Megawatts before people?
- A case study of downsizing communication in Vestas

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May, 2011

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**Summary**

Dealing with the so-called survivor syndrome that emerges among employees who remain after an organisational downsizing is becoming increasingly more important in downsizing communication if the objective of the decision to downsize is to achieve increased organisational efficiency and performance. Therefore, this thesis investigates how, in a survivor communication context, top management at world-leading wind turbine manufacturer, Vestas Wind Systems A/S, communicated its decision to downsize through central communication efforts and to what extent it accommodated some of the implications related to the survivor syndrome in connection with its 2010/2011 downsizing.

After briefly presenting Vestas and its downsizing situation and before entering into an explorative case study of three of Vestas central communication efforts, a press conference and two subsequent editions of its employee magazine, the thesis establishes a theoretical framework for survivor-oriented downsizing communication. By means of this framework, the concept of downsizing is defined and put into a management communication context before the survivor syndrome and its implications accounted for and related to the notions of changing psychological contracts and remaining employees’ focus on organisational justice in downsizing communication.

In the second part of the theoretical framework, the thesis then proceeds to account for a chosen ‘best practice’ communication model for the prevention of survivor syndrome, adapted from Appelbaum & Donia’s (2001) *Realistic Downsizing Preview*, as well as the analytical tools, Bhatia’s (1993) *move structure theory* and Aristotelian rhetoric, employed in a the subsequent case study.

Employing methodological and historical hermeneutics as the scientific approach to the case study, the thesis conducts a textual analysis of the central communication efforts based on the analytical tools to clarify how management communicated its downsizing. The thesis then continues to measure these findings against the ‘best practice’ model in order to clarify the extent to which survivors have been considered in the downsizing communication.

Having considered the intertextual historical connectedness between the text constituting the central communication efforts and based on the findings discussed, the thesis concludes that management at Vestas, taking a global perspective, communicated very carefully the rationale behind the deci-
sion to downsize, the selection criteria used, and the circumstances surrounding the downsizing. The thesis furthermore concludes, that through the employee magazines, Vestas management communicated the facilitation of a grieving period and a new deal-orientation to psychological contracts in Vestas, before finally providing a post-downsizing vision for Vestas. All of this was, the thesis further concludes, achieved through the use of all of Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals by conveying a strong sense of business logic (logos), demonstrating aptitude, social sensitivity and empathy (ethos), as well as emphasising reciprocal pride and commitment (pathos) in convincing the intended audience of the fairness in the decision to downsize.

Finally, based on the level of correspondence between the above findings and ‘best practice’, this thesis finishes by concluding that management at Vestas seems to have communicated its downsizing almost by the book in terms of preventing the survivor syndrome. In other words, survivors have to a very large extent been considered in management’s downsizing communication in Vestas.

**Keywords**: downsizing communication, survivor syndrome, psychological contracts, organisational justice, best practice, explorative case study of Vestas.
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1. Introduction

In the course of the past three decades, downsizing has taken a permanent toll in HRM in companies worldwide in efforts to remain competitive in constantly shifting markets and adapt to fundamental and structural changes in a globalised business environment (Levitt et al, 2008). As a result, deciding to downsize is no longer necessarily considered a last resort, rather “it has become a favored strategy by which [companies] can improve corporate efficiency and competitiveness” (ibid., p. 13).

However, despite seemingly logical business rationales or strategies behind decisions to downsize, research into downsizing communication (e.g. Brockner et al., 1987; Amundson et al., 2004) clearly demonstrates that “[management] cannot assume that the good intentions that may underlie particular episodes of downsizing will be enough to ensure widespread understanding, support, or compliance” (Tourish et al., 2004, p. 485), neither amongst ‘victims’, i.e. employees who are laid off, (Scronce & McKinley, 2006) nor ‘survivors’, i.e. employees who remain, (Brockner, 1992). Moreover, “the insistence on communicating decisions to downsize solely in economic terms is creating serious problems among [survivors] ... who view downsizing as a social, not economic, issue.” (Guiniven, 2001, p. 53). In other words, the so-called survivor syndrome cannot be ignored in downsizing context and particularly communication from top management is critical in dealing with survivor attitudes, behaviour, and trust in management and the future of the organisation (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998), all of which affect organisational efficiency and performance (e.g. Brockner et al., 1985).

In 2010, world-leading wind turbine manufacturer, Vestas Wind Systems A/S¹, was one of the companies who decided to join the bandwagon and pursue a downsizing strategy to adapt to market conditions, and hence it too was faced with the implications of dealing with the survivor syndrome in its downsizing communication.

¹ Subsequently referred to as Vestas
1.1 Problem statement

Based on the above, the objective of this thesis is to investigate how executive management at Vestas through communication accommodated some of the implications related to the *survivor syndrome* in connection with its 2010/2011 downsizing by answering the following research question:

*In a survivor context of downsizing communication, how has executive management\(^2\) in Vestas communicated its downsizing of 3,000 employees from the outset of central communication efforts\(^3\) to affected employees and to what extent have survivors been taken into consideration?*

1.2 Scientific approach

Seeing that the problem statement is characterised by a focus on management as the sender in the planned, top-down downsizing communication in Vestas, targeting affected employees, the receivers, the thesis follows a modernistic perspective based on a functionalistic view of downsizing communication, which considers the text-based empirical data as management tools.

Therefore, for analytical purposes, the thesis adheres to a classical hermeneutic approach in which Friedrich Schleiermacher’s methodological hermeneutics (cited in Palmer, 1969) is combined with notions of Wilhelm Dilthey’s historical hermeneutics (ibid.), which build upon the same methodology as Schleiermacher. Inherent in this approach, the focus is on the relation between management, the sender, and the central communication efforts, the texts. Ontologically, this means the answering of the problem statement becomes a matter of *understanding* how Vestas’ management communicates its downsizing from the epistemological standpoint of interpretation. As means of interpretation, Schleiermacher’s interpretative methodology referred to as the *hermeneutic circle* (Palmer, 1969, pp. 87-88) is employed. Inherent in this methodology is a part-whole, referential interpretation process. That is, the motivation, rationale, and focus of management, the *psychological dimension*, is reconstructed by interpreting the meaning of each central communication effort, the *grammatical dimension*, with reference to its parts—which, reciprocally, can be understood with reference to its whole (ibid., p. 86).

Finally, in order to add a historical connectedness between the publications of the central communication efforts, Dilthey’s concept of ‘*historicality*’, in which “*meaning always stands in a horizon context that stretches into the past and into the future*” (Palmer, 1969, p. 117), is also considered. In

\(^2\) Subsequently referred to as management.

\(^3\) Defined by the choice of empirical data accounted for in section 1.3.
light of this combination of the two perspectives, it is hence possible to interpret each text with reference to the sequence of texts, and, reciprocally, the sequence of texts with reference to each text, that is, by means of an intertextual part-whole taxonomy. Thus, the above scientific approach permits including all of the empirical data in a hermeneutic interpretation process and draw further conclusions with reference to their ‘historicality’

1.3 Choice of empirical data

The thesis’ empirical data comprise of Vestas’ October 26, 2010, Q3 Press Conference and two subsequent editions of Vestas’ employee magazine, ‘The Grid’, from December, 2010, and March, 2011 respectively. The first, which is also interpreted as text, constitutes the weight of the material due to the significance of the management’s official announcement of layoff-decisions (Feldman & Leana, 1994). The latter two texts are added to further substantiate the analysis, as it is assumed that management is in full editorial control of these. Empirical data consisting of more than one text also renders possible considerations of the notion of intertextual ‘historicality’, which adds significant perspective to the analysis, especially in relation to the post-announcement period in which a focus on survivors becomes increasingly important (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001).

The texts can be argued to be a combination of what Lotman (1973; 1977) refers to as traditional sender-message-receiver mode of communication and corporate autocommunication (cited in Broms & Gahmberg, 1983, p. 484). The latter is defined as “... communication that [an organisation] sends to [itself] with an added code” (ibid.), and the externally communicated mantra of Vestas’ own HR-department, “People before megawatts” (Vestas Annual Report, 2010, p. 16), provides an excellent example such. Thus, even though the press conference is intended as externally oriented communication, it can still be analysed on the same premises as the internally oriented ‘The Grid’ in terms of downsizing communication. Finally, based on the assumption that the empirical data is part of a larger, overall communication plan, a certain level of consistency is presumed between what management communicates internally in Vestas through other channels and its communication via the press conference and ‘The Grid’. Thus, in terms of DC, the importance of the above-mentioned communication channels, and hence the empirical data, is unquestionable.

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4 Although acknowledged, the notions of Gadamer’s (1975) philosophical hermeneutics (cited in Skinner, 1986) are not considered due to limited pages.
5 Subsequently referred to as the press conference.
6 Dilthey expands the notion of text to include all social phenomena, and, thus, building on the same methodology as Schleiermacher, social phenomena should be interpreted as text (Palmer, 1969, pp. 100-104).
7 All three texts potentially reach survivors globally due to their publication on Vestas’ corporate website.
1.4 Method and structure

In order to investigate how executive management at Vestas accommodated some of the implications related to the survivor syndrome in its downsizing communication, the introduction provides the academic framework for the thesis, which employs an explorative approach to answering the problem statement. After a theoretical framework and a ‘best practice’ model are established, a case study consisting of textual analysis of the empirical data is conducted to answer how management at Vestas has communicated its decision to downsize, and the findings are then measured against the ‘best practice’ model in order to further clarify the extent to which survivors have been taken into consideration.

More specifically, following the introduction, section 2 serves as a point of departure as a very brief presentation of Vestas and the events surrounding its downsizing of 3,000 employees is presented, further clarifying the context and (historical) origin of the empirical data. Next, section 3 establishes a limited theoretical framework for understanding some of the management implications of survivor downsizing communication in which the importance of addressing the survivor syndrome communicatively is highlighted. Section 3.4 then accounts for the choice and adaptation of Appelbaum & Donia’s (2001) ‘best practice’ model for survivor-oriented downsizing communication which takes these management implications into account and determines important parameters against which later analysis of Vestas’ downsizing communication will be measured. In order to have an outlet for the analysis, section 3.5 accounts for the choice of specific analytical tools, consistent with the hermeneutic circle, before these are employed in the subsequent case study in section 4. The analysis of the empirical data, answering the first part of the problem statement, covers Schleiermacher’s grammatical dimension by employing Bhatia’s (1993) move structure analysis (cited in Review article, 1997), illustrating what is communicated in different textual components, and Aristotle’s rhetorical analysis, uncovering how it is communicated. Section 4.3, then, offers some considerations of the ‘historicality’ between the empirical data in order to add a Dithsonian perspective to the psychological dimension. Having conducted the analysis, the correspondence between the findings and ‘best practice’ is briefly considered in section 5 in order to answer the second part of the problem statement. Section 6 proceeds to very briefly discuss some of the implications of the research with a view to maintaining a critical position toward the findings, before section 7 concludes upon the problem statement. Finally, section 8 puts the conclusion into perspective and provides suggestions to an alternative scientific approach.
1.5 General source criticism

The theoretical framework underlying this thesis, inspired by the tremendous research of Aggerholm (2009), generally consists of survivor literature, primarily from American studies. This American context could prove to have implications in relation to its applicability to the Vestas case in question. However, due to the ‘global’ nature of Vestas as a company and the online empirical data, this thesis assumes that the literature is still applicable in this particular context. Furthermore, the literature has originated from numerous studies across fields, employing various organisational and management theories, and “[g]iven the absence of a unifying definition of downsizing, it is therefore possible to search in one domain of this literature without realising ... the multifaceted nature of this subject area” (Thornhill & Saunders, 1997, p. 271). In light of this, the theoretical framework for survivor-oriented downsizing communication focuses on selected key concepts which this thesis considers most important in understanding the implications for this type of management communication. Additionally, despite “wide contextual variations between [downsizing communication] in different organisations, industries and countries[,] [s]ome level of generalisation is, of course, possible and [this thesis] draws out those which [it] believe[s] to be valid” (ibid., p. 271)

Finally, the reasoning behind the choice of Bhatia’s (1993) move structure analysis (cited in Review article, 1997) and Aristotelian rhetoric as analytical tools and the adapted version of Appelbaum & Donia’s (2001) Realistic Downsizing Preview (RDP) as ‘best practice’ model are accounted for in their respective sections.

1.6 Delimitations

As indicated above, the study of downsizing communication enters into many fields e.g. psychology, CSR, motivation theory etc. Thus, a holistic approach to uncover the implications of downsizing communication, e.g. in relation to (corporate) culture, is unrealistic within the scope of this thesis. As a result, the theoretical framework is by no means exhaustive. It is; however, intended to give an understanding of the complexity of survivor-oriented downsizing communication and provide a foundation for comprehending the subsequent ‘best practice’ model and assessing to what extent Vestas adheres to this model in considering survivors.

In that connection, Vestas’ downsizing communication might, despite being ‘internationally oriented’, prove to be influenced by its Danish context, amplified by the fact that “Danes dominate management” (Vestas, 2010b, p. 10) and Vestas has its headquarters in Aarhus, Denmark, which
serves as “... a hub for [its] global activities” (Engel, 2010a, l. 280). Despite this, and in arguing for the potential global repercussions for survivors at Vestas, the perspective of the analyses is not confined to a Danish context only. Therefore, the focus is on the downsizing communication from management to internal stakeholders, i.e. all affected employees, not the business strategy behind the downsizing, even though strategic choices are used to explain and justify the downsizing.

The thesis recognises that the empirical data is merely a part of a larger communication plan and, thus, the analyses of the texts should be viewed from this perspective. These analyses will, due to limited number of pages, necessarily be selective, which is why only sections of ‘The Grid’ deemed relevant have been included. In that connection, this thesis, using the words of Palmer et al. (1997), “… acknowledge[s] that there will always be an open question as to the meaning behind different words, expressions and languages—such as that related to downsizing” (p. 637). As a result, an underlying assumption is that the analyses “need not be 'gross' where the researchers are attentive to potential nuances and interpretations of text ... [and] retain an awareness of the way in which their conceptual categories may influence these interpretations ...” (ibid.).

Finally, due to the delicateness of the issue, it has not been possible to conduct interviews with management or the HR-department at Vestas to cover Schleiermacher’s psychological dimension; yet, the aspect of ‘historicality’ can accommodate this lack of insight to some extent. However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to thoroughly include the previous downsizing, such as Vestas’ 2009 layoffs of 1,900 employees (BBC, 2009), although these events are briefly included in the considerations of ‘historicality’.

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8 Refers to a specific line in the transcript in appendix 4.
2. Brief presentation of Vestas and its downsizing situation

For more than 30 years, Vestas has managed to retain its position as the world’s leading wind turbine manufacturer (Reuter, 2010), to a large extent achieved through pioneering R&D, a strong belief in a vision of wind power becoming an energy source on par with oil and gas (Vestas, 2011b) as well as a “people before megawatts”-approach to knowledge management. Vestas currently employs some 21,000 people globally (Engel, 2010b, s. 19) and has R&D and production facilities in Europe, Asia, and America.

In 2009, Vestas downsized 9 % of its workforce, primarily in the UK (BBC, 2009), due to overcapacity, and the exact same scenario played out late 2010 and well into 2011. Financially, things at Vestas “[were] going really well in most places, but there [was] one place where it [was] not going that well, and that is here in Europe” (Engel, 2010a, l. 12). Particularly Denmark was regarded by Vestas CEO, Ditlev Engel, as problematic in terms of overcapacity since “more than 99 percent of all turbines have been sold outside of Denmark” (ibid., l. 85). Consequently, on October 26th, 2010, Vestas announced the closure of four Danish units and layoffs of 3,000 employees, i.e. 13 % of its workforce, within a six month period. In the months following the announcement, the layoffs were implemented “in stages to allow time for systems, processes and tools to be in place to ensure smooth business operation” (Jakobsen, 2011), before the establishing of so-called Shared Service Centres concluded Vestas layoffs by the end of April, 2011 (Kruse, 2011).

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9 See appendix 1.
3. Theoretical framework for survivor-oriented downsizing communication

Having outlined the downsizing situation in question, the following sections establish a limited theoretical framework for understanding downsizing communication within a survivor context. Furthermore, it serves to contextualise the model for ‘best practice’, accounted for in section 3.4.

With a view to acquiring an understanding of the survivor context of downsizing communication, it is in order first to define the underlying concept of downsizing. However, contemporary downsizing literature provides numerous definitions, each with its inadequacies, and terms such as *rightsizing, building down, demassing, deorganization, growth-in-reverse, rebalancing* etc. are used interchangeably to substitute *downsizing* (Appelbaum *et al*, 1999, p. 536), further adding to the confusing terminology. As a result, this thesis resorts to the following definition of downsizing, tailored from several definitions—primarily by Freeman (1999) and Appelbaum *et al* (1999):

*A systematic, planned, and significant workforce reduction in an organization through an intentionally instituted set of managerial activities, which may include the use layoffs, by which the organisation aims to improve efficiency and performance.*

This definition is suitable for the purpose of this thesis as it not only fits within to the modernistic perspective, which is also most predominant in theory (Aggerholm, 2009, p. 1), *systematic, planned and intentionally instituted* also support the notion of downsizing communication as a management tool in implementing the downsizing strategy. However, building on the notions of the human-relations school and organisational equilibrium theory (cited in Osamu, 1994), organisations can be argued to consist of a rational management system (Osamu, 1994, pp. 22-23) and a social system of emotional employees which should be in balance in order for the organisation to perform efficiently. Thus, even though downsizing might be based on a rational management decision, as *systematic and planned* indicate in the definition, the term is; however, believed to be more complex since the social system in connection to downsizing experiences imbalance due to uncertainty. This is especially the case among affected employees experiencing different degrees of the so-called *survivor syndrome* (Kowske *et al*, 2009) which is related to the perceived breach of the psychological contract (Appelbaum & Donia, 2001) and perception of organisational justice (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998).
3.1 The survivor syndrome

According to Travaglione & Cross (2006) the survivor syndrome can be defined as “the emotional and attitudinal characteristics of those who have survived a downsizing” (p. 2). However, this definition lacks one important aspect, namely the behaviour resulting from these emotions and attitudes. Therefore, this thesis adheres to Robbins’ (1999) definition of the survivor syndrome as “a set of emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of employees who remain following involuntary employee reductions” (p. 32). By this definition, survivors can exhibit both positive and/or negative emotions and attitudes; however, the latter is by far most predominant in survivor literature, which is also why Robbins refers to it as a sickness\(^{10}\).

The term survivor syndrome, that underlies the analogy of survivors, victims, and even executioners (management), originated by psychiatrist W. G. Niederland’s 1968 studies of survivors of e.g. Holocaust and nuclear bombings who experienced e.g. anxiety, problems with self-confidence, and a “paradoxical sense of guilt at having survived” (cited in Guiniven, 2001, p. 62). Later studies of downsizing by David Noer showed that survivors of workforce reductions can “display a similar range of emotions, [particularly in terms of self-preservation, guilt, anger, and even hatred,] although not as intense or as severe” (ibid., 62). Therefore, as result of downsizing, survivors of recent layoffs are also likely to experience symptoms of stress (Brockner et al., 1988), perceive lower organizational performance as well as higher degree of job insecurity and intention to resign Maertz et al. (2010).

In relation to the problem statement, particularly Noer’s (1993) view of the survivor syndrome is interesting as he notes “the terms could be reversed; those who leave become survivors, and those who stay become victims” (cited in Robbins, 1999, p. 32). In other words, the notion of ‘affected employees’ is not confined to victims only. Furthermore, as it is assumed that the organisation in Vestas consists of numerous social and work-related networks extending across hierarchical levels,

\(^{10}\) See figure 1 for a list of symptoms.
departments, and even regions, the downsizing not only affects the survivors in Denmark, it can be argued to potentially affect Vestas employees globally\textsuperscript{11}, and it should thus from a management communication perspective be addressed accordingly.

Yet, despite extensive survivor syndrome research and Vestas being aware of its existence, presumably; Tourish & Hargie (2004) notes that “\textit{it may be doubted whether downsizing conducted by profitable organizations, and intended to strengthen profits further, can ever be communicated in such a way that the negative psychological effects can be avoided}” (p. 31), particularly in relation to the change or breach of psychological contracts inherent in downsizing (Robinson, 1996).

### 3.2 Changing psychological contracts

The notion of the psychological contract is unavoidable in understanding the consequences of downsizing amongst survivors, for two reasons, particularly. For one, “\textit{[i]t is clear that the moment an organization announces its decision to downsize, the psychological contract ... changes}” (Amundson et al., 2004, p. 267). Secondly, changes in or breaches of the psychological contract have a potential impact on survivor motivation and commitment (Baruch & Hind, 1999), degree of cynicism (Andersson, 1996), and trust in the organisation and management (Robinson, 1996).

According to Rousseau (1995, p. 9), the psychological contract is an “\textit{individual[s]' beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization}” (cited in Saunders & Thornhill, 2005, p. 451). Most literature and research on this implicit agreement distinguishes between a traditional, relational orientation, predominant up until the 1990’s, and a new-deal, transactional orientation (Brauch & Hind, 1999, p. 299). Typically, the old, traditional deal relationship is based on loyalty for security and mutual trust by which the compliance and commitment of employees is repaid by the employer i.a. with job security and a view to career advancement within the company. In contrast, the new-deal, transactional psychological contract is on the other end of the continuum. By this orientation, employees assume more responsibility for their own employment and competences and are expected to tolerate more change and uncertainty in return for increased flexibility, financial benefits and opportunities career development (ibid.).

Seeing that recent research indicates “\textit{employees generally continue to exhibit relational forms of attachment to the organisation}” (Saunders & Thornhill, 2005, p. 449), it is likely that the same is

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\textsuperscript{11} Further highlighting the importance of the global reach of the empirical data in the downsizing communication.
the case in Vestas. Consequently, a need exists for management, as a minimum, to communicate a focus on the psychological contract with a new deal orientation as the traditional deal might still exist among some survivors (Baruch & Hind, 1999), a communicative task in which the notions of organisational justice and fairness cannot be ignored.

3.3 Survivor focus on organisational justice and fairness

In connection with changing to a transactional orientation, research suggests “that all [dimensions] of organisational justice – distributive, procedural, informational and interpersonal – are likely ... to be important for permanent employees [who] view their psychological contracts [mostly] in relational terms” (Saunders & Thornhill, 2005, p. 463). That is, the fairness in the outcome of the decision to downsize, in the process used to arrive at and implement the downsizing, in the explanations of underlying reasons, and in the considerations and treatment of people (social sensitivity) are important determinants of the degree of survivor syndrome in those who remain and of their reactions to and perceptions of the decision to downsize (ibid., p. 453). “Thus, [Vestas] management need not be wholly caught up in only the outcomes of the layoffs; attention must be paid to the fairness of the process used” (Petzall et al., 2000, p. 601), especially as the traditional psychological contract is in play.\(^\text{12}\)

Thus, in terms of management communication, it is critical to communicate a credible, causal explanation and the reasoning underlying it, braking the rumour mill among survivors, as well as conveying a social understanding based on respect, dignity and, most importantly, empathy. Social sensitivity and fairness in downsizing communication is naturally targeted toward victims, however, as Brockner et al. (1987) note, paradoxically, when an organisation demonstrates commitment towards victims by treating them with respect and consideration, survivors are more likely to display post-downsizing commitment to the organisation, a situation known as reciprocal organisational commitment (p. 539). In other words, downsizing communication attending the needs of victims tends to indirectly have a positive impact on the reactions of survivors and the degree of survivor syndrome.

In the end, despite organisational justice to a large extent is a matter of individual survivor perceptions of fairness, certain rhetorical precautions can be considered in management communication in an effort to heighten the perception of fairness amongst affected employees and, by those means, reduce the degree of survivor syndrome (Brockner, 1992).

\(^{12}\) Cf. subsequent analysis of ‘The Grid’.
3.4 Model for 'best practice'

Having highlighted some of the most important implications in downsizing communication in terms of organisational justice, changing psychological contracts, and the survivor syndrome, the following section introduces a ‘best practice’ model for the prevention of survivor syndrome which takes into consideration these implications.

As opposed to Tourish & Hargie’s (2004) previously mentioned doubts in terms of dealing with the survivor syndrome through communication efforts, the vast majority of other researchers beg to differ, stressing the importance of adhering to ‘best practice’ on the subject (e.g. Cameron, 1994; Mishra et al., 1998).13

The model for ‘best practice’, accounted for in this section, is an adaptation of Appelbaum & Donia’s (2001a) Realistic Downsizing Preview14, “a practical, workable model ... made available to those managers wishing to take a preventive step in the prevention and management of survivor syndrome” (p. 129), i.e. a management tool for ensuring post-downsizing survivor trust and empowerment.

Besides adding the notions of Robbins’ (1999) grieving period and Cameron’s (1994) vision for the organisation’s future to the RDP model in order to add more post-announcement perspective, the adaptation is mainly a matter of focusing in on the central communicative, not underlying strategic, elements of the original RDP model as the subsequent analysis focuses on how management at Vestas communicated its downsizing, not what it in fact implemented before, during, and after.

The RDP model was chosen over other ‘best practice’ models as it is one of the few, if not the only one, constructed on the basis of extensive literature reviewing, validated through a multiple explorative study, and revised accordingly. Thus, the RDP is in stark contrast to the fact that most theories

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13 See also figure 2
14 See appendix 2
...and models, or lack thereof, on downsizing communication, which emphasise that (management) “communication is important in any downsizing program...” (Freeman, 1994, p. 222), fail to entail exactly what this communication should consist of.

As figure 3 shows, the adapted RDP model, employed in this thesis, consists of six concrete elements that downsizing communication should ideally encompass. The elements are rather self-explanatory, and as Petzall et al. (2000) note “it is not necessarily what really happens but rather what [affected employees] perceive as happening that will dictate their reactions to management's actions” (p. 601). Thus, management should be thoughtful in communicating the processes and procedures followed in the decision-making regarding “when, where, how many, and who will be affected by layoffs ... [and communicate this] with a great deal of social sensitivity, and impress on the individuals the fairness of the outcomes” (ibid.).

Appelbaum & Donia (2001) do not specify through which communication channels the different elements are to be communicated, and so it cannot be assumed that management in Vestas relied solely on the central communication efforts, analysed in section 4, to cover all elements of ‘best practice’ in its consideration of survivors. However, it is possible to identify the extent to which management has incorporated these elements in the defined central communication efforts, and by means of this measurement provide evidence as to what extent survivors have been taken into consideration through these particular channels.

In response to some of the critics of ‘best practice’ and the functionalistic understanding of communication, which presumes the audience to be a homogenous group of receivers, this thesis acknowledges that there are certain limitations in terms of the assumptions related to the interpretation processes of the individual employees. However, it also acknowledges that there is still some validity in Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) model of communication in which meaning is inherent in the

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15 See appendix 3 for a further elaboration of each element.
16 Due to the global survivor perspective, this view of the audience can be argued to be the most suitable.
message\textsuperscript{17} (cited in Fiske, 2002, pp. 6-8). This well-known information theory argues that seemingly meaningless messages are transformed into information when the sender (management) contextualises the message, a contextualisation to which interpretation is constrained. In a downsizing communication context, this means that the more contextualised the messages of the downsizing communication are, e.g. the clearer the explanation, argumentation, and reasoning communicated, the closer interpretations of them are to the intentions of management. Hence, particularly the contextualisation of the downsizing rationale, selection criteria, and management’s empathy is of great importance, if the messages are to be decoded by the affected employees in accordance with management intentions\textsuperscript{18}.

### 3.5 Analytical tools

In order to understand how management at Vestas communicated its downsizing through the press conference and ‘The Grid’, i.e. identify how the overall communicative goal (CG) of the decision to downsize is communicated in the two very distinct genres, Bhatia’s (1993) tools for genre analysis (cited in Review article, 1997) serve as foundation for the textual analyses of all the empirical data\textsuperscript{19}.

#### 3.5.1 Move structure analysis

“\textit{Bhatia distinguish[es] between three interrelated elements: communicative [goals], moves and rhetorical strategies}” (Review article, 1997, p.215). He argues that the overall CG is realised through a number of structural text components, referred to as \textit{moves}, each with its own sub-goal, and these moves are furthermore achieved through the use of different rhetorical strategies (ibid., p. 215)\textsuperscript{20}. This approach, thus, connects well to the adapted RDP model by which ‘best practice’ (i.e. overall CG) consists of six specific elements (i.e. six moves) which must be communicated/articulated in a specific way to be effective\textsuperscript{21} (i.e. contextualised through rhetorical strategies).

\textsuperscript{17} A notion which connects to the hermeneutic ontology
\textsuperscript{18} This transmission view of communication also connects with the functionalistic paradigm.
\textsuperscript{19} The choice of tools also partly covers the genre-analytical aspect of methodological hermeneutics.
\textsuperscript{20} See figure 4.
\textsuperscript{21} Cf. appendix 3.
More specifically, the move structure analysis, besides establishing an overview of the comprehensive empirical data, is basically a structural interpretation of what is implicitly or explicitly realised in the different sections of the text. These moves are then contingent on the use of specific rhetorical strategies.

3.5.2 Aristotelian rhetoric

In light of the ‘best practice’ model and the realisation of the move structure, it is evident that communicative efforts toward minimizing the survivor syndrome are essentially a matter convincing affected employees in an empathetic manner, so as to remain credible and trustworthy (ethos), that the choice to downsize is in fact reasonable and necessary (logos), also taking into consideration the emotional aspect of downsizing (pathos). Hence, the notions of Aristotelian rhetoric (cited in Corbett & Connors, 1998) are applied as an underlying approach in analysing the rhetorical strategies employed, further uncovering if, how, and to what extent management at Vestas realises the six moves of the adapted RDP model.

Halliday’s (1996) Register Analysis has also been considered as the main analytical tool; however, as it is more appropriate for in depth analysis of small pieces of text, only selected components, which enhance or clarify elements of the rhetorical analysis, are included where suitable.

Thus, by means of the above analytical tools, it is possible to break down the different texts into moves and rhetorical strategies in a part-whole interpretation process in an effort to answer the first part of the problem statement and measure these findings to ‘best practice’ to answer the second part. This analytical process is; however, not confined to text-internal factors only; Bhatia also argues that references to text-external factors also come in to play22 (Review article, 1997, p. 233).

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22 Text-external factors connect well to the notion of ‘historicality’.
4. Case study of downsizing communication in Vestas

Based on the above contextual and analytical framework, the following sections provide analyses of *how management in Vestas structured and rhetorically articulated its downsizing communication to affected employees from the outset of the press conference and two subsequent versions of ‘The Grid’.*

Vestas’ downsizing communication and implementation occurred over a six months period, and thus the empirical data constitute a communication process. In light of this, each text could be argued to be an individual *move* in an overarching move structure of the downsizing communication. As a result, the realisation of the six ‘best practice’ elements can be expected to be spread across all of the texts, and consequently, the texts can be expected to have different foci in terms of content (move structure) and rhetoric. However, common for all the empirical data is the assumption that management communicates to the intended audience of affected employees, later primarily survivors, and it is from this perspective the analyses are conducted.

The press conference constitutes the weight of the case study as it can be expected to cover most of the ‘best practice’ elements, i.e. all of the wh-questions. However, seeing that the December edition of ‘The Grid’ was closely connected to the announcement and implementation of the downsizing, it too can be expected to encompass specific elements. In particular, given its nature as an employee magazine and its ‘historicality’ in relation to the other two texts, this edition can be expected to be utilised by management as a tool for attending to post-announcement social issues as well as negative emotions, mistrust and frustrations of victims and survivors. In contrast, the March edition was published late in the implementation phase, and thus, on that account, it is likely only to function as a tool to communicate the post-announcement or post-implementation future heading of Vestas.

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23 See figure 5.
24 Cf. the parentheses in figure 3
4.1 Analysis of the Q3 2010 press conference

As shown in appendix 4, the entire press conference has been transcribed for the analytical purposes of literally transforming the event into text, making it possible to refer to specific sentences, indicated by a line number, as well as indexing its content in terms of move structure, creating an overview. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier and not taking Engel’s (2010a) explicitly stated purpose of the conference, i.e. “to inform [the intended audience] that [management is] planning to lay off about 3,000 employees” (l. 1), for granted, the overall communicative goal is a matter of convincing the intended audience of the rationale behind the choice to downsize. How this is accomplished is derived from the sum of all the moves, which again are realised through the specific rhetorical strategies employed.

4.1.1 Move structure analysis

The move structure of the press conference can be identified based on the explicitness of the communication, i.e. each move can be determined by the explicit account of its sub-goal in declarative sentences, the exemplification of which is highlighted in bold in the transcript. This explicitness is further highlighted through repeated and extensive use of interrogative sentences, which ask all the wh-questions from ‘best practice’. In fact, a total of 17 total interrogative sentences clearly define most of the moves, e.g. in “What is it we are going to do? How we are going to do it? And why?” (Engel, 2010a, l. 8), “So, are these competitors going for us?” (123), and “How critical is this to Vestas?” (147). In other words, using Halliday’s (1996) notion of speech functions derived from sentence structure in interpersonal resources, Vestas management answers its own questions with the declarative sentences, i.e. explicit statements presented as fact, in most of the moves, which connects very well to the notion of the press conference as autocommunication.

Following the same line of arguing throughout the press conference, this thesis has arrived at the overall move structure in figure 6.

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25 Subsequently in this section and the next, numbers in parentheses are references to lines in Engel (2010a) if not otherwise indicated.
26 The numbers indicate the lines between which the move is realised.
By this move structure, it is evident that the communicative purpose of the press conference realised goes beyond the informing of the decision to downsize. A very elaborative clarification of the reasoning behind the choice to downsize is also emphasised in which both the past (move 5), present (move 9), and future (move 12) situation for Vestas is considered. As a result, management at Vestas seem to have contextualised the message extensively, if not to the extent that each move is unlikely to be misunderstood or misinterpreted.27

In other words, like a game of chess, management at Vestas (the chess player) seem to employ a communicative strategy in which its moves to a large extent are explicitly defined by interrogative sentences, contemplating what the intended audiences might ask (considering the opponent’s counter moves). This leads to the accomplishment of certain sub-goals (striking out the opponent’s pieces, i.e. meeting counter-argumentation and information needs), all of which in turn contribute to the overall goal of convincing the intended audience of the rationale behind the downsizing (winning the game).

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27 Cf. Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) model of communication.
4.1.2 Rhetorical analysis

In light of the above, the press conference can be expected to be further realised through a strong appeal to the reasoning of the affected employees (logos), and to some extent their emotions (pathos), in explaining the necessity and justification of the decision to downsize. It is furthermore expectable that Ditlev Engel\textsuperscript{28} also communicates a sense of sincerity and empathy\textsuperscript{29} (invented ethos) and conveys his status as expert authority with aptitude in what he is doing (situated ethos). Succeeding in this effort would help re-establish management credibility and trustworthiness (ethos) as these; above all, take a blow the moment the decision to downsize is communicated\textsuperscript{30}.

Having imposed his and management’s authority on the audience by the first of a continuous use of declarative sentences presented as fact, "we are closing down four Danish plants and we are planning to dismiss 3,000 people" (l. 7), Engel immediately broadens the context from a local Danish one to a European perspective (13-15) and finally to the necessity to “adjust and adapt [Vestas] to the world around us” (16). This latter global perspective is then kept throughout the press conference, which can be exemplified by Engel arguing that “it has to do with globalisation” (26) causing “a shakeout in [the wind energy] industry” (173) in which he considers “Vestas a global player” (83).

Derived from this view of Vestas and its market situation, Engel mainly employs two interrelated aspects of business logic in communicating the rationale behind the decision to downsize and the selection criteria:

1. the need for employment level to match order intake, i.e. short-term capacity utilisation (23), and
2. the need to ensure lowest possible production costs, i.e. long-term global competitiveness (33).

Specifically, “the very offensive measures [taken]” (25) to “regain balance ... between the different regions in Vestas” (19), i.e. to balance capacity utilisation, are used by Engel for the sole purpose of ensuring, what he continues in the subsequent enthymeme, that in order for Vestas to remain competitive globally, it needs to focus on global cost reduction (33). This is further elaborated by the

\textsuperscript{28} Management and Engel are used interchangeably as he is speaking on behalf of executive management (141).
\textsuperscript{29} Cf. social sensitive and empathy in ‘best practice’ figure 3.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. survivor symptoms in figure 1 and the change in the psychological contract.
“Asia costs plus freight rule”\textsuperscript{31} (Engel, 2010b, s. 8), which is then applied to the Danish context in question using the following deductive logic:

\textbf{Premise 1:} All Vestas production units unable to comply with the \textit{Asia costs plus freight rule} are uncompetitive.

\textbf{Premise 2:} Danish production units are unable to comply with the Asia costs plus freight (35-38)

\textbf{Conclusion:} Danish production units are uncompetitive.

Still, Engel also emphasises that this \textit{“is the way in which [Vestas] need[s] to assess all of [its] production units”} (44), conveying a global production unit downsizing criterion, before going into a longer clarification of employee selection criteria (50-76). Furthermore, the necessity to downsize communicated through the above logic is also highlighted in terms of Halliday’s (1996) notion of tenor in Engel’s repeated use the specific modal verb \textit{must}, best exemplified in the sentence: \textit{“So no matter where we sell, we must be competitive, we must have Asia costs plus freight, we must live up to that”} (48). In other words, Engel essentially argues that even if the European market turns around in the short-term, rendering the downsizing unjustifiable, the \textit{Asia plus freight rule} still necessitates downsizing in Denmark in order to ensure global competitiveness\textsuperscript{32}.

Even though Engel can be argued to use globalisation as a scapegoat to some extent, he also explicitly acknowledges that management \textit{“maintained [its] optimism for too long”} (141), using a \textit{“we have been holding our breath”}-metaphor (13). Inherent in this metaphor seems to be a dual communicative purpose in maintenance of management credibility. On one hand, it definitively places the blame with management, i.e. it conveys management self-awareness. On the other hand, management’s role as the executioner is softened by the virtue and goodwill shown in the investment in \textit{“maintaining [its] good, skilful colleagues as long as [it] could”} (136). The latter aspect could arguably be a display of empathy and sincerity which is supported by the section following the question of what management would say to the affected employees (252-265). Engel, furthermore, makes use of specific attitudinal lexis, stressing management’s attitude toward and opinion of the affected employees and the decision to downsize. Such lexis can be seen in the repeated use of the sentence adverbial \textit{“unfortunately”} (18, 24, 51, 194, 196, 264) and adjectives describing the downsizing such as \textit{“terrible”} (106), \textit{“nasty”} (120), \textit{“frustrating and very sad”} (152). Management empathy is furthermore also implicitly accomplished by the communication of a managerial share in

\textsuperscript{31} Local Vestas production units \textit{“must be able to produce at [lower or] the same costs as ... in [other Vestas’] factories [e.g.] in China plus then the freight costs to the place where the turbine will be installed”} (43) in order to be competitive.

\textsuperscript{32} A business logic reflecting the rationale management system mentioned in section 3.
the sacrifice in that “managers ... and administration will also be hit” (59-60). However, this apparent empathetic approach only extends as far as “there is no discussion that [Vestas] need[s] to do this” (75), stressing the indisputability of the decision to downsize.

A final ethical appeal intertwined in the above is Engel’s show of mental flexibility and intelligence in demonstrating knowledge of the subject, e.g. in “were you aware...” (35). Thus, in discussion and recognition of different and conflicting viewpoints on the decision to downsize, he attempts to combine common sense with the above use of syllogisms and empathy in favour of his position along side including what “impartial analysts” say about Vestas and its current situation (27).

Moreover, taking a second look at the metaphor used, it can be argued to be an appeal the feeling of the greater good in the sense that, using a chess analogy again, Vestas is “doing this to [itself] so that others [opponents] will not do it to [the company]” (47). In other words, Engel communicates that management’s decision to sacrifice a pawn (the victims) is for the greater good of winning the game (ensuring the Vestas’ competitiveness, and hence the employment of survivors), all of which connects very well with survivor perceptions of fairness.

Finally, border lining all three appeals, Engel uses extrinsic proofs such as statistics, e.g. “more than 99 percent of all turbines have been sold outside of Denmark” (Engel, 2010b, s. 85), before and after employee numbers (114-118), and financial data (159-171), as well as testimonies, e.g. by HSBC (177), to communicate the decision to downsize. In light of its use, he intends for the intended audience to both accept the extrinsic proof as valid (ethos) and be moved by it (pathos).

Conclusively, the above appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos are utilised in concert to convince the intended audience that both in the short-term (reacting to current lack of order intake by executing a few, the victims, for the greater good, ensuring survivor employment) and long-term (ensuring competitiveness through the consistent use Asia costs plus freight rule) it is not only logical, but also necessary to downsize, primarily in Denmark.

4.2 Analysis of ‘The Grid’

Having analysed the main part of the empirical data above, the following is a combined analysis of the two editions of ‘The Grid’. However, as they include articles unrelated to the downsizing, especially the March edition, only the sections deemed relevant and representative in answering the problem statement are included in the analysis.
Since the analysis of the press conference revealed that management covered the first three elements of ‘best practice’ rather explicitly and through much elaboration, the December edition can be expected, as mentioned earlier, to have a move structure that centres on the fourth and fifth element concerning social sensitivity and empathy and new psychological contracts. On the other hand, for the March edition, it only make sense in light of its publishing date to expect a move structure that highlights the final element of a (new) vision and mission for the future of Vestas.

4.2.1 Move structure analysis

As opposed to the explicit management communication in the press conference, the employee magazines are far more implicit in terms of downsizing communication, except where management is explicitly quoted. That is, despite management being in editorial control, an editorial team outside management is in charge of composing the magazines, which consist of clearly distinguishable articles or moves. Therefore, the following move structure overviews are illustrated by article headlines

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**Figure 7**
and brief elaborations or quote examples of how their content (the explicit) realise the moves’ managerial sub-goals (the implicit). Based on the same analytical approach as in 4.1.1., the thesis has arrived at the two magazine move structures in figure 7 and 8, realised in the December and March edition respectively.

The headings of the magazines, “Finding the path to efficiency” and “Making green the new black”, and their corresponding themes, “Doing more with less” and “Making Vestas are more sustainable company”, are very indicative of the communicative goal realised by their move structure as they further elaborate the efficiency-through-downsizing rationale and provide a green vision for the future of Vestas, respectively. However, in a survivor communication context, move 5 is of most interest as it, besides dominating the magazine in terms of space and visual and textual impact, can be interpreted to have a dual purpose or sub-goal. First, management can be argued to implicitly communicate the facilitation of a grieving period by allowing victims to vent frustrations, lack of hope, and discontent with the downsizing as well as allowing for “psychologists temporarily appointed ... to help people make order out of chaos and keep their spirits high” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 16). Secondly, the same frustrations uttered by victims, e.g. “We didn’t think it would be so drastic” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 16) and “I had counted on becoming old in this job” (ibid., p. 20), are also away for Vestas to implicitly break with the notion of the traditional psychological contract. In light of this interpretation, it does not come about as coincidental that the Vestas by numbers-move highlights that “70 percent of Vestas employees are under the age of 40” and “25 percent of

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33 See the full article in appendix 5.
34 The word “agrieved [sic]” is also mentioned in the beginning of the article (Vestas, 2010a, p. 16)
Vestas employees have less than a year’s experience with the company ... 60 percent ... less than three” (ibid., p. 30), reflecting a new deal employment reality.

4.2.2 Rhetorical analysis

Along the same rhetorical lines as in the press conference, the first four moves of ‘The Grid’ employ business logic and terminology in the reiteration of the necessity-to-downsize-rationale, exemplified by “Vestas needs to make the most of its resources to stand up to the competition, according to top management” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 6), although with a focus on the implementation (move 4) and reciprocal commitment going forward (move 2). The same reiteration occurs in the interview with Ditlev Engel (move 7) in which he explains that “[management] look[s] at Vestas from a global perspective” (ibid., p. 34) with a view to “improve [its] earnings by reducing capacity costs” (ibid., p. 35) in order to cope with the challenges and even tougher competition facing Vestas in 2011 (ibid.).

However, of particularly interest in terms of the use of rhetoric in a survivor communication context is move 3, “Streamlining is natural”, in which downsizing through the expert opinion35 of Poul Houman Anders, a professor at the Aarhus School of Business, is rhetorically imposed on the intended audience as a “phase [which is] absolutely natural” for Vestas (Vestas, 2010a, p. 9). This notion is not just a claim validated by the situated ethos connected to his profession. Poul Houman Andersen makes a very distinct enthymeme in his view of Vestas’ downsizing as “all fast growing companies in the world experience this streamlining process” and “Vestas is no exception” (ibid.). By means of this appeal to reason, the previously mentioned permanent change in the psychological contract is both implicitly and explicitly communicated. For one, due to the job security inherent in the traditional deal psychological contract, it is intuitively incompatible with the notion of unavoidable streamlining processes. Secondly, given that “flexibility should be a built-in keynote towards higher efficiency”, a part of which “is to make sure that employees are skilled and capable in various ways” (ibid.), it is evident that management adheres to a new deal orientation towards the implicit contracts with its employees.

In connection with the previously mentioned facilitation of a grieving period in move 5, management does not simply allow for victims to give vent to the negative emotions and feelings. It can be argued that it also appeals to affected employees’ sense of pride and commitment to Vestas, exemplified by the sentence: "Although the announced closure has left the locals aggrieved [sic], the

35 Extrinsic proof which again border lines all the appeals.
workers are taking pride in finishing the job” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 16). This notion is further supported by the fact that Ditlev Engel, representing management, recognises that “Vestas has an extremely committed, skilled, and loyal staff” and “[d]isagreements are quite all right [e.g. with the decision to downsize], as long as [everyone] remember to stick together as one Vestas” (ibid., p. 35). Finally, it is from the above perspective, supported by the future green vision and mission of Vestas communicated through the March edition (Vestas, 2011a), that management seem to try to reinvent its situated ethos in order for itself and the survivors to “look at the future with optimism” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 35). However, management’s future estimates and use of the word “optimism” could prove problematic in connection to the survivors when considering the historicality between the press conference and ‘The Grid’.

4.3 Considerations of ‘historicality’

Seeing that “meaning always stands in a horizon context that stretches into the past and into the future”36, each text is analysed with the other two in mind, which is why it was possible to set up expectations in terms of content and rhetoric of each text. For that reason, particularly ‘The Grid’, December edition, is of interest as it addresses the past, i.e. the press conference and the decision to downsize, establishes a grieving period, and communicates how Vestas finds the path to efficiency, leading to an optimistic future. Ironically, this notion of optimism raises some credibility and trust issues in relation to survivors as it is the exact same optimism that allowed for overcapacity and failed market estimates, causing the need to downsize in Denmark, which is used to label the future prospects of Vestas. From this perspective, survivors might question whether management “look[ing] at the future with optimism” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 35) is a good or bad thing. In other words, the notion of optimism might be assigned a different meaning due to its historicality. Furthermore, it is only in the context of past downsizing in Vestas that the above analysis is able to show that management implicitly communicates a new working relationship independent of the old one37, and in that sense adheres to ‘best practice’. Moreover, along the same lines, it is in light of historicality that the overall interpretation of the ‘The Grid’, March edition, is that of a vision and mission for the future Vestas, as it would otherwise simply be an employee magazine focusing on sustainability. In other words, it is only with a view to historicality that the above findings can be identified and measure against the ‘best practice’.

36 Cf. section 1.2.
37 The explicit communication, cf. section 4.2.2., can be a product of the fact that Vestas in this context seems to borderline the notion of having downsized before as previous downsizing occurred outside Denmark.
5. Level of correspondence between findings and model for ‘best practice’

Having analysed how management in Vestas communicated its downsizing and considered historicality, the *extent to which the survivors have been taken into consideration* can be determined by degree to which the findings reflect ‘best practice’. As the above analysis clearly shows, management at Vestas seems to have communicated its downsizing by the book in terms of preventing the survivor syndrome. However, three minor aspects of the findings are questionable as regards correspondence with ‘best practice’. Firstly, it is uncertain whether the communication (and implementation) occurred *within the least amount of time possible to prevent the process from being drawn out*. Secondly, it is difficult to determine the degree of *social sensitivity and empathy* communicated. Thirdly, the grieving period is not explicitly communicated, it is only implied. In spite of this, there seem to be a very high level of correspondence between the findings related to how management at Vestas communicated its downsizing and the model for ‘best practice’.

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38 Cf. agreement between move structures and ‘best practice’ content in appendix 3.
6. Discussion

On the basis of the above analyses, this thesis cannot draw any final conclusions as to what extent any of the findings were deliberate intensions of management in terms of downsizing communication with a focus on survivors as only interviews with management could uncover such definitively. However, the findings do suggest that Vestas was very conscious of the survivor syndrome and the company’s social responsibility in that connection. In support of this, Vestas relies on R&D as well as knowledge management in competing in a global market\(^{39}\), and thus, especially in terms of employee commitment and trust, it makes sense for Vestas to intentionally tailor its downsizing communication to focus on survivor contentment for employee and knowledge retention purposes. In light of this, the high level of correspondence between findings and ‘best practice’ does not appear random since adhering to this model is likely to ensure the highest degree of post-downsizing survivor trust and empowerment.

Furthermore, derived from this thesis it is not possible to rule out the fact that the way in which the empirical data deviate from or is not an exact match to the ‘best practice’ elements is not remedied by other communication efforts or through lower level management communication.

\(^{39}\) Cf. “[the] globalisation of Vestas would not have been possible without the transfer of knowledge from loyal employees to the rest of the company” (Vestas, 2010a, p. 35)
7. Conclusion

Setting out to investigate how executive management at Vestas from a survivor point of view communicated its 2010/2011 downsizing and to what extent it accommodated some of the implications related to the survivor syndrome by identifying the degree of survivor consideration, this thesis started out by establishing a limited theoretical framework providing a survivor context of downsizing communication. Having defined the concept of downsizing and relating it to management communication, the survivor syndrome and some of its implications were accounted for before being related to changing psychological contracts and the importance of organisational justice in survivor communication. In light of these implications, a ‘best practice’ model for the prevention of survivor syndrome, focusing on six communicative elements in ensuring post-downsizing survivor trust and empowerment, was accounted for. This model furthermore provided the parameters against which Vestas’ downsizing communication could be measured and helped guide the succeeding analyses of the empirical data in terms of move structure and rhetorical strategies employed.

Based on the findings of these analyses, this thesis can conclude that management at Vestas through the move structures of central communication efforts communicated three major aspects in connection with the decision to downsize. The press conference, taking a global perspective, communicated the rationale behind the decision to downsize, selection criteria, and the circumstances surrounding the downsizing, the first edition of ‘The Grid’ mainly communicated a grieving period and new deal-orientation to psychological contracts in Vestas, and finally the second edition provided a post-downsizing vision for Vestas. These move structures were achieved through the use of all of Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals by conveying a strong sense of business logic (logos), demonstrating aptitude, social sensitivity and empathy (ethos), as well as emphasising reciprocal pride and commitment (pathos) in convincing the intended audience of the fairness in the decision to downsize. Furthermore, having measured the level of correspondence between the above findings and ‘best practice’, this thesis can further conclude that management at Vestas seems to have communicated its downsizing almost by the book in terms of preventing the survivor syndrome. In other words, survivors have to a very large extent been considered in management’s downsizing communication in Vestas. As a final note, this thesis cannot draw any final conclusion in terms of management intentions nor employee interpretations in relation to Vestas’ downsizing communication; however, the conclusion does suggest that despite the decision to downsize, the notion of people before megawatts is still very much breathing in Vestas.
8. Perspective
Despite the above conclusion, it can only be conjectured about whether or not Vestas in fact succeeded in minimizing the degree of survivor syndrome through the above-mentioned communication efforts, as the focus of this thesis has been on how management at Vestas communicated its downsizing, not how it was in fact received, interpreted, and understood by the affected employees. For that reason, it would be interesting to go from this traditional, functionalistic view communication, in which meaning is inherent in the message, to view the interpretation process of survivors as a central element in the construction of meaning. In other words, not an investigation of what was intended to be communicated by management; however, what was in fact interpreted and understood by the survivors in relation to the downsizing communication.

It could also be interesting to broadening the investigation even further by entering into the social interaction paradigm. By adhering to a social constructivistic perspective, the downsizing communication in Vestas would be considered as constituted by and constructed within the social interaction between management and the individual affected employee. By means of this approach it would be possible to get significant and valuable insight into the interpretation, understanding, and acceptance, if any, of the survivors at Vestas in relation to management’s handling of the decision to downsize. Knowing more about individual survivors’ sense making and co-construction of the downsizing communication from the perspective of social constructivism, one would get a better understanding of how and if the survivor syndrome was actually minimized by means of management communication.
References

Empirical data:


Sources:


