

# Victims, survivors and the emergence of 'endurers' as a reflection of shifting goals in the management of redeployment

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## Abstract

The victim and survivor debate conceptualises employees impacted by restructuring as one or the other. A key contribution of this study is the identification of a conceptually distinct category of employee impacted by restructuring, the *endurer*. Endurers are survivors who share many of the experiences of victims, occupying a space in-between the two and not easily understood as either. Endurers experience redundancy of role yet retention of employment. This creates specific needs that pose new challenges for the human resource (HR) function. Through examining the HR function's implementation of an internal redeployment strategy at SteelCo, the study reveals the displacement of substantive goals by institutional goals, and the impact this has on endurers. The analysis of endurers' experiences also offers a conceptual lens for understanding changes to the psychological contract in the context of restructuring.

## KEYWORDS

downsizing, psychological contract, redeployment, redundancy, restructuring, steel industry, survivors, victims

**Practitioner notes****What we currently know?**

1. Employees affected by restructuring are characterised as victims or survivors.
2. There is limited research focus on internal redeployment.
3. Human resource's (HR) role in redeployment is typically subsumed by wider debates on restructuring.
4. The way restructuring is managed is crucial for psychological contract.

**What the paper adds?**

1. Redeployees are survivors who share characteristics of victims: hence endurers.
2. Endurers have specific needs and create distinct challenges for HR.
3. Contextual factors constrain HR's ability to meet goals and needs of endurers.
4. Danger of goal displacement in prioritising institutional over substantive goals.

**Implications for practitioners:**

1. HR must address needs of redeployees to maintain a positive psychological contract.
2. Redeployment practices must be continuously reviewed to avoid goal displacement.
3. A stakeholder approach is important to the management of restructuring.
4. A concern for the outcomes of redeployees connects to EU policy.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the theorisation of the consequences of restructuring, the victims and survivors debate has played a prominent role. Traditionally, employees affected by redundancy are conceptualised in the literature as either victims, who exit the organisation, or survivors who retain employment (De Vries & Balazs, 1997; Sahdev, 2003). Less attention has been paid to the experiences of employees who face internal redeployment. The experiences of redeployees tend to be subsumed under wider discussion of the experiences of survivors. However, redeployees occupy an intermediate space in which they suffer redundancy *yet also* retain employment, sharing characteristics of both victims and survivors but not easily described as either.

In the UK context, redundancy legislation requires employers to offer affected employees suitable, internal, alternative employment. The prevalence of internal redeployment is illustrated in the UK Workplace Employment Relations Study data where 14% of employers developed strategies for internal redeployment as a means of managing restructuring (WERS, 2011). Case study research also demonstrates that internal redeployment has been a feature of the UK steel and automobile sectors (Johnstone, 2019; McLachlan, MacKenzie, & Greenwood, 2019), along with examples of its use as part of restructuring exercises in organisations such as the National Grid and BT (MacKenzie, 2000; Tarren, Potter, & Moore, 2009) and across Europe more generally (Stuart, Forde, MacKenzie, & Wallis, 2007). Redeployees have, however, specific needs distinct from victims and survivors. Understanding the experiences of redeployees illuminates the demands placed on the human resource (HR) function when managing restructuring.

To address these issues, this paper presents a study of internal redeployment at a UK subsidiary of a multinational steel company (SteelCo). A methodological strength of the research was its synchronicity, witnessing the restructuring process *as it was occurring*, drawing on data from interviews and observations at meetings

throughout. Through the empirical exploration of how the implementation of an internal redeployment strategy affects redeployees, the study addresses the research question: *is the theorisation of victims and survivors adequate for understanding experiences of redeployment?*

The study integrates individual and organisational levels of analysis, exploring the enactment of associated HR processes and the subsequent outcomes for redeployees. Drawing on the theory of goal alignment (Zald & Ash, 1966), analysis at the organisational level reveals the difficulties faced by the HR function in achieving specific institutional and substantive goals of restructuring as the process progressed. Findings show that inherent structural and temporal tensions related to HR's strategy led to shifting goals over time and how this goal realignment shaped the experiences of redeployees.

Building on research by Armstrong-Stassen (2002) and Sverke, Naswell, and Hellgren (2005), analysis at the individual level explores the implications of redeployees' experience of redundancy of role yet retention of employment within an organisation. By abstracting from the experience of redeployees, the analysis identifies a conceptually discrete category of the *endurer*, contributing to the theorisation of 'victims' and 'survivors' (De Vries & Balasz, 1997; Sahdev, 2003). The term 'endurer' parallels and is relational to the theoretical categories of 'victim' and 'survivor', adhering to a consistent metaphor that reflects a variety of restructuring experiences. Yet endurers are unique because they suffer the impact of redundancy and the specific effects of internal redeployment. The term endurer captures the essence of withstanding a difficult restructuring process, emerging from it damaged by redundancy but prevailing because of redeployment, albeit with specific needs.

The specific needs of endurers present strategic and operational challenges for the HR function. Theoretically, the conclusions contribute to an understanding of implications for the maintenance of a positive psychological contract in the context of restructuring. The emergence of endurers involved a changed psychological contract, based on antecedent promises associated with the substantive goals of the redeployment process, which was put at risk by the displacement of substantive goals by institutional goals.

The study proceeds as follows. First, a literature review is presented. Next is the context of SteelCo and methodology is presented. Through the findings, SteelCo's HR's internal redeployment strategy and employee experiences are analysed. The study concludes with further discussion on endurers and managing redeployment, including connections to practice and policy.

## 1.1 | Literature review

Whilst evidence on the impact of restructuring on organisational performance is equivocal (Datta, Guthrie, Basuil, & Pandey, 2010), research suggests that restructuring can harm firms if implementation lacks a strategic focus on humanising motivational practices for employees (Cregan, Kulik, Johnston, & Bartram, 2020). Understanding the ways, employees are impacted by restructuring is therefore of strategic importance. A key debate in the downsizing and restructuring literature surrounds the conceptualisation of affected employees as either 'victims' or 'survivors' (De Vries & Balazs, 1997). Victims are typically employees who exit an organisation. In contrast, survivors remain employed in the same role at the organisation. Survivors ostensibly fare better than victims, given they do not lose their jobs, yet the effects of restructuring can be negative. Research demonstrates both groups experience negative effects related to personal well-being, feelings of injustice, separation from colleagues and psychological contract violation (Devine, Reay, Stainton, & Collins-Nakai, 2003, Donnelly & Scholarios, 1998; Ebadan & Winstanley, 1997; Paulsen et al., 2005).

Survivors' negative experiences often relate to *survivors' syndrome* (Brockner et al., 2004), which refers to negative work-related attitudes that include reduced employee morale, distrust towards management, fears for job security, reduced organisational commitment and poor job satisfaction (De Vries & Balazs, 1997; Sahdev, 2003, 2004). Additional negative experiences are associated with role expansion and work intensification, to compensate

for redundancies. A key premise within the literature is that survivors remain in the same role. Survivors rarely emerge unharmed and may even fare worse than victims who can make a 'clean break' and develop satisfying lives externally (Devine et al., 2003).

Sverke et al. (2005) recognise that survivors have been considered a homogenous group. Their research demonstrates that survivors with changed work content through redeployment are more negatively affected in relation to job satisfaction, stress levels and health-related outcomes than those that continue in the same role. Similarly, work by Armstrong-Stassen (2002) has compared outcomes between redeployees and their colleagues, noting that redeployees report a greater decline in organisational trust, commitment and morale. This study builds on the work by Sverke et al. (2005) and Armstrong-Stassen (2002), offering insight into how the dynamics of internal redeployment processes shape their experiences.

Research has also identified how the experience of restructuring can cause perceptions of psychological contract violation amongst employees (Conway, Kiefer, Hartley, & Briner, 2014). Restructuring presents a unique context in which current and future exchange relationships between employee and employer regarding job security and career progression are thrown into sharp relief (Clarke, 2013), with potential consequences for employee attitudes and behaviours if exchange expectations are not honoured (Kraak, Lakshman, & Griep, 2020; Rosseau, 1995). A central feature of psychological contract theory, a two-way exchange, involves the promises employees infer from organisations in relation to the employment relationship (Cassar, Briner, & Buttigieg, 2016). Survivor's expectations of fair procedure and treatment thus shape perceptions of psychological contract violation (Arshad & Sparrow, 2010). Therefore, the way restructuring is implemented affects the nature of the psychological contract for employees who 'survive' restructuring. This presents a strategic role for HR in attending to the careers of employees in the context of instability caused by episodic restructuring (Clarke, 2013).

The implementation of demonstrably 'just' and 'fair' processes has been considered strategically important for the maintenance of a positive psychological contract post-restructuring (Teague & Roche, 2014, p. 179). For example, Johnstone (2019) shows that avoiding compulsory redundancies are typically viewed by HR as a more responsible way of managing restructuring, ameliorating potentially negative impacts on job insecurity, status and tenure. The outcomes of internal redeployment can hence shape the nature of psychological contracts post-restructuring. Redeployment as an alternative to compulsory redundancies tends to be subsumed, however, within wider discussions of alternative HR arrangements for managing restructuring, such as voluntary redundancy, early retirement or other employability initiatives (Bergström & Arman, 2017; Parzefall, 2012).

Returning to Teague and Roche's (2014) discussion of strategic HR practices designed to counter negative attitudes amongst survivors, a distinction is made between 'technical' and 'behavioural' practices. Technical practices seek to achieve managerial objectives, which are typically financial, and relate to metrics such as labour cost savings and headcount reduction. In contrast, behavioural practices aim to improve attitudes amongst employees, where promises are made by HR that seek to maintain a positive psychological contract in an otherwise difficult restructuring scenario. Technical and behavioural practices may also act as complementary and interacting 'bundles' of HR practices, existing side by side throughout a restructuring process. The goals of HR strategy that may underlie such practices are an analytical focus of this study.

Building on this distinction, this study supplements Teague and Roche's (2014) research into HR's management of restructuring. This approach echoes theoretical work elsewhere on goal alignment, to suggest that technical practices serve the *institutional* goals of restructuring, and behavioural the *substantive* (MacKenzie, Forde, & Ciupijus, 2012; Zald & Ash, 1966). Redeployees suffer redundancy of role often because of cost reduction measures and placement in a new role which serve institutional goals, yet are expected to maintain a positive psychological contract in their redeployed role through high motivation, morale and commitment, which reflect substantive goals. The experience of redeployees offers a lens through which to observe HR's pursuit of institutional and substantive goals as restructuring unfolds, as redeployees are exposed to both the

imperatives and consequences of alignment between the two. The experience of redeployees thus poses strategic and practical questions for HR in achieving institutional and substantive goals connected to internal redeployment.

## 2 | METHODS

The research is based on a case study of SteelCo, which conducted two restructuring programmes between 2011 and 2015 with 1700 redundancies. The empirical focus is the implementation of HR's internal redeployment strategy and the consequences for affected employees. Internal redeployment has been central to SteelCo's approach to restructuring and provides a critical case in which to examine the experiences of redeployees (Hamel, Dufor, & Fortin, 1993). Data collection consisted of 59 semi-structured interviews, non-participation observation at meetings between HR staff, management and trade unions and the review of internal IT documentary evidence. Twenty-nine interviewees were involved in implementing the internal redeployment process—senior management, HR staff and senior union officials—and 30 interviewees were affected by restructuring.

A novel feature of the research was gaining access to the restructuring process *as it was occurring*, providing a 'real time', synchronous, view of its implementation. Interviews with members from senior management, HR staff and union officials took place as restructuring unfolded, affording valuable insight into the strategic imperatives of SteelCo's internal redeployment process. Access was secured by two gatekeepers: an HR assistant and a senior union official. Observations from attendance at governance and redeployment meetings added methodological strength to the research, providing a richer, more naturalistic understanding of the process, and aided analysis in terms of the shifting goals.

Interviews with employees took place 8 months after restructuring and focused on experiences of redeployment. The sample involved redundant and redeployees who worked across steel production, engineering workshops, the finance department and clerical roles. The tenure of interviewees ranged from 5 to 35 years and ages ranged from 28 to 60. The interviewees included 22 male employees and eight female employees, 10 male union officials, five male senior managers, 10 female HR representatives and four male HR representatives. Interviews explored the social and material impact of redundancy, types of jobs available through redeployment, interactions with HR staff and unions and the challenges associated with switching jobs. Discussions with redeployees were essential to understanding the concrete effects of redeployment and constructed a picture of the relationship between HR strategy and employee outcomes. Interviews lasted 45 min to 2 h; they were transcribed and analysed using Nvivo software.

Given the nature of the aims an inductive, qualitative research design was adopted to explore employees' experiences of internal redeployment. Analytical themes were developed through iteration between data and extant research, with the objective of identifying goals of internal redeployment along with employees' experiences that were different and similar to victims and survivors. Coding of interview data took a 'fracturing' approach, whereby a primary coding cycle established a large number of nodes to provide a multi-textured picture of the process, capturing the variety of employee experiences. A secondary coding cycle identified themes most relevant to the experience of redeployment. A characterisation of endurers as distinct from victims and survivors emerged, revealing the dynamics of how HR's implementation of redeployment shaped their experiences.

Supplementary, secondary data were collected from intranet recruitment software, company restructuring policies, internal redeployment flow charts, email communiques and an internal newspaper. The intranet recruitment software objectively mapped vacancies endurers were applying for and being matched to, and the dates new internal vacancies were advertised. Data showed the number of applications from redeployees throughout the process and allowed access to their recruitment material (CVs, interviews and application forms). These data permitted triangulation of findings from the interviews and observations.

### 3 | FINDINGS

#### 3.1 | SteelCo's internal redeployment strategy

SteelCo's internal redeployment strategy was enacted through an HR process termed 'cross-matching'. Cross-matching placed redundant employees into vacant roles elsewhere in the organisation. This approach reflected a long-standing collective agreement with trade unions to avoid compulsory redundancies, established in the late 1970s amid waves of employment restructuring in the then nationalised steel industry. The agreement was renewed in 1992 in correspondence with the UK redundancy legislation. SteelCo was the dominant private employer in the region, meaning that offering redeployment protected employees against the scarcity of analogous jobs in the external labour market.

A 'cross-match committee' of HR managers and senior union officials administered the redeployment process. HR and unions claimed cross-matching represented a responsible approach to managing restructuring. Mike, the HR director, noted the importance of looking after employees by finding them alternative employment:

It's part of who we [SteelCo] are, to be responsible and support people before they make that change... maybe that's a tradition of this industry as we take these things seriously... they [employees] expect us to put effort into handling restructuring.

SteelCo's restructuring process is analysed in relation to the interplay between *institutional* and *substantive* goals (Zald & Ash, 1966). Institutional goals reflected managerial imperatives typical of restructuring and aimed at achieving quantitative metrics of headcount reduction and £120m in cost savings. Avoiding compulsory redundancies was identified as an important institutional goal for SteelCo that honoured the collective agreement and was celebrated as a measure of the success of restructuring. Cross-matching thus facilitated the institutional objectives of the process.

Substantive goals were reflected in restructuring practices and can be understood as seeking to maintain a positive psychological contract between SteelCo and the workforce throughout and beyond the process. Senior management and HR emphasised that despite the difficult decision of redundancies promises were made by SteelCo aiming to mitigate negative attitudes amongst employees, an approach commensurate with avoiding perceived psychological contract violation. This was illustrated by Steve, a senior union official on the cross-match committee:

The first thing we say to people is it isn't them going, it's their role. We'll always do everything we can to find them something else. That tends to settle them a bit.

The commitment to no compulsory redundancies therefore straddled *both* substantive and institutional goals of the process. Conducting restructuring in a fair and just manner, and avoiding compulsory redundancies, was viewed as important in maintaining employee motivation and commitment. Cross-matching was the key internal mechanism through which HR addressed substantive goals and pledged that employees would be redeployed into suitable roles based on existing skill sets and competencies. Attached was the assurance that where employees were placed into a role for which they were not trained, HR were responsible for providing relevant retraining or reskilling. Employees were entitled to a 4-week trial period, as per the UK legislation, that gave them the opportunity to continue in the redeployed role or be placed elsewhere if they deemed it unsuitable. Richard, a senior HR manager on the cross-match committee, explained the rationale behind substantive goals:

We try and go the extra mile ... but it's worth it because if you can give someone who wants to remain in employment a bit of fulfilment then that buys you a bit of loyalty in the long run. They [employees] see it as a new opportunity and give something back.

### 3.2 | Timeline and the goals of restructuring

The temporal dimension to HR's redeployment strategy was central to the dynamic between institutional and substantive goals. There were five stages. The first stage involved senior management and HR establishing the new organisational structure, and new roles within it, then selecting departments to be restructured. The new structure reflected the strategic response to the operational imperatives for restructuring, which created vacancies for redeployment.

Employees knew from the first stage which departments faced restructuring, though not whether specific roles were redundant. In the second stage, all employees at SteelCo attended an aspiration interview with HR and senior union representatives to discuss, were they affected, whether they wished to take voluntary redundancy or pursue internal redeployment. The aspiration interviews aided the cross-match process by identifying where vacancies through volunteers might arise across departments. There were hence two sources of vacancies for redeployment, roles created by the new organisational structure and through backfilling roles vacated through voluntary redundancies. As discussed below, the dual source of vacancies had implications for how HR managed the goals of the restructuring further along the process.

Employees that opted for internal redeployment selected their top three job preferences from a vacancy list. As not all vacancies from volunteers were known at this stage, employees were also asked whether they would be willing to enter what HR called the 'pot of opportunity', which meant possibly taking redeployment into any department as and when vacancies arose from voluntary redundancies. Employees were encouraged to identify jobs and departments most suited to their skill set. Offering employees the opportunity to select preferences reflected the substantive goals of the process. Management and HR stressed this demonstrated a proactive and fair approach to managing the impact on employees, affording them a sense of agency in the process to decide to leave SteelCo or decide to stay, with some influence over their redeployment destination. As Barry, a HR advisor involved in the aspiration interviews, celebrated:

Employees see redundancy and think life is crap. But that's [aspiration interviews] about turning it into a positive that says there's an opportunity for them to do something different, thinking about new skills, roles and responsibilities.

A third stage, which ran concurrently with the second, involved selecting the exact roles to be made redundant in departments selected for restructuring. The existing organisational structure was compared with the proposed new one to determine which roles were no longer required. In addition, an employee evaluation exercise was completed by HR in consultation with departmental managers. The evaluation exercise assigned employees a score based on criteria related to skills and competencies, which informed the cross-match committee in finding suitable redeployment. HR re-emphasised to employees that redeployment was an opportunity to learn new skills, further reflecting substantive aspects of the process aimed at a positive attitudinal outcome.

The fourth stage was where actual redeployment commenced. The cross-match committee met weekly with the aim of placing redeployees into vacant roles. Once a match was identified, redeployees proceeded with an application process that involved submitting a CV, which led to a job interview with HR and departmental managers. Support with applications was offered by HR and unions to increase chances of successful redeployment. Some redeployees were quickly matched into vacancies in the new organisational structure,

especially where a functional similarity existed between their skills or qualifications and the vacant role. These redeployees were typically those with the highest scores from the evaluation exercise. Nonetheless, they still withstood cross-matching as the mechanism of redeployment. Where there was more than one applicant to a vacancy, a competitive application process ensued. SteelCo thus sought to ensure the process was fair to all redeployees, and perceived as such, whilst giving the cross-match committee discretion to find them the most suitable jobs. Thereby substantive and institutional imperatives came into play again. For example, a high-scoring employee could potentially match with several vacancies where there was a functional similarity, meaning the cross-match committee assessed the scores of others to ensure the most effective strategic and operational fit.

The fifth stage was a 4-week trial period. Cross-matching was thus viewed as a responsible approach by SteelCo as it intended to address redeployees' concerns around preserving employment despite redundancy, with the hope of maintaining a positive relationship with them post-restructuring. However, redeployees were not always successful and they remained in the process until another match was found.

### 3.3 | The emergence of 'endurers'

Central to the analysis of HR's strategy was the emergence of endurers as a distinct category of employee impacted by restructuring, employees who, through redeployment, experience redundancy of role yet retention of employment. Older redeployees were more accepting of their endurer status due to pension benefits and wishing to 'hold on' for full pension entitlement upon retirement. Adam worked in finance for 20 years and illustrated the attachment to the pension scheme:

After all that time putting into my pension I didn't want to throw it away. I looked for anything, I went for six jobs in the end. But they was all in completely different trades, I was applying for anything.

External job search was resisted by some redeployees as their skills and knowledge were tied to SteelCo through internal training schemes or firm-specific apprenticeships. A paucity of external labour market opportunities in terms of pay and skill levels was a factor in the emergence of endurers as it increased the differential between internal and external jobs, making the former preferable. Gemma worked in health and safety and described the reluctance to find a job externally:

When you decide whether to go for a job outside you think, what's the benefit? I don't know what I'd do, all there is shelf-stacking or similar, which is probably ten or 15 grand less ... best to take what's available here.

The emergence of endurers, therefore, reflected an interplay between historical and contemporary HR policies. Historically, SteelCo's internal labour market structures were designed to retain employees through binding their interests to those of the company. A favourable pension scheme along with attainment of firm-specific skills made career progression internally more attractive than external job search. In the contemporary context of restructuring, the cross-matching process placed redeployees into new roles within the internal labour market, a process that highlighted endurers as a specific category of employee with specific needs.

Although endurers experienced redundancy of role, they remained bound to the organisation. HR was therefore presented with the challenge of motivating these employees, in a climate with the potential for the development of a perfunctory attachment to SteelCo. The need to raise the motivation of endurers focused



attention on their experience of the substantive goals of HR's redeployment strategy and illuminated the alignment, or not, with institutional goals.

In reflecting on victims and survivors, endurers can be understood as akin to victims of restructuring in that redundancy forced them to find alternative employment, but crucially distinct in that they relied on an internal labour market to do so. Therefore, in terms of their specific needs, endurers were particularly reliant on the efficacy of HR mechanisms, notably cross-matching and retraining provision. For those redeployed early, their experiences notionally echoed more traditional survivors of restructuring. These endurers experienced relatively nominal disruption to their employment arrangements along with a functional similarity with the matched vacancy. Redeployees enjoying this early mover advantage demonstrated that whilst endurers may be objectively defined by their in-between status, the severity of their subjective experiences varied. Redeployees matched early were still required to respond to role change and had specific needs as they moved through the process, such as the availability of relevant training and the 4-week trial period. Robert from finance appreciated this early mover advantage:

I was lucky the job I got was on the vacancy board from the get go, so I didn't have to go through it [cross-matching] much ... there weren't as much moving of the goalposts at the start.

The differing experiences within the endurers category itself was symptomatic of the structural tensions in the redeployment process. Different outcomes brought into the focus the difficulties of managing redeployment *over time* in terms of the shifting goals of the process, and the extent to which endurers did not constitute a homogenous group, as discussed next.

### 3.4 | Shifting goals and goal displacement

Acknowledging time as a feature of the process immutable by agency, analysis highlighted how the temporal aspect of the redeployment process underscored another inherent structural tension in its implementation. Despite initially representing an ideal, linear process for redeployees, tensions emerged as implementation of the strategy progressed. As the process developed, HR's early promises around the substantive goals of the strategy were displaced through an increased prioritisation of achieving institutional objectives, as time moved on it became increasingly difficult for HR to address both goals simultaneously.

These tensions were evident in the ease with which the cross-match committee placed redeployees into suitable roles earlier in the process. The establishment of the new organisational structure meant the initial vacancy pool was larger and more aligned with the requirements of SteelCo's future strategy. Redeployees matched earlier and in a role with functional similarity perceived the process as largely a success and were generally appreciative. Wendy was redeployed between finance roles:

It meant I already fitted with the team, and learned new parts to the job ... there's extra I've needed to know so it feels like an eight month training course, but it's in line with what I know, so it's not been that bad.

As the process progressed, cross-matching became increasingly difficult. Owing to voluntary redundancies emerging in the later stages, vacancies became more random rather than being aligned to the new organisational structure. In addition, confirming contractual notice periods and severance packages for volunteers caused further delays in creating internal vacancies. The difficulty with redeployment as the process moved on meant the cross-match committee began offering roles not based on suitability but rather the availability of any job. The longer redeployees stayed in the cross-match process the more likely ended up in roles at odds with existing skill sets.

Fiona, a senior HR manager, recognised the challenges in balancing institutional and substantive goals as the process evolved:

It's relatively easy to transfer somebody between production roles in the beginning, but harder to go from that to office staff. It's a different skill-set and working environment. But realistically that's what happens, we slot people in wherever we can ... ultimately it comes down to business needs.

The shift from suitability of jobs brought into question HR's early promises concerning substantive goals of the process and instead gave precedence to the institutional goal of avoiding compulsory redundancies. Steve was a senior union official and illustrated these shifting goals:

In the end it's all about getting bums on seats and getting people a job ... that's what's important.

Although avoiding compulsory redundancies straddled both sets of goals, the institutional emphasis on securing any job for redeployees came at the expense of role suitability. The cross-match committee emphasised that matching people into any job was preferable to them seeking alternatives in the external labour market.

Observations at cross-match and senior governance meetings illustrated a growing fixation amongst senior management on achieving quantitative metrics of headcount reduction and cost savings, which increased the imperative to prioritise institutional over substantive goals. A further temporal factor compounded the shift in goals, as senior management was keen to achieve institutional goals by financial year end. These demands placed additional constraints on the cross-match committee and accelerated the need to ensure as many redeployments before the financial year deadline. John was a senior HR manager and lamented the shifting objectives:

It started off beneficial, and we had more time doing the aspirations part which was good ... but it ended up we said one thing and changed our minds halfway through because we needed to deliver on the money ... it was a bit of a waste of time for people.

One manifestation of this structural tension was revealed in the discontent expressed over the irregularity in which redeployment opportunities were advertised on SteelCo's intranet. As a result of the dual source of vacancies, redeployment opportunities were staggered throughout the process. The timing of available vacancies generated uncertainty amongst endurers, creating a reluctance to accept redeployment opportunities in anticipation that one perceived as more suitable might appear later. Redeployees who remained in the process longer were left in an intermediate space as different departments restructured and moved through the process at varying speeds, and a fluctuating vacancy list meant it was difficult to know exactly what opportunities were available and when. Jane worked in finance and explained the uncertainty caused through enduring structural tensions in the process:

There was supposed to be a massive map of jobs available from the start, but then all of a sudden you'd see six jobs go up on the website at once ... I was worried about applying in case I got matched elsewhere, and you didn't want to go outside until you knew what was going on here.

Although a substantive aspect of the process was the 4-week trial period, this practice tended to exacerbate the sense of interruption. Structural issues around time and availability of vacancies meant re-entering the cross-match process after the trial proved counterproductive for endurers. Redeployees' chances of being suitably matched following re-entry was limited given the number of vacancies shrunk as the process tightened up. Only a handful of redeployees re-entered the cross-match process following a trial period, though some did multiple times. Nonetheless, this stage of the process further illuminated how structural tensions impacted HR's ability to address the initial substantive goals. The movement of endurers in and out of the cross-match process and at different

intervals also underlined the shifting priorities of management towards institutional goals. The pressure to redeploy into any available job became even more acute given the dwindling pool of vacancies. The longer endurers were in the cross-match process the more affected they were by HR's shift towards institutional goals and the less suitable their employment outcomes.

### 3.5 | Ongoing implications for endurers

Whether endurers were redeployed early or later in the process had little effect on institutional goals. Where the early promises of SteelCo and HR were reneged upon, however, were in relation to substantive goals. The displacement of substantive goals by institutional goals exacerbated the perception amongst endurers of a lack of coordination in the cross-matching process and a disregard for the suitability of redeployment. Analysis of cross-match applications on SteelCo's intranet recruitment software confirmed that, in some cases, redeployees were applying for a variety of jobs in both clerical and production areas, often inconsistent with their skill set. Gary experienced redeployment and represented a view amongst endurers of how cross-matching failed to deliver upon the positive rhetoric around the substantive aspects of the process:

Cross-matching was sold as the company's looking after you, sorting you out another job for your specific qualities and knowledge ... But really it was; you're finishing, you're not going to be working here anymore, there's your list of jobs on the [vacancy] board, go apply for as many of them as you can. I could repeat all day long, there was no proper cross-match ... was a free for all.

Endurers also reported frustrations in relation to the longer term consequences of HR's redeployment strategy. A connected theme to emerge from the disillusionment with shifting goals pointed to career-related concerns for redeployees. Redeployment led to interruption of career progression amongst endurers. Redeployees that remained in the cross-match process for longer reported the experience damaged their career trajectories. Redeployment often led to demotions in status and pay which, understandably, was perceived as a step backwards in career development, with consequential motivational implications. Consider the following from Henry and Julie, highly skilled engineering craft workers redeployed into clerical-based roles at odds with their expertise:

I was applying for jobs here, there and everywhere. Things I weren't keen on, but I didn't want to lose my job completely. I've nearly 40 years' experience and what they found for me I considered a step down to what I'm used to.

For them to just tell you to like it or lump it, and do something you detest after everything you've worked for ... it's demoralising, doing a job you don't want to do.

The feeling of career interruption also extended to clerical staff. Endurers with ostensibly generalist, transferable skills similarly viewed themselves as negatively impacted by redeployment. Mark and Amanda from finance reflected on the impact on their careers:

Because of the career I've built up, you structure yourself to do more demanding financial roles and then suddenly you're hit with it [restructuring] and put in a lesser role ... something that is now going back 15 years to when I first started out in my career and this is, well, it's a real step back

I don't think it's going to fulfil me and I don't think the company can see that. I just feel like I'm down at that bottom scale, I don't feel like I'm going anywhere.

Concerns were expressed by employees that redeployment into unsuitable jobs could lead to reduced morale and commitment amongst the workforce. Such attitudes amongst endurers were poignant given the early emphasis HR placed on the substantive aspects of the process. Structural tensions in the process hindered early promises HR made around the key substantive goal of suitability of redeployment. The shift towards institutional goals could be perceived as an infraction of the mutual understanding between SteelCo and employees at the beginning of the redeployment process. Reported dissatisfaction amongst employees demonstrated how the management of redeployment can impact the maintenance of a positive psychological contract post-restructuring. Peter was a steel production worker and pointed to demotivating aspects of the process:

There's instances where people are in jobs they shouldn't be, it's [cross-match knee jerk like that, just shoving people in like it's a game of chess when ideally they're not suited for the job... that causes problems down the line.

These concerns extended to how the shift to the 'any available job' approach by the cross-match committee not only impacted endurers but also risked being counterproductive to SteelCo's business needs. Displacing the substantive aspects of the process had implications for how endurers might perform in new roles, in terms of utilisation of their human capital, hence the future success of SteelCo. Charlie and Harriet were engineering craft workers and demonstrated the confluence between HR's redeployment strategy, employee attitudes and SteelCo's strategic and operational imperatives:

Managers would point you to random jobs here and there...they didn't see we're from an engineering background, that's what I've got more knowledge in and comfortable with. That's what I'm proud of. They weren't bothered about us branching off in a different direction, down a totally separate route.

Cross-matching didn't seem to take into account people's aspirations and match them to business requirements, so it won't work down the line. People become unhappy and can't do their job properly. They've slotted a square peg into a round hole... is that really best for the company and the person? I don't think so.

Employee perceptions of management neglect for the specific needs of endurers, and their potential contribution to SteelCo's future, were the consequence of the shifting goals within HR's redeployment strategy and the apparent abandonment of the notion that institutional and substantive goals were strategically reinforcing.

## 4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although redeployees have been recognised as an empirical category (Armstrong-Stassen, 2002; Sverke et al., 2005), the experiences of these employees have been under-theorised. The analysis abstracts from experiences of redeployment to develop the endurer as a specific conceptual category, contributing to the long-standing victims and survivors debate (De Vries & Balasz, 1997; Sahdev, 2003). The study therefore contributes to literature on the impact of restructuring on employees by explicitly focussing on the dynamics of redeployment and how specific needs of endurers emerge from its implementation. Through an examination of implementation of an internal redeployment strategy, the analysis traces the process through which HR's initial substantive goals were displaced by institutional goals, which had consequences for the changing nature of the psychological contract for endurers.

TABLE 1 Differences and similarities between survivors, victims and endurers

	Survivors	Victims	Endurers
Role status	Continuation of role (possible expansion), retention of employment by the organisation	Redundancy of role, end of employment by the organisation	Redundancy of role, retention of employment by the organisation
Job search status	No need for job search	Need for job search (external)	Need for job search (internal)
Relationship with colleagues	Continued relationship with surviving colleagues, guilt towards victims	Discontinued relationship with surviving colleagues	Discontinued relationship with surviving colleagues, guilt towards victims
Impact on career path	Lower interruption	Heightened interruption	Heightened interruption
Impact on skills	Continuation of skill deployment and existing skillset	Heightened possibility of skill mismatch in new role	Heightened possibility of skill mismatch in new role
Degree of uncertainty	Relative uncertainty	Heightened uncertainty	Heightened relative uncertainty
Role of HR	Continued need for HR support	No role for HR	Continued need for HR support
Impact on psychological contract	Potential violation of psychological contract	Violation of psychological contract	Heightened potential violation of psychological contract

Note: The table represents ideal types. For example, survivors may develop new skills associated with role expansion and the degree of career interruption for individual victims or endurers may vary.

Abbreviation: HR, human resource.

Experiences of restructuring are not only shaped by whether victims exit or survivors remain but *also* whether an individual's role is made redundant yet their employment remains within the organisation, navigating redeployment often requires endurance. Both endurers and survivors remain employed, thus endurers can be viewed as a subset of survivors. The key distinction is that endurers are survivors who share many of the experiences of victims. Differences and similarities between endurers, victims and survivors, based on SteelCo and extant research, are summarised in Table 1.

Structural factors played a key role in shaping endurers' varied experiences of restructuring. The temporal dimension (timeline of implementation, dual source of internal vacancies and financial year deadline), external labour market opportunities and pensions, all reflected structural constraints that impacted how HR managed redeployment and created inherent tensions in balancing institutional and substantive goals. Despite HR's initial promises around practices intended to improve redeployee attitudes, as the cross-matching process unfolded the emphasis of HR strategy shifted and substantive goals were displaced by prioritisation of institutional goals.

As previously discussed, Teague and Roche (2014) propose that technical and behavioural practices may interact and be complementary in the implementation of restructuring, analysing these practices in terms of securing certain institutional and substantive goals suggests a more dynamic interplay. Although technical and behavioural practices can coexist these are not necessarily synonymous with the goals of restructuring, which are susceptible to change. Technical and behavioural restructuring practices may be implemented in varying proportions but fluctuate in importance over the course of restructuring and be impacted by shifting institutional and substantive goals. The SteelCo research therefore problematizes the extent to which HR's role is to assist in

achieving a set of limited, institutional goals, concerned with cost savings, or to pursue a more substantive approach that maintains a positive psychological contract with redeployees.

The SteelCo case corroborates previous research suggesting the reliance employees, and thus redeployees, may have on their employer to provide stability through career support and development (Clarke, 2013). Whether endurers were redeployed early or later in the process did not diminish the fact that consequences for endurers were heightened due to their dependence on the internal labour market and the efficacy of SteelCo's HR mechanisms. Recognition of endurers as a distinct employee category provides an opportunity for additional research into the nature of the psychological contract in relation to not only traditional 'survivors' but also the separate, specific needs of endurers.

These findings build on Arshad and Sparrow (2010) and Conway et al. (2014) by identifying how the HR function risks heightened perceptions of psychological contract violation during the implementation of restructuring processes. The examination of the process by which the implementation of restructuring, and in particular redeployment, impacts the psychological contract thus leads to a further theoretical contribution. The specific needs of endurers created new expectations of their employer, which taken in combination with antecedent promises made on the basis of substantive goals, could be seen as amounting to changes in the psychological contract, making it distinct from that of survivors. Any perception of breaking such promises associated with the incremental displacement of substantive goals by institutional goals risked violating this changed psychological contract. These additional elements of the exchange relationship therefore heightened the potential vulnerability of the psychological contract for endurers, above that of survivors. The study hence posits that changes in the psychological contract because of redeployment constitute an important feature of the endurers' experience. Correspondingly, in turn, examination of the distinct experiences of endurers offers an additional conceptual lens for understanding change in the psychological contract.

#### 4.1 | Policy and practice implications

Effective management of redeployment is an important role for the HR function as part of an overall strategic focus on a fair and just approach to the management of restructuring. Findings highlight the importance of addressing the specific needs of endurers whose career trajectories are disrupted by redeployment. Savings in terms of redundancy payments can be reinvested in the career development of endurers, hence supporting longer term job retention. The shifting goals at SteelCo also point to a need for HR practitioners to help employees make sense of their experience of restructuring. The adoption of continuous communicative practices that reflect changes in circumstances throughout the process could, in this respect, be beneficial. Such practices will influence how substantive aspects of redeployment are perceived by employees and contribute to the maintenance of a positive psychological contract with endurers. Acknowledging and understanding how structural features of restructuring processes make substantive goals vulnerable to the pressures to deliver institutional goals is a key challenge for the HR function.

SteelCo's HR redeployment strategy was underpinned by a collective agreement committing SteelCo to a jointly coordinated approach, involving trade unions. Such an approach reflects SteelCo's status as a large organisation, with a strong union presence and employment practices shaped by a public sector heritage and steel industry employment relations. Redeployment is not uncommon in organisations of similar heritage, size or level of unionisation, even within a liberal market economy like the United Kingdom. Elsewhere in Europe, multiple stakeholder approaches to the management of restructuring would be common in coordinated market economies and welfare systems that promote active labour market policies, whereas in the United Kingdom, these interventions tend to be collectively regulated. The SteelCo case thus highlights the importance of a stakeholder approach to managing restructuring.

Findings from the SteelCo case resonate with EU policy. The European Restructuring Monitor's (Eurofound, 2018) report on restructuring and working conditions advises organisations to design restructuring in a way that accounts for the consequences for 'stayers'. Identifying endurers challenges the view that stayers, or survivors, are a homogenous group with undifferentiated needs. Future research into the impact of redeployment on endurers would complement this policy agenda, developing a more intricate view of the challenges facing HR practitioners in the anticipation and management of restructuring.

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# Victims, survivors and the emergence of 'endurers' as a reflection of shifting goals in the management of redeployment

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