

Locus of Control and Job Status as Mediators of Employees' Perception of Downsizing and Organizational Commitment in Selected Ministries and Parastatals in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed the mediating role of locus of control and job status on the relationship between employee's perception of downsizing and their commitment to work in selected public sector establishments in Nigeria. The study employed descriptive survey design and a Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six Federal Government establishments in Abuja and Lagos State. Using stratified random sampling, a total of 604 respondents comprising (58.9%) males and (41.1%) females were selected from these establishments. Data were collected through the administration of standardized psychological tests: General Perception of Downsizing (GPD), Locus of Control Scale (LCS), and Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ). Data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed a significant positive relationship between employee's perception of downsizing and their work commitment ($r = 0.17$; $p < 0.05$). That is, employee's perception of downsizing exercise influenced their commitment to work. The results also showed that employees' perception of downsizing was significantly influenced by locus of control i.e. Locus of Control ($r = 0.29$; $p < 0.01$). However, there was no significant relationship between downsizing and job status ($r = -0.08$; $P > 0.05$). Furthermore, the results showed that locus of control significantly mediated the relationship between perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work ($\beta = 0.40$; $t = 10.30$; $p < 0.01$), while the result reveals that job status did not significantly mediate the relationship between perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work ($\beta = 0.02$; $t = 0.64$; $p > 0.05$). The study concluded that employees' perception of downsizing related to their commitment to work, and this relationship was mediated by employees' locus of control.

Key Words: Downsizing; Commitment; Locus of Control; Job Status

C. Introduction

Employees' commitment in the workplace is one important objective of human resources managers and practitioners (Bishop & Dow Scott, 1997). Studies have revealed that commitment has positive effect on work performance, turnover, employees' willingness to assist co-workers, and organizational productivity in the long run (Becker & Billings, 1993). Committed employees do better work than uncommitted employees. No organization can perform at its best unless each employee is committed to the corporate objectives and works as an effective team member. Commitment could be considered as hallmark of a healthy organization. Yet, it has recently become a contentious issue in most of the organizations, especially, in the events of organizational change such as downsizing, restructuring or re-engineering. It is not uncommon nowadays, to see employers and employees trade blame among themselves. Bragg (2002) argues that employers see workers as a disloyal group of free agents willing to leave the organization at the slightest increase in pay and other enticements from elsewhere. On the other hand, employees also believe that employers do not value loyalty and are willing to sacrifice workers to maintain the financial bottom line or to cover up for management blunders. Employees often refer to, as evidence, what usually happens during downsizing exercise and the way employers treat them as an expendable commodity when times get tough (Bragg, 2002).

In the period of radical changes such as mergers, outsourcing, and downsizing, employees may feel that their attachment to the organization has changed, usually decreased. The main reason leading to decreased commitment during these organizational changes is strongly connected to factors such as feelings of job insecurity, decreased trust, job redesign, and increased stress (Dordevic, 2004). Some authors conceptualize job insecurity as the perception of a potential threat to continuity (Greenhalgh and Rosenglatt, 1984).

The phenomenon of downsizing has lately become a recurrent issue in the public sector (Lloyds & Weissman, 2001). The recent global economic events may have made the decision to downsize a veritable choice, most especially among the developing countries of the world. Rama (1997) argues that downsizing in the public sector is becoming an increasingly important ingredient of economic reform in developing countries. Over the past decades, the public service has been dramatically transformed through downsizing at a great human cost (Frederickson & Perry, 1998). Cases of public service downsizing exercises and staggering figures of downsizing casualties in some countries of the world were recorded. In 1992, about 2,800 workers were laid-off out of 5,800 workers of the Central Bank of Ecuador (Rama & Donna, 1999). Canadian government announced in 1995 that the Federal Public service would be reduced by 45,000 positions over the next three years (Frater, 2004). Japan, which has been noted for its tradition of life time employment, as her human resource management philosophy, has adopted employee layoffs as a result of a decade of economic turmoil (Zuris, Kando, Weinger & Weeks, 2003). Downsizing, even though, appears as a new terminology within the context of the public sector of Nigeria, it has all the indications of retrenchment, which is a familiar terrain in the nation's civil service. The spate of mass retrenchment that accorded the civil service reforms of 1975 and 1984 in Nigeria, coupled with cases of staff dismissal that followed minimum wage increment in 1999/2000 can attest to this fact. For instance, States like Osun and Lagos embarked on mass retrenchment exercise, where 15,000 and 12,000 public servants including teachers were dismissed from both states (Socialist Democracy, 2002). Moreover, as the goal of revamping the economy is unfolding in Nigeria, the government downsizing policy and the likely psychological trauma that may accompany the exercise may have begun to take its hold on the people. The retrenched workers, as well as those who are left behind, may have started to witness career destruction as a result of changes in work environments, and job redesign created by downsizing exercise. While the laid-off workers may quickly accept their fate and, to a greater extent, pose no problem to their immediate past organizations, the changes in work environment created by the exercise may affect the retained workers' commitment to work. Downsizing may induce symptoms such as fear, distrust, and distress in the 'survivors' and these symptoms generate different reactions from them. These experiences, however, are subjective in nature and the reactions generated by them may also depend on individuals' personal and social factors. This study considers the mediating role of factors such as locus of control and job position/status on the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work. It sets out, not only to investigate employees' reactions to organizational change like downsizing, but to determine how some of these variables influence employees' work behaviours, i.e. commitment, in the aftermath of downsizing.

Locus of control was considered as mediating variable in this study because of its relevance in workers' decision making with respect to attribution of causes of downsizing decision. Locus of control has been related to attitude toward work and client participation in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with industrial injuries (Duvdevany & Rimmerman, 1996). Yu-Chia Kuo (2005) also reveals that locus of control is positively related to perceived organizational politics, and that internals acquire higher intrinsic job satisfaction and extrinsic job satisfaction compared to externals. However, Hillman (1987) finds that a supervisor's locus of control did not significantly influence his behavior toward an employee. Hunter (1994) also reports that external locus of control has been identified as problematic among prison inmates across a number of dimensions, related both directly to substance abuse as well as to more general adjustment.

A Job position/status was included because it may also be viewed as one of the major socializing forces that influence the extent to which psychological attachments are formed with the organization. Job position/status was considered as an investment because the higher positions are supervisory positions, which are a reward from the organization that should enhance the employee's identification (Sheldon, 1971). Several arguments have been made to substantiate a belief that an employee's job position/status has a potential and moderating effect of downsizing influence on organizational commitment. Lincoln and Kallerberg (1990) argue that those in higher positions in an organization are typically those who are most favoured in terms of material rewards, authority, autonomy and therefore tend to be the most committed to the organization. Further argument by Brockner, Tyler and Cooper-Schneider (1992) also states that employee's attitudes depend on the relationship between prior belief and subsequent experiences. Therefore, layoff experience should be most disturbing for those who had identified most closely with the organization. That is those in senior positions and those who have spent a good number of years before they attain higher level.

However, the few studies reviewed in this area contradict the above arguments. For instance, Bateman and Strasser (1984) report a negative relationship between job level and organizational commitment. Similarly, Naff

and Crum (1999) find that employee's job position is highly insignificant to organizational commitment after major change. Thus, these contradictory findings provide the basis for proposition that employee's locus of control and job position/status will not significantly mediate the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing exercise and their commitment to work.

Furthermore, studies of downsizing exercise in the private sector have shown that perceived job insecurity, lower organizational commitment, intention to quit and lower productivity are 'survivors' reactions to organizational downsizing (Sronce & McKinley, 2006; Allen, Freeman, Rusell & Rentz 2001). Few empirical investigations had analyzed employees' perceptions of downsizing in relation to employees' commitment to work with attendant mediating role of psychosocial factor on such work behaviours in the public sector. While all the factors examined by earlier researchers (Anderson-Connolly & Greenberg 2000) on perception of downsizing are more in the private establishments and aimed at determining the acceptability status of downsizing to the employee, the present research efforts represent a movement towards identifying those factors that can aid survivors' adjustment, as reflected in their commitment to work, to changes brought about by downsizing, especially in the public service. Meanwhile, there are a few recent studies (Lee & Peccei, 2006; Armstrong-Stassen 2001) on the relationship between psychosocial variables and specific job behaviour during the organizational change. While much conceptual discussions (Evered, 1977; Kirton & Mulligan, 1973) on the personality characteristics of workers on employees' reactions to organizational restructuring had only reflected nearly aging analysis, the present study attempts to improve on the previous works in the area.

Implications of Attribution Theory to the Present Study

Attribution theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour. Heider's attribution theory considers how the average person constructs the meaning of an event based on his /her motives to find a cause and his/her knowledge of the environment. Thus, the theory basically looks at how people make sense of their world; what cause and effect inferences they make about the behaviours of others and of themselves. Weiner focused his attribution theory on achievement (Weiner, 1974). He identified ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck as the most important factors affecting attributions for achievement. Attributions are classified along three causal dimensions: locus of control, stability, and controllability. The locus of control dimension has two poles: internal versus external locus of control.

The present study focuses on mediating role of locus of control and job position/status in the relationship between employees' perception of government's downsizing exercise and organizational commitment. Thus, application of attribution theory explains employees' cognitive and behavioural reactions, to organizational changes such as downsizing. The theory implies how the average employee interprets downsizing event based on his/her motive to find cause and to make inferences about the behaviour of others and themselves. This invariably indicates that employee has tendency to attribute a cause of downsizing event to either government or inefficiency on the part of workers. Based on this assumption, the present study proposes that employees who probably attribute the cause of downsizing to government policy has external locus of control orientation and thereby will have lower organizational commitment, while employees who attribute downsizing to lack of skills and inefficiency on the part of workers have internal locus of control and will exhibit high organizational commitment.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework on the relationship between downsizing and organizational commitment, and the mediating role of locus of control and job position/status on the relationship, is expected to explain the focus of the present study. The model, as presented on page 23(Appendix's page) in Figure 1, explains the influential role of downsizing policy of the Federal Government on employees' commitment to work, as well as the mediating role of these variables on this relationship.

D Methods

Descriptive survey is employed in this study. The order of the research variables is as follows; the independent variable is perception of downsizing exercise, the mediating variables are personal characteristic such as locus of control and job characteristic such as job position, while the dependent variable is employees' commitment to work. The study population consists of civil servants in the Federal Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. The Federal Civil Service as at the year 2005, consists of 307,566 staff. The figure is total sum of 145,195 (47%) workers from the 31 Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Departments and 162,371 (52%) workers from 158 Federal Parastatals and Agencies (Federal Character Commission, Tenth Annual Report 2005).

3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique in the process of the selection and the collection of data. These sampling techniques include; the purposive, stratified and random sampling method. The purposive sampling technique was used in selection of six Federal Government's establishments. These consist of two Ministries (Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Mines and Steels Development), two Parastatals (Nigeria Port Authority and National Council for Museums and Monuments) and two Agencies (National Orientation Agency and Federal Character Commission), all in Abuja and Lagos State. The selection was based on the following

criteria: firstly, that the establishments selected belong to the public sector, secondly, the establishments were among the public institutions where downsizing had been carried out. The stratified sampling technique, which specified that the sample be first classified along specific criteria, was also used. The selected establishments were stratified into ministries, parastatals and agencies, from which a total number of 604 participants who responded to the research instrument were selected randomly.

3.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument used for the collection of data in this study is divided into four-section comprising scales that are already in use.

3.2a Section A: Demographic Data

This section contains items, which sought information on respondents' demographic characteristics. These include, age, sex, marital status, education, job position/status, and length of service.

3.2b Section B: General Perception of Downsizing Scale

This section sought to determine respondents' general perception of downsizing exercises in their respective establishments. The instrument was close-ended questionnaire using the combination of items adapted from Multi-Item Perception of Downsizing Scales developed by Sronce and McKinley (2006), and Perceived Fairness of Downsizing Exercise Scale developed by Brockner et al (1992).

3.2c Section C: Locus of Control Scale (LCS)

To measure employees' locus of control, Locus of Control Scale (LCS) developed by Spector (1988) was adapted. The Locus of Control Scale (LCS) is a 16 item instrument designed to assess control beliefs in the workplace. It is a domain specific locus of control scale that correlates about .50 to .55 with general locus of control. The format is summated rating with five response choices: *Strongly disagree - 1, Disagree - 2, Undecided - 0, Agree - 3, Strongly agree - 4*. Total score is the sum of all items, and ranges from 16 to 64. The scale is scored so that internals receive high scores, while externals receive low scores.

3.2d Section D: Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)

The survey instrument used to measure employee's commitment to work in this study is eighteen-item scale, which measures the three components of commitment, as proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991). These components include, affective, normative and continuance commitment. A revised version of the instrument by Meyer, Allen and Smith (1993), only contained 18-items of 6 items on each of the three components.

3.3 Procedure

The data were collected in batches. The first batch of data were collected within the last seven days in the month of March, 2009 in one of the establishments i.e. Nigerian Port Authority (NPA) in Lagos, while the remaining batch of data were collected between April and early May 2009 in the five establishments, which are located in the Federal capital Territory, Abuja. In Nigerian Ports Authority's, Marina Headquarters, Tincan Island and Apapa Wharf, a total of 350 questionnaires' were distributed out of which only 292 were returned and 284 were duly completed. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed in five different establishments in Abuja. The order of the distributions is as follows: Ministry of Finance- 125, Ministry of Mines and Steels Development- 100, Federal Character Commission- 75, National Orientation Agency- 100, National Council for Museums and Monuments-100. On the whole, a total number of 850 questionnaires were distributed out of which 702 were returned. Out of these, 604 were found to be duly completed and useful for analysis. 148 were not returned, while 98 were either not filled or not completed and thus rejected. Altogether, a response rate of 71% was recorded.

E. Results

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Six hundred and four (604) employees in the six federal government establishments responded to the research instrument, (M= 37.6, S.D =7.77). They were mostly between 31 – 50 years of age.

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between employee's perception of downsizing and psychosocial factors (locus of control and job status). The second hypothesis examined the influence of employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work, while the last hypothesis assessed the mediating role of the locus of control and job status on the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work. All the hypotheses were tested by series of multiple regressions. The result is presented in Table under Illustration caption in appendix page

Model 1 as presented in Table under illustration caption in appendix page, shows that independent variable (perception of downsizing) significantly influenced by locus of control, while job status of employee had no significant influence on their perception of downsizing exercise. A detailed assessment of the analysis in Model 1 further reveals that employee's perception of downsizing is significantly influenced by locus of control ($\beta = 0.29$; $t = 7.35$; $p < 0.01$). Results in Model 1, however, reveals that employee's perception of downsizing did not

have significant relationship with job status ($\beta = -0.08$; $t = -1.85$; $p > 0.05$). The results in Model 2 show that perception of downsizing (independent variable) has moderate but significant influence on employees' commitment to work (dependent variable) ($\beta = 0.17$; $t = 4.14$; $P < 0.01$). The result in model 2 has, therefore, shown that perception of downsizing, while controlling for locus of control and job status variables can predict employees' commitment to work to some extent. In addition, Model 3 on table shows the test of mediation among variables of interest by introducing each of the psychosocial factors as mediator between perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work. The results as presented in Model 3 on the table, reveal that locus of control significantly mediated the relationship between perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work ($\beta = 0.40$; $t = 10.30$; $p < 0.01$). When both locus of control (mediator) and perception of downsizing (independent variable) were introduced on employees' commitment to work (dependent variable), the joint percentage influence was 42% ($R = 0.42$; $F(2;601) = 63.16$; $p < 0.01$). Independently, locus of control contributed 40%. This is higher than beta value obtained when mediating variables were held constant in Model 2. This result, therefore, shows that the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work was significantly mediated by locus of control. The results as presented in Model 3, however, show that job status did not significantly mediate the relationship between employee's perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work ($\beta = 0.02$; $t = 0.64$; $p > 0.05$). When both job status (mediator) and perception of downsizing (independent variable) were introduced on employees' commitment to work (dependent variable), the joint percentage influence was 17% ($R = 0.17$; $F(2;601) = 8.79$; $p > 0.05$). Independently, job status contributed 02%. This is less than the beta value obtained when mediating variables were held constant in Model 2. This result, therefore, shows that the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work was not significantly mediated by Job status. **Discussion** The primary focus of the present study is to contribute to the knowledge in the area of understanding the relationship between organizational downsizing/retrenchment and employees' commitment to work in general. Specifically, the study aims to contribute to the knowledge in the area of determining the factors that could mediate employees' perception of downsizing and commitment to work among workers in the public sectors in Nigeria. This study therefore, developed a model which explained the mediating role of the locus of control and job status on the relationship between employee's perception of organizational downsizing and their commitment to work. The conceptual framework also proposed that these psychosocial factors can act as a mediator in this relationship.

The result in model one of the hypotheses tested revealed that employee's perception of downsizing exercise is significantly influenced by locus of control, while job status had no significant influence on employee's perception of downsizing exercise. That is, an independent significant relationship between perception of downsizing and employees' locus of control. The finding of this study is in line with the finding of Yu-chia Kuo (2005) who report that locus of control is positively related to perceived organizational politics. A possible reason for this influence may be attributed to the fact that the federal civil servants who are survivors of the governments downsizing exercise are very high on internal locus of control orientation construct. Thus, they did not feel so much threatened by the exercise because they believed that hard work and confidence in their ability can always make them become indispensable to their respective organizations and thereby escape being laid off in the subsequent exercise.

The study, however, indicates that perception of downsizing has no significant relationship with job status. This implies that there is no significant difference between senior cadre federal civil servants and their junior counterparts in the way they perceived the governments downsizing exercise. The finding of this study contrasts with the finding of Brockner, Tyler and Cooper-Schneider (1992) who state that employees' attitudes toward organizational change depend on the relationship between prior and subsequent experience. Their argument was that lay-off exercise should be most disturbing for those in senior position who had identified most closely with the organization. Conversely, they also expect that those at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, who are typically afforded little autonomy, authority and trust by the organization are likely to feel less 'betrayed' thus having less feeling of violation of mutual contract by downsizing exercise. The simple reason for this finding could be explained in view of the fact that employees irrespective of their positions were all affected either directly or indirectly by downsizing exercise.

The result in model 2 of hypothesis tested revealed a significant, relationship between employee's perception of downsizing and their commitment to work. Even though, the strength of the relationship was low. This finding was in line with the finding of Knudsen, Johnson, Martin and Roman (2003) who found that the model in which downsizing was directly and indirectly associated with commitment was generally supported. Also sharing this view are Bennett and Durkin (2000) who report that downsizing as a term in organization structural change has been found to have a great influence on the organizational commitment. A plausible reason for this relationship may be explained from two different perspectives. Naturally, downsizing/ retrenchment has tendency to create an atmosphere of apprehension and uncertainty in the work environment. This may bring about psychological fear that could dampen workers' morale and result in lower commitment, which is a

negative trend. On the other hand, downsizing may spur higher organizational commitment since the action may serve as a mean to an end. This invariably means that workers may resolve to put in their best in the aftermath of the exercise in order to escape being laid-off in the subsequent exercise.

Model three of hypothesis tested shows the result of the mediating role of locus of control and job status on the relationship between employee's perception of downsizing (independent variable) and employee's commitment to work (dependent variable). The results indicate that the hypothesis was confirmed, that is, locus of control mediated significantly, the relationship between employees' perception of downsizing and their commitment to work. When both locus of control (mediator) and perception of downsizing (independent variable) were introduced on employees' commitment to work (dependent variable), the joint percentage influence was 42%. This is greater than beta value obtained when the mediating variables were held constant in Model 2. This result therefore shows that the relationship between the Federal civil servants' perception of downsizing and their subsequent reaction in term of commitment to work was mediated by locus of control.

However, the result indicates that job status did not significantly mediate the relationship between perception of downsizing and employees' commitment to work. When both job status (mediator) and perception of downsizing (independent variable) were introduced on employees' commitment to work (dependent variable), the joint percentage influence was 17%. This is rather equal to beta value obtained when the mediating variables were held constant in Model 2. This result, therefore, shows that the relationship between the Federal civil servants perception of downsizing and their subsequent reaction in terms of commitment to work was not significantly mediated by job status.

Meanwhile, the conclusion drawn from the conceptual model, which explained the model three is that locus of control has propensity to influence the way employees of the federal government interpreted the last downsizing exercise, and subsequently mediate the relationship between their perception and their responses in terms of employees' commitment to work.

F. Implication of findings and Recommendations

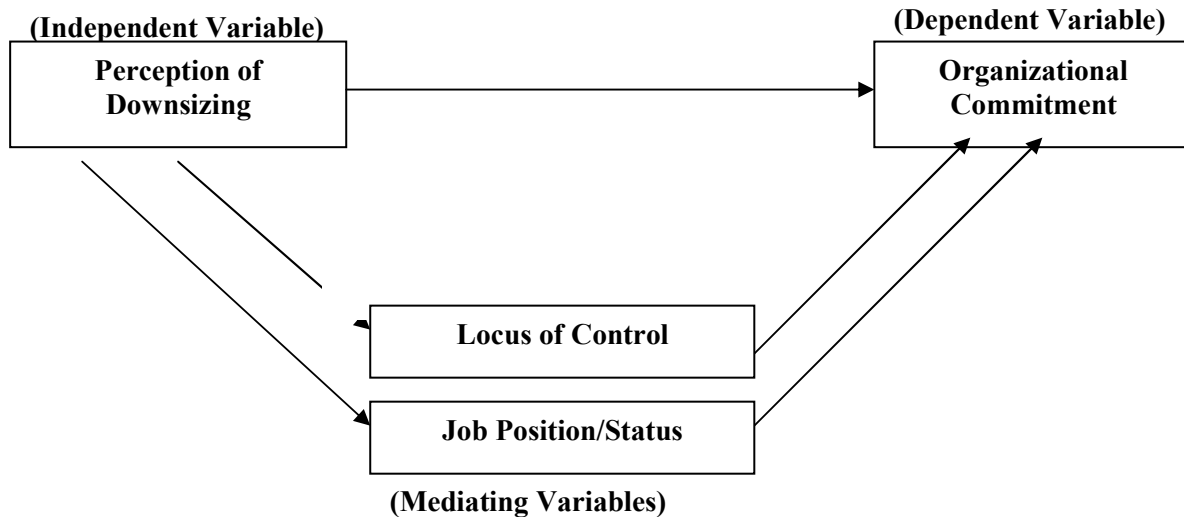
The findings of this study have very relevant and important implications for the employees of the Federal Government themselves in that it will help them to gain insight into those important factors within and outside of them, which are required for successful coping and better adjustment to an event like downsizing exercise. It also has implications for the stake holders such as Federal Civil Service Commission, Ministry of Labour and Productivity in Nigeria. This study will inform those who are at the helm of affairs in these establishments on employees' general perception of the recent downsizing exercise. It will also afford them the opportunity of understanding those employees' characteristics that are paramount, to the sustenance of employees' commitment during and in the aftermath of downsizing exercise.

Understanding the factors that motivate individuals to remain strong and to resolve to forge ahead in the aftermath of government' downsizing exercise is an important step in explaining human behaviour in the work place. Especially, when it comes to how to manage the survivors (those who are left behind) to put in their efforts in spite of changes such as, new work environment, job redesign and work overload, brought about by organizational downsizing. Based on this submission, measures should be taken by policy makers to make regular assessment of employee's personality a routine in the public service. Again, government should also consider the act of nurturing and promotion of employee's sense of control in the face of challenges as part of its training and development exercise among the work force in the government's establishments.

G. Appendices

i Conceptual Model Figure from Page

Fig. 1: Conceptual Model Of The Relationship Between Downsizing And *Employees'* Commitment To Work And The Mediating Role Of Locus Of Control And Job Position/Status On The Relationship



ii Table Depicts the Results of Analysis of Hypotheses Tested on Variables of Interest in the Study from Page

Table 1: Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis showing the Mediating Role of Locus of control and Job Status on the Relationship between Perception of Downsizing and Employees' Commitment to Work

MODEL	PATHS	BETA	R ²
1.	PDE LC	0.29**	0.08
	PDE JS	-0.08	0.01
2.	PDE ECW	0.17**	0.03
3.	PDE & LC ECW	0.42**	0.40
	PDE & JS ECW	0.02	0.17

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

Keys:

PDE: Perception of Downsizing Exercise

LC: Locus of Control

JS: Job Status

ECW: Employees' Commitment to Work

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