ARCADA

Crisis Management in Small Organizations during COVID-19

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Abstract:

Crisis management is the process of analyzing threats to an organization and making plans that assist in navigating crises and protecting an organization. This thesis aims to study crisis management in small organizations, using the global crisis COVID-19 as a case study. It aims to answer the questions of how small organizations view crises, how they plan for crises, and if having a crisis management plan helps in managing the crisis. The study is limited to focusing on small organizations managing the COVID-19 crisis. The study was done by interviewing managers. The results were studied side by side and compared with prior literature in order to gain an insight into how organizations view and manage crises. Prior research done by Paraskevas (2006) and Bundy et al. (2017) argue that crisis management is an important aspect of management. Research done by Chong (2004), Pollard and Hotho (2006) argue that in today's world, organizations are always in a crisis, and if they are not in crisis, they are in precrisis mode, a state just before the actual crisis occurs. The results from the thesis showed that the older organizations with more experienced leaders had crisis management plans, however none of those plans anticipated anything close to the COVID-19 crisis. Smaller organizations with less experienced managers did not have any crisis management plans. The organizations managed the crisis quite well, even without a crisis management plan, larger organizations focused on surviving and getting through, while smaller organizations found ways to thrive. The study had its limitations as some organizations received financial support, as well as having to follow government regulation and guidance. The conclusions showed that in crisis management planning, organizations do not take a large enough scope in analyzing possible risk scenarios that could be a threat. Larger organizations understood the importance of crisis management plans and included them in their operations. Smaller organizations felt that their organizations were too small to warrant investing in crisis management planning. Smaller organizations were able to adapt and modify their business rapidly in order to be innovative and find solutions in a crisis, while larger organizations appeared satisfied with getting through the crisis and just surviving.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is a master's thesis done at ARCADA University of Applied Sciences for the Fintech track in International Business Management. This study is done in an effort to understand crisis management and how the events of the last year involving Covid-19 have affected small organizations. This study aims to understand what crisis management is and how it can help organizations deal with crisis situations. Do small organizations plan for crises, do they have crisis management plans that can help guide them in times of crisis, and if having a crisis management plan makes a difference.

1.1 Background

Uncertainty has been part of life from the beginning of time: from man-made crises to natural events, we are surrounded by uncertainty and variability. This holds true even more in today's world where technology and the high speed of markets facilitate the rapid dissemination of information. The speed at which information flows also allows for constant awareness, not only of what is happening but also of the consequences of crises. (Chong, 2004)

These uninvited, unwanted, and unexpected negative events, whether man-made or natural, often have a direct impact on business, particularly when they are directly associated with the business or business environment. Often the impact is significantly more unexpected and consequential in nature when the crisis is a natural event. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Events such as the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident in 1979, and the 1982 incident when Tylenol capsules manufactured by Johnson & Johnson were laced with cyanide, are examples of organizational crises that have caused businesses billions in costs, and in some cases resulted in loss of life (Mitroff et al., 1987). In addition, events caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters, can also affect business in a variety of ways, creating all sorts of crises. (Haupt & Azevedo, 2021)

Being able to understand these risks and manage them is an important part of businesses and organizations. The field of crisis management has been evolving over the last few decades. However, with the spotlight on recent significant incidents, such as the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11 and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the importance of understanding crises and managing them better has grown. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006; US EPA, 2013)

1.2 Aim

In today's world, crises are occurring at an alarming frequency. From data hacks to natural causes, crises are a regularly occurring situation for organizations. This study aims to understand whether small organizations plan for such risks, whether they are able to execute an existing plan and whether having such a plan helps or not.

The ability to understand risks and risk management allows for planning and continuity in an organization. Small organizations are exposed to crises in a variety of ways. The study aims to analyze if being able to anticipate and plan for crises allow small organizations manage disasters and survive better.

1.3 Research questions

The aim of this study is to explore whether small organizations plan for crises. If they do, does having a crisis management plan assist in navigating the crisis? Following are the main research questions that are used to guide the research:

1. How do small organizations think about crises?
2. How do small organizations plan for crises?
3. How does having a crisis management plan help in managing a crisis?

1.4 Limitations

Crisis management has been around for some time, and has been studied in organizations for decades, as such its scope is immense. In addition, a crisis can be spread across a variety of situations thus expanding to mammoth proportions. (Bundy et al., 2017)

Due to the immense scope of the topic of crisis management, in an effort to concentrate on the topic of this paper, the focus is narrowed down to how small organizations have managed during the COVID-19 crisis.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The theory for this study is based on crisis management literature mostly sourced from journals and academic research papers. This academic literature ensures a high level of quality on which the framework of this study is built. Considerable research has been done on crisis management and organizations. The use of a theoretical framework builds a strong foundation for the research of this paper exploring crisis management in small organizations. Most of the literature seems to be focused on medium-sized and large organizations. Using that literature as a base allows this study focusing on small organizations to explore a less researched area while ensuring that the fundamentals of the research are anchored in a strong theoretical framework.

1.6 Method

The research method in this chapter describes the process applied for conducting this study. The research starts with creating research questions that needs answering. For conducting the research, a theoretical framework is studied and laid out as the foundation on which this study proceeds.

The empirical research of this study consists of qualitative collection of data on crisis management in small organizations followed by analysis of the data obtained from respondents in a position to provide such information. Data collection takes place in the

form of interview questions that are then gathered together, sorted and analyzed in order to deduce results.

The results are then analyzed further against the source literature in order to make a connection with proven academic hypotheses, thus answering the research questions posed in this study.

1.7 Structure

This study consists of seven chapters. Below is an explanation of the structure and format of each chapter:

Chapter 1:
This chapter is an introduction to the research, and explains the background, need, and expectations of the study.

Chapter 2:
In this chapter an explanation of the theoretical framework for the study is given. The theoretical framework lays the foundation for sound research and provides academic backing for this study.

Chapter 3:
In this chapter the methods and techniques used for data collection, analysis and the overall specifics of conducting this study are described. Information is given on the basis and reasoning applied for these, supported by academic theory concerning the specific methods and techniques used. It discusses the process of data collection, the results obtained from the data collected, and the responses given by the respondents.

Chapter 4:
This chapter explains the empirical process followed for the research of this thesis. This chapter presents the results obtained from the data collected. It shows how well the selected methods of analysis worked with the data.

Chapter 5:

This chapter summarizes the study and discusses the finding. The research questions are answered and discussed, and the validity of the study is considered. In addition, recommendations for management and organizations are given, as well as the conclusions of the study itself.

Chapter 6:

This is the final chapter. It contains a list of references used for the academic foundation of this thesis.

2 LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on crises and crises management from a theoretical standpoint. It studies the theory and academic research on how crisis management is applied in organizations and how it affects business. The chapter explains how crisis management works and provides the support for crisis management and its use in organizations. It also explores how crisis management is linked to strategic planning and scenario building, which should be an integral part of crisis management planning and discusses how organizations can use crisis management plans in their business strategy.

2.1 Crisis management

In the world today, crises are extremely common. Every day there is an event that causes a crisis for some organization in some way. It is said that an organization not currently experiencing a crisis is in precrisis mode, waiting for a crisis to happen. Warning signs and indicators for a future crisis are readily visible if one looks for them. Organizations should continually pay attention to what is happening in the environment around them so that they notice the warning signs and can prepare for the oncoming crisis. (Paraskevas, 2006)

It is argued that when organizations focus on being crisis resilient, they build processes and systems within the organization that help them to deal with crisis situations that may arise in the future. This type of forward thinking and behavior leads to a resilience and thoughtfulness in managers, which often is the determinant factor differentiating between organizations that can withstand crises and those that fail during a crisis. (Bundy et al., 2017)

There are many different perspectives, definitions and explanations of the word crisis. Originally the word crisis comes from the Greek word "krisis" and had several meanings, including judgment, decision, the outcome of an event, and turning point. (*Definition of CRISIS*, n.d.)

According to Pearson and Clair (1998, p.60) a crisis is "a low-probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made quickly."

According to Coombs (2007) crises are "sudden and unexpected events that threaten to disrupt an organization's operations and pose both financial and reputational threat."

According to Chong (2004) crises are "negative events that can cause the demise of an organization."

Bundy et al. (2017, p. 3) writes that a crisis is "an event perceived by managers and stake-holders to be highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive."

Crisis management is often perceived as preparing for threats and risks, the intention being to mitigate or prevent them, thus providing the organization with a better chance of survival should something untoward occur. (Paraskevas, 2006).

Throughout all the definitions, views, and perspectives, a crisis is considered to be an event or occurrence that threatens the future of an organization in some unforeseen way. A crisis has both the power and the potential to disrupt business and threaten the organization.

Mitroff (2004) presents seven types of crises, He argues that most crises fall within one of these groups.

Economic related. These are risks associated with the economy and the market environment. This group includes, among others, trade policies, losses, trade unions, variability in the stock market, and competitors.

Informational. These types of risks are associated with data and information, they include the hacking of confidential data, loss of information, and breaches in information security.

Physical. This type of risk is related to corporal damage, such as breakdowns in manufacturing equipment, data servers, and product or production problems.

Human resources. These risks are related to personnel issues. Examples include departure from the organization, death, fraud, etc.

Reputation related. These are risks associated with the organization's image and reputation, which can be damaged by rumors, hacks, misconduct, low-quality marketing materials, and websites, etc.

Psychopathic. Psychopathic risks involve outside acts that directly affect the company, such as vandalism directed at the company or its products and acts of terrorism. They are acts that focus on the organization with the specific intention of directly harming it.

Natural. Risks that are associated with natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, storms, floods, and fires. Organizations generally have no say over such risks, they are only able to manage the situation to the best of their abilities.

Most crises are a combination of two or more of the above types of crises, they often start as one type and spread to encompass the other types. This spreading of the crises stems from natural causes or mismanagement of the situation by the organization. While most types of crises are beyond an organization's control, being able to understand the possibility of these crises and the impact on the organization, helps in planning and building possible solutions to manage if not mitigate them. (Mitroff et al., 1987; Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

It is suggested that most organizations can be in two states relative to crises: crisis preparedness, and crisis prone. In crisis preparedness, the organization and mangers take a proactive approach and are constantly analyzing and scanning for possible threats and risks. If an organization does not do so, by default it is in crisis-prone mode and has a higher susceptibility to a crisis that may occur (Pollard & Hotho, 2006). Some organizations by nature have more vulnerability to crises. Risk-inclined organizations need to be especially aware of their vulnerability and must have crisis management plans in place to

deal with disasters. Crisis management planning is an important aspect of ensuring that an organization can continue to operate and survive in the long term. (Chong, 2004)

It has been argued that having elaborate crisis management plans creates a false sense of safety, thus giving the organization a false sense of confidence stemming from the belief that everything is under control. It is important for organizations to remember that crisis management plans do not assure success, they are merely a tool for analyzing and solving situations and problems that may arise. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Studies have shown that crisis management plans guarantee an effective model for predicting future risks, solving problems and minimizing the risks to an organization. Every organization should focus on building a culture and system that has in place a framework for modeling crises and use it as a tool for managing damage and keeping crisis-related damage to a minimum. (Paraskevas, 2006)

2.1.1 Communication in crisis management

An extremely salient aspect of good crisis management is the ability to communicate efficiently and effectively during and after a crisis. It is extremely important to be able to properly accumulate and dispatch information regarding a crisis. A crisis often involves several stakeholders, ranging from shareholders, customers and employees to governments and communities. In addition, most stakeholder groups use different channels for communication, which makes conveying relevant information a challenge in itself. In crisis situations the information to disseminate is often constantly evolving and changing. The messages are often complicated, and it is not always simple and easy to communicate the situation to the stakeholders. Therefore, the ability to communicate with stakeholders, provide the right information, and successfully dispatch that information while at the same time creating a communication channel that also receives feedback is a highly essential feature of good crisis communication. (Haupt & Azevedo, 2021; Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016)

According to Sellnow and Seeger (2013, p.13) crisis communication is "the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals,

and agencies, within a crisis, in order to plan for, reduce, limit, and respond to threats and harm."

Coombs (2010, p. 20) defines crisis communication as "the collection, processing, and dissemination of information required to address a crisis situation."

Crisis communication is a field of study that started with the Johnson & Johnson crisis in the 1980s, when one of its Tylenol products was laced with poison, causing several deaths. It was during this period that organizations began to pay attention to crises and how they impacted businesses. In an effort to deal with the negative effects of crises, organizations started looking into crisis communication and how communication helped manage stakeholders' perceptions of crises. By being able to understand the details between stakeholder perception and influence and thus communicate accordingly, they hoped to manage both the organization's reputation and the crisis better. (Haupt & Azevedo, 2021)

In crisis theories, the basis of most communication lies in the ability to lead the narrative when crises occur. People tend to look for someone to blame and hold responsible when something goes wrong. This is referred to as the Attribution Theory, which has been described by Coombs (2007). The ability to guide the story and explain the facts allows an organization to put the story being presented into perspective and to manage it.

During crisis situations there is a dire need for information and guidance. Often stakeholders want to know what is happening, especially in the event of a natural disaster or a crisis where people are at risk. People have a need to know what is happening, and they need information in order to stay calm and rational. In such situations, communicating information regarding a situation to the public can save lives, provide a sense of calm, and avert alarm and anxiety. (Fredriksson, 2014)

Crisis communication should be started immediately, as the crisis starts, possibly even before the crisis occurs, if precrisis signs are noticed. This communication needs to focus on building and maintaining trust throughout the crisis and after. This can be accomplished by upholding positive virtues such as integrity in the communication content,

honesty about what is really happening, and openness about what is being done. In addition, being factual and informative is also extremely important, as most information and data can be readily accessed and checked online. (Nätti et al., 2014)

In crisis communication, organizations need to tell a credible story which is believable and sincere. This needs to be followed by actions and commitments that show a desire to do what is right. Regardless of how crisis communication is carried out, it is important for organizations to take crisis communication seriously and keep all the stakeholders involved in the process. Accurate, honest information must be provided in a timely manner, as this helps the stakeholders to understand and accept that everything is being done to rectify the situation. When a crisis occurs, it is important that those involved receive the information they need in order to understand, trust, and continue forward. (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015)

External Communications

External communication refers to communicating with people outside of the organization, such as shareholders, consumers, customers, governments, communities etc. When a crisis occurs, these stakeholders are directly or indirectly affected by what is happening, and they need to be informed of the situation. (Coombs, 2007)

Stakeholders are an important consideration to any organization. Failure to provide them with information on the crisis and on what is being done to rectify and manage the situation can lead to loss of faith and reputation. This often results in stakeholders wanting to distance themselves from associating with the organization, thus damaging the business as a whole. (Coombs, 2007)

The theory behind crisis communication is to minimize reputational damage to the organization and continue to maintain and uphold the organization's relationship with its stakeholders. Part of this process is communicating the acceptance of responsibility when things go wrong, acknowledging that people have been affected and accepting that things can change for better or worse. During this process, it is also important to convey that

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the organization is doing everything in its power to ensure the best interests of the share-holders. (Haupt & Azevedo, 2021)

Internal Communications

Internal communication is the process of communicating within the organization. It often takes place between management and employees, the people involved in running and managing the organization. It is important for management to keep employees in the loop during a crisis, and to actively communicate with them during the process of managing and dealing with the crisis. Internal communication is often ignored by organizations with a greater focus put on external communication. (Strandberg & Vigsø, 2016)

Managing employee emotion and perception are vital in crisis situations, this is done via internal communication. If employees lack a clear view and understanding of the situation, the result can be changes in trust and loyalty, which in turn may lead to failure in managing a crisis. Employees often associate themselves with their workplace, some go so far as to link their identity to that of the organization. Any changes in how they view the organization can cause deep emotional conflict that may lead to changes in loyalty and their perception of how they see their connection to the organization. This in turn can affect their performance. (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015)

An important aspect of how well internal communication functions is based on the organization's culture. Every organization needs to promote a culture of openness and honesty. Cultivating an open and honest culture makes a difference when it comes time to explain to everyone about what is happening. In addition, based on the type of culture, internal communications need to touch upon information related to how employees feel, what they expect, and how their emotions may change as the crisis is resolved. (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015)

Many companies underestimate the value of internal communication and focus solely on external communication. Few organizations realize the importance of communication in times of crisis, and thus do not provide sufficient support and resources to employees during crises. It is importance that organizations realize the potential of internal

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communication and strive to integrate it into their crisis management plans. This approach would enable the employees to play an important role in assisting crisis management efforts and in guiding the organization through the crisis. (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015)

Social Media and Communication

Social media is one of the fastest ways to communicate in today's world. Technology and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn have made it faster and easier to share information in real time, be it public opinions or mainstream news. In addition, it has also become significantly faster and easier to reach large groups of people or selected target group. Thus organizations see the potential in adapting and using social media as a medium for communicating in crises. (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019)

Due to the speed at which information can travel through social media, it is important that organizations plan for using social media as a medium of communication during a crisis. These plans need to be in place before the crisis occurs. Advance planning is required to determine, for instance, who will run the platform and send out messages, receive and document feedback, answer queries etc. Planning for the use of social media in a crisis will make the process more efficient and productive during the crisis. There have been case studies where organizations have made use of social media in their communication, with very positive results. These studies have showed that integrating social media into their communications has brought an increase in the quality of communications and has meant better relations with stakeholders. (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019)

With the constant availability, widespread reach, and immediate sharing of information that is possible with social media platforms, it is also important to remember that any information released is readily available to everyone. Thus special care needs to be taken to ensure that all information made available is factual and true, and that the organization is in complete control of the conversation and narrative that is occurring. (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019)

The use of social media for crisis communication can sometimes result in a mixed bag of success and failure, with both advantages and disadvantages. However, using social media is almost unavoidable in today's world of communication. Almost every organization

has some form of social media as a means of communication. The use of social media in communication is inevitable, and organizations need to include social media as part of their communication strategy. (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019)

2.1.2 Crisis stages

According to Paraskevas (2006) a crisis can be divided into several phases during the crisis period. These consist of a prodromal stage, an acute crisis stage, a chronic crisis stage and a resolution stage.

The prodromal stage is before the crisis actually begins, it is the precursors to the start of a crisis, but the organization is not affected yet. There may be signs and warnings, indicators that act as an antecedent. Even though it may be hard to recognize and notice these signs, it is important that organizations do their best to learn what they are looking for and try to pick up on them and prepare the best they can. It is also important to build a networked system that that can help in sensing these signals, as this allows organizations to create a wider net that is constantly watching for signs of a crisis brewing, and is thus able to anticipate risks. (Paraskevas, 2006)

The acute crisis stage occurs when the crisis is in effect and is directly affecting the organization. It is often impossible to prevent damage from occurring. The severity of the effects on the organization is often the result of how much the organization was able to predict and plan for the crisis. During this stage, not much can be done other than to try and minimize the damage and survive through it. It is important to be proactive, take responsibility, lead well and repair the damage. Good leadership will improve the chances of surviving the crisis, and improve the organizations reputation. (Chong, 2004; Paraskevas, 2006)

The chronic stage occurs directly after the crisis. The organization focuses on recovering and repairing the damage done. This stage involves reaching out to affected customers, shareholders, and other personnel involved. At this stage, all of the information is collected and documented for later analysis. (Chong, 2004; Paraskevas, 2006)

The last stage is the crisis resolution stage. This stage deals with the situation when the crisis has passed, focusing on getting the organization up and running again. It is important to focus on the business and on building both trust and reputation. Part of this stage consists of reviewing the whole crisis situation and studying it in an effort to understand what went according to plan, what was successful in regard to the plan, and where the failures occurred. It is important to determine what happened and why it happened. Learning from mistakes helps to build a better plan for future crises and to manage them better.. (Chong, 2004; Paraskevas, 2006)

In most cases, crises are associated with a negative connotation, and a bad reputation. On the positive side, crises provide an opportunity to change and improve. Countless organizations have used crises to achieve a turnaround, fixing their reputation and rebuilding in a different, better direction. Two examples of organizations that have used a crisis to build a better organization are British Petroleum and Target. During the BP Gulf oil spill, the organization used the crisis to completely change its policies and how it associated with its customers and community. When Target's consumer data were breached, putting the personal information of millions at risk, the company changed the way it handled customer data, improving its digital records systems. (Bundy et al., 2017; Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

While crisis plans provide an opportunity to learn and manage crises better, it has also been argued that having crisis management plans can be a source of other challenges. The thinking is that as crisis occur infrequently, there may be resistance to focusing on crisis management due to cost and lack of resources. In addition, organizations often take the view that they are immune to any possible risks and therefore do not need to bother with planning or allocating resources to conduct analyses and predict future risks that the organization may face. This results in negativity and inflexibility in the creative thinking essential to predicting crisis. (Bundy et al., 2017)

2.1.3 Limitations of crisis management

Throughout the years, a lot of studies have been done on crises and crisis management, however there are suggestions that it is just the beginning of truly understanding crisis

management and its relationship with organizations. There is also a general acceptance that not enough research has been done in this area, and that there is not enough theoretical and empirical evidence, which creates an opportunity for a lot of future research in the field of crisis management. (Bundy et al., 2017)

There is also complaint among scholars that most of the research done on crisis management is done in isolation and based on individual cases. They claim that there is no integration between different areas of crisis management, or even between researchers. This limits the development of literature in the field of crisis management. Due to this isolation of research and considering the vast areas of topics and research in the field of crisis management, it is argued that a consensus on the subject may not be reached, and therefore this could minimize its validity. Crisis management needs to be studied further and integrated into other areas of studies. (Bundy et al., 2017)

Modern thinking suggests that researchers should take a different approach to crisis management by focusing on a very broad and open view of crises within organizations. They should focus on studying the how crises affect organizations in a very broad view that studies the full dimensions of both the crisis and organization in every aspect. Not just limit it to certain areas. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Another reason that often limits research and contribution to the field of crisis management is due to the fact that often crisis literature refers to actions such as terrorism and crime. And therefore, organizations believe that due to their type of business or some other aspect of their business they will never be involved in such situations that could put the organization in a crisis situation. And while a lot of the crises do revolve around criminal behavior and acts of terrorism, they are not the only reasons for an organization ending up in a crisis situation. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Often the focus and measure of crisis management plans are based on the financial success, social management, reputation and survival of the organization. However it is suggested that crisis management research could benefit from other types of models too that focus on crisis planning and management that shows success in other ways such as

learning, development of the organization, and improvement in organizational relationships etc. (Bundy et al., 2017)

In addition to the gaps in literature, there are also questions as to how effective crisis management plans are in practice. Organizations are complex institutions and are quite sensitive to the rapid changes that occur. It is argued that plans designed in theory for certain risk scenarios cannot keep up with the constant changes that are occurring when an organization is in actual risk. Therefore questioning the effectiveness and validity of crisis management plans and if they truly can make a difference. (Paraskevas, 2006)

2.1.4 Crisis management planning

Crisis management planning involves making plans that cover a variety of possible scenarios that may occur. When taking crisis management planning into consideration, it is important to remember that it is not just about making and having a plan. Executing that plan is equally important, as well as being able to adapt and modify the plan as the circumstances and situations change. (Chong, 2004; Paraskevas, 2006)

Often crisis management planning is not considered important enough due to a low perception of the risks and that planning may interrupt day to day business, and increase the costs and resources involved. This can lead to managers being against crisis management systems and not believing in the benefits which leads to a lack of commitment that further affects planning. For successful implementation of crisis management plans and execution of those plans, strong leadership is often the key difference in success or failure. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

It is argued that even with all the possible drawbacks, costs, inaccuracies of the nature of predicting and forecasting future risks, the positives of doing crisis management outweigh the negatives of not doing it. It has also been noted that when crises occur, having a plan gives the organization something to fall back on and use as a guide. Even in cases when the plan doesn't match the crisis at hand, having a template plan gives the organization a certain confidence that results of prior planning. In addition, crises tend to be stressful challenging situations, and having a crisis management plan gives managers more

confidence to navigate the crisis by providing something for managers to rely on. (Chong, 2004)

An important aspect of building a sound crisis management plan is the variety of people from different areas in the organization that are involved. While upper management assumes responsibility for the plans, it is important to include lower management, directors and anyone who will be responsible for the daily execution of the plan. In addition, a culture should be created and fostered that promotes thinking about crises and building scenarios to combat future crisis. This culture should connect the whole organization, building a system that helps in crisis situations. Everyone relevant should be encouraged to take responsibility and be involved in the process of helping manage the crisis. It is also an integral part of good crisis management to provide training and support in order for personnel to feel more comfortable in managing crisis situations.(Paraskevas, 2006)

Crises by nature are constantly evolving, crises are never constant, therefore it is necessary to understand that any plans that are made, need to be adaptable and evolve with the situation. Most crises are extremely dynamic, and crises that involve humans are extremely sensitive, and as such plans need to be extremely malleable for them to be effective. It is important to be able to check the situation at any point during the crisis and explore possible options and possibilities, and let the plans change accordingly. (Paraskevas, 2006)

When building a crisis management plan, details are important, however it is paramount that the plan doesn't get bogged down by details and revolve around details. If the whole plan revolves around minute details, often those details tend to render the crisis plan useless. While details help create a thorough plan, it is important to remember that as the situation changes the plan needs to change too, therefore it is important to ensure the details do not hinder the execution of the plan. (Paraskevas, 2006)

At its core, crisis management plans are built by considering every possible case where something can go wrong. Using each of these possible scenarios, solutions are then built around them to encompass the problem while leaving space for adaptation and modification as the crisis develops. It is important to realize that all scenarios cannot be covered,

and so while it is beneficial to run through every perceivable case, importance should be given to narrowing down those risks to the ones that are most likely to have an immense impact on the organization. It is argued that for almost every possible crises, really great solutions in some form can be found, these solutions are enough to build upon and develop a concrete plan. (Paraskevas, 2006; Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Crisis management planning involves constant analysis and should be included in the daily planning and operations of an organization. According to Chong (2004) crisis management is considered part of the modern strategic management process. However, with most organizations this is not the case, and organizations do not integrate it as part of their strategic management process. Adding crisis management planning to the strategic planning of an organization, allows a seamless transition in integrating crisis management as part of the strategic management process. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

2.2 Strategy

Though relatively little research has been done combining crisis management with strategy, there is a case to be made for including crisis management as part of the strategic plans. It has been suggested that combining crisis management plans as part of the strategic plans could create for better crisis management planning systems. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

There are many thoughts on what strategy is and it is still a growing area of research. However, strategy is used by almost every organization in some way, specifically to achieve goals and targets. There are many opinions and models on strategy and how it should be implemented, however at its core, it is the process of making plans, implementing those plans and evaluating those plans, in order to achieve what an organization constitutes as success. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Making strategic plans involves analyzing the organization, its environment, resources, and what is possible, thus creating a plan that directly targets what the organization wants to accomplish, this is the first step. The second step is implementing those plans. Executing those plans in an attempt to guide the organization towards its goals and achieve

success. The third step is the analysis of the plan and making changes to improve the strategic process. This needs to be a continues process, as business is a constantly changing environment and is never at a standstill. As the environment, situations and resources change, the organization's business strategy needs to evolve and change too. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Over the years, several methods have been developed to help with strategic thinking and planning, one of these methods is scenario planning and forecasting. Due to the nature of analyzing the environment for possible crises and the need to predict possible risks, scenario planning and forecasting provide a method by which an organization can imagine the future, the possible risks and therefore possible crises in the future. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

2.3 Scenario planning

Scenario planning is a method that allows for imagining possible situations and subsequent solutions. A worst-case crisis or scenario is imagined by asking the questions of what if this happens or that happens, for a particular case, and then the discussion continues, revolving around the idea, linking it to the organization and multiple possible solutions. It is a method for imagining different possibilities and outcomes to the future. Using this method allows for organizations to delve into future possibilities and analyze its impact on the organization. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Scenario planning has been around for a long time. It dates back to its use in planning and strategizing in wars and has been used in businesses from about the 1970s. However, there is some resistance to adopting it despite its apparent advantages. It has been noted, that quite often managers are against using it as part of their strategy planning. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

Scenario planning involves brainstorming and imagining possible risk, crisis, or events that could occur in the future, further imagining how it could impact the organization. From there multiple possible paths are drawn based on further imaginations of what could happen, how it could affect the organization and possible solutions to prevent damage.

Though these predictions are purely machinations of the imagination, it helps imagine possible alternate futures, and assists in taking a broad view of what could go wrong and impact the organization. (Pollard & Hotho, 2006)

2.4 Previous research

The literature review will analyze two studies done on crisis management. Studying crises that have occurred in the past allows for a great deal of learning and knowledge development. This knowledge can be applied to future planning for managing crises, thus avoiding the same pitfalls and mistakes that organizations have made in the past. The literature can be then compared to the theories of crisis management, which further builds upon the foundation of this study.

These two studies were chosen because the first one covers crisis management from a theoretical perspective, and the author does an excellent job in explaining crisis management and how it can be applied to various situations. The second study was chosen because it provides an exceptional and practical case study for looking at crisis management in practice and applying it to real life scenarios.

2.4.1 Paraskevas 2006

Introduction

This research paper looks at crisis management from the unique perspective of viewing an organization as a complexity system. Paraskevas (2006) studied crisis management from a rather unique angle of complexity science. Complexity science refers to viewing and understanding organizations as a complex system. It is a relatively small field, that is still in development, however complexity science does have documented research in other fields too. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze if using a complexity-based framework can help design a better system for crisis response and management. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Sample

The study was based on a hotel chain based in the Mediterranean that dealt with a crisis consisting of a serious food poisoning incident in 1993. Seventeen people within the company were interviewed from which data was collected for the study. The respondents were managers involved with the crisis. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Problem

The hotel in this case study was a considerably large chain of five and four star establishments. It had detailed plans and procedures in place for all operations. The hotel had been around for more than twenty years and was one of the largest in the national tourism industry. The detailed plans were a necessity in order to successfully expand. After the September 2011 events at the World Trade Centre in the United States, the hotel started working on crisis management plans. They even brought in outside consultants to assist in building the crisis management plans. These crisis management plans covered a variety of scenarios from natural disasters to product problems within the hotel. (Paraskevas, 2006)

In the summer of 2003, the chain received several alerts of foodborne illnesses throughout their properties, the number of illnesses were increasing exponentially, and the crisis management team was called up immediately to look into the situation. The guests were contacted and provided medical care. An investigation was started to trace the source of the illness. At the same time the media team started to manage the situation in an effort to protect the reputation of the hotel. (Paraskevas, 2006)

The results of the investigation showed that some shrimp imported from another country through one of its product chains, was contaminated with bacteria that caused the outbreak. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Process

The interviews were between one and one and a half hours long and consisted of discussions with the respondents. The goal was to capture the respondents' opinions and views on what happened and their evaluation of how the crisis was handled, and the hotels response to the crisis. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Variables

Qualitative data was collected in the forms of the interviews. The data form the interviews were sorted into a format which could be easily compared to each other for analysis. The interviews were recorded and then converted into text for analysis. In addition, a video of a committee meeting related to an evaluation of the crisis and the management of the crisis was recorded for analysis

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by making observations on the facts and information gathered, this was done by comparing the perspective of the respondents. The personal views and opinions of the respondents helped create a holistic view of the crisis and how it was managed. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Results

The results showed that while they were well prepared in theory, the crisis management plan did not live up to its expectations. This resulted in loss of business, payments to settle damages, and the reputation of the organization was affected. The results also showed that running crisis management exercises and having plans do not guarantee success. The results also indicated that even though there were crisis management plans, and a lot of emphasis was put on these plans, there didn't appear to be a culture of anticipating crises within the hotel, in addition managers only received copies of the plan, without any auxiliary support or training. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Some managers said they felt lost and didn't know what to do, as there wasn't a crisis management network within the hotel. Managers needed to get all decisions approved from higher management before they could take action and handle things, which caused further delay and frustration. Some expressed thoughts that other than medical care, more could have been done for the guests. (Paraskevas, 2006)

These results express what many studies in crisis management have confirmed, that having a plan is not enough, the plan needs to evolve and adapt with every change in the

business environment. In addition, the whole of the organization needs to be part of the crisis management, especially when creating possible crisis scenarios. (Paraskevas, 2006)

Conclusions

The research concluded that plans do not always guarantee success in managing a crisis, instead of looking at crises and plans as static, it should be viewed as dynamic and flowing, where plans adapt and change with the crisis. It is important to view crisis plans as a means to make the organization strong and resilient and not used the crisis plan to survive and solve a problem. In addition, the results showed that organization could benefit from taking a complexity view and looking at the organization as a complex system. Doing this would allow organizations to react much better to crises. (Paraskevas, 2006)

The hotel invested in crisis management planning, going as far as bringing in consultants, however, outside consultants do not necessarily know the culture of the place. It would have been more efficient to integrate employees within the hotel and form a network where crisis brain storming could create possible scenarios. In addition, having such a complexly detailed plan put the hotel in a state of stasis. They should have a created a more general plan covering every scenario and built upon that as the crisis unfolded.

The study showed that executing a plan is of greater importance than the plan itself. It is hard to stop something such as food poisoning from happening as the food can get contaminated at any part of the logistics chain, however having a specific plan for food poisoning could help in managing the situation and most importantly rectifying the situation immediately by taking better care of the customers. Medical assistance is the bare minimum, the hotel should have done considerably more to ensure the guests understood it was an accident and everything was being done to ensure it wouldn't happen again. The guests should have also received other forms of compensation or benefits such as complementary commodities, in order to repair the harm to reputation.

Limitations

The original literature does not discuss the limitation in the research. It does appear to be sound research with valid and reliable results. However, the interviews were done with managers. It could have been beneficial to get the perspective of employees and kitchen

staff, not just in understanding the crisis, but for getting a very holistic view of where and how the food is prepared. In addition, nothing is mentioned about the crisis plan details of the hotel, there is no information as to if they had a plan for food poisoning and how it was supposed to be handled.

The study itself made a valid point that viewing an organization as a complex being could help anticipate the constant changes and thus would make it easier to respond to crises. However, there was very little on the topic and theory of complexity science. A better explanation on complexity science and further research on how it assists in building a better framework for crisis management and response would make it more acceptable as a valid theory. Comparing complexity science to other frameworks related to crisis management could be an avenue for further research.

2.4.2 Heller and Darling 2012

Introduction

Toyota's crisis in 2007 is a great study on the impact crises can have on organizations. In the study conducted by Heller and Darling (2012) an in-depth review and analysis of Toyota was done in order to understand how they managed the crisis and the subsequent results. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to inspect how crisis management was handled at Toyota, how one of the largest organizations in the world and a leader in producing vehicles, mismanaged a crisis so badly. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Sample

The research was conducted as a case study of Toyotas after the crisis in 2007. It was conducted in the United States, as it is one of the largest markets of Toyota. The research used information gathered from different sources, such as data from the NHTSA, and news reports, as well as some information that Toyota released. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Problem

The crisis started as a simple floor mat issue, where the floor mat was sliding forward and getting stuck on the gas pedal. This escalated when a car sped out of control and crashed killing four people. It was reported that the brakes were not working, and the acceleration did not decrease when the foot was taken off the pedal. In October 2009 there were other stories of cars accelerating on their own. The reports also showed that there had been prior investigations into Toyota, relating to acceleration issues. After the crash that killed four people, Toyota recalled some cars, and informed the public that no issues existed with the acceleration and tried to remedy it by recalling some cars and replacing the floor mats, but the NHTSA pointed out that there was more to it than floor mats and that something was wrong with the acceleration pedal. Further reports came out showing that over the last year more than a thousand complaints had been made regarding automatic acceleration in the cars. Toyota kept making minor changes such as shortening the pedal and changing floor mats. Finally, there was another death where a car accelerated into a lake and the mats were found in the trunk of the car. Toyota then recalled several million cars, and started halting sales, and seriously looking into it. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Process

The process in this research was based on a case study, collecting different sources of information on what happened and how the different parties reacted, gathering information from the government agencies, Toyota, and news reports. Combining facts of information and creating a timeline of events and matching it with theories related to crisis management. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Variables

Qualitative data was collected in the form of news reports, government reports, and press releases from Toyota. This data was publicly available and provided facts and information in order to create a narrative of the crisis. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Data Analysis

The data being qualitative in nature was analyzed by making observations on the facts and information gathered. Linking them to each other and building a timeline and scenario on the development of the crisis and how it was managed. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Results

The results of the study showed that failing to act initially at the precrisis stage was the biggest mistake. During the early stages, they refused to investigate the claims, they failed to show consideration and concern for their consumers and did not take into consideration that all the signs were pointing to a crisis. Considering that part of their core principles consisted of precrisis management, it is interesting they did nothing for so long. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

Conclusions

The research concluded that Toyota's biggest mistake was failure to act in precrisis mode, when they had the opportunity to step in and take control of the situation immediately. This could have been an opportunity for Toyota to turn the crisis into something positive, however failing to act put them in an even more dire situation. Toyota eventually started working on managing the crisis and started recalling cars in an effort to fix the situation, however it was too late, as the organization was already in full blown crisis. In an effort to rebuild the reputation Toyota, started working on a number of initiatives, improving decision making and quality, however the organization's reputation was negatively affected for a long time. (Heller & Darling, 2012)

The study showed that top leadership in Toyota didn't seem to care about its consumers and people getting hurt. However, it is strange to imagine an organization as large as Toyota, prone to high risks due to their type of business could be so careless and not notice how a small floor mat could escalate into a really big crisis. Management had to know that in a business where the use of products could put lives at risk was something important that need to be constantly evaluated. The research showed the importance of being vigilant and constantly looking for precrisis indicators.

If Toyota had noticed that they were in precrisis mode, they could have changed the whole narrative of the crisis. As Pollard and Hotho (2006) argue, if you are not in a crisis, you are in precrisis. Toyota was in precrisis and their failure to notice that, led to the crisis that cost them immensely. The precrisis stage as explained by Paraskevas (2006), provides an immense opportunity for organizations to have sufficient warning before the

crisis hits. It is almost unimaginable that a large organization such as Toyota, failed to notice these precrisis signs and take action.

Limitations

The study does a great job in signifying the importance of crisis management planning and the ability to notice a crisis before it takes hold. However, the authors do not directly address the limitation of the research.

The results and conclusions seem to be speculation by the authors based on good data, and while quite accurate, it does not necessarily paint a full picture, especially from Toyota's side. The results could be further validated if the case study could have been conducted within the organization of Toyota. Being able to talk to personnel inside of Toyota, managers as well as employees, might have painted a better picture of the perspective from the other side. It is possible some issue prevented Toyota from managing the crisis better, the delay in taking action could have a reason and explanation. Information such as this could give better credence to the claims by the author, thus supporting their conclusions better. This could be an opportunity for further research, looking into Toyotas side of the crisis and seeing how that information could contribute to the literature on crisis management.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter focuses on the methods and processes used for planning and building the research for this study. It introduces and explains the structure and the source literature upon which the foundation of the study is built. It further describes the data collection process, how that data is analyzed, and finally how the data will be presented.

In this study, the research done will help answer the research questions mentioned in chapter one. It will attempt to analyze how managers in small organizations deal with crises, if small organizations make crisis plans, and if crisis plans assist in crisis situations. In addition, the research creates another source of knowledge related to the field of crisis management.

3.1 Research method

The type of research done in this study is based on qualitative analysis.

There doesn't seem to be a specific definition for qualitative research, academics agree that due to the nature of qualitative analysis, it is difficult to define. However there are several ways it has been explained. (Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009)

One explanation expresses it as a method of research, using words to describe results, and a combination of theory and assumptions based on research data. (Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009)

Another explanation is that it helps explain and elucidate information. And that it is often used for explaining information that is not numerical in nature. (Cassell & Symon, 2006)

Qualitative research helps with understanding and describing the information that results from information and data that has no structure or format. Information such as experiences, interviews, discussions etc. can all be quantified as qualitative data. This type of data, cannot be organized such as quantitative numerical data can, thus qualitative

methods are used in an effort to gain insight, and a deep complete understanding into the knowledge. (Sinkovics et al., 2005)

Therefore, based on the above observations, using qualitative methods seem the most ideal form of research for this study. Using qualitative analysis would allow the study to gain a firm understanding of actions, reasoning's, the thought processes, and viewpoints of managers who deal with crises and how they manage their organizations throughout a crisis.

3.2 Limitations

The limitations of using the above-described method of qualitative analysis, are that often the data is open for interpretation. The resulting deductions can be skewed based on biases of the researcher. There are many ways of looking at the data, and every time the results can appear different, based on who and how the data is being viewed.

3.3 Data collection

Data collection is the process of collecting information pertaining to a specific study, it aims to collect views, opinions or some sort of data related to the study from a set or sample of individuals, groups, or data systems etc. (Tella, 2015)

The concept of data collection is based on the observation of the things that are to be studied. Research aims to collect information about something specific in a systematically guided way. (Sapsford & Jupp, 1996)

Sample size is often a much-argued subject in qualitative studies. Based on the type of data qualitative methods deal with, it is argued that the size of the sample does not matter as much as the quality or depth of the sample. This implies that it is more important to get a deep understanding, than a broad understanding, and therefore the sample size is of irrelevance. However, there are exceptions, such as in a situation where measurements are taken within a qualitative study. In general a sample size of even one could reveal

deep useful insights that would be completely valid, such as the experiences an individual has gained over many years, or the experiences of a single organization. (Boddy, 2016)

For the purpose of this study, data will be collected via interviews, however due to the COVID-19 situation, this makes it slightly more complicated. Conducting the interviews via digital methods, such as web-based video chat seems to be the safest course of action. Video chat takes away certain important aspects, such as body language and expression, but hopefully ensuring that the interview questions are precises, could increase the quality of the data collected.

The sample size being considered for this study, is somewhere between five to ten respondents. This would ensure that there is more than one opinion and view, and it would lead to a more holistic view of crisis management in organizations. The intention being to gain a deep insight into the view and perspective of managers who deal with crises in small organizations. The sample size though small, will provide deep and complete information as explained by Boddy (2016).

3.4 Data analysis

There are many ways to explain data analysis, data analysis is based on extracting useful attributes from data, that can be used to make informed decision or learnings. Data analysis is the process of studying and examining sets of data which can then be interpreted and integrated into some useful case, such as expanding horizons of knowledge, knowledge integration, insights for businesses, or data for decision making in organizations and businesses. (Scarisbrick-Hauser, 2007)

Content analysis is a term often associated with qualitative research. It is said to be a scientific method of analyzing and doing qualitative research. It deals with data extracted from communications and data that quantitative systems cannot understand, such as the nuances involved in social and behavioral aspects of human interaction. Content analysis uses qualitative methods and processes, to make conclusions and speculations, based on the patterns and comparisons in data. (Karanja & Zaveri, 2013)

The analysis done in this study will be based on content analysis. Based on the type of data expected to be collected from interviews, it is apparent that content analysis can help sort through the data and derive patterns as is explained by Karanja & Zaveri (2013). The results, in addition to answering the research questions, can also be compared to the literature section, to validate the theory of crisis management.

3.5 Reliability

According to Sapsford & Jupp (1996), research methods tend to change the data once it is extracted. They say that once the data is taken out of the real world for analysis, the data changes. The challenge is therefore to ensure that once the data is extracted for analysis it does not lose its context and relevance to the real world. After analysis, the results need to have real-world implications and context in order to be useful and valid.

To ensure the results of this study be as reliable as possible, the utmost care will be taken in collecting and analyzing the data. The same questions and formats will be used in all collection of data to ensure the data is as similar as possible, which should help improve the quality of data collected, as explained by Sapsford and Jupp (1996). In addition, the results will be compared to the source literature, which gives a clear indicator of the type of results expected, thus ensuring the validity and reliability of the study.

4 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter focuses on the results from the interviews. The respondents were asked questions relating to the COVID-19 crises and the management of crises within their organizations. The questions revolved around the research questions presented in chapter one of this paper, on how organizations think about crises and how they plan for crises, in order to understand how small businesses, manage crises.

All questions were divided into five themes, the first three themes were based on the research questions and the last two are supporting themes for each of the initial research questions. The last two themes are based on crisis management communication and crisis planning for the future.

The interviews were conducted digitally via video calls and recorded, the results were then sorted by their respective themes and analyzed side by side.

The smallest organization in the sample had just four employees, while the larger ones had more than forty employees. The respondents were all managers in their organizations, thus providing a high-level perspective on how their organization views crises. The ages of the respondents ranged from twenty to sixty years, thus providing a varying depth of experience and perspective. The youngest respondents had few years of experience in their current business, with varying experiences in different lines of business prior to their current job. The older respondents had been working in the same line of business in some form or another for their entire careers.

The results are expressed in the form of thick descriptions based on the summary of multiple conversations. The word thick is used to describe a detailed account, rich in content and explanation. It is often used in explaining qualitative results and analysis. (Bui, 2014)

The results presented below are a combination of the responses from each respondent. Select statements were chosen from the conversations to make a point and put emphasis on certain opinions and thoughts, thus further supporting the ideas presented in the summarization of multiple conversations.

4.1 Views on crises

In order to understand how small organizations, manage crises, it is important to understand if organizations take a proactive view to crisis management. The COVID-19 crisis was used as a base to gauge, and ask questions related to crisis management.

When asked how the respondents viewed crisis management, and if crises were something they planned for in their business, the answers were quite varying.

In regard to the COVID-19 crisis, the respondents expressed shock and surprise, in how it forced them to manage their business. In addition, a common idea was that crises related to global diseases such as COVID-19 was hardly considered a possible crisis to business.

One respondent who had started a business just two years ago, was surprised by how fast COVID-19 spread. Some respondents didn't even expect it to come to Finland and impact business locally.

> "No, never imagined anything like this. Didn't even think about it, kind of shock. Very unexpected and uncertain." (Respondent 3)

Another respondent who started as an entrepreneur and has been growing her company from one employee to twenty-four employees over the last twelve years, was equally surprised by the crisis, and its impact on business.

> "No, and that was a big mistake, cause I realized when crisis comes you need to have a buffer. I didn't think before that something like this could happen." (Respondent 2)

Other respondents were completely taken by surprise, even with years of experience they said it was very unexpected, unimaginable, and had no idea something like this could occur and pose a threat to their business.

> "No, I haven't experienced anything like this." (Respondent 4)

"This is one of a kind and hopefully never again." (Respondent 1)

A clear result from the research, showed that the threat COVID-19 posed, was quite unexpected. The more experienced respondents admitted to having to deal with crises on a regular basis, which gave them the insight in realizing that this could pose a threat to their business. However, they were still quite surprised at how fast it started affecting business. Expecting crises as part of their daily business operations allowed them to anticipate and start taking action early on.

"We quite immediately started to try to figure out what this could mean" (Respondent 1)

"Soon after we started thinking about what happens when it comes to Finland." (Respondent 4)

The COVID-19 crisis appears to have caught a lot of businesses unaware, some business did not expect it to spread across the world so fast. The consequences of the COVID-19 crisis were equally unimaginable. The results showed different managers, in different lines of business, all reacting to the crisis at different times and in different ways, the one constant was that it was a complete surprise to all of them.

4.2   Planning for crises

The results from this part of the interview were quite varying too. Some respondents said they did not have any formal crisis management plans, while others said they had crisis management plans, and risk analysis was part of their business. However, the respondents who had crisis management plans did not have anything that anticipated dealing with the crisis such as the COVID-19 virus. The results showed that many managers just deal with situations as they arise and said that due to the size of their organization it was quite easy to just manage situations in the moment, without needing crisis management plans.

"No formal plans, just seeing things and reacting just reacting and making plans on the go" (Respondent 2)

"I think we are too small, no need for an actual plan at this size." (Respondent 2)

"We are not a big corporation; we didn't have any crisis management plans in hand" (Respondent 3)

The results showed that being able to work the problem when it arises, by analyzing what is happening around them and finding solutions, seemed to work best for many mangers. Many small businesses appear to manage crises in that manner.

"Observe the customer and try to adapt to the situation" (Respondent 3)

Other respondents had crisis management plans that covered a variety of threats, they also did regular risk analysis for every project and situation. However, they were caught by surprise with the COVID-19 crisis and had no plans for dealing with something such as the COVID-19 crisis. It was also noted that as the virus originated in another region of the world, no one assumed it would spread so fast, and cause so much damage, therefore none of the crisis management analyses and plans accounted for something such as this.

"We try to do crisis estimates, for roof falls, we make risk analyses, but this was something new." (Respondent 4)

"This was completely something else, no we didn't have" (Respondent 1)

The results showed that all the respondents agreed that having a crisis management plan helps in managing a crisis. Whether it is a formal document or a process where they constantly anticipate and analyze risks, it contributes positively to managing a crisis. However, the results showed that the crisis management process varied between businesses.

4.3 Managing a crisis

The results showed that while some of the businesses had crisis management plans others did not. The businesses that did have crisis management plans, those plans did not account for the COVID-19 crisis in any manner.

However, the results showed that all of the respondents started looking into the situation and analyzing the risks quite fast. Some businesses did it faster than others, but quite early on it became a priority for everyone. Once it was apparent that the virus was spreading in Finland, and it posed a risk to businesses, the respondents took action by analyzing and creating crisis management plans to manage the threat of COVID-19 in their organizations.

Some business had direct information from the originating region of the outbreak, while others relied on local governmental sources of information. This resulted in each respondent taking different approaches, at different times, to managing the crisis. While each crisis management plan varied in method and nature, each respondent took action immediately.

An important concept in crisis management is being able to immediately handle the situation and take action in pre-crisis mode, before the actual crisis occurs. The results showed that the respondents took action right away in a stage akin to pre-crisis mode, in an effort to get control of the situation and minimize damage to their business.

> "It's important to handle in time, it's better to do before than after." (Respondent 1)

> "You should listen to what you hear and make conclusions." (Respondent 1)

> "The main thing is to anticipate the issue, if you see things start to go bad, try to figure out how to change now don't just wait there." (Respondent 2)

The results showed that the respondents immediately started analyzing the situation and making plans. Some respondents used existing crisis management plans as a template to create crisis management plans to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, while other just created

new plans to manage the situation. The results showed that while some made formal plans, other respondents handled the situation in a more informal manner, making decisions and solving problems without any documentation or formal paperwork.

In addition to immediately creating crisis management plans, these plans were executed just as fast. The results showed that each business took a different approach to managing the crisis, these varied based on their type of business. Some initially wanted to shut down immediately, others waited to see how things would play out, others made multiple plans to cover a variety of scenarios. Some organizations took action immediately to minimize any damage that could occur, regardless of how the crisis played out, some completely based their plans on governmental mandates related to the crisis. It was noted that many organizations did not have much of a choice and were forced to follow government regulation in many instances.

The results showed that being calm and practical was a major theme in managing the crisis. Understanding the situation and excepting the reality is important. Practicality is extremely important in managing a crisis.

> "You don't start by thinking how could we shut this down, you practically think how can we prevent this from affecting our business." (Respondent 4)

> "It is important to be practical and pragmatic" (Respondent 4)

The results also showed that each organization, however they managed the crisis, they seemed to have done it successfully, with some organizations actually thriving by finding new opportunities and new sources of revenue. One business was able to open a new channel for sales by offering delivery services, which they had not previously considered. The crisis forced them to consider other channels which increased their revenue significantly. Another business was able to keep their revenue and business by simply cutting extraneous costs and focusing on protecting their clients and their needs. They were so afraid that the crisis would destroy the business, they took extreme measures early on in the form of cost cutting to ensure the business could survive the crisis.

The results also showed that every respondent was quite satisfied with how they managed the crisis. They felt quite confident they did the right thing in order to minimize the

potential damage to their organization, by acting fast and handling things in pre-crisis mode.

One interesting result was that in some organizations there was not much to be done, except to shut down and wait for permission from the government to open again. Thus, some of the crisis management plans were invalid, and the organization did not have much control on the situation. The success and failure were dependent on factors out of the organization's control.

"Couldn't do much different than what I did" (Respondent 2)

"We have done all the things we could have done" (Respondent 4)

"It is difficult to know if everything was done right" I would say that maybe 80-90 percent we have done right the rest of the percentages that I leave out are uncertainties that we cannot predict." (Respondent 3)

4.4 Communication in crisis

In any crisis, being able to efficiently communicate is an important aspect of good crisis management. The results showed that every respondent felt it important to communicate efficiently with the stakeholders. Each respondent used a variety of methods and forms for communicating, depending on the stakeholder. The results showed that it was important to have direct communication with employees, and the respondents deemed it quite important to provide regular and timely information.

"Information is very very important" (Respondent 1)

The results showed that everyone seemed accepting, and they understood the seriousness of the crisis, and were willing to do their part to be responsible in surviving and getting through the crisis for the good of the organization. It was important that everyone contributed and did the best they could to make things work and to ensure the organization survived the crisis. The results showed that the organizations viewed the situation quite practically, in the sense that something just had to be done, certain measures had to be taken and there was no other option.

"Everyone understood the severity" (Respondent 4)

"You knew what you had to do." (Respondent 1)

The results showed that it was not easy talking to employees about the crisis. It was a scary situation, and there was a lot unknown about the virus at the time, hence, talking to people about it, and explaining the situation was difficult. However, being able to explain and communicate facts to employees are really important. Being able listen to their fears and talk them through the situation is an important part of crisis management. When communication is simple, factual, and direct, it is easier to get employees to understand the decisions being made regarding the business. Everyone has their own ideas and opinions and being able to tell them the facts and how the crisis is going to be managed is important. Everyone involved needs to understand what measures are being taken and for what purpose, they need to feel as they are part of the crisis management process.

"Hard talking to employees, everyone was so scared" (Respondent 2)

"The information given to the personal has to be very simple, short and clear, shouldn't start long discussions, how to do or not to do, what is right what is wrong it doesn't help. If it is a crisis, somebody has to tell how it has to be managed. It has to be clear simple and according to the law." (Respondent 1)

The results showed that the communication message was important too. The results showed that it was important to be honest, open and practical, while at the same time not feeling pitiful. The results also showed that it was important to give hope and something for the customers to look forward to in the future. So instead of outright canceling and shutting down, many businesses took the approach of postponing events and business activities. The stakeholders were given a possible future schedule, something they could look forward to, and hope for in the future.

"We have been quite spare full when it comes to communicating unnecessary worries, we have simply been pragmatical and practical and said what's when we are going forward, and we are aiming at that and see you then." (Respondent 4)

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"If you cancel the world doesn't stop, give a new date." (Respondent 1)

The results showed that the form of communication is just as important as the message and the respondents chose methods that fit with the business, some used social media, while others took more traditional mainstream approaches. In addition, the importance of showing empathy to the stakeholders impacted by the crisis was quite apparent in the results too.

> "We used our social media platforms, we used our media platforms, and also we did press releases, and we communicated to every customer separately through our ticket broker. We reached everyone." (Respondent 4)

> "The best way is to talk face to face" (Respondent 1)

4.5 Crises planning and the future

The results showed that respondents answered favorably to the apparent importance of having crisis management plans for their organization. The results showed that most respondents agreed that there was a need for crisis plans that included global contagion risks moving forward, and that it would be a part of their crisis management plans for the future.

> "So yes, this question is now relevant, what global infections can influence our business in the future, will be a point of consideration in any risk analysis forward." (Respondent 4)

> "I believe after this crisis we have manuals, and it will be easier." (Respondent 1)

However, there were some respondents who felt their business was too small and simple to warrant formal crisis management plans, and they prefer to do their crisis management in the moment as things happen, by anticipating and solving problems as they happen.

Due to the nature of the COVID-19 virus, the crisis continues, with no guarantee of what the future holds. This crisis has affected organizations in a way that could not have been

foreseen. The success and failures of how organizations have coped and managed the crisis will be something that can only be seen in the future. However, the results also showed that organizations were eager to start again, find new innovative ways to solve the problems introduced by COVID-19, and find ways to keep their business operational. The results on the future and the COVID-19 crisis were quite mixed. Some businesses seemed to be doing well and were quite positive about the future, and others were completely dependent on the government. The results showed a mixture of views on how business will proceed in the future.

> "Restart everything again and see how u can do things in a new different way."
> (Respondent 1)

The results showed some important views and opinions on successfully managing a crisis. Managers were quite optimistic about the situation in the long term, expressing that things will work out and businesses would find a way to survive. Organizations with a social aspect to their business had similar views on the future. The consensus was that the social aspect is an important part of life that you cannot take away, and thus people will find a way to make it work. The changes and protocols in place for interaction and communication will become the new normal, and life will go on.

> "People now adays only think about themselves, and if you do that your already in a crisis, you should think more widely how you do what you do and the surroundings, this is the only way to handle a crisis" (Respondent 1)

> "Future is very uncertain, no one knows what will happen, so plan for it and be able to adapt to the market" (Respondent 3)

> "But it is still in the future very difficult to predict what's going to happen. Because nobody knows, nobody can give any real sustainable answers to the fact that yes that's when you can do it safely." (Respondent 4)

The results appeared to be very consistent with the literature on crisis management, it showed some interesting facts about how small businesses view crises, and how they manage crises.

5   DISCUSSION

This study aimed to answer the research questions, if small organizations thought about crises, how they planned for crises, and if having a crisis management plan helped in managing the crisis.

The results showed all the respondents in the study thought about crises, however, how they planned for crises, largely depended on the experience of the managers and the size of the organizations. In addition, while all the organizations agreed that having a crisis management plan helps, some of them did not think the benefit was worth the cost, relative to the size of their organizations.

This chapter discusses the results and its implications. It focuses on answering the research questions, comparing it to the source literature, and contributes to the study of crisis management. In addition, it mentions the limitations, and suggests areas for further research.

5.1   Findings

The analysis and findings are presented below in the same order as the results in the above chapter. The results are analyzed according to their theme and the findings are presented subsequently under the corresponding theme.

5.1.1   View on crises

The results from the research showed that while some organizations expected crises as part of their business, they did not anticipate anything like COVID-19. Every organization was quite shocked and surprised. It was completely unexpected, and even organizations that dealt with crises on a regular basis, could not comprehend or plan for the consequences that the COVID-19 crisis presented.

Interpretation

All the crisis management plans that some organizations had, were based on everyday risks, threats the organization deemed more likely to happen. Not a single organization

had crisis management plans that related to anything such as a global pandemic. No one thought that a disease halfway across the world could spread so rapidly, impact their organization, and pose such a great threat.

There was also a stark distinction between the more experienced managers and the less experienced managers. The experienced managers depended on crisis management plans; it was part of their daily operations. The less experienced managers did not see a need for a formal written down guide for managing crises, and preferred to handle crises in the moment, by solving problems as they appeared.

It was also noted that the larger organizations relied on crisis management plans, while the smaller organizations did not feel the need for a crisis management plan.

Summary

Every organization in the study, appeared to think about crises and protecting their business. While almost all the organizations took a proactive view on crises, and it was part of their process of running the business, how they went about this process varied quite a bit. The experienced, larger organizations, appeared to take a more formal view and process, while the smaller, less experienced organizations, took a more informal view and process.

Crisis management planning is an important part of business continuity, and they help in ensuring a business can survive a crisis, as pointed out by Chong (2004) and Paraskevas (2006). The research also showed that organizations that have crisis management plans, and actively think about crises, found it easier to adapt and manage crises.

5.1.2 Planning for crises

The results showed that larger organizations had crisis management plans that covered a variety of scenarios, these crisis management plans were based on risks that had a high potential of occurring. Smaller organizations did not have any formal crisis management plans but preferred to manage crises by solving problems as they appeared

Interpretation

The organizations with plans, were older organizations, in business for many years, these plans covered a variety of scenarios related to high probability threats. The crisis

management plans were a practicality for their business and the risks involved in the organization's operations. However not a single crisis management plan that existed, accounted for a crisis such as COVID-19. When the COVID-19 crisis occurred, the organizations with crisis management plans, used the existing plans as a template for building a crisis management plan for COVID-19.

The smaller organizations without any crisis management plans, were quickly able to analyze the situation, create a plan to manage the crisis, and take measures to minimize the damage to their organizations. The organizations that did not have a crisis management plans, dealt with the situation by analyzing what was happening, observing in real time and making plans as the situation unfolded.

The results implied a difference in the approach to crisis management planning, between the older more experienced respondents and the younger less experienced respondents. Having crisis management plans are integral to managing a crisis, and it was interesting to note that some respondents expressed emotions of regret, indicating that they should have planned for this, and had some sort of buffer in place to protect the organization from any crisis that could occur.

Summary

There was a clear divide between the organizations that did crisis management planning and the ones that did not. The reasons for not doing crisis management planning were mostly based on the managers perspective of the size of their organizations and its needs. This could be contributed to an experience factor, as well as lack of resources as explained by Bundy et al. (2017). The older more experienced organizations had managers that had experienced crisis before, and therefore understood the need and usefulness of crisis management plans. In addition, the larger organizations had the resources for crisis management planning.

Therefore, it can be noted that not all small organizations make crisis management plans. In fact, it can be seen that smaller organizations are less likely to invest and allocate resources to creating an environment and culture that prioritizes crisis management planning, this is also something argued by Doern (2016). Crisis management planning is something that small organizations should take more seriously, regardless of the size of

organization, or scope of crisis management, having a simple plan can make a significant impact in managing a crisis, as argued by Pollard and Hotho (2006).

5.1.3 Managing a crisis

The results showed that even though some organizations had crisis management plans, none of them had any plans that anticipated a threat as the COVID-19 virus. The COVID-19 crisis was completely unexpected and took every organization by surprise.

However, the results also showed that all the organizations took action immediately, each organization acting in precrisis mode, well before the crisis took hold. They prepared by listening and gathering information on the crisis and were thus able to anticipate and solve certain problems before it was too late.

Due to the differences in the business of each organization, each took action in a different way, as well as at a different time in the precrisis mode. Many organizations were heavily dependent on information and guidance from the government in conducting business as the COVID-19 crisis hit. This led to less-than-ideal outcomes and crisis management for some organizations, as they were not entirely free to do what they thought best.

Interpretation

It appears that every organization managed the crisis to the best of their abilities. They started managing the crisis in pre-crisis mode which gave them an advantage to plan and minimize the damage to the organization. Being able to step in and take action before the crisis actually hit, allowed the organizations to minimize the potential damage of the crisis.

Every manager appeared to be proactive, constantly analyzing their organization and business environment. This appeared to be the main reason they were able to start planning and executing in the precrisis stage. In addition, even though some of the managers faced doubts and fears as the crisis expanded, they appeared extremely calm and practical when it came to decision making and managing the crisis.

The decisions and planning were based on being empathetic, practical, and focusing on problem solving, which allowed the organizations to minimize the potential damage of

the COVID-19 crisis. The organizations that had crisis management plans, used them as a template to plan and execute for the crisis at hand.

It was also noted that some of the organizations were able to adapt to the new environment quite quickly, and while the COVID-19 crisis greatly impacted the business, they were able to find new opportunities, expanding business and revenue. An important outcome from the study revealed, that it appeared that small organizations are able to adapt more easily than larger organizations.

Summary

Every organization managed the crisis quite well. Some were dependent on government regulation and policy and were therefore constricted in certain aspects of managing the crisis. Others found opportunity to expand and increase revenue from other channels withing their organizations. Being a small organization has the benefits of being able to easily adapt to a situation.

Effective crisis management in the organizations that were studied, were a result of acting in precrisis mode, which can make a huge difference in dealing with a crisis, as explained by Paraskevas (2006). In addition, being practical and accepting the facts of the situation, allowed the organizations to manage the situation to the best of their abilities.

The results showed that having a crisis management plan does help in managing a crisis. It provides a plan to fall back on and provides guidance and room for adaptivity to any crisis, as argued by Chong (2004). However smaller organizations without any crisis management plans appeared to handle the crisis just as well, and in some cases even better, due to being able to adapt quickly. Having a crisis management plan can only add to the efficiency and ease of managing a crisis, this is something that organizations without crisis management plans concurred on.

5.1.4 Communication in crisis

The results showed that communication was an extremely important aspect of managing the crisis. Every respondent took the time to talk with the personnel involved in the business, providing accurate and factual information as simply and directly as possible.

Interpretation

There was a lot of confusion and fear around the COVID-19 crisis, and the managers did an admirable job in dealing with the personnel and customers. A lot was unknown about the COVID-19 crisis, making it difficult to have complete conversations, about the present and the future. Yet the managers communicated exceptionally well. Being practical, honest, and empathetic, they were able to lead by example.

Some managers involved their employees in decision making and managing the crisis. While other managers assumed the role of an educator and decision maker, in explaining the situation and what needs to be done in order to survive. It appeared that the managers had a hard time in communicating the situation as there was very little information at the time.

Communication with customers were a priority too, customers were contacted via different channels and methods, and provided with information regarding products, services, as well as information on how the crisis was being managed. The customers were involved throughout the crisis, and focus was put on creating hope, and a future in the form of postponing events instead of canceling them, thus keeping them involved.

Summary

An important aspect of managing crisis situations, is being able to communicate with all the stakeholders affiliated with the organization, as argued by Haupt and Azevedo (2021). Choosing the right methods for communicating, and an understanding of the culture within their organizations, allowed them to convey an effective message through the confusion and fear.

The research showed that every respondent put emphasis on being honest, factual, and showing empathy, which is extremely important in communication during times of crisis, as explained by Nätti (2014) and Fredriksson (2014). This resulted in effective communication, where all the stakeholders especially the customers and employees, understood the severity of the decisions being made, and were sympathetic towards the organization during the crisis.

5.1.5 Crisis planning at the future

The results showed that every respondent appear to be satisfied with how the crisis is being managed within their organization, they are confident they have done the right thing, and everything within their control. The results also showed that most respondents agreed to needing a crisis management plan that covered crises as the COVID-19 crisis. They agreed that in the future there would be crisis management plans that covered crises such as COVID-19.

The results showed that the respondents agreed the future was unknown, however they appeared positive about the future and that their organizations would find a way to survive.

Interpretation

It appears every organization did the best they could, given the situation and environment. A lot of their decisions were based on government regulation, which made things a lot simpler as it was simply a matter of doing what was expected by the government. However, this also limited their organization in managing the crisis.

The respondents appeared focused on restarting business and looking forward to the future. They appeared focused on changing how business was done, cutting extra costs, and managing daily operations in a more streamlined manner in an effort to combat the consequences of COVID-19. All the managers agreed that planning was important and that in the future crisis management plans would have a place in their organizations. However, there was one respondent that was not so sure, making the case that their organization was too small to warrant crisis management plans.

Summary

Though some of the organizations were shut down and had to operate within restrictions put in place by the government, it appears that the respondents are quite positive about the future. In addition, creating crisis management plans that cover such crises as COVID-19, appears to be a priority.

The research showed that the crisis provided an opportunity for many organizations to see the benefit of crisis management plans, and the potential crisis management plans have in managing a crisis, this is also suggested by Chong (2004) and Paraskevas (2006).

Thus, creating an opportunity for organizations to do better in crisis management and protect their businesses against future crises.

5.2   Limitations

The research went according to plan, with results that appeared to be valid and in line with the source literature. However, as the interviews were done online via video chat, there were certain aspects and information such as body language and expressions, that could not be accounted for.

In addition to the above limitation, another major limitation was noted. Some of the organizations received financial assistance from the government during the crisis. Thus, the crisis management plans and decisions that were made could be brought in to question, assuming they would have made different decisions and handled the crisis differently if they had not received any financial assistance.

5.3   Future Research

Based on the results from the research, as well as the limitations that appeared during the research, there are several recommendations for further research.

Based on the limited number of respondents, it would be beneficial to compare crisis management planning within a much larger sample of organizations. It could also be useful to do a comparison of the organizations within their respective areas of business.

Another avenue of further research could be studying crisis management between organizations, ones that make plans and ones that do not make plans, in an effort to study the actual difference in terms of some quantifiable aspect.

5.4   Managerial recommendations

Crisis management is considered a daily operation in today's business environment. Organizations need to consider how crises can impact their business and plan accordingly. In order to plan and manage crises well, it is important for managers to understand the nuances to creating good crisis management plans and implementing them. It is also

important for managers to understand the importance of creating a culture within the organization that fosters proactive thinking, planning, and communication around crises.

Whether the business is a small organization or a large one, managers need to realize the importance and potential that crisis management plans can play in safeguarding the business, and lead from that perspective. If they are inexperienced, or the business is new, they need to start small and create crisis management plans that covers the scope of their operations. But accepting the importance of crisis management plans is paramount.

5.5 Conclusions

Three critical conclusions can be deducted from this study. The first conclusion is that when making crisis management plans, organizations do not fully consider all possible crises that could affect their business. The second conclusion is that small organizations do not feel the need for crisis management plans and thus do not view crisis management the same way larger organizations do. The third conclusion is that smaller organizations seem to be able to adapt much faster than larger organizations.

The first conclusion is that organizations often take a limited scope in analyzing possible threats. Organizations focus on their direct business operations and create crisis management plans that cover probabilities within their range of operations, often based on geography. Not a single organization expected the COVID-19 crisis to affect their business, or even affect Finland. The crisis management plans were limited in their scope of scenario analysis. A good way to overcome this is by involving a diverse range of personnel from different areas within the organization, and not limiting their imagination when creating crisis scenario possibilities.

The second conclusion is that some organizations view crisis management planning as inconsequential due to their small size, however, this appears to be related to limited experience, rather than the size of the organization. In small organizations, personnel and managers are often overworked, this results in tasks such as crisis management planning being overlooked due to time and resource constraints, as it is not a priority for day-to-day operations. This type of perspective and thinking can be changed by experience and further management education. The results showed that some respondents realized the error of not having a crisis management plan and were committed to creating crisis

management plans for the future. Therefore, understanding the importance and potential of having a crisis management plan can get managers to commit time and resources for crisis management analysis and planning.

The third conclusion is that smaller organizations seem to be able to adapt and modify themselves as an organization and business more efficiently and rapidly than larger organizations. The larger organizations seemed content with surviving the crisis and getting through the crisis, the focus was on ensuring that the business was operational as soon as possible. The smaller organizations on the other hand were more creative, they were constantly looking for ways to keep the business running and continuously finding new sources of revenue. It appeared as if the larger organizations did not have the freedom or option to explore other possible solutions other than what was expected of them. The smaller organizations were free to experiment and explore, they had the freedom to try out new things and look for solutions other than what was expected. It is important that every organization strives to keep innovating and adapting, instead of getting stuck due to its size.

Managerial positions require being able to balance multiple aspects of the business simultaneously. Part of this balancing act is ensuring tasks that may be potentially important for the business are not ignored. Crisis management planning is an important aspect of safeguarding an organization. It is important to understand the potential upside of a crisis management plan and the consequences of not having a crisis management plan. This study has provided a salient perspective on how crises are handled within small organizations, with results that show the substantial impact crisis management plans can have on an organization and how managers can protect their organizations from future crises.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Research Questions:
How do small organisations think about crises?
How do small organisations plan for crises?
How does having a crisis management plan help in managing a crisis?

Date:
Introduction:
Disclaimer: Is it alright if I record this session? All information will be anonymous.

Background Questions:
Name:
Position:
Experience in field:
Work History:
How many employees:

Theme 1 Q1:
Did you think about crises before COVID happened?
Has something like this affected your business before, have you experienced something like this in your career before?
Late in 2019, when there were early reports of the virus, did you think about it or wonder if it would affect your business in anyway?

Theme 2 Q2
Do you make crisis management plans for crises or events that could affect your business negatively?
Did you start doing any planning regarding the crisis at any time as COVID19 started escalating?
Do you think if you had looked into the crisis early on, it would have helped manage the situation better, when things really got bad?

Theme 3 Q3
Do you think if there was a detailed plan, it would have helped manage the situation better?
Do you think having a crisis management plan would help make a future crisis easier to manage?

Theme 4
As news about the crisis started spreading, did your business have clear communication of what was happening?
Was there communication among employees, and other stake holders about the possible risks the crisis posed?
What was the process in communicating with the people involved, employees, shareholders, customers etc.

Theme 5
How have you handled the crisis in your organisation?
Has your view on crises, and how you plan in your business changed going forward?
Any comments or thoughts you would like to add?