, leadership as a job resource plays a critical role to restore team morale and employee commitment.

When employees feel support from their leaders, a sense of stability and regaining trust in the organisation can be re-established, creating a psychologically safe environment for the employees. Encouragement from leaders and their involvement in helping the teams navigate through the challenges faced after retrenchments can boost morale and employee engagement.

Some participants shared the experience of inadequate support from their leaders during and after the retrenchment process. Seven participants (P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P14, P16) specifically highlighted the lack of support from leadership. The lack of support was highlighted by the following comment from participant 2: *"It becomes stressful because now you need to face the guys... and try to put the people at ease."*

Participant 2 who is a senior manager faced a massive challenge where he was expected to reduce several people in his department without prior consultation and

rationale behind the number. He was expected to deliver on this reduction while his role was also affected. His comment highlighted that the process was stressful as he needed to think about himself and his team. He needed to find ways to keep his team at ease while also delivering the mandate initiated by the organisation. This made him acknowledge the lack of support from his leadership.

Although this senior leader didn't get the expected support from his leaders, he chose to provide the necessary support to his team, which is very commendable. He did this by being transparent and engaging his team more often, providing feedback when there were updates from the organisation. His comments were "engage with the staff more and get ideas from the team on how to enhance engagement and get things done". Although his team was badly affected in terms of the resource percentage reduction one of his subordinates who took part in the interviews highlighted that having a good manager who has an open-door policy helped and empowered her. This shows that leaders who navigated this period by absorbing the psychological challenges that their teams were facing through clear communication, and honest conversations provided the necessary support. This approach is a key factor in promoting engagement.

There was another senior manager (participant 6) who highlighted lack of support in the following comment: *"I can't recall corporate personnel coming to the site to give site support... it could have been better or carried a lot of weight if they were there to give site personnel support."* This comment emanated from a concern that the recent retrenchments were significant and the support from corporate could have helped with providing direction on how to go about the process without causing a lot of anxiety that most remaining employees resonated with. This comment shows that some organisations focus more on the financial aspects and neglect the human element when it comes to retrenchments.

Although there were participants who highlighted lack of support from their leaders, some participants acknowledged varying degrees of support from their immediate managers, HR and supervisors. Supervisor support can provide direction and clarity when there is confusion making the surviving employees feel at ease after a restructuring. *The following comments captured the experiences from participant 3 and 7 respectively: "My manager was open and supportive",* and this gave her the assurance that there is support. (P3)

"HR has been supportive... they will also come and give further progress... the HR was supportive all the way up until we reached the end." (P7). Supportive leadership and HR teams can help negate the effects of retrenchment on the surviving employees, boost morale and help with the restoration of confidence and commitment towards the organisation.

The evidence provided highlighted fragmented and inconsistent leadership responses, where some employee survivors felt reassured while others reported neglect. When leaders don't provide support during crisis, they can erode the confidence that employees have and induce anxiety or confusion. Some leaders were thrown into a complex role that was not just management but required them to play a psycho-social role and provide support. The successful leaders managed the process by moving beyond merely managing stress to actively fostering recovery through communication and team engagement. These findings imply that effective leadership support practices, anchored on transparent communication and being visible and approachable, are essential in maintaining employee engagement and reducing the negative effects of retrenchment. The sentiments shared emphasise the role of leadership as a critical job resource on enhancing the engagement of employees after a retrenchment exercise.

5.3.2.2. Transparent and effective communication

Effective communication is a job resource that has been identified to play a critical role during and after retrenchments (Beatty, 2015). When organisations undergo a big change such as retrenchments, they need to ensure that they clearly communicate with their employees to provide updates and guidance consequently minimising anxiety and fear. In this context, effective communication needs to cover the reasons why the organisation is retrenching, the process it will follow, and the number of people affected. The organisation needs to also clarify the strategic direction the organisation is taking and what the future entails to improve their employee engagement. There should be platforms provided for employees to raise questions and feedback given. This will help employees to comprehend the current challenges faced and what they can do to help the organisation survive as well as feel involved which promotes employee engagement.

The organisation needs to also clarify on how the reduction of resources is going to impact job demands and how it will support the surviving employees to reach their set targets without driving employees to experience challenges such as stress, burnout and ill-health because of prolonged emotional or physical strain.

Effective communication, characterised by transparency, clarity, seeking and providing feedback was the most significant factor that leadership could use to influence survivors' experience. The data indicated that the extent to which the company was open about the reasons for the retrenchment, the process and mapping the future, played an important role in building trust between the organisation and the employees. A total of seven participants (P7, P8, P10, P11, P12, P15, P16) praised the company for its openness regarding the reasons behind the retrenchments. Participants highlighted that the company was transparent about the challenges it was facing and how they will address them, employees were not left in the dark. The participants also praised the consistent updates that they received from the company regarding the retrenchment, with participant 7 and participant 8 acknowledging that regular communication helped them understand the evolving situation. The comments from various participants about communication were captured as follows:

After every shift, he'll give you feedback whether it's negative or positive... and he'll give you an opportunity to talk to him so that you can see where your gap is... and how to solve them." (P7)

"What they did well is communication... overall general, the communication was very good. We'll get updates... to understand what's going on." (P8)

I believe it was transparent because whatever they had spoken about prior, it is indeed happening... every step... they would communicate... we were never left in the dark. (P9)

I told myself communication is key to team success... You need to engage the team... You need to have a plan... share information with the team... they will understand the importance." (P13)

The data showed the value of consistent updates regarding the retrenchments, as it helped employees to understand the situation better. What is notable about

participant 7's comment is that he was given feedback and guidance on how to address the identified gaps. This shows that effective communication can enhance employee's commitment or engagement, helping them to have confidence and trust in the outcome of the process.

Lack of communication and transparency was also identified by some participants (P1, P2, P3). The participants described these gaps thus:

"They would just tell us this is what's going to happen." (P1)

The company needs to be more transparent... in terms of the impact of... macroeconomic factors... the impact of the tariffs has not been properly quantified." (P6)

These comments highlighted that the surviving employees were not happy with the level of communication as it was not transparent enough. It also shows that the team was not engaged they were just told about what is going to happen and not necessarily elaborated and provided platforms for clarity seeking leading employees to draw their own conclusions.

The above evidence indicated that most surviving employees experienced and appreciated the level of transparency and opportunity to be given updates throughout the entire retrenchment process. Some also highlighted that they were able to get feedback which demonstrated the characteristics of effective communication. Although the retrenchment was an uncertain time for them, effective communication helped them to navigate the challenge better as they knew what to expect. The ones who experienced lack of effective communication revealed the need for the organisations to provide a clear business rationale for the retrenchments as well as constant updates to support the employees during and post retrenchments.

5.3.3.3. Perceptions of fairness and strategic alignment

Several surviving employees contributed towards this theme of perception of fairness and strategic alignment. This theme underscored survivors' judgment about aspects of fairness, logic and integrity of the retrenchment process and the business strategy behind it. It highlighted the importance of leadership to promote positive perceptions about the retrenchment process.

Restructuring and downsizing is believed to be one of the quickest strategies to cut costs and turn the business performance around. This perception is mostly believed by the executive leadership; however, employees find the process challenging, stressful and eroding trust. The challenge stems from who will stay behind and who will lose their jobs. This process must be clearly defined, showcasing the criteria used to lay off else there may be suspicions and rumours that can affect organisational perception negatively. It is imperative for organisations to ensure that the downsizing process is fair to enhance employee engagement and preserve business continuity.

When there are perceived opportunistic restructuring or nepotism, employees may feel betrayed, and this affects how they perceive the organisation. They may end up feeling isolated, disregarded and disengage due to lack of trust in the process. The data showed that perceptions of fairness were critically fractured for a significant portion of the participants. This was experienced by five participants (P3, P4, P8, P9, P12). Where the process was perceived to be biased and inconsistent, it caused severe damage to the perception the employees had in the process, resulting in a lack of trust. The experiences are stated by the following comments:

"What wasn't clear was how individuals were affected... it depended on how well you were known? Or are you in good books with your respective managers?" (P3)

"The questions that I was asked... the interviewer goes and says... 'That is not the answer I'm looking for'... I felt like it wasn't even an interview" (P4)

"I had just received an award... best HRD officer... surprisingly, I get a letter to say you are affected... I thought... it could have been handled differently." (P8)

These comments highlighted that the criteria used for identifying the affected employees was not explicit. Furthermore, during the interviews and selection process of the surviving employees, there was no clear criteria causing the employees to perceive the process as opportunistic restructuring. A process where managers exercised their powers to get rid of the employees they do not want and reappoint those they are familiar with. This perception is concerning as it may lead the remaining employees to lose trust in their leaders, negatively affect employee engagement and cause the remaining employees to start looking for alternative jobs especially if they believe that they were not preferred.

The other challenge raised by the retrenchments was that some surviving employees needed to be deployed to other operations. The positive aspect about this is that the affected employees did not lose their jobs however, relocating may affect the established lifestyles and families of those individuals. This perception was raised by participant 15 who stated that: *The downside... is people... had to be moved to other operations, not considering the circumstance... their livelihood... like what they established in terms of family... that was not considered.* (P15). Such disruptions can affect how employees perceive fairness, and support in the process, thereby lowering their engagement.

On the contrary, where employees believed the business's rationale was sound, they had positive attitudes towards the retrenchment process. Three participants shared these sentiments (P3, P1, P15). These participants believe that there was a fair rationale for the retrenchments and due diligence was followed. Participant 11 shared the following comment:

"It is us that make the company to make such decisions, sometimes we are contributing by not reaching targets and misusing funds, we are in charge"

This comment highlighted that employees were somehow held accountable for the performance of the company, and participant 11 resonated with that perception.

The above transcripts indicated that fairness is a crucial leadership practice that should be demonstrated during the process of retrenchment and recruitment. Most participants felt that the process was unfair as it ignored the employees' contributions to the organisation. However, there were a few participants who viewed the retrenchment process positively as the ability to "rationalise the business".

The above transcripts showed that the role of leadership in ensuring perceptions of fairness is important to promote engagement in the remaining employees. A flawed process or retrenchment was perceived as having inflicted deep wounds on some of the survivors. The findings highlighted that the way employees are treated during a retrenchment is important, as it directly influences the nature of re-engagement with the remaining workforce.

5.3.3. The Interventions required to mitigate the negative effects of retrenchments and promote employee engagement post restructuring

The third research question asked participants' perceptions regarding interventions that can be utilised to mitigate the negative effects of retrenchment and promote employee engagement. The analysis yielded two themes, suggested as recommendations: enhanced communication and employee involvement, addressing workload, roles, and operational realities and leadership management and support interventions. There were two subthemes from the first theme namely: strategic communication and feedback, and employee engagement. The two subthemes under the second theme were supportive leadership practices, training and development. Figure 6 below show the themes and subthemes under the third research question.

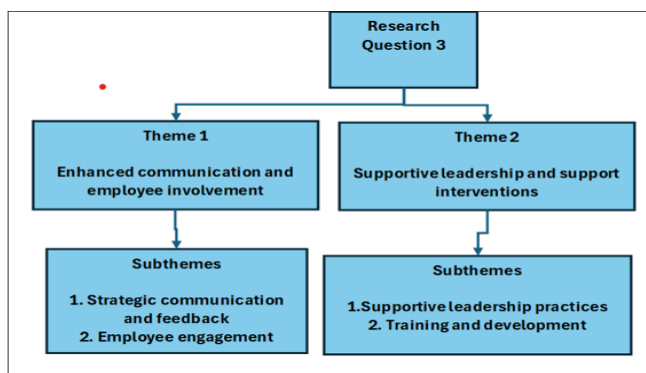


Figure 6: Themes and subthemes under the third research question

5.3.3.1. Enhanced communication and employee involvement

When organisations restructure, their main aim is to save costs and ensure that the business continue running during economic downturns, however in some instances organisations don't experience these benefits due to the negative effects that retrenchments have on surviving employees (Harney et al., 2018). With increased job demands and reduced resources being the main attributes of retrenchments, employees are faced with challenges that need strategy to buffer them for a sustainable organisational performance. Organisations need to work hard to build surviving employees' morale and enhance their engagement given the effects of retrenchments.

The participants highlighted that enhanced communication and involving the employees throughout the process can negate the effects of retrenchments such as increased demands and reduced resources and improve employee engagement. They also highlighted that the frequency of engaging employees needs to increase for alignment purposes. The theme of enhanced communication and employee involvement included two subthemes: strategic communication and feedback, and continuous engagement. The two subthemes are shown in table 7 below together with their frequencies and percentage within the first theme. These subthemes are presented in the next subsections.

Table 7: Participant frequency on the subthemes under the third research question

Theme 1: Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strategic communication and feedback	27	75
Employee engagement	9	25

Table 7 above highlighted that employees valued communication and feedback more under the theme of enhanced communication and employee engagement with a frequency of 27.

Strategic communication and feedback

Strategic communication and feedback had a higher frequency than employee engagement under the theme of enhanced communication and employee involvement. Six participants (P1, P2, P3, P7, P9, P10) emphasised the importance of being involved in the decision-making in the organisation. They also highlighted the need for leaders to actively and genuinely listen to employees which is crucial for strategic communication and promoting employee engagement. The participants expressed concern that there was a lack of communication and feedback after the retrenchment process even though they were updated during the process, highlighting the importance of leveraging communication to provide support to the remaining employees.

Some isolated contributions from participants included the need for clear strategic communication (P2, P3, P9), the importance of transparency in decision-making (P9) and continuous reaffirmation updates (P15, P16). The following statements aptly

captured employee perceptions regarding the importance of communication and feedback:

"Allowing the people to be involved every step of the way, because the people who are working on the floor are the ones who can give you advice."(P1)

"Create an environment where there is really a solid collaboration between leadership and the stakeholders... it was like there was a tell, tell, tell game... engaging... even if you think it's the most stupid or simple thing... it carries a lot of weight." (P3)

These two comments highlighted the need for employees to be consulted and involved in the process and decision making or providing advice. The employees believed that they are the ones who execute the work in the field, and they know what is required for each task therefore consulting and involving them seemed to be what they believe can enhance their engagement at work. It makes them to feel valued and their contributions to the organisation matter.

The need for communication and involving the team was further emphasised by participant 13 in the following comment:

"I told myself communication is key to team success... you need to engage the team... you need to have a plan... share information with the team... they will understand the importance." (P13).

Communication enables the team to succeed according to participant 13. It enables them to understand and align. Feedback plays a critical role in this aspect as he mentioned that information must be shared with the team for them to have a better understanding.

The perceptions presented above indicate that interventions centred on transparent, participatory and continuous communication are key for both mitigating the negative impacts of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement in the period following a retrenchment exercise. The findings suggest that embedding systems for inclusivity and continuous communication can help the organisation to rebuild commitment and resilience among surviving employees.

Continuous employee engagement

The subtheme of employee engagement builds on strategic communication. It was supported by four participants (P4, P5, P10, P13) who suggested that continuous engagement with employees, rather than once-off engagements, was important for mitigating the negative impacts of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement in the period following a retrenchment exercise. Different engagement strategies that were recommended ranged from more structured avenues, such as regular engagement forums (P13) and informal practices like reviving casual check-ins and conversations to show care (P10, P14). More details of perceptions are presented below:

“Continuous engagement... you don't only speak about work issues... asking an employee how the family is... it shows that indeed he really does care”. (P10)

“Looking at... to be once a month or once in three months just to hear... how can we improve the standard that we are working on?” (P13)

Just having the chats with the management team... have a cup of coffee and physically talk... We need to have these check-in sessions again... demonstrate that they care for each other (P14)

The company can... take the employees... and talk to them, make us free to talk whatever might be bothering us... just to hear from them. How that's like now... try to assist us where we need assistance. (P16)

The above transcripts highlighted that engagement is not just about formal processes, but can also include building connections, trust and opportunities that help employees raise their concerns in a psychologically safe environment. These engagement forums formal or informal, foster a stronger sense of belonging and commitment in employees who survived retrenchment, improving their level of engagement.

5.3.3.2. Supportive leadership and support interventions

The theme of supportive leadership and support interventions underscored two critical interventions as subthemes: supportive leadership practices and training and development. Visible and supportive leaders can cause the remaining employees to

feel that they are cared for, making the period after retrenchment bearable. The employees end up feeling valued and respected and this improves their engagement and loyalty to the organisation. When leaders provide support interventions the remaining employees don't feel alone instead their leaders' support foster a collaborative culture that can encourage them to adjust to the changed conditions, craft their jobs and start taking ownership of their work thereby enhancing their engagement.

Supportive Leadership Practices

The findings under this subtheme highlighted a strong view of the importance of creating a workplace environment where employees feel valued with 7 participants sharing the view (P3, P4, P5, P8, P9, P10, P12). These participants noted the negative effect of increased workload on employees after the retrenchment exercise. Specifically, participants 1, 5 and 10 indicated that consultative workload planning, role-consolidation and target setting were important in ensuring an environment where employees can rebuild themselves and thrive after a traumatic retrenchment process. Instances of mismatched staff-workload cuts (P2, P9) and consolidation of multiple roles into one were deemed unsustainable by the participants, highlighting the need for decisions that involve the input of employees and ultimately benefit them. Participants made the following sentiments:

Involving them every step of the way will help... It will help a lot to make sure that we cut off the stress." (P1)

Have that engagement and then those that you feel maybe they need to see a psychologist, refer them there so that they can find that closure... talking to somebody that doesn't know you, you can get all of that off your chest (P5).

The remaining employees believed that the organisations should have provided platforms for psychological help so that they can handle the stress well. They also believed that if they were involved throughout the process, it could have been better as that was going to reduce the level of anxiety. These comments highlighted the need for organisations to ensure that they prioritise emotional support for their

employees during the retrenchment process and get their teams involved through engagement.

There was also a concern raised that the employees are overworked, and they are currently working overtime to help with reaching the targets. This is perceived as a violation of respect and lack of involving the teams in working together to derive a solution for the increased job and reduced resources. The frustration was echoed by participant 10 saying: *"We are at the point where we are playing with people... they should take [leave] on odd days... so that they can come back and assist."* (P10). Employees coming to work on their off days can increase their level of fatigue and the remaining employees believe that they should be engaged in how to turn situations around so that they can be able to rest during rest days.

The findings highlighted that interventions to mitigate the negative effects of retrenchments must focus on realistic workload management, employee consultation and flexible support mechanisms. The survivors' experiences highlighted that engagement is undermined when workforce is expected to take on excessive responsibilities without adequate planning and support. Practical measures such as introducing flexible staffing arrangements, psychosocial support, setting achievable targets and forums for participation are the cornerstone of sustainable engagement.

Training and development

The theme of training and development emerged as a crucial recommendation for mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments. Four participants suggested multi-skilling and training opportunities (P1, P5, P11, P13), emphasising that this kind of training helped to expand competencies. One challenge the participants highlighted is working overtime to maintain performance and multiskilling can address this challenge, providing the team sufficient time to rest and manage fatigue.

Participant 1 and 5 pointed to a lack of structured skills transfer, implying that such an approach was necessary as a preparation for the post-retrenchment situation. The following statements represent the different views expressed by participants regarding training and development:

"Bridging the gap, we're trying as hard as we can to make sure that all the people are trained, and we encourage them to ask questions. We encourage them to be involved in everything that we do (P1)

"The way we are doing... is the effort from line management and the specialist to coach the artisans daily." (P5)

The evidence presented above highlighted that comprehensive training and development initiatives are crucial interventions for mitigating retrenchment impacts and sustaining engagement. The reflections for survivors suggested that both management and employees benefit when training is proactive, continuous and embedded in a culture of care and support. Training enhances managers to effectively handle retrenchment processes, while for employees, training helps to restore a sense of personal growth and empowerment.

5.4. Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, the data collected shows how each participant was affected by the retrenchment process. Their experiences shed the light on how challenging the retrenchment process was and provides insight into the various emotions and physical strain they experienced. Their emotional experiences span from stress to extreme distress indicating how unbearable this process was; however, they leaned heavily on support from the peers that were experiencing the same challenge and their personal motivation and resources.

The inconsistency in support provided by their leadership highlighted the need for the organisation to equip leaders to handle such processes better, making them good stewards of the organisation during a significant change. The recommendations highlighted by team on the job resources needed to enhance employee engagement highlighted that communication, employee involvement through consultation and support from leadership can buffer the effects of retrenchment and improve employee engagement.

Chapter 6: Discussions of Results

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered the discussion of the findings from this study and Chapter 6 focuses on discussing these results, linking them to the literature review in Chapter 2. The purpose of the study was to establish what the PGM mining sector needs to do to maintain the remaining employees' engagement post retrenchments. The main research questions focused on establishing the key factors that affect employee engagement post retrenchment, the role of leadership in improving employee engagement after retrenchments and lastly the interventions surviving employees require to mitigate the negative effects of retrenchments and promote employee engagement.

The data collected indicated that retrenchment has a negative impact on the surviving employees with the process leading to some employees experiencing increased levels of psychological and emotional strain as well as physical exhaustion. Leaning on the JD-R framework, it was evident that retrenchments bring about a lot of change, which can result in employees feeling alone and overwhelmed by the amount of work that needs to be conducted. The findings are discussed in relation to the three main research questions, linking the employees' experience of retrenchments with the theoretical constructs established. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to literature starting with the first research question, followed by the second and the third one, then conclusion.

6.2 The key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchments

The three themes that emerged under the first research question are discussed in the following order: psychological and emotional impact, shifting workloads and demands and survivor's changed perception of the organisation.

6.2.1 Psychological and emotional impact

Many organisations undergo restructuring and retrenchments to save on costs and ensure that the business continues to perform during economic challenges however, organisational restructuring and retrenchments have been identified as major threats and challenges that affect the emotional and psychological well-being of employees according to Abildgaard et al. (2018). These processes introduce profound strains,

particularly among surviving employees, rooted in the increased presence of stress, anxiety, anger and uncertainty regarding their future and working conditions (Mthembu, 2019). Dlouhy and Casper (2021) cited that reducing the number of resources is conceptualised as a stressor for the remaining employees, making them to experience what is called “survivorship syndrome”. Data collection from this study confirmed that the retrenchment process caused anxiety and stress, resulting in surviving employees being anxious about their perceived uncertain future. The findings from the study concur with literature on the negative effects of retrenchments on the surviving employees. This is confirmed by participant 1 who highlighted that the process was very challenging to navigate through, triggering uncertainty about the future and stressful experiences. Participant 4 further stated that it was not easy for her to endure the process, resulting in her breaking down several times due to the uncertainty.

The main uncertainty that the survivors experienced was the fear of losing their jobs and concerns about their organisations’ future. Job insecurity is defined by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) as the apparent threat to employment continuity and stability. This insecurity triggers worry, stress and anxiety as employees may not be certain that they will be able to find alternative employment opportunities. With the country experiencing high levels of unemployment, this process can make the affected employees even more vulnerable. The anxiety that comes with job insecurity has also been associated with severe stress potentially leading to ill health and low commitment to the organisation (Abildgaard et al., 2018). The effects of emotional stress on employee commitment were highlighted by participant 3 who indicated that the process took a psychological toll on her affecting her level of performance at work. When the level of performance at work is affected, the employee can do bare minimum because of low commitment, and the company will not benefit entirely from her services.

Fear, anxiety and uncertainty were the dominant emotional experiences expressed by participants. Participant 10 who is a front-line supervisor highlighted that he experienced a lot of emotional strain that came from the uncertainty regarding his employment, as well as having to handle complaints and concerns from his team. Such can be overwhelming and can result in lack of commitment or low engagement because the burden may be unbearable. This experience was confirmed by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) who cited that retrenchments weigh the remaining employees

down and supervisors may find it difficult to handle the process and provide sufficient support to their teams.

When surviving employees experience high levels of stress and anxiety, they may end up resorting to maladaptive self-regulation strategies to cope according to Bakker and DeVries (2021). This was evident from the study when participant 12 from the safety department, indicated that the stress and anxiety were excessive leading her to a point where she numbed herself from what was happening and just focused on doing her work. These coping strategies can have negative long term health effects and can make employees to withdraw mentally from work. The other concern stemming from her comment is that as a safety officer she may not provide adequate safety guidance and support to the teams executing work, potentially contributing to safety incidents in the industry.

Some participants indicated that they experienced loss of belonging during and after the process. This was echoed by participant 3 who indicated that she doesn't know if she belongs or not. Literature supports that retrenchment interrupts the social relations that employees had which are critical for enhancing creativity and flexibility within the organisation (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). With some employees leaving the organisation due to layoffs, the remaining employees may experience low morale and cohesion because they had to witness their friends getting retrenched. Some participants indicated that this process made them to evaluate their relationship with the organisation. This experience can result in the remaining employees having negative feelings and reduced commitment and engagement towards the organisation according to Kawai (2015).

With all these psychological and emotional challenges experienced by the surviving employees, the sentiments from the data collected showed that some employees didn't have formal support systems to help navigate through the change. Instead, most of them relied heavily on their personal resilience and support from the peers that were going through the same challenges. Arthur et al. (2025) cited that resilience and self-efficacy can help employees cope and adapt to the change. This is confirmed by participant 4 who stated that her motivation during and after the retrenchment process was taking care of her daughter whose future is critical. Kotzé and Nel (2019) also found in their study that personal resources helped employees to navigate through a difficult change more than job resources. This could explain why the participants were able to endure the situation with limited formal support.

Even though this process was overwhelming, some employees experienced a sense of relief when they realised that their positions in the company were confirmed, improving their morale and engagement at work. Participant 7 was happy that his role was confirmed, and he will be able to continue to provide for his family.

Both literature and the real-life experiences from the participants indicated that restructuring and retrenchments affect the surviving employees psychological and emotional wellbeing, altering their coping mechanisms and eroding their sense of belonging. These experiences highlight the need for organisations to integrate employee wellbeing in their strategy when undergoing retrenchments to ensure that a psychologically safe environment is created and sufficient support is provided to the employees during and after retrenchments. The support will not benefit the employees only but the organisation as well considering that provision of support can enhance employee engagement which is a key enabler of organisational performance. The other critical aspect that the organisations need to work on is building the personal resources capacity of their employees through engagement and training to enable them to handle challenging events.

6.2.2 Shifting workloads and job demands

The physical wellbeing of the surviving employees is often affected by the effects of retrenchments due to altered working conditions, increased job demands and reduced resources. These shifts in workload are theorised using the JD-R model that advocates that experiences of increased strain and low engagement among surviving employees are caused by alterations in job demands and job resources (Frone & Blais, 2020). After downsizing, surviving employees experience increased responsibilities and constant work pressure because of reduced resources, a condition that is often referred to as work intensity (Harney et al., 2018). This experience was supported by participant 1 who stated that there is more work to be done with less people, causing a strain in how daily tasks are executed.

Literature further indicated that this increased intensity of work leads to energy depletion manifesting in strain, exhaustion and burnout (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). This is because the remaining employees are expected to carry out their normal tasks together with the tasks that were carried out by the laid off employees. This increase in workload, responsibility and pressure to meet targets contribute to occupational physical ailments according to Harney et al. (2018). No one from the

participants highlighted physical ailments as an experience, however there were multiple participants that echoed that their job demands have increased, and they feel that they are overworked.

When the workload has increased substantially, the remaining employees may not be able to cope or cover all the tasks, resulting in them having to find alternative ways to address the demand. Participant 16 shared that her responsibilities have increased substantially leading her to work overtime or work in a hurry to meet the expectations. This was supported by a substantial number of participants who shared the frustration of being overworked with an emerging trend of working overtime. Vischer (2018) cited that working overtime is a component of work intensity, supporting what the participants experienced.

Working long hours has a negative effect in the sense that it induces fatigue and exhaustion. Some of these workers work shifts which are outside normal human working time i.e. working at night. With most people feeling that they are overworked, there can be safety incidents resulting from fatigue especially because most of the tasks require manual intervention. Working in a hurry on the other hand may compromise the quality of work, providing an opportunity for employees to take short cuts. Compromised quality, long hours and working overtime have a cost implication for the organisation that is trying its level best to recover financially, and according to the JD-R framework, increased job demands causes employee disengagement (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021). Participant 3 confirmed what was found in literature by stating that she is not performing at her optimum level because her motivation was lower. When employees are disengaged the company may not be able to sustain its performance.

The other critical aspect comes with increased workload and less people to execute work is role clarity. With some employees laid off and work remaining consistent regardless, the remaining employees may not fully comprehend what is expected of them and the alterations in their new roles may be ambiguous. Role ambiguity has been considered as a job demand according to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022) and can lead to conflicts at work. The finding from literature was similar to what participant 16 experienced in this study, highlighting that she was given more areas to cover without handover or clarity on what her role entailed. This caused a lot of conflicts between her and the teams she was servicing because those teams kept expecting her to work like her predecessors, confirming literature. This experience unveiled

resistance to change which was identified by Schenkel and Teigland (2017) as one of the effects of downsizing, making it difficult for the remaining employees to remain engaged.

When employees know what is expected of them and have sufficient resources to execute, they remain engaged, however, when roles are ambiguous, remaining employees may be frustrated and resort to other ways of coping such as withdrawal and reduced engagement, compromising on goal achievements (Rai, 2018). In this context the employee didn't withdraw however she mentioned that her time with her family is now compromised.

Loss of skills is also a critical aspect that stems from retrenchments because the laid off employees leave with their acquired skills and if there is no sufficient time provided for handover, the remaining employees may experience role ambiguity and conflicts, leading them to more frustrations (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Participant 8 highlighted a similar experience by sharing that a lot of experienced people have left the organisation, leaving them with a lot of gaps to address. This has added more load to the employees that are already feeling overwhelmed because of less resources and increased workload.

The consequences of these increased demands altering the way surviving employees work have been highlighted to affect the overall efficiency and performance of the organisation because they reduce motivation and engagement (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020).

6.2.3 Survivors' changed perception of the organisation

Literature highlights that retrenchments affect how the surviving employees perceive the organisation they are working for, resulting in them suffering from what is called survivor remorse because of witnessing some of their friends and loved ones being retrenched and having to carry out more work than before (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). This tends to lead to a decline in job satisfaction according to Harney et al. (2018) and low affective commitment according to Dlouhy and Casper (2021). Some employees may also experience disappointment in the organisation and its leadership, feeling a sense of betrayal and lack of protection (Mthembu, 2019). Some participants echoed what literature had already established with participant 2 who is a senior leader raising his frustrations about the competence of the executives of the organisation, asking what happened to their strategic planning and if they didn't see restructuring coming, to alert the employees on time instead of just deciding and

executing with less appreciation of the effects of retrenchments on both laid off and surviving employees. For a senior manager to raise such a concern, it shows that some organisations are not transparent and don't take their managers along the change, leaving them vulnerable and navigating the challenge on their own.

Participant 12 also indicated that she lost trust in the organisation, because of how the whole process was handled. It was as if everyone had to look out for themselves. This is confirmed by Kurebwa (2011), who cited that retrenchments result in employees losing trust in the organisation. When employees' jobs are at stake, they tend to abandon their commitment to the organisation, unconsciously allowing the process to affect their morale and engagement (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020).

Team dynamics and collaboration can be impacted negatively during and after retrenchments resulting in employees not trusting their leaders, immediate supervisors and fellow colleagues (Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020). Some routines are being affected by the reduction in resources, consequently affecting the accomplishment of tasks (Schenkel & Teigland, 2017). The way this process was handled according to some participants, it highlighted the amplification of fear and survival as each person was focusing on surviving the retrenchment.

Some participants lost trust in their leaders who failed to provide clear direction and support and some lost trust in their fellow colleagues who were perceived to have advantage over them. This was shared by participant 4 who indicated that it was a painful experience because she realised that some employees' positions were guaranteed before they went for interviews, eroding the trust she had for the leadership and fellow colleagues. This experience of loss of trust in managers was confirmed by Mthembu (2019) who cited that retrenchment erodes trust in the organisation and its leaders. Participant 8 also shared that the process was very toxic as everyone wanted to be retained. This experience can affect how employees collaborate even after the process is complete resulting in low trust, sabotage, low morale and employee disengagement.

In conclusion, retrenchments affected surviving employees emotionally, psychologically and physically. Remaining employees experienced stress due to uncertainty and job insecurity, and experienced exhaustion and fatigue because of increased workload and reduced resources. These increased job demands can reduce overall morale and employee engagement resulting in poor performance. Trust in the organisation and leadership was also affected as employees may start

feeling betrayed despite their long service and commitment to the organisation. Some surviving employees expressed their sense of not belonging and this was exacerbated by lack of support and direction from the employer. With all these challenges, some employees leveraged personal resources and support from peers to remain focused and overcome the challenges that the retrenchment brought along. However, it is crucial for organisations to ensure that they map out the support strategy they need to implement and provide to the remaining employees to enhance their engagement.

6.3 The role of leadership and in improving employee engagement after retrenchments

The three themes that emerged under the second research question are discussed in the following order: leadership approach and provision of support, effective communication and perception of fairness and strategic alignment.

6.3.1 Leadership approach and provision of support

Retrenchments are associated with various negative effects such as a decline in psychological and emotional wellbeing, increased job demands and reduced trust on the remaining employees, and leadership play a pivotal role in helping restore employee motivation and stabilize the team (Mthembu, 2019). Surviving employees often experience significant increases in workload because they must continue with their normal tasks and the tasks that were carried by the employees that have left the organisation, and this can affect the relationship between leaders and surviving employees, causing lack of trust and anger towards the leadership of the organisation (Vischer, 2018). It has also been established that when job demands increases and job resources reduce, the surviving employees experience a strain that may lead to continuous stress and burnout, and this is where leadership comes into play by ensuring that the goals set are achievable and realistic, and the resources provided are supporting the employees to reach those targets (Bakker & De Vries, 2021). The need for leadership support to help with the transition and stability was shared by eight participants. Participant 2 who is a senior manager acknowledged that a leader need to put people at ease during and after the retrenchment process. This sentiment from participant 2 was confirmed by Tummers and Bakker (2021) who cited that the support from leadership can reduce the increase in job demands thereby enhancing employee engagement.

Participant 7 also stated the importance of leaders focusing on team building that helps with fixing the fragmented relationships because of retrenchments. Abildgaard et al. (2018) also concur with the need for leaders to buffer the effects of retrenchments. Mthembu (2019) on the other hand supports the need for leaders to focus on team building to negate the effects of retrenchment on the surviving employees. The participants sentiments pointed to the need for leaders to be actively involved in the retrenchment process and provide the necessary support to restore the broken trust and build team resilience.

On the contrary, participant 6 shared that he never saw anyone from their head office come to the operations to provide guidance or support. This experience was confirmed by Mthembu (2019) who cited that some organisations still expect the surviving employees to continue as normal and navigate through the process despite the indication from several studies that showed that leadership support is critical in negating the effects of retrenchments. This is truly concerning; it simply shows that organisations just focus on saving costs and tend to turn a blind eye on how people handle these challenging processes. Bakker et al. (2023) cited that when job demands are challenging and job resources are adequately provided, employees will be engaged in their work. Therefore, it is critical for leaders to be present and create a work environment that is meaningful for the surviving employees as meaningful work contribute significantly to employee engagement (Vischer, 2018).

6.3.2 Effective Communication

Effective and transparent communication is critical for day to day and is even more important when organisations undergo retrenchments. Retrenchments are associated with job insecurity, anxiety, fear and uncertainty and keeping people informed of what is happening and providing direction helps with understanding. Literature highlighted that effective communication is a tool that enables the team leaders to articulate the current situation in the organisation well and its strategy to deal with the issue as well as provide employees with the organisation's long-term strategy (Bakker & DeVries, 2021). In this way employees' feelings of anxiety can be managed considering that job insecurity has been one of the reasons for anxiety.

Many participants were grateful for the communication they received from the organisation regarding the retrenchment process. They indicated that they were updated on every step of the way, and this made them to understand the process better. Participant 7 confidently stated that they were not left in the dark. This

experience concurs with the finding from Vischer (2018) who cited that communication is very important during retrenchment, providing clarity and direction to the employees. This constant communication can buffer the effects of retrenchments such as anxiety and fear because employees are updated throughout the process and can make proper arrangements on time if they are going to end up losing their jobs. However, there were other participants who felt that the communication was poor affecting how some of the surviving employees interpreted the process. For example, participant 1 stated that the company was not transparent enough. This was further supported by participant 6 who said there were details that were missing in the communications provided, such as macroeconomic factors and the impact thereof on the organisation. This experience is confirmed by Mthembu (2019) who cited that lack of communication allows employees to have their own interpretation and get lost in their own interpretations. This means that organisations still need to work hard on improving their communications to ensure that everyone understands and is aligned on what is happening and where the organisation is heading to.

Retrenchment news is deemed to be sensitive for the affected employees and need to be handled with care especially because the news can bring about a permanent change on an employee's life. Confidentiality and care were unfortunately not the case in one of the organisations where participant 12 stated that their manager called one of them in public and issued a letter to her. This experience differed with what Mthembu (2019) cited, that sensitive news for a person being affected in the retrenchment process must be spoken face to face to allow for clarity and questioning. Sharing sensitive news in public is very concerning and can damage employee engagement beyond recovery. Participant 4 also stated that the criteria for selecting affected employees was not clear as some employees were told that they shouldn't worry about their positions. This finding was confirmed by Mthembu (2019) who cited that employees at Telkom were not made aware of the selection criteria and considered the process to be unfair. Such experiences can affect employees' engagement negatively. Employees deserve to know the selection criteria so that they can handle the appointments or disappointments with satisfaction, else there can be rumours that end up eroding organisational trust.

The other critical part of communication that is relevant for the surviving employees is the workload management conversations. With retrenchments seen to impact the

surviving employees negatively, they may end up feeling that they will not be able to cope with the increased demands that increased job demands and less resources bring because employees remain engaged when they are aware of what is expected of them and have resources to help with work execution (Rai, 2018). The JD-R model suggests that the integration of job demands and resources enable strain management and enhances motivation and employee engagement, alleviating burnout when employees have sufficient resources (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022). Therefore, communicating with the remaining employees about where they fit in, in the new structure and their job roles can help with understanding what is expected of them as well as identify the gaps that need to be addressed. Most of the participants in this study stated that their workload has increased, they feel overworked and resort to working overtime to reach the set goals. This exposes the lack of communication on redefining the job roles after retrenchments, allowing employees to just figure out how they will execute their tasks on their own.

In conclusion, some participants experienced good communication during the process, and some didn't. This highlights the need for consistent communication across the sector so that the effects of retrenchment can be negated since communication is regarded as a job resource. The main concern raised was lack of clarity on role description. This is where the organisations need to focus the most as they still expect the remaining employees to deliver output. Most participants highlighted that they resort to overtime with one participant who indicated that she tries to work in a hurry. So, the organisations involved need to improve on effective communication to ensure that the remaining employees know what is expected of them and have sufficient resources for execution.

6.3.3 Perceptions of fairness and strategic alignment

Retrenchment on its own can affect the remaining employees negatively, however what is more critical is how the process was handled. The retrenchment process should be conducted with fairness and organisations need to be transparent about the entire process. Mthembu (2019) cited that when the surviving employees perceive the retrenchment process to be fair, their attitude towards the organisation is positive.

Participant 8 praised the company for being open and fair about the rationale behind the retrenchments and keeping the employees updated throughout the process. This experience is supported by Harris (2000) who cited that the rationale behind a

decision must be explained and a process that is perceived to be fair can help the remaining employees to re-establish confidence in the organisation even though the outcome is not favourable. Some participants highlighted that they were aware of everything that was happening because of the regular updates that they were receiving which helped with handling the challenge.

The selection criteria of who stayed and who got retrenched was not explicit in this study. Some senior managers were just given a mandate to reduce a specific number of people without reasons behind the number. In one of the organisations, the junior managers were also not consulted on helping with the decision making on employees that can use the opportunity to take early retirement or separation packages, instead they were told about the new structure, and senior managers ran with the process of deciding who goes and who stays. Some participants highlighted that lack of involvement of junior managers resulted in a significant loss of skills, creating a gap for the remaining employees.

Participant 3 highlighted that the selection criteria for the affected employees was not clear and it was perceived as managers using nepotism to give those, they prefer jobs. This experience was further highlighted by participant 4 who said some employees were told that they should not worry about their jobs, they will be safe while others were stressing about interview preparations. These experiences contradict what Mthembu (2019) said about the need for the process to be ethical and follow set standards that demonstrate fairness. However, they supported what Harris (2000) cited when he said the violation of procedural justice has a negative effect of perceived fairness. Most participant didn't perceive the selection process to be fair.

Participant 8 shared a personal experience where he highlighted his disappointment in the process when he received a letter about his position being affected following his award for best performance. He got mixed feelings from this experience because he felt that he couldn't trust what was happening as he didn't know where he stands. He stated that the process could have been handled better. This experience of getting a letter even though he was given an award for best performance contradicts what Mujtaba and Senathip (2020) cited when they said HR should lay off the employees who are not performing well. When employees feel that the process is not fair their level of engagement gets affected, however when they feel that the

process is fair, they ignore rumours regarding the retrenchment process and their commitment towards the organisation is enhanced (De Jong et al., 2016).

6.4 Interventions required to mitigate the negative effects of retrenchments and promote employee engagement post-retrenchments

There were two themes that emerged under the third research question, and they are discussed in the following order: enhanced communication and employee involvement, and supportive leadership and support interventions.

6.4.1 Enhanced communication and employee involvement

Many organisations opt for restructuring and retrenchments to turn their financial challenges around; however, this strategy comes with a lot of challenges for the surviving employees. Retrenchments pose threats to the psychological and physical well-being of the remaining employees, manifesting as stress and physical strain respectively (Abildgaard et al., 2018). These negative experiences cultivate mistrust, reduced commitment and employee disengagement (Mthembu, 2019).

There are efforts required for sustaining employee engagement post retrenchments. Participants were asked what they think is required to enhance employee engagement after retrenchments and enhanced communication and employee involvement was one of the themes that emerged from this research question.

Participant 1 highlighted that involving the people on the floor is crucial as they are the ones who know what is happening. This is also supported by Schweizer and Nienhaus (2017) who cited that involving employees during and after retrenchments enhance employee engagement. However, what was evident in this study was that some participant felt that they were not involved and engaged. Strategic communication is vital to provide clarity, direction, negate uncertainty and preserve the organisational trust and credibility according to Mujtaba and Senathip (2020). It is crucial for organisations that are planning to undergo retrenchments to implement ways to communicate transparently to their employees, proactively reducing anxiety and job insecurity. This communication must be on a continuous basis to afford employees to ask questions for clarity and maintaining alignment throughout the process, possibly dismissing fears and addressing rumours that can affect organisational trust negatively (Mthembu, 2019). The participants highlighted that

being made aware of what was happening in the company and involving them throughout the process could help manage the effects of retrenchments and enhance employee engagement. This comment was raised because one of the organisations made the decision to reduce the number of people without consulting front line managers. Front line managers were given a new structure of their teams without an opportunity to raise concerns, instead the directive was for them to work with the structure as is. In this instance, role ambiguity intensifies and can lead to conflicts unless the front-line manager finds a way to make things work.

In the JD-R framework, consulting with the employees provides a buffer that negates the effects of increased workload and reduced job satisfaction (Harney et al., 2018). When employees are involved, they can comprehend and make sense of what is happening and adjust. Furthermore, when employees are involved, they can end up feeling engaged and start owning some of the decisions, making the change process much easier (Abildgaard et al., 2018). Participant 3 stated that they were told what to do without being involved, echoing the need to get involved and voice their frustrations or concerns even if management may feel that some comments are stupid. He emphasised the need to be heard.

6.4.2 Supportive leadership and support interventions

The effects of retrenchments have been highlighted to be negative for the remaining employees, consequently impacting their psycho-social and physical health as well as employee engagement (Schweizer & Nienhaus, 2017). To buffer the effects of retrenchments on the surviving employees, the participants from this study highlighted the need for leadership support as a job resource and support interventions. The support they highlighted was for leadership to involve them because they believe that they know more of what is happening in the field as opposed to their leaders and their knowledge can help with problem solving, thereby driving participation. They also highlighted the need to have continuous engagements with leadership for alignment and prioritisation. This was echoed by participant 1 who stated that their involvement can add value and reduce their frustrations and stress. Participant 5 also highlighted the need for engaging with the team so that leaders can be aware of the challenges their teams are facing and offer appropriate support or refer them to experts if intervention is required. Literature from Harney et al. (2018) supports the notion of supportive leadership as a critical buffer

to mitigate the effects of retrenchments and enhance morale and employee engagement.

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the need for training and development to enable them to address the skills shortage gaps and reduced resources that have been created by the laid off employees. Participant 6 stated that reskilling is crucial to keep the business going and this was also emphasised by participant 5 who took it upon himself to train his team to address the gaps that were created. Dlouhy and Casper (2021) also supported the view that training and development are critical job resources that can lead employee engagement.

Supportive leadership and provision of support systems are critical for enhancing employee engagement following retrenchments. With retrenchments affecting the remaining employees negatively, organisations need to prioritise supporting the employees through involvement, consultation, transparent communication and training to negate the effects of retrenchment and promote trust and employee engagement.

6.5 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 6 looked at the findings from the study and compared them with the existing literature in addressing the three main research questions. The experiences from the participants highlighted that retrenchments brought about a lot of uncertainty. These experiences were also confirmed by literature. Their experience of uncertainty was fuelled by job insecurity which made them to feel uncomfortable and uneasy. The uncertainty led some employees to feel stressed at varying degrees. The participants also highlighted increased workload with less people to execute work leading most of them to work overtime to reach targets. These experiences affected their morale and level of engagement because they always had to go an extra mile due to the increase in demand. These experiences addressed the first research question which focused on establishing the key factors that erodes employee engagement post retrenchment.

The second question focused on the role of leadership in mitigating the effects of retrenchments. The findings highlighted that some participants experienced good

communication about the retrenchment process while other believed that the organisation was not transparent enough. Beyond retrenchment, the employees complained that they experienced challenges with increased workload, role ambiguity and lack of support from the leaders. They were expected to deliver output without taking into consideration the changes that retrenchments brought. No participant highlighted job crafting, or redesign being mentioned by their leaders, instead they improvised through working overtime to deliver on expectations. On a positive note, some supervisors found a way to help their teams navigate through the change. The lack of leadership support made some participants to lean on their personal resilience to cope and continue working. This question revealed a need for organisations to prioritise leadership support as a job resource because literature highlighted that it could buffer the effects of retrenchments.

The last research question focused on identifying the necessary interventions that are critical to enhance employee engagement post retrenchments. The job resources that were strongly highlighted were enhanced communication and involving the employees throughout the process. Supportive leadership and support interventions were highlighted. Literature did highlight communication, consultation, leadership support and training and development as critical job resources that buffer the effects of retrenchment.

Building on the findings and discussions it is evident that retrenchments can affect employees negatively because it increases job demands and reduces job resources according to the JD-R framework. However, the application of other job resources can close the gaps that downsizing has created. It is crucial for organisations to familiarise themselves with these job resources and equip their teams to go through retrenchments with minimal impact and enhance employee engagement which is crucial for organisational performance.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter covers the concluding insights from the study on maintaining employee engagement post retrenchments in the PGM mining sector in South Africa. The study was intended to explore the key factors that affect surviving employees' engagement post retrenchment and determining the interventions required to negate the effects of retrenchment, thereby maintaining employee engagement. This study maintains its relevance due to a global increase in organisational restructuring that end up affecting the remaining employees negatively. Anchored on the JD-R model which is a suitable theory to explain and comprehend how various occupational challenges such as retrenchment can affect employee well-being and engagement, organisations can find ways to negate the effects of retrenchment on the remaining employees (Lombard, 2020). The framework addresses the importance of balancing job demands with job resources and incorporating personal resources which enables survivors to cope with the change (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The findings from the study highlighted that retrenchment affected the remaining employees both psychologically and physically, affecting their level of engagement at work. The employees navigated through the stressful process leaning on their personal resilience and support from peers instead of formal support, indicating the need for structured support from organisations. With increased demands and decreased resources, the participants found themselves overworked which can lead to burnout according to Galanakis and Tsitouri (2022). Lower level of engagement on the other hand affected how some participants performed, consequently affecting organisational performance.

This study explored how the support from leadership can mitigate the effects of retrenchment as part of job resource, and the findings highlighted that leadership support was critical but not consistent, leading some participants to navigate the challenge on their own. Employee involvement, leadership support, communication and continuous engagement were highlighted as the interventions that can negate the effects of retrenchment and enhance the engagement of the surviving employees.

This chapter covers the findings from the study and its implications. Followed by the study limitations and recommendations for future exploration. The limitations from

this study are recognised and its findings cannot be generalised, but expansion through other studies are welcome to enhance knowledge in this topic considering that retrenchments are prevalent in this economic era.

7.2 Key findings of the study

There were three main research questions in this study and the key findings start with the findings that are addressing the first research question, followed by the second one and ending with the findings under the third research question

7.2.1 What are the key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchments?

Research on the key factors affecting surviving employees' engagement after retrenchment highlighted that the employees experienced emotional and psychological strain because of the uncertainty and fear that retrenchments bring . The study highlighted that fear, uncertainty, anxiety, severe stress and emotional trauma were the emotions the remaining employees experienced, affecting how they relate with the organisation. Mujtaba and Senathip (2020) support this experience indicating that retrenchments offer immediate costs advantages, however, detrimentally affect the surviving employees by inducing stress, fear and anxiety. One participant was severely affected to the point of breaking down and had to keep leaning on her personal resilience to cope during the retrenchment process.

The study revealed that the feelings of anxiety, stress and fear were heightened by job insecurity. Job insecurity was cited by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) as one of the main reasons why surviving employees experience anxiety and fear. Job insecurity is further highlighted as a job demand according to the JD-R model, requiring more effort from the surviving employee to focus because of the associated psychological costs (Bakker et al., 2023). The affected employees often ask themselves how they will provide for their families if their primary source of income is taken away from them. The repercussions of fear and uncertainty about employees' jobs are low morale and disengagement (Abildgaard et al., 2018). What was supporting this finding from literature were the comments of few participants who highlighted that they are no longer performing at their best because of the shock and stress the retrenchment brought into their lives

With retrenchments reducing resources and not compensating for the increase in demands, the study highlighted that the surviving employees experienced increased workload, role ambiguity and having to conduct the tasks they are not familiar with because of the lost skills. These experiences were highlighted by Dlouhy and Casper (2021) who cited that retrenchments reduce job resources and increase job demands, leading to physical strain, role ambiguity and conflicts among the surviving employees. Some participants felt a sense of not belonging because their psychological contracts were breached, confirming what Kawai (2015) said when he mentioned that retrenchments violate employees' psychological contracts. These experiences cause the surviving employees to lose trust in their organisations and affects their level of commitment and engagement. Organisations that undergo restructuring need to consider the effects of retrenchments on surviving employees and use the JD-R model to guide on determining the interventions that can negate the effects of retrenchment.

7.2.2 What role do leadership play in improving employee engagement and mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments?

Leadership support plays a paramount role in improving employee engagement after retrenchments according to Harney et al. (2018). This study highlighted that leadership support is critical however it was not consistent. Two senior managers highlighted the lack of support from the executive leadership with one indicating that he never saw anyone from head office come to their site to provide guidance on how to go about the process. The other one highlighted how his leaders gave him the number of roles to cut in his team without consultation and rationale behind the number. This lack of leadership support is highlighted in literature by Dlouhy and Casper (2021), and Mthembu (2019) as a concern that can affect employees' psychological wellbeing and confidence and eventually lower their engagement.

Literature further highlighted that lack of resources such as support from leaders results in their teams adopting maladaptive coping strategies to navigate through the stress (Bakker & DeVries, 2021). This was seen in the findings where one participant got to the point of numbing herself just to get the job done. Another one highlighted that she relied heavily on her personal resource to keep going even though she broke down several times. Her responsibility to take care of her daughter is what fuelled

her to continue regardless of the burden the retrenchment news brought. Lack of support from leadership led most of the participant to find alternative ways to cope and the two main coping mechanisms highlighted were leaning on their personal resilience which is a personal resource according to the JD-R model and leaning on the support from the peers who were facing the same challenge. Literature supported that personal resources enable individuals to face challenges with hope that things will get better instead of focusing on challenges as threats (Kotzé & Nel 2019).

These experiences highlight that there were no formal support structures or if they were the environment was not psychologically safe for the employees to allow themselves to be vulnerable. Maladaptive coping mechanisms and extreme stress drive employees to continuous cycles of stress and reduced performance at work (Bakker et al., 2023). These findings reveal that the organisations in this sector have a lot of work to do in relation to employee support, which is critical to restore engagement, especially because the sector is not fully mechanised.

Part of the support that was evident from the leadership was constant updates on the progress of the retrenchments with some participants highlighting that they were not left in the dark. Literature highlighted that consultation which involves employees and enhanced communication are job resources that can mitigate the effects of retrenchments on surviving employees (Harney et al., 2018). When communication during and after the retrenchment process is transparent and clear, it can address uncertainties and rebuild organisational trust (Mthembu, 2019). Most participants in the study highlighted that they were not left in the dark and were made aware of the reasons for the retrenchments, and they were updated throughout the process. There were just few who felt that there was poor communication. These inconsistencies highlighted the need to the sector to improve on effective communication to ensure that everyone is aware and there is clear alignment, because when information is shared, it helps with sense-making and reduces the levels of anxiety.

Although most participants highlighted that they were not left in the dark in terms of communication, most of the conversations ended on updates about the retrenchment process. The communication didn't go beyond the process to address concerns such as workload, working overtime, fatigue and exhaustion. Most employees still highlighted that they are working overtime to cover their work. There were no efforts

from the leadership to focus on job crafting or job redesigning instead, the front-line managers were expected to get things done and deliver on the set targets by figuring better ways of delivering output. This experience supported what was picked up by Mthembu (2019) when he conducted a study at Telkom that organisations expect the surviving employees to continue as normal and navigate through the process despite the indication from several studies that showed that leadership support is critical in negating the effects of retrenchments.

In terms of fairness of the process, the study highlighted that remaining employees could understand the rationale behind the retrenchment, and this could be attributed to the constant updates provided by the leaders. Harris (2000) highlighted the need for employees to be updated, and it was evident in this study. However, the selection criteria for employees who remained and who were laid off was not explained, revealing what Harris (2000) highlighted as an unfair process. When employees find the process to be unfair it reduces their affective commitment according to (Kawai, 2015). These findings highlight the need for organisations to be transparent and uphold fairness in all their processes to avoid causing the remaining employees to lose trust in the organisation.

7.2.3 What interventions are required in mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement post-retrenchments?

The JD-R framework highlights that when job demands increase, job resources must be utilised to enhance employee wellbeing in an occupation (Lesener et al., 2019). Employee involvement, communication, supportive leadership and support interventions such as training, development and job redesign are all part of job resources according to Dlouhy and Casper (2021). These job resources were highlighted by the participants in the study as necessary interventions to mitigate the effects of retrenchments and promote employee engagement.

The participants highlighted that getting involved helps the organisation with problem solving because they are the ones who have an understanding of what is happening in the field. This demonstrates the need to be for them to be consulted and participate, and this was highlighted by Harney et al. (2018) who cited that consultation is a vital job resource that can buffer the effects of retrenchments because it makes

employees feel involved. The study further highlighted that when surviving employees receive constant support from their leaders and they have platforms where they can communicate with their leaders their level of engagement can improve as this can help with rebuilding trust. Dlouhy and Casper (2021) supported this when they cited that providing these resources improves the engagement of employees.

When organisations provide training to the remaining employees, they develop their skills, thereby enhancing their motivation and engagement (Harney et al., 2018). This concurs with what the participants highlighted when they indicated the need for training to close the gaps created by the laid off employees and improve their level of engagement.

7.3 Conclusion on findings

In conclusion, the findings from the study highlighted that retrenchments affected the remaining employees negatively causing most of them to experience various emotional and psychological strain. The teams didn't have much support in terms of coping mechanisms and relied heavily on their personal resources for motivation. The decrease in resources and increase in demand left the remaining employees with a lot of responsibility and work to cover causing them to work overtime to cover all the requirements.

The support from leadership was mostly evident when the teams were updated about the retrenchment process however beyond that the remaining employees had to find ways of delivering on expectations. The participants highlighted that they needed frequent engagements and consultations to fully participate. They also highlighted that they require consistent support from their leadership team and training to address some of the gaps that the retrenchment created. Provision of these job resources will help negate the effects of retrenchments and improve the remaining employees' level of engagement at work according to them. These findings highlight the need for organisations to prioritise employee well-being post retrenchments as it plays a critical role in employee engagement which leads to sustaining organisational performance.

7.4 Implications of the study

7.4.1. Integration of the JD-R Framework in the retrenchment procedures

This study uncovered the experience of retrenchment on the remaining employees with the aim of comprehending the real concerns and utilising both literature and participants experience to recommend interventions that can mitigate the negative effects of retrenchment on them. Retrenchment trends are growing due to multiple economic challenges the world is facing and surviving employees tend to be the victims that must keep organisations performing despite how the experience impacts them. This study therefore integrated the rich literature from the JD-R model to recommend the balance of an increase in job demands with an increase in job resources. The study acknowledges that downsizing is a reduction in resource and needs to happen if the organisation see it fit to downsize however, there are multiple resources that can be used such as employee involvement, effective communication, leadership support , job crafting etc to mitigate the effects of retrenchments. Organisations need to familiarise themselves with these resources and intervene before retrenchments impact their employee wellbeing and engagement negatively.

Learnings from this study can help policy makers, CCMA , HR executives and managers to appreciate the effects of retrenchment on the remaining employees and formulate relevant support systems and structures to enable the employees to navigate the retrenchment process with ease. The JD-R model enables practitioners to understand the root cause for employee disengagement and offers both theoretical and practical solutions to stimulate and enhance employee wellbeing and engagement post retrenchments, making it relevant for any organisation that is considering retrenchments (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Integrating the JD-R framework in the retrenchment procedures and policies can help improve employee wellbeing during and after retrenchments. CCMA focuses more on the fairness of the process especially for laid off employees but is limited in ensuring the well-being of the remaining employees and these learnings can help with the development or augmentation of policies and procedures thereby prioritising employee wellbeing.

Involving policy makers because of the learnings from this study can foster employee involvement, and organisations may be required to produce detailed structures with clearly defined roles, indicating how the gaps that are created by the downsize will be addressed. Furthermore, the authorities or senior executives can have key performance indicators that demonstrate that the process is fair, transparent and delivering on all the set objectives.

7.4.2 The need for defined support systems

The lack of leadership support highlighted in this study can be viewed as a gap that can be addressed. It could be that leaders don't know how to go about supporting their teams during retrenchment and this study can help HR executives and managers to start equipping themselves and other leaders to handle the retrenchment process better and provide sufficient support to their teams. Mthembu (2019) also highlighted a lack of leadership support at Telkom in Durban, and these can be viewed as a leadership gap that need to be addressed even though the organisations are not related.

Before undergoing retrenchments, organisations can check if their leaders are equipped and ready to execute the mandate and know how to support their teams. Organisations can utilise the rich knowledge from the JD-R framework to guide them and develop training that equip leaders. They can also use literature to help define the change management process, highlighting the risk and mitigations for each risk. This can help organisations navigate through retrenchments with better.

7.4.3 Recommendations for the PGM sector

The findings from the study highlighted that retrenchments affected all levels of employees in a negative way, although the intent was to save on costs. There was an increase in job demands and a significant reduction in resources. Some participants ended up questioning their relationship with the organisation, some lost their sense of belonging and this can be a challenge for the organisation. The JD-R model suggests that providing resources can negate the effects of retrenchments and enhance employee engagement (Galanakis & Tsitouri, 2022).

The following recommendations are therefore made for the PGM sector to enhance employee engagement post retrenchments

1. The PGM mining sector need to incorporate the JD-R framework in their HR strategies to guide them with how they should handle the retrenchments processes effectively This is supported by Bakker et al. (2023) who highlighted that the framework offers both the theoretical and practical solutions to enhance employee engagement and wellbeing following a retrenchment
2. The organisations in the sector need to involve the surviving employees through consultation to determine the best way to communicate the change and collectively agree on who can be voluntary laid off. This will also help with executing the change effectively. Consultation with senior managers and supervisors can help with determining the realistic number of employees required to work in an organisation instead of getting the numbers from the executive leadership. Abildgaard et al. (2018) highlighted that involving employees helps with achieving the desirable outcome.
3. Leadership must be trained and equipped to provide support during and after the process to minimise the level of psychological and emotional challenges the remaining employees experience. They can have KPI trackers that show the employees that need support with coping and the employees that are coping well to ensure that they provide sufficient resources to those that are not coping well. Leadership support must also help with addressing physical challenges through job crafting, job redesign and providing role clarity, addressing the challenges created by increased workload. Rai (2018) cited that leadership support can buffer the effects of retrenchment on the remaining employees.
4. The study highlighted that lack of support from leadership made some participants to lean on personal resources such as resilience while others broke down and regained strength. There were a lot of participants who experienced severe stress and anxiety, and this could affect their level of engagement. To ensure that the remaining employees handle the retrenchments better, the organisations can provide trainings that focus on enhancing personal resources which are a critical component of the JD-R model. Lesener et al. (2019) cited that personal resources help employees

to cope with the change and can mitigate the effects of an increase in demand.

5. It is recommended that the PGM mining sector improves on their communication as a job resource to minimize the level of anxiety and stress that comes with retrenchments. The organisations can create platforms where they communicate about the performance of the organisation throughout instead of only when there is crisis. This will help the remaining employees to understand what is happening and how they can help the organisation to perform better. They can also create platforms for employees to ask questions and provide feedback for understanding and alignment. Effective transparent and clear communication enhances trust and commitment to the managers and the organisation according to Husain (2013).
6. Lastly, organisations must ensure that the gaps created by loss of skills and increased workload are addressed through training. This will address the conflicts those surviving employees experienced after retrenchments. It will also address the risk of employees undermining themselves because of lack of knowledge as this drives them into a cycle of defeat that constantly increases job demands (efforts needed) and result in exhaustion according to the JD-R model outlined in Figure 1 in the second chapter. Dlouhy and Casper (2021) support the need for training and development on the surviving employees to address the skills and experience gap created by the laid off employees.

7.5 Academic Contributions

There is a lot of academic contributions from various authors on the effects of retrenchments on the remaining employees and this study gathered similar results that other researchers found such as employees experiencing emotional, psychological and physical strain due to the changes that retrenchment brings. The academic contribution of this study stems from the need highlighted by Schaufeli (2017) who cited that organisations need to keep evaluating the aspects at work that affect employee engagement considering its criticality in maintaining operational performance. Parent and Lovelace (2018) also highlighted that retrenchment affect employee engagement, and it is critical to establish the interventions needed to enhance employee engagement.

The study focused on providing the key aspects that affect employee engagement after retrenchments and the relevant job resources (interventions) that can be applied to negate the effects thereof. This research qualitatively clarified and supported that retrenchment affect employee engagement and organisations need to incorporate valuable frameworks such as the JD-R model into their strategies to negate the effects of retrenchments and enhance employee engagement.

7.6 Study Limitations

This study has various limitations that are acknowledged by the researcher. These acknowledgements support the reliability and credibility of the study.

Researcher's lack of experience

The researcher who conducted this study does not have training and experience on conducting interviews, as results there can be inherent bias in data collection and analysis. The researcher may not have been able to separate herself from her perspective of the world and this could have affected the interpretation of the results. However, the researcher used the sourced literature to guide on conducting this study to minimise bias.

Sample size

The sample size comprised of 16 participants who survived retrenchments in the PGM mining sector in South Africa. Although saturation was achieved, a bigger sample size could have yielded further in-depth analysis considering the magnitude of the sector.

Time Horizon

The time frame for this study was limited to a year to obtain a snapshot of the study, however a longitudinal study could yield a more comprehensive appreciation of the effects of retrenchment on the surviving employees and the interventions required to enhance employee engagement.

7.7 Recommendations for future research

This study highlighted that the remaining employees experience a lot of challenges after retrenchments. It highlighted that retrenchments increase job demands such as psychological challenges, increased workload and lack of clarity on the roles of the remaining employees. The study further highlighted that although some participants were kept updated during the retrenchment process, leadership support was minimal and inconsistent in the process especially after retrenchments. The remaining employees leaned more on working overtime to complete their tasks revealing a lack of leadership support in providing direction on how to make work bearable after retrenchments through job crafting and job redesign. Bakker and De Vries (2021) cited that leadership support buffered the effects of retrenchments on the remaining employees and the participants in this study also highlighted the need for leadership support. The need for improving leadership support was also highlighted by Mthembu (2019) on his study at Telkom in 2019 because his findings revealed lack of leadership support.

It remains crucial to unpack the characteristics of leadership support, so that leaders can provide proper support to their teams during high stressful times. Future research must go beyond generalising leadership support and delve deep into unpacking the effective behaviours that display leadership support. Bakker and De Vries (2021) cited that transformational leadership played a significant role as a job resource, and this can be explored further to help organisational leaders comprehend what is expected of them. The study can even guide their training in capacitating them to handle these challenges well.

7.8. Conclusion

The study highlighted that the experiences of the remaining employees after retrenchments are somehow overlooked because organisations focus on generating profits more than employee wellbeing. Retrenchments are deemed necessary to turn the organisations around, however the psychological and physical impacts they have on the remaining employees are substantial. Employees end up experiencing stressful periods that affect their level of commitment and engagement. While they are experiencing these challenges they are also expected to continue working as if

nothing has changed. They are expected to balance the changes on job demands and job resources on their own without clear guidance on how to go about it. Because output is expected from the remaining employees, they end up improvising through long working hours or working overtime to meet the set targets.

Unfortunately, it is not sustainable for the remaining employees to always go an extra mile, hence the need for incorporating successful theories such as the JD-R framework in the organisations that intend on retrenching. The success of a retrenchment hinges on proactively involving employees through consultation and communication, providing leadership support and having clear action plans that incorporate job resources that can buffer the effects of retrenchment (Abildgaard et al., 2018). In this way, the organisations can enhance the engagement of the remaining employees post retrenchments.

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Appendix

Table 8 : Consistency matrix

Questions	Literature Review	Data Collection tool
What are the key factors that influence the engagement of surviving employees after retrenchments?	(Motyka, 2018) (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021) (Abildgaard et al., 2018)	Interview questions 1-6
What role did leadership and Human Resources Practices play in improving employee engagement and mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments?	(Mujtaba & Senathip, 2020) (Frone & Blais, 2020) (Mthembu, 2019)	Interview questions 7
What interventions are required in mitigating the negative effects of retrenchments and promoting employee engagement?	(Lesener et al., 2019) (Frone & Blais, 2020) (Dlouhy & Casper, 2021)	Interview questions 8 & 9

Table 9: Codes per participant

Participant	Total Codes	Code Numbers Assigned to This Participant
P1	9	1, 14, 18, 84, 85, 101, 102, 109, 120, 130, 141, 149
P2	16	1, 2, 3, 15, 34, 35, 36, 46, 59, 65, 73, 76, 84, 86, 87, 88, 101, 103, 104, 105, 131, 150
P3	17	1, 5, 10, 14, 22, 23, 34, 48, 62, 68, 70, 78, 84, 85, 88, 101, 102, 105, 108, 125, 129, 148

P4	12	3, 5, 6, 7, 11, 16, 37, 41, 65, 72, 78, 79, 84, 93, 94, 110, 111, 118, 130, 133, 142, 148
P5	11	1, 12, 69, 70, 76, 82, 83, 93, 107, 109, 111, 125, 126, 128, 132, 147, 148, 149
P6	14	5, 18, 19, 24, 25, 46, 47, 59, 65, 66, 71, 76, 77, 82, 86, 87, 90, 99, 100, 107, 108
P7	13	1, 12, 49, 56, 62, 73, 78, 79, 84, 87, 90, 91, 92, 101, 104, 118, 119, 134, 141
P8	25	1, 2, 3, 18, 20, 29, 30, 41, 42, 50, 51, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82, 85, 88, 97, 102, 104, 110, 127, 143, 148
P9	14	1, 4, 24, 26, 56, 62, 70, 71, 77, 82, 84, 85, 88, 91, 92, 101, 102, 105, 108, 109, 148, 150
P10	18	5, 8, 18, 39, 43, 56, 57, 62, 72, 78, 80, 83, 84, 86, 87, 89, 93, 94, 101, 103, 104, 110, 111, 113, 114, 117, 135, 147, 148, 149
P11	12	17, 31, 39, 44, 52, 53, 56, 69, 75, 98, 99, 107, 114, 115, 116, 124, 136, 147
P12	16	1, 5, 9, 38, 56, 62, 69, 70, 72, 73, 78, 79, 84, 95, 96, 104, 105, 106, 121, 122, 123, 138, 141, 145, 146, 148
P13	11	1, 13, 45, 55, 58, 64, 92, 94, 95, 110, 112, 113, 116, 124, 127, 137, 139, 149
P14	9	40, 54, 59, 75, 81, 83, 98, 113, 140
P15	14	1, 18, 27, 28, 56, 60, 67, 68, 69, 70, 73, 74, 75, 77, 87, 89, 104, 106, 123, 137, 144, 145
P16	14	18, 19, 21, 27, 28, 32, 33, 56, 59, 72, 76, 82, 83, 85, 89, 102, 104, 106, 137

