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Designing a Strategic Restructuring Implementation Framework for Organisational Resilience: Insights from an Engineering and Technology Firm

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Abstract

In the face of ongoing technological disruption and global uncertainty, organisational resilience has emerged as a strategic imperative. This study explores the design and implementation of a human-centric restructuring framework to enhance resilience within a global engineering and technology firm. Drawing on qualitative data from 36 semi-structured interviews and 321 employee survey responses, the research identifies core challenges including emotional strain, leadership disconnect, workload imbalance, talent loss, and inadequate planning. Thematic analysis highlights the significant psychological and cultural costs of poorly executed restructuring, especially in the absence of compassionate leadership and strategic alignment. To address these gaps, the study proposes an eight-stage “Re-Focus, Re-Organise, Re-Build” implementation framework grounded in Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Organisational Resilience Theory. The framework integrates cognitive, behavioural, and relational resilience capabilities with ethical and employee-centred practices, such as inclusive communication, work redesign, and structured talent transitions. By embedding compassion, transparency, and strategic intent throughout the restructuring process, the framework seeks to balance business transformation with human well-being. This approach not only mitigates the unintended consequences of change but also positions organisations to emerge more adaptable and engaged. The findings contribute new insights to the literature on responsible restructuring, offering a practical and theoretically informed model that aligns people practices with long-term organisational health and agility.

Keywords

Change management, employee well-being, human resource management, resilience, restructuring

INTRODUCTION

In today’s global and technology-driven business environment, organisations face unprecedented pressures to adapt continuously. Rapid technological advancements such as artificial intelligence and frequent disruptions—from the COVID-19 pandemic to geopolitical and market upheavals—have made continuous change the new reality [1]. Companies are now undergoing multiple transformations in just a few years. In fact, one recent survey found 95% of organisations had experienced at least two major transformations within

a three-year span [2]. In such turbulent conditions, organisational resilience —the capacity to absorb shocks, adapt, and thrive amid uncertainty, has emerged as a critical determinant of long-term success [3]. However, accomplishing this agility is no simple task; traditional change management models are often insufficient for the scale and speed of changes faced today. This reality highlights a pressing need for new frameworks that marry technological innovation with human adaptability, ensuring that constant transformation becomes a source of strength rather than instability [4].

One strategic response gaining prominence is organisational restructuring as a deliberate effort to enhance resilience and competitiveness [4]. Organisational restructuring refers to the comprehensive reshaping of an organisation's structure, roles, and processes to better align with evolving business goals and environmental conditions [5, 6]. This multifaceted process can be triggered by various forces: technological advancements, market shifts, mergers and acquisitions, cost pressures, or growth into new domains [7]. In the era of digital transformation, many firms have had to transition from traditional hierarchies to more agile, decentralised structures, form cross-functional teams, and redefine roles to integrate new digital competencies [5]. Ideally, strategic restructuring is proactive rather than reactive – a means not just to cut costs or react to crises, but to drive innovation, efficiency, and agility in pursuit of long-term sustainability [7]. When executed well, restructuring can lead to improved operational efficiency, faster decision-making, and greater organisational adaptability, thereby bolstering the firm's capacity to weather future shocks [8]. Indeed, alignment of restructuring efforts with overarching strategic objectives is crucial: restructuring is most effective when it reinforces the organisation's strategic vision and goals, rather than being a disconnected cost-cutting exercise [9]. Ultimately, strategic restructuring could be a pathway to enhanced resilience, enabling organisations to not only respond to change but to anticipate and thrive on change as a competitive advantage [10].

The challenge, however, lies in the implementation. Restructuring, especially when it involves workforce changes such as layoffs, redeployments, or re-skilling, can entail significant human and ethical costs [11]. A growing body of evidence shows that poorly managed restructuring can undermine the very resilience it seeks to build [12,13]. Workforce downsizing, a common form of restructuring often yields unintended consequences for all employees, including those who remain with the organisation [14]. When layoffs are handled without due care, “survivors” experience lower morale, increased stress, and reduced trust in management, which can translate into lower productivity and higher turnover intentions among even the retained talent [13, 15]. In other words, ill-conceived restructuring can erode human capital and weaken an organisation's adaptive capacity, leaving it less resilient than before. These challenges highlight why ethical and human-centered considerations must be at the heart of strategic restructuring initiatives [7]. Beyond the immediate financial and structural aspects, leaders must consider the social impact: How will changes affect employee well-being, engagement, and organisational culture in the long run? Neglecting these questions can lead to a scenario where short-term efficiency gains are offset by long-term damage to organisational health and resilience [11, 15].

In response to these concerns, contemporary thought on change management emphasises “responsible” and human-centric restructuring approaches [16]. Rather than defaulting to mass layoffs as a first resort in times of uncertainty, many organisations are exploring strategies to reorganise more ethically and sustainably [8]. One such approach is responsible restructuring, which involves shifting and redeploying talent internally to meet evolving business needs instead of simply cutting headcount. This approach rests on the idea that employees are assets to be developed and reallocated, not just costs to be removed [17]. Companies practicing responsible restructuring identify employees' transferable skills, invest in retraining or upskilling, and reassign staff to new roles or projects where their capabilities can be better utilised [8]. By doing so, organisations can address changing priorities without the loss of institutional knowledge and talent — and they often find that this strategy yields higher morale and trust. Studies have noted that avoiding layoffs through internal mobility and reskilling helps maintain employee motivation and commitment, as people feel

valued and secure [16]. Similarly, research highlight a “humane approach” to restructuring those balances business imperatives with compassion and transparency [7, 18]. A humane restructuring process involves careful planning, open communication, and support systems to help employees navigate the transition [18]. For example, HR leaders are advised to prioritise frequent and honest communication about the reasons for change and the future vision, provide counselling or career guidance to those affected, and actively work to preserve a positive workplace culture throughout the upheaval [16]. Such people-centred practices not only reduce the psychological distress associated with change but also foster an environment where employees are more likely to embrace new structures and roles, thereby facilitating a smoother transition [10]. In essence, ethical restructuring frameworks argue that how changes are implemented is as important as what changes are implemented. By embedding principles of fairness, transparency, and employee involvement into restructuring, organisations can mitigate negative outcomes and even strengthen loyalty and engagement in the process [7, 8].

The role of leadership and strategic human resource management (HRM) in these change efforts cannot be overstated. Leaders serve as the architects and ambassadors of change; their actions set the tone for whether a restructuring is perceived as a strategic evolution or a chaotic disruption [11]. Modern organisations increasingly recognise that successful transformation requires leaders to not just manage operations, but to inspire and engage their people through change [14]. This is particularly relevant in engineering and technology firms, where the pace of innovation is high, and the talent is often specialised. Leaders in such contexts must align restructuring initiatives with a compelling vision of the future and ensure that employees understand the purpose behind the changes [4]. Change leadership involves addressing cultural barriers and “legacy mindsets” – in other words, guiding the organisation to embrace new ways of working and letting go of outdated practices. At the same time, HRM practices provide the toolkit for implementing change in a human-centric way. Research has shown that strategic HRM practices (such as participative decision-making, continuous training, and performance management aligned with change goals) can significantly enhance organisational resilience [3]. By investing in employee development and reskilling programs, organisations prepare their workforce to adapt to new roles and technologies, thereby reinforcing resilience [10]. During restructuring, HRM plays a critical role in managing talent transitions: identifying which skills are needed, which employees can be retrained, and how to redesign jobs and teams accordingly. HR leaders also act as change agents, ensuring that restructuring efforts consider employee feedback and minimise harm [17]. This human-centered change management is not just ethically sound but pragmatically wise, as it sustains productivity and commitment during periods of upheaval.

The current wave of AI-driven transformation adds another layer of complexity to strategic restructuring. As organisations integrate artificial intelligence and automation into their operations, they often must redesign organisational structures and workflows to accommodate these technologies [19]. AI can indeed be a catalyst for positive change—enabling data-driven decision-making, automating routine tasks, and augmenting human capabilities, but it also poses disruptive challenges [20].

The introduction of AI may render certain job roles obsolete while demanding new skills for others, prompting difficult restructuring decisions around redundancies and retraining. Moreover, adopting AI systems brings ethical considerations to the forefront: issues of algorithmic bias, transparency, and the impact on employee autonomy and privacy must be managed [21]. Recent industry research suggests that the major obstacles to successful AI adoption are not technical but organisational and cultural [22]. Given this backdrop, it is evident that organisations—especially in fast-moving engineering and technology sectors—need a strategic restructuring implementation framework that integrates technological opportunities with human-centered change management. Yet, a gap persists in both research and practice: while there is extensive literature on change management models and some on responsible restructuring, there is less guidance on how to operationalise these concepts into a cohesive framework that practitioners can follow in

real-world settings. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by developing a comprehensive strategic restructuring implementation framework for organisational resilience. Grounded in both contemporary literature and insights from an in-depth case study in a global engineering and technology firm, the framework is designed to help leaders navigate the complex intersection of strategic objectives, employee considerations, and technological change.

To guide this research, the following research objective are being explored:

To explore the lived experiences and perceptions of organisational leaders and employees involved in strategic restructuring within an engineering and technology firm.

To investigate the organisational and human factors that influence the development of resilience during restructuring processes.

To interpret how cognitive, behavioural, and relational resilience capabilities are enacted and understood in practice during periods of organisational change.

To construct a contextually grounded strategic restructuring implementation framework that integrates organisational goals with ethical, compassionate, and employee-centered considerations.

By answering these objectives, this study contributes both theoretical and practical value. First, it provides a novel framework that integrates principles from organisational change management, strategic HRM, and information systems to address the contemporary challenges of restructuring in the digital age. Second, through the case analysis of a global engineering/technology firm, it offers empirical insights and lessons learned on managing restructuring processes—illustrating how the proposed framework can be applied in a real-world context and highlighting common pitfalls to avoid. Third, it emphasises an ethical, human-centric approach to change, expanding the discourse on organisational resilience by explicitly incorporating considerations of employee well-being, trust, and inclusion alongside business performance [7, 23]. In doing so, the paper aims to enrich the global conversation on how organisations can transform not just effectively but also responsibly.

The negative impact of organisational restructuring

Organisational restructuring – including layoffs, downsizing, and major reorganisation – often carries hidden costs that extend beyond short-term financial gains [14]. Recent global research has critically highlighted numerous negative impacts on employees and organisation [7, 16]. These effects span psychological contracts, trust and morale, survivor syndrome, emotional strain on implementers, innovation decline, and cultural deterioration [24].

Major restructuring frequently breaches the psychological contract – the unwritten expectations between employer and employees [10, 25]. Studies confirm that organisational change (especially downsizing) is strongly linked to perceived broken promises, undermining the employment relationship [1, 10]. When layoffs or reorganisation occur, employees often feel that the employer failed to honour implicit commitments, resulting in a psychological contract breach [10]. This breach has well-documented effects: it reduces employees' commitment, trust, and willingness to go above and beyond at work [24]. A review by [26] identified loss of trust as a primary outcome of downsizing. This erosion of trust often goes hand-in-hand with declines in morale and engagement, creating a workplace climate of uncertainty and cynicism [24, 26]. Organisational restructuring tends to sap employee morale and engagement [11]. Survivors – the employees who remain after layoffs – frequently experience demoralisation, anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction [17, 26]. Those who keep their jobs after a restructuring often suffer from "survivor syndrome" [14, 27]. This syndrome includes anxiety, guilt, a sense of loss, and even envy or resentment [9,13]. Research

describes survivor syndrome as manifesting in "increased anxiety due to uncertainty, feeling of loss, and risk aversion" in those left behind [7]. Survivors may become risk-averse and withdrawn, reducing overall performance. Symptoms include lower productivity, higher absenteeism, and intent to quit [28]. Restructuring also affects managers and HR professionals, who must plan and execute these changes [11]. Middle managers often act as "executioners" of layoffs, a role that induces intense moral conflict [11, 12]. Qualitative research by [29] shows that managers responsible for downsizing struggle with conflicting roles and values. They must appear professional and loyal to upper management while empathising with subordinates losing jobs [7]. This creates strong internal tension, and managers report emotional strain and stress [29]. Downsizing managers adopt contradictory positions – for example, rational toughness versus supportive empathy – and use coping methods to handle the psychological burden [29]. HR professionals involved in layoffs also experience emotional exhaustion. A multi-stakeholder study by [30] noted a considerable cascading psychological impact on the human resource ecosystem during layoffs.

Organisational Impact

Another critical effect of restructuring is a potential decline in innovation and loss of knowledge. When organisations cut jobs, they risk losing expertise and disrupting team networks [26]. Post-layoff, surviving employees often become risk-averse, hesitant to propose bold ideas for fear of failure in a fragile environment, which can negatively impact innovation [39]. The cumulative effect of breached trust, low morale, survivor anxiety, and leadership strain is deterioration of organisational culture. After a poorly handled restructuring, companies often find their culture marked by fear, cynicism, and lower ethical standards. Trust in leadership may be replaced by skepticism [9, 27] with downsizing-induced psychological contract violations leading to declines in citizenship behaviour and commitment [10].

Modern Restructuring: Work Redesign, Strategy, and Theoretical Integrations

In today's volatile business environment, organisations must restructure in ways that promote agility, resilience, and human-centric outcomes [1]). This means moving beyond old notions of blunt downsizing to more thoughtful approaches [26]. Simply cutting headcount is no longer sufficient for sustainable success [31]. Instead, modern restructuring frameworks emphasise work redesign – rethinking workflows, roles, and processes – alongside a systematic strategic approach that aligns changes with the organisation's long-term vision and culture. By redesigning work and planning change holistically, companies can adapt swiftly to disruptions while maintaining employee well-being and performance [32].

Work redesign focuses on adjusting how work gets done (tasks, processes, and roles) rather than just who does the work. It is often a medium-term strategy to streamline operations by assessing which functions, products, or services can be modified or eliminated for efficiency [31]. Recent evidence confirms that well-planned work redesign interventions tend to improve organisational outcomes – boosting productivity, employee well-being, and overall performance [32]. A systematic review found that top-down work redesign initiatives (such as reorganising job roles or team structures) can enhance employees' capacities and motivation, leading to higher effectiveness [32]. In practice, this might involve redesigning jobs to better utilise technology, introducing more flexible team structures, or reconfiguring workflows for hybrid work arrangements. Such human-centric redesign not only cuts waste and cost but also preserves morale by involving employees in creating more meaningful, balanced jobs, thereby reducing the stress and resistance typically associated with restructuring [14, 31].

Alongside job and process changes, a systematic, strategic approach to restructuring is crucial for long-term success [7]. Systematic change is a long-term strategy that reshapes the organisation's underlying systems, culture, and values to support new ways of working [26]. Rather than ad-hoc cuts, this approach treats restructuring as an integrated part of corporate strategy and continuous improvement. Modern

organisations link restructuring efforts to their strategic goals and organisational development plans, often calling this “right-sizing” or transformation rather than downsizing [6, 7]. A systematic framework might include communicating a clear vision for change, adjusting organisational culture to embrace innovation, and developing new capabilities among staff. Research indicates that successful change efforts require a shared vision, readiness for change, and alignment of the restructure with broader strategy and values [7]. By taking a comprehensive, strategy-driven view – addressing structure, people, and culture together – companies can reduce the risks of change and embed resilience and quality improvements into the fabric of the organisation [5].

Strategic Human Resource Management

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) [33] emphasises aligning human resource practices with the strategic objectives of the organisation [34]. In recent years, scholars have called for a more human-centric approach within SHRM, emphasizing compassion as a core value [35, 36]. Rather than viewing employees as mere resources, integrating compassion means acknowledging their well-being and treating them as strategic assets [50]. This reflects an emerging paradigm shift from self-centred management to a focus on interconnectedness and humanistic values [34]. By embedding compassion into HR policies (e.g. supportive leadership, empathy-driven decision-making, and care-oriented programs), organisations create a culture that respects dignity and alleviates suffering. Research suggests that such a compassionate culture is not just “nice to have” – it directly contributes to better alignment between employees and organisational goals, higher engagement, improved performance, and long-term success [37]. Integrating compassion into SHRM supports strategic alignment by ensuring that the company’s values and HR practices are in sync. In fact, management experts argue that compassionate management needs to be incorporated into an organisation’s aims and goals so that strategies for fostering compassion become an integral part of the business plan [35]. A growing body of research shows that compassionate HR practices boost employee engagement and commitment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, a study in the HRM field found that organisational compassion had a significant positive effect on employees’ mental health and work engagement [38]. The authors demonstrated a chain reaction: compassion from the organisation alleviated stress and improved employees’ psychological well-being, which in turn increased their affective commitment and engagement at work [38]. In essence, when employees feel cared for, they are more emotionally connected to their work and workplace. Another recent study of managers in South Africa reported that receiving compassion from others in the organisation led to higher levels of “secure flourishing” (a state of well-being) and significantly boosted organisational commitment among those managers [39]. These findings reinforce the idea that compassionate HRM – through practices like empathetic communication, supportive counselling, or assistance in personal crises – fosters a work environment where employees feel valued. This heightened morale translates into stronger engagement, higher motivation, and reduced turnover intentions. Even indirectly, compassion reduces workplace stress and burnout, which are known barriers to engagement [35]. SHRM practices, combined with a supportive culture, significantly enhance organisational resilience [40] and sustainable success in turbulent environments [3].

The role of organisational resilience theory in responsible, compassionate, and strategic restructuring

Organisational resilience theory emphasises an entity’s ability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and emerge stronger from disruptions [41]. In the context of corporate restructuring, particularly during economic shocks or industry transformation, resilience theory underlines the need for firms to manage change not only efficiently but ethically and compassionately. Strategic restructuring, when informed by resilience thinking, moves beyond short-term cost-cutting to focus on sustaining organisational capabilities and human capital [42]. [43] argue that relational resilience, the ability to cultivate and draw upon networks of mutual support, underpins such efforts by fostering psychological safety and open communication. In turn, this diminishes

the likelihood of ‘survivor syndrome’ and helps protect the organisation’s social fabric during and after restructuring [5].

Recent research stresses that responsible restructuring practices such as avoiding mass redundancies where possible, offering redeployment, and providing psychological support help protect employee trust and engagement [44]. [44]’s framework for responsible downsizing identifies regulatory compliance, fair procedures, transparent communication, and employment support as key pillars for minimising harm during restructuring. This people-centred approach is crucial, as evidence suggests that organisations which restructure responsibly maintain stronger post-crisis performance and faster recovery trajectories [5, 35].

Compassionate leadership is equally critical. [29] found that managers who displayed empathy during downsizing—acknowledging emotional distress and offering personal support—helped preserve morale and reduce survivor cynicism. Thus, integrating resilience theory into restructuring initiatives ensures that firms not only survive adversity but emerge more unified and adaptable. By embedding compassion and responsibility within strategic decisions, organisations safeguard their human capital, protect their reputations, and build capabilities critical for long-term success in a volatile environment [39].

Strategic restructuring must also preserve the organisation’s capacity for future performance. [43] highlight cognitive resilience as a critical capability that enables firms to reframe threats, assess complex trade-offs, and avoid reactive or short-sighted decisions. This outlook supports thoughtful workforce planning that balances necessary savings with the retention of key skills and institutional knowledge. [42] note that resilient organisations actively seek to retain adaptive capacity such as critical thinkers and cross-functional teams—even amid downsizing, in order to support future innovation. Behavioural resilience complements this by ensuring that the organisation maintains the ability to act flexibly and efficiently throughout restructuring, using learned routines and improvisational practices [41]. Evidence from prior recessions confirms that organisations taking this longer-term, capability-preserving view outperform those that prioritise workforce reductions alone [35].

Finally, resilience-integrated restructuring facilitates a more effective rebound following the disruptive change. Employees who perceive the process to have been fair, transparent, and humane are more likely to remain engaged, motivated, and committed to the organisation’s future [39]. [29] found that empathetic leadership during downsizing played a pivotal role in maintaining team morale and trust. These outcomes are enabled through a combination of relational resilience (which fosters support networks) and behavioural resilience (which facilitates practical action and learning). [43] assert that resilience is not merely about returning to a previous state, but about emerging stronger and more capable—a finding that supports post-restructuring strategies focused on upskilling, internal mobility, and leadership renewal. Furthermore, organisations that adopt a resilience-oriented approach are more likely to sustain long-term performance because they retain both their human capital and their internal legitimacy [35].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research context

This study was conducted within a global engineering and technology firm specialising in digital building infrastructure and smart building solutions. The company operates across multiple international markets and is recognised for integrating intelligent automation, IoT-enabled systems, and advanced energy management technologies into commercial and industrial building environments. Amid rapid technological transformation and shifting market demands, the organisation undertook a series of strategic restructuring initiatives aimed at enhancing agility, innovation, and long-term resilience. These changes occurred in the context of broader

digitalisation efforts within the built environment sector, reflecting the growing need for adaptive organisational capabilities in response to technological disruption and evolving customer expectations.

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design within an interpretivist paradigm [45]. The single-case approach was selected to enable deep, longitudinal exploration of a global engineering and IT firm that underwent four major restructuring processes over a five-year period. This extended timeframe allowed for the capture of rich, context-specific insights that may have been diluted in a comparative multi-case design [64]. The interpretivist orientation assumes that reality is socially constructed and best understood through participants' subjective meanings and lived experiences [47]. The study aimed to understand how employees and "restructuring envoys" perceived, made sense of, and navigated repeated organisational change in real-world conditions. This approach aligns with calls in contemporary human resource and change management literature for in-depth, qualitative inquiry into employees' subjective experiences of transformation [48]. By grounding the research in longitudinal participant narratives and perceptions, the interpretivist case study design enabled a dynamic, insider perspective on how strategic restructuring was experienced and interpreted over time, consistent with an inductive, meaning-oriented research philosophy [49].

Methodologically, the study was inductive in nature, theory and insights emerged from the data rather than being imposed a priori. This stance fits the relatively under-explored phenomenon of serial restructurings; working inductively is appropriate when existing theory is insufficient to explain a complex, context-bound process [46]. Focusing on one instrumental case facilitated a holistic, in-depth understanding of organisational change dynamics over time, aligning with interpretivist goals of contextualized understanding rather than broad generalisation [46]. The design also incorporated multiple data sources to enable triangulation, thereby strengthening the richness and credibility of findings in line with best practices in qualitative HRM research [50].

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select information-rich participants who could provide deep insight into the restructuring phenomena, which included victims, survivors and implementers of restructuring activities [51]. Purposive sampling involves strategically choosing participants based on their knowledge, experience, or role related to the research topic [51, 52]. Inclusion criteria ensured participants had direct experience with at least one if not several of the firm's recent restructuring programs. This criterion-based selection ensured participants could speak to the research questions and enhanced the transferability of results [52].

In addition the study incorporated theoretical sampling as the research progressed. Theoretical sampling is an iterative technique where emerging analysis guides further sampling to explore developing concepts [53]. After an initial wave of interviews, the researcher reviewed preliminary themes and identified areas needing elaboration. This adaptive sampling continued until theoretical saturation was reached i.e., no new themes or insights were emerging from additional data [54, 55]. Theoretical sampling is compatible with an interpretivist case study insofar as it embraces an emergent research design [53].

In this case study, data were collected through 36 semi-structured interviews and 321 free-text comments obtained from an engagement survey. The use of these two methods offers distinct and complementary benefits.

Firstly, semi-structured interviews which typically lasted 60 – 90 minutes provide a flexible yet systematic form of data collection, enabling participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences while allowing the researcher to probe emerging themes [56]. The flexibility of the interviews was crucial, as it allowed the

interviewer to adapt questions based on the evolving theoretical framework, consistent with the principles of theoretical sampling. Semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable in case study research because they capture complex social processes and diverse individual perspectives within a real-world context [46].

Secondly, the engagement survey, offered a structured source of supplementary data. The survey provided insights into broader patterns of employee engagement and satisfaction, enabling the identification of areas that merited further qualitative exploration. Using the survey comments in conjunction with interview data strengthened the depth and breadth of the analysis by allowing for data triangulation, thus enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings [57].

Overall, the integration of the interviews and survey comments contributed to a robust and comprehensive dataset. This combination of sources supported the development of a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of the case, while reinforcing the methodological rigour of the study through the triangulation of different data types [58].

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. To further enrich the case study, documentary evidence was collected, including meeting notes from a lessons-learned session conducted with the management team, and notes from meetings with internal employee representative groups. These documents were collected and used to triangulate and contextualise the interview findings. Triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources or methods to develop a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the research [59].

Throughout the data collection process, ethical and practical considerations were prioritised. Participants were informed that all data would be anonymised to protect their identities and confidentiality. Interviews were conducted with empathy and sensitivity, with informed consent obtained prior to participation, in line with ethical research practices [60] and the ethical approval granted by the relevant research institution. These measures helped to foster a trusting environment, encouraging participants to share open and candid accounts of their experiences, which is crucial for obtaining authentic and rich qualitative data.

Interview transcripts and documentary materials were analysed using thematic analysis, a rigorous yet flexible method for identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data [61,62]. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides a systematic way to handle large volumes of narrative text and is well-aligned with an interpretivist approach [62]. Interview participants were coded as follows:

Table 1: Interview data coding convention

Abbreviation Code	Role profiles	Responsibility in restructuring activities
HR	Human resources	Implementation, coordination, consultation, planning, advisory role
M	Manager	Communication, implementation, consultation
REP	Employee representative	Consultation, advisory role, communication

A reflexive, interpretative form of thematic analysis was prioritised. The credibility of the analysis was further supported through triangulation, member reflections, and peer debriefings [50].

Ensuring Rigor and Trustworthiness

Rigor was ensured through triangulation of data [50], member reflections, peer debriefing, thick description [49], and reflexivity [50]. Reflexivity involved documenting researcher assumptions and analytic decisions in a memo trail. Ethical rigor was maintained by adhering to ethical protocols, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and sensitivity to participant distress. The methodology was carefully designed to align with an interpretivist, qualitative inquiry into organisational change.

FINDINGS

This section presents the core findings that informed the development of the Strategic Restructuring Implementation Framework, presented later in the discussion chapter.

Thematic analysis of interviews and survey comments revealed seven interrelated themes: emotional and psychological stress, leadership and communication gaps, unmanageable workloads, employee exclusion, ineffective talent strategies, cost–purpose misalignment, and planning fatigue. The identified themes are underpinned by rich qualitative data, as summarised in the restructuring data themes table, which presents the key themes alongside supporting evidence and the researcher’s interpretative commentary.

Table 2: Primary data themes and researcher’s commentary

Key themes	Supporting Evidence (Survey and Interviews)	Interpretation
Emotional Intelligence & Psychological Safety	Survey: 'We work in a long hours culture... my health and relationships are under constant strain.' Survey: 'I regularly work 60–70 hours a week just to try and do the day job.' Interview: 'I suffered and developed acute stress from implementing redundancies. I had to get help from a psychologist.' (HR2) Interview: 'I put on two and a half stone as a result... had no inclination or time to go to the gym.' (M6)	Across multiple data sources, participants conveyed high levels of emotional distress linked to restructuring roles. Survey respondents reported symptoms of burnout, health decline, and stress spillover into their personal. This emotional cost was a consistent and powerful signal across the data, underscoring the need for trauma-informed and psychologically safe restructuring strategies.
Leadership, Communication & Vision	Survey: 'More leadership required at ground level.' Survey: 'Open and honest communication, not just towing the party line.' Interview: 'Leadership must be authentic and present—talk to people, be there.' (HR1) Interview: 'There was no successful turnaround without a visible leader.' (M2)	Survey data strongly indicated a perception of disengaged or inaccessible leadership during change processes. The absence of clear strategic messaging and visible leadership contributed to uncertainty, fear, and resistance, particularly during high-stakes transformation
Work Design & Workload Pressure	Survey: 'I am working very hard covering 3 people’s jobs due to leavers.' Survey: 'One person covering three people’s jobs leads to burnout.' Interview: 'We feel overwhelmed, driven by a lack of resources.' (Workshop participants) Interview: 'We took people out with no plan how to manage the workload.' (M9)	Findings revealed a chronic imbalance between workload expectations and available resources. The withdrawal of staff was frequently accompanied by poor post-restructure capacity planning. Participant experiences point to significant risks of burnout and performance degradation, particularly in the absence of

		restructured work designs and clear prioritisation frameworks.
Employee Voice & Inclusion	<p>Survey: 'Nobody really listens to employees who could help improve things.'</p> <p>Survey: 'Staff dialogue is a tick-box exercise.'</p> <p>Interview: 'If I think I've not done enough... I feel like I've let that individual down.' (REP1)</p> <p>Interview: 'Employee representatives felt moral responsibility without influence.' (REP3)</p>	The data surfaced widespread concerns about tokenistic consultation and the suppression of employee input. The absence of genuine two-way engagement appears to have eroded trust and weakened the relational fabric between staff and leadership.
Outplacement, Retraining & Talent Retention	<p>Survey: 'More attention and focus needs to be given to retaining staff.'</p> <p>Survey: 'We lose highly skilled and irreplaceable people.'</p> <p>Interview: 'Out of the 60, 56 were voluntary, and everyone was excited.' (HR5)</p> <p>Interview: 'We should have done more to save costs before getting to redundancies.' (M2)</p>	Concerns were raised about the departure of skilled staff and the lack of structured transition support. These mixed results highlight inconsistent application of outplacement, training, and redeployment strategies—emphasising the need for structured, equitable exit design.
Operational Cost Management & Strategic Fit	<p>Survey: 'Fancy buildings don't create revenue; skilled and motivated employees do.'</p> <p>Survey: 'Short-term profit obsession is costing us skilled workers.'</p> <p>Interview: 'We had to no-bid orders due to lack of skilled staff.' (Survey – Retention)</p>	Survey and interview participants frequently cited a disconnect between short-term cost-saving measures and long-term business needs. The pattern suggests a need for restructuring strategies that centre long-term strategic fit over immediate cost minimisation.
Continuous Evaluation & Planning	<p>Survey: 'We make the same mistakes over and over again.'</p> <p>Survey: 'We are constantly changing with no clarity or follow-through.'</p> <p>Interview: 'It felt like 6–9 months of additional pressure... It drains your energy... sucks the life out of you.' (M3)</p> <p>Interview: 'No clear rationale, rushed planning, poor stakeholder involvement.' (M5, HR3)</p>	Participants voiced frustration over repeated, ill-timed restructures with poor planning. Rushed timelines and insufficient stakeholder input were commonly cited concerns, indicating a gap in adaptive, consultative project planning and evaluation processes.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of employees and restructuring envoys during organisational change and to generate an evidence-informed framework to guide future restructuring efforts. Through qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and survey comments, as well as secondary data, seven interrelated challenges emerged, spanning emotional strain, leadership disconnects, excessive

workload, lack of employee agency, talent loss, short-termism in financial planning, and weak evaluation mechanisms. These findings highlighted systemic and relational failures in how restructuring had previously been designed and delivered.

In direct response to these findings, as illustrated in Figure 1, the framework unfolds in three sequential phases comprising eight key stages: from strategic reassessment and stakeholder engagement through to post-restructuring renewal and learning.

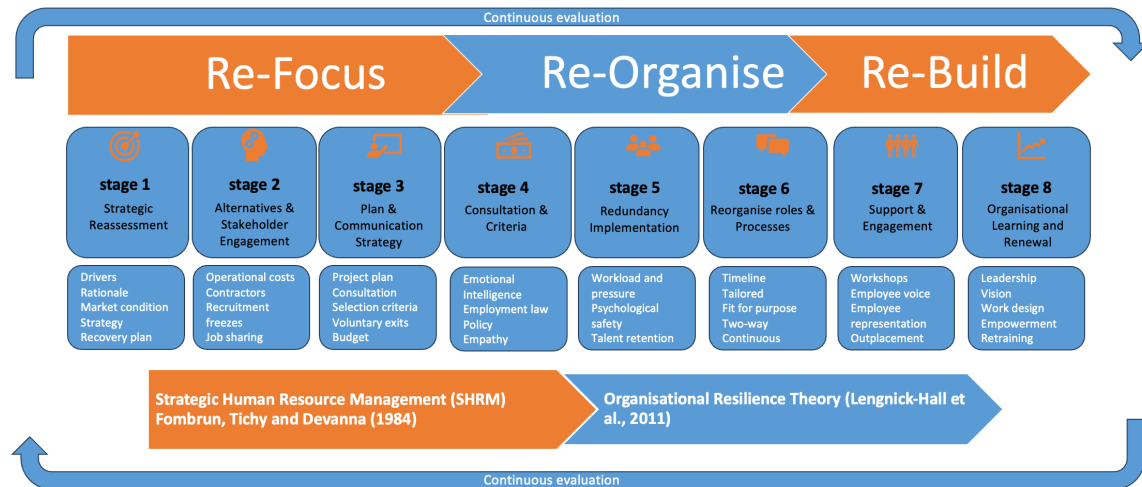


Figure 1. Strategic Restructuring Implementation Framework

The framework integrates two core theoretical foundations: SHRM [33] and organisational resilience theory [43]. The SHRM foundation ensures that restructuring efforts align with long-term organisational goals and people strategies. The resilience perspective contributes the critical capabilities—cognitive, behavioural, and relational—that enable organisations to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to disruption in a sustainable and human-centered manner.

The empirical data from this study affirm the importance of embedding these capabilities at each restructuring stage and further validate the relevance of the framework in practice.

Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Safety, and Relational Resilience

Participants across interviews and surveys described intense emotional strain linked to restructuring. Reports of burnout, health deterioration, and psychological distress were consistent: “I suffered and developed acute stress from implementing redundancies” (HR2). These findings highlight deficits in relational resilience, especially in providing trauma-informed support during and after structural change [43].

The framework’s Stage 5 (Redundancy Implementation) and Stage 7 (Support & Engagement) explicitly call for psychological safety and empathetic leadership, reflecting SHRM’s increasing emphasis on compassionate management [36, 35]. Integrating these elements promotes relational strength and rebuilds trust post-restructuring.

Leadership, Communication, and Cognitive Resilience

Survey respondents reported an absence of strategic visibility and transparent communication: “Open and honest communication, not just towing the party line.” Cognitive resilience is needed in Stage 1 (Strategic Reassessment) and Stage 3 (Plan & Communication Strategy) to help leaders frame restructuring with foresight, clarity, and a consistent narrative [43].

This aligns with SHRM literature advocating for authentic, values-driven leadership that is both visible and inclusive during transformation [34]. The data reinforce the necessity of investing in leadership capability as a strategic resource—not only to lead change but to model resilience.

Work Design, Workload, and Behavioural Resilience

Participants described being overburdened due to insufficient resource planning: “I am working very hard covering 3 people’s jobs due to leavers.” This finding highlights weaknesses in behavioural resilience, particularly in Stage 6 (Reorganise Roles & Processes). Organisations often failed to anticipate the operational implications of headcount reductions, neglecting to redesign workflows or redistribute responsibilities sustainably.

The framework responds by incorporating practical work design elements informed by SHRM (e.g., job analysis, workload balancing, and talent mapping). SHRM principles emphasise the importance of maintaining operational continuity and staff wellbeing during and after restructures [33].

Voice, Inclusion, and Relational Fracture

Participants reported a lack of meaningful engagement, with one noting: “Employee representatives felt moral responsibility without influence.” This erosion of employee voice is a breakdown of relational resilience and contradicts SHRM’s commitment to inclusive decision-making [38]. Stage 2 (Alternatives & Stakeholder Engagement) and Stage 4 (Consultation & Criteria) within the framework foreground two-way communication and consultation, designed to rebuild trust and moral legitimacy.

Talent Management, Outplacement, and Strategic Fit

Concerns about the exit of skilled talent without redeployment strategies were common: “We lose highly skilled and irreplaceable people.” The uneven application of outplacement and reskilling reflects gaps in behavioural resilience and SHRM alignment. Stage 7 and Stage 8 of the framework directly address this by integrating talent retention, retraining, and succession planning—reaffirming that people are not disposable but strategic enablers of post-change recovery [3].

Planning, Timelines, and Continuous Learning

Finally, rushed implementation was a recurring frustration: “We make the same mistakes over and over again.” Stage 8 (Organisational Learning & Renewal) in the framework responds by embedding continuous evaluation, reflecting both resilience theory [41] and SHRM’s strategic cycle of planning, implementation, and review [33]. Incorporating feedback loops ensures that organisations avoid reactive restructuring cycles and instead build institutional learning.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative, interpretivist case study set out to investigate strategic restructuring in an engineering and technology firm. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and open-ended engagement survey responses, it explored the human dynamics of organisational change and the role of resilience within a restructuring context. This conclusion summarises how the four research objectives were addressed, outlines key

contributions to theory and practice, discusses the study's limitations, and provides directions for future research.

Exploring lived experiences during restructuring, objective 1 was met as follows: The study successfully illuminated the lived experiences and perceptions of organisational leaders and employees undergoing restructuring. Through reflexive thematic analysis [62], key themes such as emotional strain, leadership visibility, and trust in decision-making were surfaced. These nuanced insights fulfilled objective 1 by offering a rich understanding of how restructuring was subjectively experienced, in line with the study's interpretivist foundations. Investigating organisational and human resilience factors, objective 2 was achieved through the identification of several critical enablers and barriers to resilience. Factors such as psychologically safe leadership, employee involvement, and effective workload design were all found to foster resilience. Conversely, rushed implementation, tokenistic consultation, and lack of clarity impeded it. The findings support existing literature on resilience capacities [43], demonstrating how human factors shape organisational adaptability during change.

Interpreting the enactment of resilience capabilities, objective 3 was met as follows: The study observed how cognitive, behavioural, and relational resilience capabilities were enacted in real-world restructuring. Cognitive resilience was evident in employees' and managers' sensemaking; behavioural resilience was demonstrated through adaptability and problem-solving; and relational resilience emerged through emotional support and team cohesion. These findings bring empirical depth to resilience theory by showing how such capabilities are understood and practised on the ground. Constructing a strategic and compassionate implementation framework, objective 4 was achieved through the development of a practical eight-stage implementation framework: "Re-Focus, Re-Organise, Re-Build"[7]. Grounded in empirical findings and informed by SHRM [33] and resilience literature, the framework outlines how organisations can integrate strategic intent with ethical, compassionate, and employee-centred considerations throughout the restructuring process.

Contribution to Theory

This study makes three main contributions to academic theory. It extends Strategic Human Resource Management theory by integrating resilience and compassion into the restructuring domain. While classical SHRM models emphasise alignment between HR practices and business strategy [33], this study shows that aligning HR with employee well-being and relational trust is equally critical during disruptive change. The findings reinforce recent calls for more compassionate, human-centered approaches to SHRM [35]. In addition, the research offers a grounded illustration of how organisational resilience capabilities including cognitive, behavioural, and relational—are enacted during restructuring. It expands on the framework proposed by [43] by revealing how resilience is constructed in practice through leadership behaviours, employee relationships, and adaptive routines. The "Re-Focus, Re-Organise, Re-Build" framework provides a structured yet adaptable guide for embedding resilience and strategic alignment throughout organisational restructuring. As such, it contributes a theoretically informed and empirically derived framework that links resilience, HRM, and change management.

Contribution to Practice

Practically, the study offers a number of actionable insights for HR professionals, senior leaders, and restructuring consultants. The findings underscore the importance of designing HR practices that not only support operational objectives but also build emotional, social, and adaptive resilience in the workforce. Interventions such as workload redesign, emotional support, retraining programmes, and transparent communication can mitigate the psychological costs of restructuring. In addition, the study demonstrates that

a compassionate approach is not only ethical but also strategic. Acts of transparency, dignity, and inclusion protect trust and morale—key ingredients for post-change recovery. Compassion, therefore, should be treated not as a ‘soft’ counterpoint to strategy, but as a lever for sustainable change implementation. The proposed implementation framework offers HR and change leaders a clear and adaptable roadmap for structuring responsible restructuring efforts. Its eight stages—from strategic reassessment to organisational renewal—highlight critical interventions at each phase, including leadership visibility, employee voice, and outplacement support.

Research Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. First, as a single-case study, its findings are context-specific and may not be generalisable across all organisational types, sectors, or cultures. Second, the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry means that findings reflect participants' perceptions, which may be influenced by recall bias or role-based perspectives. While reflexivity and triangulation enhanced credibility, alternative interpretations may exist. Lastly, external factors such as market conditions or policy shifts, which may have influenced restructuring outcomes, were not within the study's primary scope.

Future Research

Future research could build on this study by conducting comparative case studies across different sectors or national contexts to test the applicability of the proposed framework and uncover context-specific dynamics. Further investigation into targeted resilience interventions—such as leadership coaching, peer support initiatives, or emotional intelligence training—could clarify their direct influence on restructuring outcomes. Additionally, extending the framework to other forms of strategic change, including mergers, digital transformation, or crisis recovery, would help evaluate its broader relevance and adaptability. Finally, future studies could adopt cross-disciplinary perspectives by integrating insights from organisational psychology or ethics with Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), offering a more nuanced understanding of compassionate restructuring and its ethical implications. As noted by [35], integrating human-centric values and interdisciplinary approaches into HRM research can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of organisational transformation initiatives.

This study has demonstrated that strategic restructuring is not merely a logistical or financial exercise—it is a deeply human one. By attending to the lived realities of employees and restructuring envoys, the research has revealed both the costs and capacities involved in organisational change. The integration of SHRM and resilience theory underscores that long-term success lies not only in sound planning but also in the compassion, adaptability, and inclusion shown throughout the process. Ultimately, organisations that lead change with both strategy and humanity are better positioned to not only survive, but to rebuild stronger, more connected, and more resilient futures.

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