

# Making People Redundant

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## Abstract

This paper looked at the correlates of individual's recommendations for making people redundant. Participants ranked the importance of various criteria (length of service, attendance, disciplinary/performance records) used to make job redundancies. They were also asked to add any additional criteria, and their many suggestions included individual circumstances, organisational costs, and employee engagement. The focus was on individual difference correlates of rating 10 criteria to make redundancy decisions. In all, 499 working British adults completed various questionnaires, including Just World Beliefs, Organisational Disenchantment and Equity at work. There was considerable agreement on redundancy criteria, with the three most important being performance records, skills and competencies, and disciplinary records. The variable that most correlated with the chosen redundancy criteria was education. Regressions indicated that different individual difference variables were related to different redundancy criteria preferences. Limitations are acknowledged, and implications considered.

**Keywords:** lay-off; redundancy; just world; equity; fairness.

## 1. Introduction

Many financial crises lead to organisations making people redundant. The COVID-19 pandemic has had major economic consequences throughout the world (Grover et al., 2020; Kraus et al., 2020). The financial consequences were enormous which included shortages, event cancellations, economic uncertainty and bankruptcy (Ahmed & Sarkodie, 2021). Certain industries, particularly travel, entertainment, catering and retail were particularly badly hit worldwide and there remains daily headlines in many countries of companies shutting down and/or being forced to make mass redundancies, often well over 50% of their staff. Leaders and managers must decide who to retain and who to "let go". The question is what is the fairest method and what criteria to take into consideration about choosing one person over another. Thus, organisations like the Chartered Institute for Personal Development (CIPD) in Great Britain published a Redundancy Guide in 2020 and updated later to help employers make better decisions and execute the process more sensitively.

Whilst there are studies on reactions to being made redundant there are fewer on the perceptions of justice and fairness in the process. One theoretical approach, taken in this study, is that of social justice (Pleasence & Balmer, 2010). This study is on the individual correlates of what people think is fair in choosing who to make redundant. It was conducted in late 2020, at a time when many people were concerned about the security of their jobs. It is a very neglected area of research.

### 1.1 Selection for Redundancy

Inevitably, there are various legal constraints and HR issues when coming to choosing who to make redundant and how businesses and companies do so. There has been a large increase in the number of online articles suggesting how this is best achieved (C.I.P.D., 2021). For instance, in Great Britain the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has noted the following: "*You should base the criteria on: standard of work, skills, qualifications or experience, disciplinary record and attendance record, which must be accurate and not include absences relating to disability, pregnancy or maternity. You must not select employees based on: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, family-related leave, their role as an employee or trade union representative, membership of a trade union, part-time or fixed-term employee status, pay and working hours, or concerns they've raised about whistleblowing*". Nearly all of their commendations also provide advice on the best practice to ensure the process

is seen to be fair and honest.

There is a vast academic literature on employee selection for jobs (Furnham, 2020). It concerns identifying the markers of work-related success in particular jobs and finding methods to identify those markers. However, there is far less empirical literature on selecting people for sacking/laying off, though papers exist concerning some of the major issues concerning lay-off and redundancy (Brockner et al., 1987; Butler, 2018; Datta et al., 2010; De Meuse et al., 1994; Grunberg et al, 2006; Kivimäki et al., 2001; Lindell & Stewart, 1974; Martin, 1982; Monteith et al., 2016; Shaw et al, 1998; Stokes & Cochrane, 1984; Wooden 1988; Worrall et al, 2000). Davey et al (2013) suggested that redundancy triggered “organisational grief” which could be understood in the same way as understanding reactions to the loss of another person. Similarly, Baker and Kabwe (2017) suggested reaction to redundancy was best understood in terms of “survivor motivation”

In another relevant study Waters et al (2007) compared experiential differences between voluntary and involuntary job redundancy on depression, job-search activity, affective employee outcomes and re-employment quality. They found the involuntarily redundant group reported higher depression, lower organizational commitment, higher perceived job insecurity and lower perceived re-employment quality.

In a recent Dutch study Borghouts - van de Pas et al., (2021) noted that redundant workers suffer from insecurities about work and income. They found that when redundant workers received training, education or individual coaching shortly before or after the dismissal, they were unemployed for an average of almost three months less.

Few, if any however, concern the topic of this paper. In one relevant study however, Furnham and Petrides (2006) asked people to rate 16 vignettes devised to give combinations of the following: two gender (male/female), two levels of ability (average/high), two levels of work experience (less than five years/more than 15 years) and two levels of motivation (average/high). They were rated for possible promotion and redundancy. Participants favoured males over females, the more over the less experienced, the more over the less able/intelligence and the more over the less motivated for promotion *and* to be retained rather than made redundant. Of all the factors employee motivation was seen to be the most important factor.

This study looks at demographic and belief correlates of attitudes to redundancy. Specifically, we are interested in Just World Beliefs and attitudes to equity at work. Our central concern was understanding how individual ideology (religious and political beliefs) and beliefs about justice and fairness effect the way they rate how redundancies should be made. We selected three belief variables rated to fairness and justice which we thought might be associated with redundancy decisions.

### 1.2 Belief in a Just World (BJW)

The “belief in a just world” concept (Lerner 1980; Lerner & Miller, 1978). The suggests that people have a fundamental need to believe that the (social) world is a just place because it is necessary to develop principles of deservingness (Furnham, 2003). They also have to make sense of their own misfortunes. The idea of the BJW is that it helps answer some of these very difficult questions (Dalbert, 2001) like some people get made redundant while others do not.

Many studies have used measures of the BJW to examine further the relationship between “just world” and other beliefs and behaviours (Furnham & Procter 1989) such as age, income and religion, but also such personality factors as attitudes to authority, conservatism and locus of control (Furnham & Procter 1989). BJW are no doubt related to such factors as pay and reward satisfaction at work, as well as feelings about equity (Dalbert, & Umlauf, 2009). All issues concerning distribution and procedural justice at work are, no doubt, related to “just world” beliefs, as well as sensitivity to all issues to do with “fairness” in the workplace. (Blader, & Tyler, 2003). There are numerous studies on how BJW influence social decision making (Hafer & Begue, 2005; Hagedoorn, et al., 2002). Indeed, Richter and Konig (2017) showed that individuals justify downsizing to preserve the legitimacy of the prevailing social-political system.

In this study we explored the idea that a BJW would be related to beliefs about fair redundancy. For instance, would factors over which the worker has more control and relevance to productivity than like attendance count more than social factors like personal relationships?

### 1.3 Equity Sensitivity

Redundancy judgements, like selection decisions are about equity and fairness. (Wanberg et al., 1999). It is clear that some people can be more sensitive to equity issues than others. Huseman et al. (1987) argued that all workers pay attention to input-output equity (i.e., what you give to and get from an organisation), however some really take it very seriously and are called *equity sensitive*. They adjust their inputs to those of others to ensure equity of effort and reward. There are two other groups: *benevolents*, who appear not to mind giving more than they receive and

those called the *entitled*, who are pretty determined to ensure others do the lion's share.

*Benevolents* are those who are always socially useful, because they think always more about giving than receiving and are always prepared to contribute and co-operate. Their motto is "service above self". Cynics and sceptics, however, believe benevolents are disguising their real motives, which are to gain social approval, or to enhance their self-image or their reputation.

The *entitled* believe they have a right to others' total, continual and unconditional support. They have a high threshold for feeling indebted. They demand help and support from all around them as their due and feel little or no obligation to reciprocate. Entitleds are exploiters and manipulators and are worried that they are not getting a better deal.

If work is being carried out on a piece-rate system entitleds tend to produce a lot, but usually at subsistence levels rather than achieving high quality. Benevolents tend to produce more and better work. This is particularly true in under-salaried work conditions. Benevolents are consistent and low in their absenteeism and turnover regardless of the level and equity of reward. Entitleds are the opposite and will demonstrate high absenteeism and turnover if equity is not ensured. There is also evidence that Benevolents and Entitleds define work outcomes quite differently. Thus doing "challenging work" may be seen as a privilege by Benevolents, but as a source of stress by Entitleds. Yiu et al. (2011) called the benevolent "givers" and the entitleds "takers". Again, we tested the idea that these attitudes to equity at work would be related to beliefs about justice. We simply explored the idea that entitleds and benevolents would hold different beliefs about ranking ordering factors relevant to redundancy decisions.

## 2. Work Disenchantment

There is a great deal of interest in work engagement, satisfaction and commitment, but far less on its opposite. Recently a short measure of Work Disengagement has been devised and tested (Furnham & Treglown, 2017). It has five dimensions, firstly *Organisational Lying/Hypocrisy*, which is the employee's perception that what the organisation says about itself in public, and even to its employees, is a pack of lies. The more the organisation tries to capture the moral high ground the more outraged the astounded and angry insider becomes. Second, *Perceived Inequity*, which is the idea that some people in the organisation are treated very differently from others. The feeling of being unfairly held back while a few succeed can stimulate a great deal of resentment. Third, *Bullying and Mistreatment*, which is the belief that some senior people are callous, uncaring, nasty and manipulative, and that you are a victim. Further, some organisations have a management style that is essentially aggressive and Machiavellian. Fourth, *Distrust*, which is the feeling that the organisation does not even trust its own employees. Whilst top management may talk about, and demand, loyalty from their staff, it is clear that they do not trust their own employees. Fifth, *Broken Promises*; this is all about expectations not being met. For some, the selection interview and the induction period are where people set your expectations about working for the organisation. This study explored the idea that work disenchantment would be related to beliefs about fair redundancy.

This study was stimulated by a number of press reports on mass worker redundancies as a function of the COVID crisis. However, a review of the literature suggested there were almost no studies on what factors decision makers would choose and then weight in making these decisions. The literature on related topics did however suggest a number of belief systems (just world, equity) which suggested that people might rate some worker characteristics more important than others in making decision.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

In all, 499 participants finished the questionnaire, 249 men/males, 250 women/females. All lived and were born in the UK and were currently not studying. Participants ages ranged from 23-86 ( $M = 38.1$ ;  $SD = 10.8$ ). 418 (84%) were working full-time, 52 (10.4%) part-time, 11 on zero-hours contracts and 18 currently not working. 314 (63%) of these 499 had a university degree. The median salary band was '£20,000-40,000' with 285 (57.1%) participants, the next largest was 'under £20,000' with 116 (23.2%) then £40,001-£60,000 with 67 (13.4%) participants. In all, 34 of the 499 identified themselves as an ethnic minority, and a similar number, 41, indicated that they were members of a trade union.

### 3.2 Measures

1. *Making People Redundant*: Participants were shown 10 criteria to make people redundant (see Table 2). Their instructions were: "The COVID-19 crisis means many thousands of people will be made redundant. There are lots of criteria managers can use to decide on who should stay, and who should go, in these difficult times. Look at this list then rank order them according to what you think is *appropriate and just* to use to decide on who should be made redundant, if necessary, in *your organisation*. Put a 1 against the criterion that you believe

is most important, 2 against the next until you get to 10 which is the least important criterion you think managers should consider”

2. *Open ended question*: After the list of factors we also asked; “Are there any other criteria that you consider relevant?” We planned to do a content analysis of this.

3. *Belief in a Just World* was measured using the six-item, unidimensional scale for general belief in a just world from Dalbert (1999). This was measured on an 8-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree ( $\alpha = .800$ ).

4. The *Equity Preference Questionnaire* (Sauley & Bedeian, 2000) measured the equity sensitivity of participants. Miller (2009) used a series of CFAs to identify a two-factor structure of the scale, the factors Entitlement ( $\alpha = .923$ ) and Benevolence ( $\alpha = .835$ ), that had better fit than a unidimensional model.

5. *Disenchantment*. Employee disenchantment was assessed through the 45-item inventory developed and verified in the previous chapter. Respondents stated the extent to which they agreed with statements on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 10 = strongly agree). Totals for the five factors of disenchantment and overall disenchantment were calculated by summing the scores of all relevant items. Internal consistency was high ( $\omega_{\text{hierarchical}} = .86$ ) and comparable to what is seen in the previous chapter.

6. *Ideology*. Participants also indicated how Religious they were from 1 = Not at All to 9 = Very ( $M = 2.62$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) and their political beliefs from Conservative = 1 to Liberal = 9 ( $M = 5.62$ ,  $SD = 2.12$ ).

### 3.3 Procedure

Participants were recruited online through the website Prolific.ac. This website was chosen over its competitors due to its more diverse participant pool and better accessibility with its recruitment filters (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017). Participants were filtered according to their answers to demographic questions upon account creation. Filters used selected UK residents who were also born in the UK, participants aged between 23-100, non-students, and those working at least 21 hours each week. Due to the higher number of women on the website two surveys were used to recruit sex differences, both aiming to recruit 250 participants. For homogeneity, both the sex and gender filters were used in agreement to only select cisgender participants. The questionnaire took an average of 8 minutes and participants were paid £0.85 for their time. Each question prompted participants to answer if they had missed one but did not require a response. Item order was randomized for each participant in the new measure called *Making People Redundant*. Incomplete data cases were removed prior to analysis.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Content Analysis

After ordering the attributes given, participants were then asked: “Is there any other criteria you think are relevant?”. Of the 499 participants, 278 did not leave an answer, and a further 102 answered the question, but indicated there was nothing left to add to the current measure. A content analysis was then done on the remaining 119 items. Following instructions by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), condensed meaning units were identified, then coded and sorted into themes. Content was analysed inductively (Burnard et al., 2008). Due to the direct nature of the question, many of the codes were similar if not the same to the answers. Some answers echoed/resembled answers that were already present in the above measure so were excluded from further analysis. Three overarching themes were identified from the answers: Individual Circumstances; Organisational Cost; Employee Personality and Engagement (see Table 1).

Table 1. Content analysis of redundancy criteria

Themes	Subthemes	Examples
<b>Individual Circumstances</b>	Voluntary Redundancy	“Their own desire to be made redundant (if it involves redundancy pay)” “Voluntary redundancy should be first option”
	Age and plans for retirement	“Current personal circumstances (young children, likelihood of them finding further work due to age); “Nearing retirement age” “Well-being of those being made redundant. Knowing that someone has previously struggled with mental health issues, struggled to find work in the past, or is the sole earner in a family - essentially assessing the impact of the redundancy on the individual.”; “Who has family or people to take care of and would really struggle with no income”
	Family and financial responsibilities and the individual’s ability to recover	“If there are any reasons for an employee to be positively discriminated for”; “Any mitigating factors (disability related sick, child care etc); “Representation in the workplace.”
	Representation and reasons of positive discrimination	“Usefulness of role, number of people in a role, whether anyone else can do that role” “If the job is still required in the organisation.” “Any knowledge that would be lost with the employee when they go.” “Cost of making them redundant versus someone else where all other criteria are evenly matched.”
<b>Organisational Cost</b>	Unique value of skills and job role / Employee Disposability	“For redundancy, whether the tasks that individual carries out are no longer needed, then consider whether that individual can be moved to another position, and only then look at individuals' records” “Rank (manager/assistant)” “Role within the company - whether they have management responsibilities, are responsible for delivering projects versus new business and so on” “Cost of training this position”
	Salary of employee and comparison with others on the same pay level	“Salary / Remuneration - Cut the expensive person doing the same work as someone on half the salary.” “Value for money (salary vs performance)” “Size of account relationships with key Clients” “Client relationships“
	Relationships of that employee with clients/ customers	“Cooperative relationships with the clients” “Customer feedback” “Relationships they have with key customers/suppliers” “Relationships with Customers/Stakeholders”
	Contribution to organisational culture	“If you work well with your team” “Impact of loss on other employees“
	Intrinsic value to operational team	“Not criteria for employees but to consider the workings of the company on the ground and who is vital and keeps the company going rather than purely based on the above personal employee 'criteria“ “team fit”
	Potential of Employee	“Future potential of an employee” “Long term potential to make the company more productive.”
	<b>Employee Personality and Engagement</b>	Adaptability
Work Ethic/ Effort / Engagement / Attitude		“commitment to the company” “I would suggest flexibility and overall attitude, though these are more subjective.” “a good work ethic, open and honest” “Willingness to adapt with the company/ not resistance to change“
Integrity		“I would suggest flexibility and overall attitude, though these are more subjective.” “A good work ethic, open and honest”

**Individual Circumstances:** Some participants wrote that they would consider the individual's personal circumstances when making people redundant. This included whether they wanted to become redundant and would happily take the redundancy money. Many would also consider employee age, whether the employee was approaching retirement, or would struggle finding further employment. Other personal details were also mentioned by participants, with many also writing that the familial and financial responsibilities were also worth considering, in addition to the mental health of the employee. Finally, some participants also considered a need for positive discrimination and representation in the workplace.

**Organisational Cost:** Other participants focused on the costs of laying off a specific employee. These ranged from the more concrete, such as the cost of training a replacement, whether the role was still needed, and how unique the employee's skills were within the job market. More simply, participants also would consider the salary of employees, and whether the higher paid workers were bringing in more revenue or expertise for the company. Others focused on more tangible losses, such as the strength of relationships with (key) clients and customers, as well as relationships within the company, reflecting how the employee contributions to the organisational culture and works within the team. Finally, participants considered future loss of the organisation and the potential of employee's work. However, perhaps due to the nature of the data collection, no participants defined their perception of employee potential.

**Employee Engagement and Personality:** Some participants also suggested that they would consider redundancy based on an employee's personality. Indeed, many participants just answered "Attitude" to the question with no further explanation. Some mentioned a good work ethic, which, while normally considered a personality trait, could also relate to engagement (or a lack of disenchantment) with the company. Others suggested other personality-related skills such as adaptability and flexibility. One participant answered that honesty was important to them.

#### 4.2 Rank Order Data

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Redundancy Measure. Smaller numbers indicate a greater priority (n= 478)

Attribute	M	SD	#1	#1 %	Skewness	Kurtosis
Length of Service	5.93	3.08	50	10.5	-.151	-1.33
Attendance Records	5.43	2.52	17	3.56	.170	-.974
Alignment with company values	7.10	2.38	10	2.09	-.667	-.344
Personal Relationships	7.04	2.29	1	0.21	-.385	-.906
Disciplinary Records	4.86	2.64	69	14.4	.159	-.946
Skills and competencies	3.06	2.21	152	31.8	1.138	.624
Qualification of the employees	6.86	2.47	10	2.09	-.567	-.677
Total work experience	6.29	2.69	21	4.39	-.325	-1.03
Performance records	2.99	2.07	124	25.9	1.284	1.104
Influence on the work (quality, quantity) of others	5.45	2.49	24	5.02	.098	-.931

#1: The number of people who chose this attribute as their most important. #1% this number as a percentage of all participants

Table 2 shows the mean scores for each criterion and also the number of people who put each criterion as their first rank option. There were two very clear preferences: performance records as well as skills and competences. Equally, there were two which received very low ratings: alignment with company values, and cooperative personal relationships in the company.

These rank-ordered preferences were then correlated with the demographic, ideological and attitudinal data shown in Table 3. Note because of the rank ordering a negative correlation indicates a positive association between the variable and the criterion for making redundant. There were relatively few significant correlations, with education (to degree level) being the exception, where 7 correlations were significant. Equally, some redundancy factors, especially attendance and performance, attracted three correlations. These indicated that older, less educated and politically conservative people rated attendance highly, and that more job entitled, and less benevolent males rated job qualifications more highly. Interestingly, having a degree had no relationship with the perceived importance of qualifications.

Next, a series of regressions was run with selective redundancy reasons as the criterion variable and the individual

difference factors as the predictor variables. These included step-wise multiple regressions and binary regressions. The first regression was using the most highly rated redundancy criteria, namely performance record. The regression was significant and accounted for 6% of the variance. The results suggested that the less educated people were (having not been to university), the more they believed the world was just and felt entitled, and the less they felt performance was the best criterion for choosing who was to become redundant. Two variables were related to the ranking of disciplinary record; members of trade unions and minority groups thought this a less important criteria for redundancy. The final regression, with alignment with company values as the outcome, accounted for only 2% of the variance. Religiousness was a negative predictor, while liberalism was a positive predictor.

Table 3. Kendall’s tau correlation coefficients between items

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1. Length of Service																			
2. Attendance	.027																		
3. Company Alignment	-.179**	-.096**																	
4. Personal Relationships	-.201**	-.150**	.086*																
5. Disciplinary Records	-.044	.243**	-.065	-.135**															
6. Skills	-.145**	-.269	.018	-.009	-.306**														
7. Qualifications	-.047	-.164**	-.164**	-.151**	-.103**	.099**													
8. Work Experience	-.019	-.150**	-.172**	-.186**	-.167**	.084*	.078*												
9. Performance	-.130**	-.051	-.076*	.075*	-.075*	-.059	-.109**	-.065											
10. Influence on others	-.200**	-.158**	.064	.117**	-.127**	.006	-.129**	-.157**	-.020										
11. Sex	.004	-.021	-.055	-.073	.056	-.077	.118**	-.027	.039	.047									
12. Age	.003	-.105**	.041	-.002	.001	-.018	.023	-.047	.077*	.035	-.081*								
13. Degree	.122**	.191**	-.036	-.092*	.095*	-.128**	-.012	.036	-.175**	-.087*	.039	-.158**							
14. Religiousness	-.005	.008	-.086*	-.042	.040	-.006	.051	.016	.017	.012	.071	.073*	.049						
15. Liberalism	.009	.070*	.090*	-.065	.017	-.029	-.036	.041	-.055	-.034	.054	-.115**	.195**	-.096**					
16. BJW	-.008	-.028	-.018	.019	-.048	.052	-.013	-.045	.098**	.029	-.004	-.033	-.092*	.090**	-.210**				
17. Entitled	.017	-.009	-.027	-.019	-.021	.034	-.070*	.028	.038	-.028	-.217**	-.087**	.001	-.080*	-.004	-.008			
18. Benevolence	.027	.038	-.021	-.059	.017	-.030	.098**	-.027	-.030	-.008	.270**	.010	.018	.078*	.008	.038	-.484**		
19. Disenchantment	.009	-.018	-.022	.011	-.030	.009	.008	.002	.033	.004	-.069	.001	-.059	.012	-.034	.037	.219**	-.065*	

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05

Table 4. Multiple Regressions of select items

	Performance Records				Disciplinary Records				Alignment with company values			
	B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t	B	SE	Beta	t
Sex	.140	.197	.034	0.712	.345	.254	.065	1.359	-.170	.231	-.036	-0.739
Age	.019	.009	.094	-1.957	.014	.012	.056	1.157	.014	.011	.060	1.223
Degree	-.748	.202	-.175	-3.713**	.491	.260	.090	1.889	-.179	.236	-.036	-0.757
Religiousness	-.010	.039	-.012	-0.261	-.004	.050	-.004	-0.086	-.113	.046	-.118	-2.471*
Liberalism	.005	.053	.004	0.087	.038	.068	.028	0.565	.170	.062	.135	2.746**
Minority Group	.134	.380	.017	0.352	1.631	.490	.157	3.331**	-.212	.445	-.023	-0.475
Trades Union	-.059	.248	-.011	-0.236	-.971	.320	-.139	-3.306**	-.129	.291	-.020	-0.443
BJW	.236	.083	.135	2.843**	-.034	.107	-.015	-0.314	.098	.097	.049	1.005

Entitled	.212	.090	.152	2.350*	-.127	.117	-.071	-1.094	-.155	.106	-.097	-0.146
Benevolence	.068	.106	.041	0.641	-.110	.137	-.051	-0.803	-.178	.125	-.092	-1.431
Disenchantment	-.004	.010	-.021	-0.440	-.003	.013	-.012	-0.262	-.001	.012	-.003	-0.058
<i>F</i>	3.519				2.723				1.871			
<i>P</i>	.000				.002				.041			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.055				.038				.020			

## 5. Discussion

This study showed reasonable consensus among people with respect to making redundancy decisions: that is there was little disagreement about the rank order of these factors and relatively few individual difference correlates of these judgements. Similar amount of consensus occurs around perceptions of fair and accurate selection methods at work (Furnham & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). Respondents rated performance record and skills most highly, as these are seen to be most related to personal and company success. They did not rate qualifications very highly as these are presumably seen as not clearly related to performance, though they may feature in selection.

Interestingly, length of service was given a comparatively low rating (7<sup>th</sup>), suggesting that the first/last in-first/last out (FILO, LIFO) easy to apply criterion was not thought of as a very good criterion. There are many complaints that staff loyalty, usually expressed as years working at a particular organisation, is not fairly rewarded and that this could very clearly be taken into consideration in redundancy decisions.

The “soft” criteria of aligned with company values (culture fit) and the quality of personal relationships at work were rated very low, suggesting that comparatively these factors should not be considered in redundancy decisions. One reason for this may be related to the fact that it is difficult to assess these highly subjective factors without context.

What is also interesting is the added suggestions of the participants as shown in Table 1. Some of the suggestions were particularly interesting, taking into consideration more the personal, nonwork-related, aspects of the workers life such as their family commitments as well as more obviously their desire to be made redundant. Whilst both of these criteria demonstrate a level of compassion, they may be difficult to enforce especially taking into consideration non-work-related factors. Similarly, establishing that some people very clearly do not want redundancy (while others do) may influence that decision making.

Free response suggestions also recommended looking into the uniqueness of a worker’s skill set as well as their replacement cost in selection and remuneration. Other factors mentioned included a judgement about the potential of an employee, though this would almost necessarily mean a subjective judgement. They also mentioned adaptability (flexibility) work ethic and attitudes, as well as integrity. These would no doubt be related to some of the criteria already specified.

The relationship of the general (just world belief) and work-related (equity sensitivity and disenchantment) attitudes to recommended redundancy decisions indicated that they were very weak. In other words, an individual’s judgement about justice in the world and the workplace as well as their personal sense of work disenchantment and engagement did not show any clear patterns in the correlational or regression analyses. There was some indication that those who felt entitled rated performance records less and qualifications more than those who did not feel entitled, suggesting that people who had achieved some work-related qualification probably thought this sufficient evidence for not being made redundant and gave less importance to whether the qualification had “translated” into higher performance in the workplace. This result may have been different had a wider range of criteria been considered, like some suggested in the free responses: child-care responsibilities, relationship with boss.

The regressions did illustrate how certain individual difference variables were logically related to the redundancy factors: education and work experience to performance record, minority and trade union membership to disciplinary record, and political and religious views to alignment with values.

In difficult economic times (such as when this data was collected in late 2020) many companies are having to lay off staff, often permanently. The question from a PR, but more importantly from a (remaining) staff morale and engagement point of view, is how to do this most fairly and justly. Certainly, many criteria could be applied some more easily and accurately assessed (attendance record, years of service) than others (personal relationships, alignment of values). Indeed, it would also be possible to develop an algorithm to include a number of weighted factors. What this study has shown is *more evidence of consensus than disagreement*. The individual difference



variables that were examined were very weakly related to the redundancy decisions. Yet there was some evidence of disagreement. For example, while length of service was rated overall as seventh most relevant factor, 50 of the sample did put it as their highest rating, and it had the highest variation in position of any.

Although we examined nine individual difference variables (demography, ideology, work experience) there were few significant differences suggesting consensus in these matters. The variables we chose may not have been totally relevant to our task. Equally decisions about redundancy could vary widely depending on job, competitiveness of role, circumstances of the redundancy etc. One question is what other variables to consider in future studies in this area that may show significant disagreement. For instance, we did not consider organisational culture, leadership styles or different economic conditions. In future research, it would be desirable to enquire from individuals as to their own experience of redundancy and of those close to them and relate this also to decisions about redundancy.

#### **Informed consent**

Obtained.

#### **Ethics approval**

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Canadian Center of Science and Education.

The journal and publisher adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

#### **Provenance and peer review**

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

#### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

#### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

#### **Open access**

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