

**CEOs' strategic leadership role during crises: Shaping
employee perceptions**

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A research proposal submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Corporate Strategy).

28 November 2022

Abstract

Of all stakeholders challenged by organisational crisis, employees are arguably the most affected. While scholars have extensively investigated external stakeholder influence on crisis, the internal stakeholder's perspective is lacking. Employees as internal stakeholders, form perceptions about how they are led during crisis. Perceptions either support or disrupt CEO ability to effectively resolve crisis.

Using qualitative methodology, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with line managers to CEOs to understand how employees perceived CEOs strategic leadership during two crisis events of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the political unrest, in Eswatini. An additional interest of the study was to explore how employee perceptions during crisis can be positively shaped by CEOs to effectively resolve crisis.

The research findings first illustrate that CEOs play a critical role in shaping employee perceptions during crisis. Several factors: leader behaviour and trait, knowledge about CEOs (experience and biases) and the context and style of leadership, shape how employees perceive CEOs during a crisis. Second, the findings show that employee perceptions influence the support CEOs garner. Third, CEOs who apply leadership traits perceived positively by employees during crisis, manage and resolve crisis effectively. Fourth, leadership traits and behaviours which CEOs use to drive effective crisis outcomes include: care and empathy, communication, decisiveness, agility, positive attitude, a calm demeanour, vulnerability, honesty, use of incentives, listening, and the use of clear policy frameworks.

The study contributes to the theories and frameworks of impression management, attribution theory and reintegration and employee trust repair during crisis. Importantly, it expands the strategic leadership role of CEOs during crisis, to embody crisis management through learned behaviours and understanding of what employees require from CEOs. By reviewing employee perceptions during crisis, the researcher suggests ways in which CEOs can strategically lead to shape impressions and perceptions of employees to drive positive and collective crisis resolution. This knowledge will assist leaders to manage their employees during crisis.

Keywords

Strategic leadership, crisis, crisis leadership, perception, impression management.

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy Corporate Strategy at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Date: 28 November 2022

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Eswatini like most countries faced the COVID-19 pandemic from early 2020. As the pandemic scoured through the country and the world, threatening lives, social structures, health and businesses (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021), another crisis of widespread anarchy, extensive looting, and the burning of infrastructure emerged mid-2021, taking the country deeper into a state of shock, terror and disarray (Ebrahim, 2021).

The state of emergency due to the crises prompted the government of Eswatini, like other governments around the world, to use their extraordinary powers to enforce and suspend certain rights. The government of Eswatini controlled movement, business operations, certain public and private access, and declared others businesses 'essential services' (IOE, 2021). This action resulted in only businesses which were classified essential services operating during the crises. Commonly referred to as daily required services critical to the preservation of life, health, public safety and basic societal functioning (IOE, 2021), essential services in Eswatini included financial services, retail and consumer business, government service industries and communications (Ministry of Commerce, 2020).

While at present there is reduction in contractions and deaths from the pandemic, and the threat of the unrest has subsided, long-term effects of both crises linger. Each crisis, which for the study collectively are referred 'crises', had one common thread. Each put astounding and unprecedented pressure on government, firms, and leaders in both public and private sector, and required strategic and decisive action (Johansen et al., 2012). Such demand for strategic leadership was more apparent in essential service firms, and on 'front line' employees who had to continue servicing customers through the crises (Mcanea, 2021). These employees required leaders (CEOs) to navigate the quickly changing landscape with calm, agility and a transformational style of leadership which promotes innovative ideas and positive results (Mcanea, 2021; Paixão et al., 2020; Tokakis et al., 2019). As internal stakeholders, employees are crucial and can be instrumental in ensuring quick resolve of crisis through active engagement and fostered alliances (Mazzei et al., 2019).

Employees formed perceptions of how CEOs led them during the crises (Baert et al., 2022; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Van Beurden et al., 2021). Perceptions formed on the strategic leadership role of CEOs may have pre-existed prior to the crises (Cone et al., 2017; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Perceptions included inferences to whether CEOs led strategically, and whether leadership tools and traits used by CEOs during the crises were efficient and timely enough to positively shift perceptions that may have pre-existed.

1.1 Research focus and scope

The study primarily focused on essential services companies. The period under review begins at the precrisis stage and explores the strategic leadership role of CEOs. Influence of perceptions incept from March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic and in June 2021 when the civil unrest erupted. Representation included line manager direct reports to CEOs of essential services companies in banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals, for diversity of account of the lived crisis experience (Frechette et al., 2020). The criteria used to identify suited demographics to make up the sample included participants who led teams through both crises, were direct reports to CEOs, had not less than 3 years' experience and 3 staff reporting to them. Focus was to understand the varying lived experiences and perception of line managers. CEO strategic leadership capabilities pre and during crisis was explored with focus to learn perceptions formed by employees about CEOs, and to explore means in which CEOs can positively shape employee perceptions during crisis for effective crisis resolution.

1.2 Background and purpose of the research problem

For many CEOs in Eswatini, the magnitude and effect that the crises had, was unlike any other previously experienced (Hatami et al., 2020; Smet & D'Auria, 2020). The novel and erratic nature of the crises was daunting and became a real test of character. As employees demanded compassion, factual updates and visibility, Hatami et al (2020) posits that CEOs were most pressured, with huge expectations for them to drive positive solutions through sober enthusiastic leadership, anchoring on "coherent long term views and a set of effective short term fixes" (2020, p. 1). CEOs grappled with many new questions. For all their capabilities, no recent past event had compared nor prepared them enough for the crises (Alexander et al., 2020; K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Hatami et al., 2020).

Similarly, essential service employees were most affected by the crises (Mcanea, 2021). While non-essential service employees were able to work from home, essential services and front line employees had to make unfathomable sacrifice to attend to business through the most damning risks that the crises bred (Hatami et al., 2020). Common news stories about these businesses, and this class of employee and their experiences during COVID-19, infer that most front line employees were emotionally stressed, strained, fearful and concerned for themselves and their families' mental, social and financial health (Berinto, 2020; Brewer, 2020; Mcanea, 2021) although authors like (Berinto, 2020) make this claim when referring to 'women' frontline employees.

The purpose of the study was to interrogate how CEOs in Eswatini lead during the crises and to explore how CEOs can strategically lead during crisis to positively shape employee perceptions. The study further seeks to explore how the strategic leadership role could be used to shape employee perceptions to support effective and timeous resolution of crises (Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

1.2.1 Environment of business

The Kingdom of Eswatini, a country landlocked by South Africa and Mozambique, with a population of 1.2 million, has for the longest time been proudly known as one of the most peaceful countries in Africa and the world (World Bank, 2020). Eswatini is economically dependent on South Africa such that political and economic developments in its neighbour, have huge impact on the Kingdom.

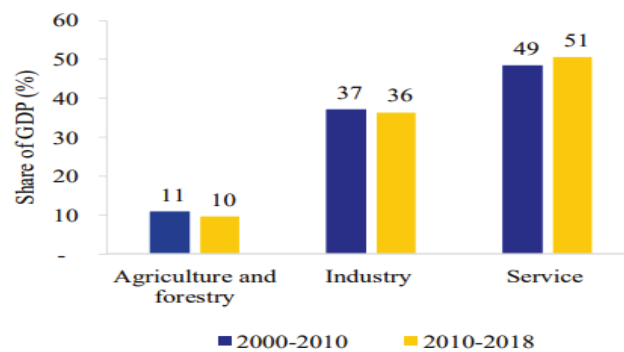


Figure 1.1: Sector contributor to GDP

Source: (World Bank, 2020)

The Eswatini economy was dependent on the few sectors outlined in Figure 1.1 in 2018. Services dominated by banking, wholesale and retail trade was the largest at 51% of GDP, followed by agriculture at 10% of GDP and industry at 36% of GDP. The average annual economic growth rate declined from 3.5% to 2.6% between 2000 and 2018 (World Bank, 2020) and further down to -1.9% in 2021 (Trading Economics, 2022).

The banking sector is controlled by four banks, three of which are South African. While this benefits the country, it arguably can also create weaknesses of financial shock transmissions (World Bank, 2020). Between 2018 and 2021 youth unemployment in Eswatini increased from 46.5% to 50.9% (Statista, 2022). Government's inability to service arrears, most of which are from small businesses, compromised the ability of many companies to repay their loans. This resulted in continued pressure on an already vulnerable system (World Bank, 2020).

1.2.1.1 The COVID-19 pandemic

The first case of the COVID-19 pandemic was established in March 2020 in Eswatini. By August 2022 Eswatini had recorded 73,307 cases and 1,419 fatalities from the pandemic. As shown in Figure 1.2, Eswatini recorded one of the highest daily new cases and deaths between end of June 2021 and August 2021 (*COVID-19 Pandemic in Eswatini*, 2022). This period was also around the same time that the political unrest was ripe, signifying a period of high emotional turmoil among citizens and the youth (CHRPCA, 2021).

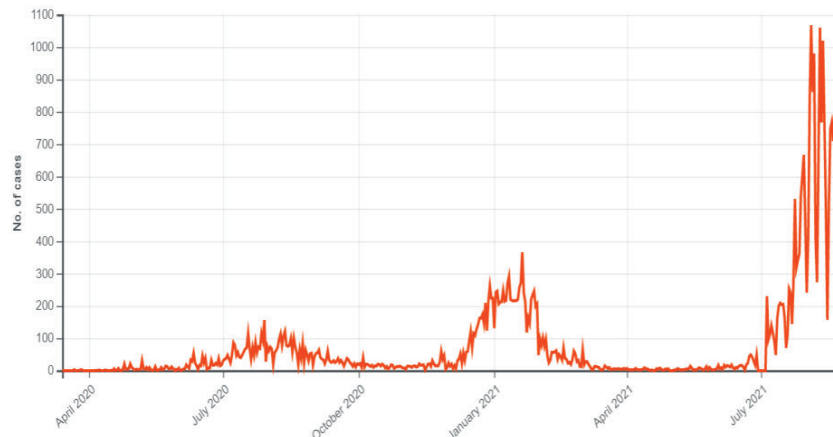


Figure 1.2: Confirmed new cases per day

Source: (*COVID-19 Pandemic in Eswatini*, 2022)

The pandemic affected businesses in many ways. One of the more common effects was decline in trade and tourism in Eswatini. Government's policy enforcements of lockdowns and travel restrictions affected many sectors, including domestic demand and supply (World Bank, 2020). Mass job losses, loss of income, company closures and loss of life from COVID-19 especially, became a common occurrence for many Swazis. There was resultant heightened demand on the fiscal as government was forced to respond to human needs. The demands put further pressure on an already challenged economy (World Bank, 2020). The pandemic further reduced expenditure and investment by families, government, and firms; leading to increasing redundancies, reduced wages, enhanced stress on affordability and disposable income, and reduced profits (Kniffin et al., 2021; Smet & D'Auria, 2020). Front serving sectors which require direct connections between producers and consumers were struck especially hard by the health measures (Kniffin et al., 2021). This had a swelling effect on the wider economy, as many businesses halted operations and slashed employment (World Bank, 2020). Employees faced these challenges with fear of job losses, and anxiety about the unknown (Brewer, 2020; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021; WHO, 2022).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in the first year of the pandemic, there was over 25% increase in global incidences of anxiety and depression (WHO, 2022). One of the major stresses prevalent to employees was attributed to the social aspect of not being able to meet friends and families (Mcanea, 2021). Others included enhanced loneliness due to fear of contracting the virus among other employees in the work vicinity and exhaustion from working thinly as many contracted the COVID-19 virus (WHO, 2022) or were unable to get to work during the riots (Ebrahim, 2021). The fear of losing jobs and the general heightened uncertainty of what the future holds (B. Liu et al., 2016; Oliver & Parrett, 2018; Verschueren et al., 2021) added to anxieties.

The crises forced many firms and leaders, in particular CEOs, to radically revise and process how to lead employees (Daniels et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2021) through the challenge of balancing safety and the business sustenance. To many employees, fears lived through the crises were very real, and resulted in enhanced feelings of dim hopelessness, depressions and pronounced apprehension, grief and a compromised mental state of mind (Berinto, 2020; Brewer, 2020; WHO, 2022).

1.2.1.2 The civil and political unrest

A few months following remonstrations by the youth, claimed to be calling for justice for a student who died brutally at the hands of police, protests quickly transformed into demands for political and economic reform (Harber, 2021). With high youth unemployment rates of 50.9% in 2021 (Statista, 2022), the youth Eswatini had for long been critical of both government and leaders. At the same time, some members of parliament diverted from the norm and began to call for the next prime minister to be democratically elected. These uncommon prescriptions by both the youth and the MPSs heightened the situation and spiralled out of control, thus causing extreme fear, violence, and volatility. Supermarkets, industrial plants and other businesses were set alight, looted, or vandalised (Ebrahim, 2021).

The army was deployed to restore order and shooting and visible fighting in the streets burgeoned (Ebrahim, 2021). A nation in shock used platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp to retaliate and disseminate information which drove a narrative of oppression. Government, through regulatory frameworks and licensed mobile firms, shut down the internet, causing a nationwide communication blackout (MISA, 2021). The move to cut all communication, condemned by many organisations, had major effects on services such as transport, banking, retail, and consumer services. With zero access to point of sales and other systems, businesses couldn't service customers. Major frustrations, fear and confusion was inherent.

Further perpetuating fear was the violence and utter disarray in the streets, and the many businesses that were looted or vandalised (CHRPCA, 2021). An economy already struggling to grow in the midst of the pandemic (Ebrahim, 2021) came to a standstill; further instilling fear, depression, exhaustion and anxiety on employees (Brewer, 2020; Mcanea, 2021; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021).

Consequently, Eswatini dropped 24 points in the 2022 GPI from 69 in 2021 to 93 in 2022. According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2022, a report produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the deterioration can be attributed to the political unrest and violent demonstrations that took place in 2021. A preliminary report by the Commission on Human Rights in Eswatini further states that the unrest which erupted end of June 2021 had 46 fatalities, 245 gun short injuries and over 235 arrested and detained, numbers which are claimed to have risen in July 2021 as the unrest continued (CHRPCA, 2021).

Businesses and employees were paralysed, confused and fearful, and this placed even greater demand on the expectations that leadership, in particular CEOs, would ably guide employees through the crises (Birkeland et al., 2017). Leaders found themselves challenged to focus on instilling confidence and show resilience to employees (Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

1.2.1.3 Perceptions

Social networks, employees and individuals form varying perceptions about each experience, and the state of leadership observed during crisis (Alknawy, 2019). Leader and employee perceptions “a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment” (Robbins & Judge, 2015, p. 166) were inadvertently formed during the crises. Fear, worry and confusion drove employees to expect CEOs to lead strategically to steer them out of crises and path a clear way forward (CERC, 2019). Depending on CEO response against what was expected, varying perceptions, and in some cases ‘distorted’ perceptions were formed (de Lange et al., 2018; Robbins & Judge, 2015). Some employees felt that companies and CEOs did not communicate clear plans of actions, and others felt that CEOs did not care enough for them (Daniels et al., 2022).

1.2.2 Research contribution

The research provides a review of the strategic leadership role of CEOs during crisis and explores how CEOs can shape employee perceptions positively during crises for the effective resolution of crisis. Several contributions made are detailed below:

1.2.2.1 Business perspective

Of all the stakeholders, the researcher suggests that 'essential services' employees and CEOs were most affected. Consequently, business would benefit from studies focused on exploring the relationship between CEOs and employees during crises, in specific relation to the strategic leadership role of the CEO during crisis. The researcher further posits that CEOs would be best equipped to lead from a place of understanding on how the strategic leadership role dictates of decision making, motivating and influencing, managing conflicting demands (Samimi et al., 2020) and other, informs 'perceptions' from employees during crisis. That in a crisis, employees receive information, process it and behave differently than they do when there is no crisis (CERC, 2019) and that employees therefore, have varying expectations and demands from CEOs, which if managed properly, can assist with the management and resolution of crisis (Daniels et al., 2022; de Lange et al., 2018).

How employees perceive leaders has consequence on organizational crisis (Fusch et al., 2018; Mazzei et al., 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2022). CEOs as leaders who hold visible positions of leadership (Altarawneh et al., 2020), face most demands. The CEO role to shape perceptions (Schaedler et al., 2021) is therefore crucial and must be understood.

Through clear understanding of shifts in leadership styles and behavioural traits required by employees during crisis (Alknawy, 2019), CEOs would gain insight to better understand and respond appropriately to employees. By creating enabling environments with agile and flexible progressions which can accommodate employee needs (Zacher & Rudolph, 2022) and ensure that CEO leadership during crisis is efficient, CEOs could drive effective crisis resolve.

1.2.2.2 Theoretical perspective

Perception is a practice by which people categorise and construe what they witness to make sense to the environment (Goffman, 2021). Employees will view a leader or experience the same incident, but have varying perceptions of it (Robbins & Judge, 2015). How a leader is perceived can lead to important outcomes (Peck & Hogue, 2018). How employees perceive CEOs can influence firm performance (Grutterink & Meister, 2022). Perceptions, by and large, are shaped by the perceiver (who they are and how they view the world), the object being perceived (what the person or experience seems like to the perceiver) and the situation (the context) in which the experience occurs (Robbins & Judge, 2015).

In the context of a crisis which impacts an organization, employees invariably form perceptions of not just the crisis and its impact, but of leadership (Birkeland et al., 2017; Paixão et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2017). Employee perceptions differ and as Robbins & Judge (2015) and other scholars (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Guarana et al., 2021; Krause & Miller, 2020) claim, many factors influence perceptions. Factors include the perceivers characteristics, interests or past experiences, features of what they perceive and how that 'thing or experience' connects with the environment they are observing it in. The factors are responsible for shaping, and in some cases distorting perceptions (Robbins & Judge, 2015). Attribution theory attempts to explain ways in which individuals judge and perceive each other differently, and attributes the differences, to meanings credited to each observed behaviour (Gilbert, 2021).

This study contributes to the theories and frameworks of impression management, attribution theory and reintegration and trust repair during crises from perspectives of employees. Importantly, it expands the strategic leadership role of CEOs during crises, through learned behaviours and an understanding of employee requirements. By reviewing employee perceptions, the researcher suggests ways in which CEOs can strategically lead to shape employee perceptions to drive effective crisis resolution.

1.3 Definition of the research problem

Over the last two decades, the world has been flawed with erratic and increasingly frequent crises whose devastating effects continue to pose major threat to economies, firms, and stakeholders (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Each crisis as it confounds, shifts the perceptions people have of each other (Coombs, 2014; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020) and the environment.

Examples include the Boeing's 737 Max Fraud Conspiracy which cost Boeing US\$2.5billion in fines (Department of Justice, 2021), the Volkswagen emissions scandal with estimated losses above US\$42.5 billion and over 30 000 job losses (Colvin, 2020), the global financial crisis which at firm level magnified challenges between external stakeholders and leader capabilities (Johnstone et al., 2019), the Steinhoff scandal touted the largest company fraud in South Africa's business history (Naudé et al., 2018) and recently, the COVID-19 pandemic cited as the worst crisis the world has ever experienced collectively (Smet & D'Auria, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic impact did not just render economies, firms and employees struggling to exist, it blindsided unprepared and inexperienced leaders (Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021) at all levels.

Employees, lacking leadership with emotional intellect to support them, were most affected (Dasborough et al., 2021). Compounding challenges included the imposed requirement for employees to adapt to organizational change 'how they work, how they get to work, if they work from home or the office' and new safety protocols (Zacher & Rudolph, 2022). An infringement on voice and on choices (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018) as some organizations introduced 'forced vaccinations' policies which required employees to only return to work if vaccinated, intensified pressures already faced. Coupled with fear emanating from rising threats of job losses, injury from looters, demotivation and emotional instabilities, challenges resulted in employees looking to CEOs for insightful and strategic leadership (Birkeland et al., 2017; Oc, 2018) which would direct them through and out of the crises. A season rapidly confronted with profound uncertainty, instability, and shocks, caught most leaders off-guard. CEOs grappled with existential, sustainability, mental and social challenges (Alexander et al., 2020; Smet & D'Auria, 2020) and in most cases, were slow to respond with strategic conducts tailor made to address employee needs (Emmett et al., 2020).

In a crisis controlled by strangeness and ambiguity, efficient reactions are crucial (Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020). Realising the enormity and impact of decisions, some with life threatening consequences, makes leadership roles more pressing (Schoemaker et al., 2018). Most CEOs however follow the typical approach of decision making, and delay responses at the onset of crisis (Alexander et al., 2020). This could be because, in an environment that is ambiguous and influenced by urgent flawed information, delaying a decide is in itself a decision (Alexander et al., 2020; Boman & Schneider, 2021). According to Petriglieri (2020), the first step during a crisis is acknowledging that, there is a crisis with the potential to harm the firm. This he cautions, can be complex, especially in a gradually developing crisis, where timing responses is not always simple. Once a leader recognizes crisis as such, he can initiate responses (Markman, 2020; Petriglieri, 2020).

The CEO becomes the spotlight charged to lead the firm to safety (Alknawy, 2019; Saidu, 2019). This responsibility demands psychological focus and influence, through strategic leadership that will instil assurance and strength in employees, customers and other stakeholders (Alknawy, 2019; Beilstein et al., 2021).

Strategic leadership includes among others, the function of information management. A CEO, in his role as a strategic leader can gather and process, immediately share or withhold information until timed pertinent for distribution (Samimi et al., 2020). When and how privileged information is shared supports the CEO's role to mitigate employee stress and can, used effectively, motivate employees to be beams of light (Besieux et al., 2018; Coombs, 2014;

Johansen et al., 2012). Also vital to strategic leadership during a crisis is the CEO's ability to make the right decisions at the right time, and be persuasive to 'employees' that he has made the right decision, even if the decision is restrictive and ostracized (Nyenswah, 2016).

The social evaluation's lens, a theory grounded on ideas of evaluator's review of perceptions and sensemaking of an organization and its member behaviours, has commonly addressed how strategic leaders are likely to influence 'external' evaluator perceptions (Busenbark et al., 2016; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2017; Gomulya et al., 2017) especially in a crisis context. The review has however, ignored leader strategic influence (Samimi et al., 2020) on internal stakeholders such as employees (Schaedler et al., 2021).

"Employees are the most effective advocates of a company's reputation and a crisis is when the support of the work force/employees is critical" (Mazzei et al., 2012, p. 32). CEOs require employees to continue to deliver optimally, even during crises (Alexander et al., 2020; Malik & Sanders, 2021; Oreg & Berson, 2019). It is surprising therefore that, with only a few exceptions (Fusch et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2014), employee's vital perceptions during crisis has either not been considered, or been considered as a subset team tasked with marginal information during a crisis (Coombs, 2007) rather than being actively inspired by the CEO to collaboratively shape the outcome (Oc, 2018).

Prior studies have outlined negative effects of neglecting employees during crises, detailing major risks to the firm (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015). Scholars found that, in the absence of credible information and leadership, employees can be detractors who affect CEO ability to effectively manage crisis (Gilbert, 2021; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019). Employee perceptions on CEOs as leaders matter (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). Neglecting employees however, damages trust, cause low morale, disengagement and non participation which undermines decision making (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). When specific groups lack adequate support or voice during crises, they are likely to feel excluded over time (Straatmann et al., 2016), leading to an erosion of trust in leaders and organizational failure, which to resolve, consequently requires intricate violation repair measures (Kähkönen et al., 2021).

Ignoring employees can also lead to silence (Hao et al., 2022), a silence which at times leads to critical information which would otherwise assist an organization respond to crisis challenges, being withheld to the detriment of the firm (Oreg et al., 2018; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018). This could potentially develop lack of trust (Prouska & Psychogios, 2019) on the CEO's strategic capability to motivate and influence, manage issues and conflicting

demands of employees and other stakeholders (Samimi et al., 2020), thus making it more challenging for leaders to resolve crises (Carrington et al., 2019; Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018).

On the contrary, informed and empowered employees armed with pertinent, effective and dependable information (Cockerill, 2021; Eva et al., 2019), promote effective crisis resolution (Mazzei et al., 2012) and positively contribute to social change (Fusch et al., 2018). These employees also serve as ambassadors for firms (Besieux et al., 2018). Focusing on employees (Alknawy, 2019; Malik & Sanders, 2021) therefore develops robust crisis management (Kapucu & Ustun, 2018). By shaping employee perceptions, CEOs arguably empower employees to support them gain rounded insight (Fusch et al., 2018) and better understanding of the landscape and traits that foster good leadership (Doornenbal et al., 2021). Employees would be motivated to contribute to solutions which during crises, promote resolution (Coombs, 2007; Einwiller et al., 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Karam, 2018) and inform future organizational success (Stouten et al., 2018) and social change (Fusch et al., 2018).

1.4 The primary and secondary research questions

Noting CEOs strategic leadership role in organizational crisis through the internal perspective lens, the main research problem was to investigate the strategic leadership role that CEOs can play in shaping employee perceptions during crises (Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021), with a view to propose a framework to foster positive and convergent CEO employee perceptions (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Landry et al., 2014) in support of CEO's ability to lead strategically during times of extreme organizational turbulence and crises of existential threats (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019; Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016).

1.4.1 The primary research question

The primary question is: how can CEOs use the strategic leadership roles to shape employees perceptions during crises (Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021) to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution (Wu et al., 2021)?

1.4.2 The secondary research questions

1. What perceptions do employees have on CEOs during crises and do prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Mazzei et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014)?

2. How should CEO's leadership roles during crises adapt to shape positive employees' perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to the resolution of crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018)?

1.5 Research aims

To address risks which emanate from ignoring employees, the aim of this research, founded in studies by (Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021) and (Wu et al., 2021) proposed a focal point of employee's lived experiences of crises. The research used the qualitative exploratory method to explore how the role of CEOs as strategic leaders during organisational crises could be explored to influence and shape employee perceptions with the intent objective of ensuring that perceptions are shaped positively during crises (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

Building from claims from scholars who focus on the CEO at the apex of a strategic leadership role (Samimi et al., 2020; You et al., 2020), the study explored how CEOs of Eswatini firms, tasked with the responsibility to lead during crisis (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021) by making strategic decisions and managing conflicting demands (Samimi et al., 2020), led employees through the threatening and devastating crises (CERC, 2019; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020). The study also explored how CEOs' strategic leadership roles (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Krause & Miller, 2020) in the context of organizational crises, could be exploited to shape employee perceptions (Schaedler et al., 2021).

Drawing from impression management and reintegration and organizational trust repair models (Gillespie et al., 2014) to formulate research questions for participants, the study investigated perceptions employees had about CEOs during the crises and propose recommendations for CEOs to shape employee perceptions in support of crises resolution (Bundy et al., 2017; Eisbach et al., 1998).

1.6 Overview of the structure

The introduction chapter provides background information to the research question, research problem and outlines the research questions and aims of the study, while chapter 2 highlights current and relevant literature and situates the study within existing academic architype. Arguments which reveal how other scholars shed light on the topic are presented and used to draw conclusions which confirm the theoretic relevance of the research questions. Chapter 3

defines the academic focus of the research through presentation of research questions. The fourth chapter gives justifications for the methodology and design used, with clear outline and reasoning on the population and sampling method and size, research setting, and research instruments used. Details of how data was collected and analysed and the procedures to ensure research quality and rigour are also outlined in chapter 4. Chapter 5 systematically and logically presents the findings from the qualitative research study through each construct and research question while chapter 6 discusses the research findings in relation to literature. Findings are compared to the literature view in chapter 2 and chapter 7 highlights the main conclusions of the research followed by limitations of the study and briefly outlines avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Rapid, erratic and challenging events such as crises, which are rare and yet significant in impact to a firm and its stakeholders, and demanding of urgent responses from leaders (Wu et al., 2021), will force certain behaviours and provoke interpretations and perceptions from employees on leaders (Birkeland et al., 2017). Perceptions formed during such erratic events will invariably differ from perceptions held prior to these events (Ferguson et al., 2019). While many scholars claim that changing the impressions we have of ourselves, and of others such as those entrusted with the responsibility to lead us, is often challenging and a slow process, especially where impressions are implicit (Cone et al., 2021), there are still certain behaviours from those we perceive, behaviours which can influence our responses and consequent impressions of them (Cone et al., 2017; Mende-Siedlecki, 2018).

Since claims that there are behaviours a human being can effect to influence perceptions (Cone et al., 2017), questions on whether influencing behaviours are short term momentary observed shifts, or if influence to change how we perceive others is shaped by major identifiable changes (Mende-Siedlecki, 2018) have formed. In a setting of crisis, which by nature is volatile, unpredictable and prone to bring emotions of uncertainty and fear (Tokakis et al., 2019), how does a strategic leader such as a CEO lead employees?

Guided by one primary research and two secondary questions, the review explored how CEOs can use the strategic leadership role to shape employee perceptions during crises (Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021) to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution (Wu et al., 2021)? To address the primary question, the review investigated the perceptions that employees had on CEOs during the crises and whether prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Mazzei et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014), and how CEOs' leadership roles during crises can adapt to shape positive employee perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to the resolution of crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018). The exploratory study was premised on two events, being the COVID-19 pandemic and the political unrest, both unplanned and erratic events which occurred and brought shockwaves in Eswatini in 2021 (CHSPA, 2021; *COVID-19 Pandemic in Eswatini*, 2022).

The chapter is organised through constructs which guide the reader to easily understand the process thinking of the researcher through the extensive review of the topic. It begins with an

investigation of literature on the strategic leadership role of a CEO (section 2.3), followed by exploration of research which sets the framework of the study, which is the 'during crisis' stage (section 2.4). Crisis leadership (section 2.5) and impression management (section 2.6) follow, and the chapter concludes with theories of reintegration and organisational trust repair and impression management (section 2.7) which served as frameworks for the study.

Figure 2.1: Organisational depiction of the literature review



2.2 Literature sources

Extensive literature search was carried out using google scholar for peer reviewed highly rated journals around the subjects. Whilst the research was not anchored in psychology, the researcher borrowed from the discipline of psychology among others, to explore perceptions, in particular impression formation and impression updating, using literature by scholars such as (Cone et al., 2017; Mende-Siedlecki, 2018; Petersen & Laustsen, 2020). The study also reviewed the psychology of leader and follower, and developing content from impression management theory by (Rosenfeld et al., 1994) to explore the subject on how employee perceptions can be positively shaped during a crisis. Key scholars (Bundy et al., 2017; Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021) provided primary context for strategic leadership, crisis and crisis leadership. Using the constructs of strategic leadership, crisis and crisis management, crisis leadership, and impression management, the researcher interrogated literature findings to respond to the research questions.

In the context of crisis, the researcher sought to determine whether behaviours and leadership traits which CEOs displayed in the crises mirrored behaviours exhibited prior to the crises, and further explored how CEOs tasked to lead employees during crisis, could adapt or strengthen traits in leadership to provoke the strongest and more robust changes in how they are perceived by employees (Cone et al., 2017). Using frameworks and clusters of leadership during a crisis (Wu et al., 2021) the study focused on internal and external perspectives of crises and crisis management (Bundy et al., 2017), to identify a gap to extend the social evaluation review of internal stakeholders, by examining the internal perspective of organizations, employees and CEOs during crises. The aim was to explore ways in which CEOs can shape employee perceptions (Schaedler et al., 2021, p. 18) during a crisis.

A review of strategic leadership, crisis leadership and crises management outlined fragmentation in prior approach. While research has been extensive (Boman & Schneider, 2021; Bundy et al., 2017; Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021), the constructs have been studied in isolation of each other. It wasn't until (Wu et al., 2021) that a study advanced knowledge by integrating prior studies to focus on leadership during crisis, and make recommendations on how leaders can strategically lead through crises. The researcher further used key words 'perception' 'impression management', 'organizational change', 'reintegration and trust repair' to identify articles for extensive literature on employee perceptions.

The review further aims to contribute to strategic leadership and crisis leadership, as well as impression management literature by focusing on how CEOs can anticipate and shape employee perceptions.

2.3 Strategic leadership role of the CEO

2.3.1 Strategic leadership defined

The concept of strategic leadership has been extensively studied over the years, with particular emphasis on understanding the impact that behaviours and actions of strategic leaders such top management teams, CEOs and the Board, have on the companies they lead (Samimi et al., 2020). Strategic leadership is broadly used in reference to (i) a type of leadership style, or (ii) leadership at the apex of companies. Common among the definitions of strategic leadership according to Samimi et al. (2020)'s extensive review of definitions, is the inference that strategic leadership involves the role and the influence exerted by those individuals who sit at the top tier of companies.

For the study, a few other definitions of strategic leadership which broadly support key functions the researcher claims key to exist in a strategic leader tasked to shape and influence employee conduct, are detailed in Table 2.1. The definitions are not exhaustive but represent the scope of literature reviewed and found relevant to strategic leadership in the context of the topic. The definitions of strategic leadership best encompassing the researchers' assertions, is by Boal & Hooijberg (2001) who state that "the essence of strategic leadership involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom (2001, p. 516). Similarly findings by Samimi et al. (2020) that activities often associated with strategic leadership include, making decisions, creating and communicating a vision of the future, developing structure, processes and controls, developing key competencies and capabilities, and identifying and empowering the next level of leaders support the researchers' claims.

Scholars such as Hooijberg & Lane (2014) defined the purpose of strategic leadership to be to cataract the vision of the company throughout an organisation using three approaches of strategic leadership; 'visionary, transactional and instrumental leadership, which they argued were instrumental and essential to strategic leadership.

Table 2.1: Definition and purpose of strategic leadership

Author	Definition and details. Strategic leadership is ...	Purpose
(Hooijberg & Lane, 2014)	... about translating an organization's vision into reality. It consists of successfully combining three components of strategic leadership approaches 'visionary, transactional and instrumental' to implement organisation's vision effectively and concretely at all levels of the organisation	To cascade the vision throughout the organization
(Ireland & Hitt, 2005)	... is a person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future.	To create superior competitive advantage for superior return on investment
(Boal & Hooijberg, 2001)	... involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom.	To create meaning and purpose for an organisation
(Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016)	... proposed that strategic leadership is a combination of many strategic roles which primarily centre on making strategic decisions regarding all aspects of the business operations, and hence cannot all rest on a CEO but is best shared among teams, clans, and networks	Mobilize the business to pursue its vision
(Samimi et al., 2020)	... about the functions performed by individuals at the top level of an organisation intended to have strategic consequences for the firm	Among others... Make strategic decisions, engage external stakeholders, motivate, and influence, manage information, and manage conflicting demands
(Boal & Schultz, 2007)	... pushes organizations to the "edge of chaos" and out of stasis; without it no significant change can emerge...	Providing balance between the inertia of bureaucracy and anarchy, resulting in fluid responsiveness of innovative and a creative organization.

Source: Author's own

While (Hooijberg & Lane, 2014; Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016; Samimi et al., 2020) define strategic leadership in the context of an organizational level perspective, both (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Ireland & Hitt, 2005) had earlier adopted an individualistic approach to

strategic leadership, approaches which many scholars since have argued are too focused on an individual, and hence prone to failure as no one individual can accomplish the required tasks which embody a strategic leadership role, arguing that leadership roles and inspiration must be shared among teams (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016; Zhu et al., 2018). With consideration to the varying interpretations, and the growing arguments on the concept of shared leadership, the next section focuses on the CEO, who is arguably the most critically positioned strategic leader in a company, whom, notwithstanding the advanced approaches of shared leadership, remains at the cornerstone of company success or failure, especially during a crisis (Altarawneh et al., 2020; Johnson, 2021).

2.3.2 The strategic role of the CEO

At the apex of a firm is the CEO and his team (Georgakakis et al., 2019). As the leader tasked with a strategic leadership functions which include leading effectively (Busenbark et al., 2016), making strategic decisions (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Schaedler et al., 2021) and carrying out strategic actions to influence firm outcome (Samdanis & Özbilgin, 2020; Samimi et al., 2020), CEOs are vital in a crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021). A CEO most personifies strategic leadership, and can play the role of a star (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016). He is as vital to his employees as his employees are to him. Busenbark et al. (2016) classification of the CEO in three perspectives; 'the position' identifying the role of the CEO of strategic influence, 'the person' classifying CEO characteristics and his perceptions of others, and 'the environment' which attributes firm performance to the CEO, affirms the cruciality of the role of CEOs to influence the internal and the external stakeholder. This key role of the employee CEO relationship is amplified during turbulent times of organizational crisis (Emmett et al., 2020) as CEOs endeavour to influence stakeholders through corrective measures which lead to positive results (Hersel et al., 2019) and drive firm performance (Luciano et al., 2020).

In a review of the 'what, the why, and the how' strategic leaders lead, (Samimi et al., 2020) found that strategic leaders carry out their roles with resolve to impact the strategic consequence on a firm. Among key functions, they identified leader ability to (i) make strategic decisions, and to (ii) manage stakeholder relationships, with emphases on the external stakeholder, leaving gaps for relationship management of employees. At the heart of a leader's role is the ability to adapt to the environment (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). The findings by (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Samimi et al., 2020) and other scholars such as (Crossan et al., 2008; Schoemaker et al., 2018) support studies which focus on the role CEOs play in impacting consequence of a firm in crises (Cockerill, 2021; Saidu, 2019) and that this impact in today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment (Tagarev & Ratchev,

2020), includes willingness to systematically adapt leadership styles (Fusch et al., 2018; Samimi et al., 2020) and develop entrepreneurial aptitudes which embody suited responses capable of shaping stakeholder perceptions, even way through challenging times, where leaders can be perceived to have failed (Kibler et al., 2021).

The CEO's role in particular, is central in determining firm's successes or failures (Altarawneh et al., 2020). Studies argue that, more than other strategic leaders, CEOs as leaders have the most power to shape firms' strategic direction (Sy et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2014; You et al., 2020) and that this influence unchecked, give CEOs false impressions of power, and place them at the core of external attention (Abebe et al., 2020; Busenbark et al., 2016). Using theoretical and conceptual reviews, Saidu (2019) offers explanations for the possible influence CEOs have to shape firm directions.

Several leadership styles have been identified pertinent to strategic leadership, particularly those that focus on leader conduct. Some of the more established styles include transactional, transformational, and charismatic leadership; and in more recent theories that have emerged over the last few years, scholars have included authentic, servant, and responsible leadership, reflecting the more complex and multitude of stakeholders which leaders continue to have to deal with (Carter & Greer, 2013). Transactional leaders use incentives to drive performance and transformational leaders are usually stated as a contrasting style to transactional. This being because in transformational leadership, no rewards are used to incentives employees. Instead a relationship of bonding develops between leader and follower through the leader's ability to craft a vision, communicate it with clarity, and inspire employees through charisma to perform (Carter & Greer, 2013; Peck & Hogue, 2018). Other scholars identify negative relations between certain types of CEOs such as generalists, egoistical (Li & Patel, 2019; Sadler-Smith et al., 2017) and firm performance, arguing that generalists CEOs may result in negative firm performance, especially in the short term, while specialists and therefore confident in the craft CEOs, and humble, humorous and charismatic CEOs bring organizational stability, and manage crises better (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019; Li & Patel, 2019; Lovelace et al., 2019).

Inherent in the CEO's role is the ability to guide a firm out of a crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). The role of the CEO during crisis comes into the spotlight more than most other periods of leadership (Alknawy, 2019). When crisis hit, many stakeholders look for answers, guidance, and direction, and while scholars promote the requirement for communication during crisis (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018; Mazzei et al., 2012) others question the linkage between communication and the uncertainty of crisis, noting that it is not

always simple to communicate when there are knowledge deficiencies emanating from the very nature of crisis being an event nought with uncertainty (B. Liu et al., 2016).

The CEO is usually at the centre of all varying expectations for not just answers to what is happening, but for solutions to what employees should do (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Supporting the argument of CEOs being the critical strategic leaders, and expanding the argument to add that strategic leadership is part of a complex adaptive system, (Boal & Schultz, 2007) suggested that “strategic leadership pushes a firm to the ‘edge of chaos’, without which no significant change can emerge” (2007, p. 411) and that CEOs as strategic leaders function as agents who foster cohesion between all the other agents in the system, and use resources to drive efficiencies. Other scholars further expand the role of the CEO in crisis to add that, apart from driving strategic direction, the CEO is expected to shape perceptions of all stakeholders (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Gomulya et al., 2017; Maiorescu, 2016; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2019). Focus however has been on the external stakeholder at the expense of employee perspective, who according to (Schaedler et al., 2021) has largely been ignored.

The study as already stated, sought to shift focus to employees by exploring how employee perception of the CEO during crisis can be shaped. Before the researcher reviews literature of crisis leadership, it was prudent to situate the study in crisis and investigate literature on the impact of crisis on employees and business.

2.4 Crisis

Defined in google ‘as a time of intense difficulty or danger’, crisis comes in varying forms which include natural disasters such as floods and storms, fires and droughts, or manmade events which may include wars, financial crisis, and even environmental crisis (Malik & Sanders, 2021). Others define crises as “combined products of unusual events and shared perceptions that something is seriously wrong” (Firestone, 2020, p. 10). Claiming that perceptions of crisis vary among different people who experience the event, Firestone (2020) further proposes that people’s vulnerabilities, positions, and responsibilities, even values, shape how they interpret crisis. Examples of natural crisis include the COVID -19 pandemic which was seen as a disruptive and revolutionizing event described as a black swan which altered the path of businesses, communities, governments and human beings (Daniels et al., 2022) and forced leaders to make urgent and potentially shifting and impactful decisions (Grandori, 2020). Crisis and its classification differ.

Earlier attempts to classify crisis advanced a four-quadrant crisis type matrix which categorised the different kinds of crisis into intentional and unintentional, against an external internal path. Accidents noted as unintentional, random, uncontrollable and unstable would include disasters such COVID-19 (Coombs, 1995). As outlined in Table 2.2 crisis definitions vary depending on focus of study (Leta & Chan, 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

Table 2.2: Definition of crisis

Author	Definition of crisis
(T. A. Williams et al., 2017)	Crisis is “a process of weakening ... that can culminate in a disruptive event to the actors ... normal functioning. (p 739). They further develop a framework of key themes of resilience and crisis, including capabilities for durability, adjustment, response, disturbance, and feedback.
(Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018)	defines crisis as a sudden unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat.
(Wu et al., 2021)	Crises are unexpected events that catch leaders unprepared, or lacking experience to manage them, with large impact. Crises demand urgent responses and cause disruptions to firms and stakeholders.
(Bundy et al., 2017)	“an event perceived by managers and stakeholders to be salient, unexpected potentially disruptive” (p. 1663).

Source: Author's own

Whilst there have been varying and opposing debates on the definition of crisis, on whether it is an event or a process that develops by its reasoning (Leta & Chan, 2021), whether it's a process of weakening (T. A. Williams et al., 2017) or an event that threatens business operations (Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018), what is common among many definitions of crisis, is the unpredictability and erratic nature that it is, and the potential it has to cause major disruptions (Kahn et al., 2013). Whether impactful at societal, family, business and even human health level such as the COVID-19 pandemic, crisis disrupts and threatens whatever it impacts significantly, be it threats to health, business and financial, reputational, even death in some cases (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Leta & Chan, 2021).

Some crises have local impact, while other types, due to their reach which tends to affect many at the same time, are classified global. Irrespective of its nature, when crisis is unmanaged, it has the potential to cause terrible consequences which in many cases, are interrelated on a causality effect with each other (Coombs, 2007).

The COVID-19 pandemic was the first global natural event in decades which everyone from all corners of the earth, was able to observe and react to in real time. Its impact on the globe, to business and to human lives has been unfathomable (Leta & Chan, 2021; Paixão et al., 2020). People experienced unprecedented levels of disruption in their homes, communities and in their jobs. While many scholars came together to study its impact and effect, up to this day, the world is still dealing with its aftermath, and it may be years before its economic, and social impacts are fully understood and adequately arrested (Leta & Chan, 2021).

Other types of crisis, such as the Paris terrorist attack on 13 November 2015 (Hirsch et al., 2015) studied reveal that high paced crisis situations can quickly become volatile. According to Grandori (2020), salvaging an organization from uncommon and erratic crisis like COVID-19 demand more than just 'bouncing back' to prior states, as such events are classified as social systems which rarely revert to past states without fundamental shifts, particularly because of their disruptive feature of 'black swans' (Grandori, 2020). Such shifts do not only rest on organisations, but also on leaders. Confronted with instability, contrasting interests, expectations and calls for urgent actions, stakeholders lose sight of their connectedness (Wolbers et al., 2018; Zacher & Rudolph, 2022). The result, influenced by pressures of disorder, a break down to existing structures of authority (Metz, 2020), blame and degradation of purposeful sharing of decisions ideas which could otherwise lead to resources and skills to dynamically resolve crises (Gichuhi, 2021; Gilbert, 2021; Pitelis & Wagner, 2019), place huge demands on CEOs.

2.4.1 Organizational crisis

Bundy et al. (2017) defines organizational crisis as "*an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—can threaten an organization's goals ...* (p. 1662). Organizational crises can develop from within or from external pressures. It either has lasting impact and threatens firm existence (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021) or it is a short term traumatic experience which dissipates as quickly as it comes. Organizational crisis can be disruptive to business and leaders, and cause panic along its path. Schaedler et al. (2021) adds that crises are particularly demanding, not because they can be communal and affect stakeholders, but because they are typically difficult to resolve. Other scholars also recognize the disruption and profound consequence crises have on a firm and its relationships with stakeholders (Bundy et al., 2017; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021) and the astonishing demands that it puts on leaders who may not have time to analyse and plan suited responses (Smet & D'Auria, 2020); and argue that, crises demands urgent responses, and that when crises occur, people call for action (Wenzel et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Depending on the nature, the void and risks of ignoring employees, compounded by inaction from ill-equipped leaders, ignoring employees could be damaging (Wu et al., 2021; You et al., 2020) to an organization during crises.

Since organisations are made up of people who share relationships in the context of departments, teams, functions, leader and follower, they are arguably the biggest source of complex relations which can be defined by designs of how well the members within each context connect, engage and support each other (Kahn et al., 2013).

Human relationships are either growing toward one common goal or moving apart, and relations have influence in how the organisation performs. During crisis, it would be crucial therefore, similarly to the arguments raised by shared leadership scholars (Müller et al., 2018; Pitelis & Wagner, 2019) to ensure that relations between employees and CEOs are well coordinated to attain a common goal, which is resolution of the crises; for “when relational systems damaged by crisis are indeed not truly repaired, organisations and long term performance can be at risk” (Kahn et al., 2013, p. 379). One of the ways which CEOs can repair relationships, and inspire employees toward a common goal, which support the management of crisis is effective, timely and easily available information (Gilbert, 2021). Information can be shared through various platforms during crisis, one of which is social media. Interest in the role of the role of social media during crisis has increasingly been growing and the researcher broadly reviews related literature in the next section.

2.4.2 The role of social media in crisis

During crisis, time is of the essence. Communication to those affected is crucial to mitigate the severity of the crisis and bring calm (Gilbert, 2021; Hatami et al., 2020). In support of findings that negate non action and non flow of information, scholars suggest concepts of ‘filling the silence’ or ‘stealing thunder’ on social media (Eriksson, 2018). “Social media is a platform where people connect and react instantly” (Saroj & Pal, 2020, p. 2). There is a lot of curiosity about the event as it unfolds during crisis and many people seek to understand its origin, time of occurrence and impact (Saroj & Pal, 2020). Social media platforms have growingly taken up space for instant communication that can arguably shapes narratives of crisis. Social media can be used to drive the correct messages people can use to make sense of critical situations (Mirbabaie et al., 2020). During crisis such as COVID-19 for example, various media narratives were being reported, detailing growing concerns about the pandemic, reporting data on number of infections, hospitalizations, even deaths; travel and gathering restrictions implemented as well as the confusion that ensued with respect to the lack of understanding that was rife (Saroj & Pal, 2020; Stewart et al., 2017; Tsoy et al., 2021).

Scholars argue that social media has become more influential than traditional media and that business therefore, cannot afford to ignore the risk and consequent opportunities that it represents (Tsoy et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2019). Introducing effective ways of using social media to communicate during crisis, Eriksson claimed, not just the critical role of social media, but implied that there are effective and ineffective ways to communicate and use social media during crises, which include ensuring that the message shared is accurate, understanding the audience, monitoring feedback and strategically aligning messages to respond to firm needs

(Eriksson, 2018). Growing social media distrust emanating from misinformation, sensationalizing or trivialization of crucial information as sometimes seen during the pandemic, is claimed to affect the dissemination of disaster information as it involves changes in how media is perceived, and brings growing challenges to institutions' crisis communication strategies (Mirbabaie et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) referred this problem of overabundance of potentially inaccurate information in the context of the pandemic as a social media information pandemic, which they defined as 'an overabundance of information – some accurate and some not –that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it' (WHO, 2020).

Bundy et al. (2017) expands this phenomenon to state its impact as, "in the internal and external perspectives of crisis, "manager and stakeholders' cognitive abilities are reduced" (p. 1676) during crisis, resulting in high risk of compromised, emotionally driven communication flow. Ignoring stakeholders such as employees does not gather much support as a leadership strategy during crises, nor does it gain support for influencing followers or managing complex, uncertain nor dynamic environments (Samimi et al., 2020). During organisational crisis therefore, whether internal or external, employees expect and demand leaders to lead (Daniels et al., 2022). The next section reviews the demands and how these demands impact business, and what responses or approaches are consequently applied by CEOs. While approaches will not be exhaustive, the researcher's focus of review is on those argued to be impactful to employees.

2.5 Crisis leadership

While scholars suggest that a definition that best encapsulates leadership has become more challenging over the years due to leadership foundations which demand varying styles in response to differing situation (Zafar et al., 2021), one definition which the researcher proposes best responds to situations which may include crisis states that "leadership is an interpersonal influence, exercised in situation and directed, through the communication process, toward the attainment of a specified goal or goals" (Tannenbaum et al., 2013, p. 24). These same authors expand the definition to include that, leadership always involves attempts on the part of a leader (influencer) to affect (influence) the behaviour of a follower (influence) or followers in situation and that leadership ensures that goals are achieved through the influence of effective and continued communication tactics which draw those who are led to a desired goal, across dynamic and complex environments (Crossan et al., 2008; Jachimowicz et al., 2018; Tannenbaum et al., 2013) such as crises. Expanding on the narrative of a leader who influences followers during crisis, Carrington claims that leaders first interpret the crisis,

then develop a mental prescript on responses to manage crisis which are then shared with employees through a process of discernment shaping which encourage followers to adapt to the CEO's point of view (Carrington et al., 2019).

Findings by researchers such as (Russell et al., 2021) who posit that crisis leadership focuses on strategic managerial processes which include among others, people management, communications, preparedness and budgeting, as well as channelling resources adequately during a time of uncertainty and disorder support and expand the definition by (Tannenbaum et al., 2013), and further explains that crisis leadership has potential to impact (influence) companies and its people (Russell et al., 2021).

Crisis leadership studies by Williams et al. (2017) and Wu et al. (2021) on the other hand, primarily focus on the impact of crisis to leaders while Bundy et al. (2017) and Dhanesh & Sriramesh (2018) use the crisis management lens to focus on crises' disruptive nature to firms. Common among these disciplines is the unpredictability and demands that crisis has on leaders. Wu et al. (2021) broadened crisis impact to include reputational damage and emphasizes the demands that stakeholders place on leaders to make urgent responses to avoid firm disruption. When crisis occur, it is senior executives such as CEOs who are at the spotlight, and expected to lead companies to safer grounds (Johnson, 2021; Schaedler et al., 2021) and this expectation demands mental focus, calm, clear decision making capabilities and communication to instil focus, calm and confidence from all stakeholders (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Wu et al., 2021), and also bears huge responsibility for a leader.

There is always likeliness that during crisis, there is amplified uncertainty, fear, confusion, and chaos among stakeholders; employee more so, as they directly and instantly are pressured during organizational crisis to a point where they sometimes may not even know what, how or if to communicate (Emmett et al., 2020; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019). These emotions, which sometimes include dissatisfied customers and panicked employees, can also deflate leaders who watch their hard work gets under threat (Alkaway, 2019).

During crisis, most companies and leaders implement several changes to minimise the impact of crisis on businesses, and people (Malik & Sanders, 2021), and these changes are not always understood or supported. When crisis affects firms and employees, and leaders are forced to change how they work as they were during the pandemic, opportunity exists for scholars and practitioners to review just how leaders lead during crisis, identify impact and gain learnings which can be applied in future (Leta & Chan, 2021).

2.5.1 Organizational crisis and crisis management

Organisational crises can have deep implications for a firm's relationship with its stakeholders (Bundy et al., 2017; Einwiller et al., 2017). Crisis such as the Steinhoff scandal in 2017 which culminated to then CEO Markus Jooste's resignation after auditors signalled accounting irregularities in the firm's books, had profound effect on internal and external stakeholders. The group's share price plunged by over 95% and billions of dollars were wiped from Steinhoff's market value. The scandal harmed the firm's reputation, redefined relationships and perceptions of employees, shareholders and regulators (Naudé et al., 2018).

Researchers in crisis management find that crisis whether internally or externally driven can have momentous effect on economies and business (Williams et al., 2017). Others however argue the opposite, stating that a crisis such as the pandemic creates opportunities for business to get innovative as it seeks for responsive measure to manage the crises, with claims of demonstrated resilience which bode well to its stakeholders (Donthu & Gustaffson, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021).

There is a congruence of claims however that crisis require innovative and active leadership (Schoemaker et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2021) to manage varying and challenging demands from stakeholders (Pfarrer et al., 2008; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). As an example, the pandemic tested leadership capabilities worldwide, causing major political, social and economic risks among other ills in many economies (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Beilstein et al., 2021) and catapulted into overdrive vital inquiry on scholarly learnings on leaderships roles during crisis (Paixão et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021).

Studies outline the roles of strategic leaders as complex, multi-layered and dynamic (Samimi et al., 2020; Schoemaker et al., 2018) and requiring of a combination of evolving behaviours (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Krause & Miller, 2020). The CEO's ability to motivate and influence his employees to be his closest allies (F. Liu et al., 2021) therefore, can ensure that a complex and otherwise challenging crisis is managed and resolved effectively (Bundy et al., 2017; Stouten et al., 2018).

Different scholars accord planning as an important strategic leadership practise for firms and CEOs to manage crisis (John-Eke & Eke, 2020; Karam, 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021). Literature further establish that style of management used during crises, determine the severity of crisis to a firm (Díez-Martín et al., 2022; Maiorescu, 2016; Russell et al., 2021). CEOs who utilize strategic approaches to manage crisis are better prepared to cope early

(John-Eke & Eke, 2020). Eke et al. (2020) further details that, for firms to recover through crises with minimal loss, they need a strong strategic leaders' planning focus to crisis management and employees who are well trained. They, similar to (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Crossan et al., 2008; Johnson, 2021) proclaim that, concern for crisis management is not only for a CEO, but that employees (followers) should also be proactively trained to adapt and support CEOs during crises. Crises can impair relations between employees as the engines that drives the system long past the end of crises and CEOs who blindly assume that crises is resolved could cause catastrophic damage to firms (Kahn et al., 2013).

It is imperative for CEOs to recognize the critical role they play in channelling ongoing timely and accurate employee information flow (Fusch et al., 2018) and tapping into opportunities to shape employee perceptions (Schaedler et al., 2021) and use these to further shift and potentially develop new perspectives (Detjen & Webber, 2017) that will strengthen leadership from many other employees and build teams and clans to drive continual positive change (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016). The role of a CEO as a strategic leader during crises was best emphasized to state that *“overall, the responsibilities of making sense of the environment, crafting strategy, and establishing the boundaries for self-organization provide a picture of the strategic leader as a creator of meaning and understanding ... responsibility becomes that of pulling all elements together, presenting the big picture ... and offering a coherent unifying approach that enables the alignment of the strategy, organization, and environment”* (Crossan et al., 2008, p. 570).

2.5.2 Contingency and implicit leadership theories

Leadership is about exerting influence, a process which entail a leader (CEO) and a follower (employee) working toward a shared goal (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Georgakakis et al., 2019; Oc, 2018; You et al., 2020). Leadership efficiencies anchor on leader characteristics and behaviours and how these are perceived by the follower, and more importantly, on the 'context' in which the influencing is being done (Oc, 2018).

Context form part of contingency theory by Fiedler, a theory which states that effective leadership is contingent upon the situation at hand. Varying situational factors create a context which dictate the type of leadership style suited to effectively influence behaviours. Context may include the type and quality of relationship between leader and follower, leader power status and the clarity in which tasks are structured to support leader efficiency (Fiedler, 1978; Oc, 2018). Path goal theory on the other hand, explored varying leadership styles, and how they relate with attributes of the follower, and cognitive resource theory explored whether the

circumstances or context of leadership, which was conceptualised to include boss related, time pressure, or temporal and shifting crisis context, affect how leaders apply themselves and are consequently experienced by followers (Oc, 2018). Accordingly, Oc (2018) emphasizes that, whichever contingency theory is applied, the role of context crystalizes and that situational factors inform the style of leadership which will best suit and assist with effective management of the context.

Implicit leadership theories on the other hand proposes that perception influence the idea of effectiveness (Eden, 2021; Ronay et al., 2019), arguing that how employees perceive a leader will influence the measure of how effective the leader is. More importantly, how employees believe a leader should lead during a certain context such as crisis, shapes how they assess and respond to that leader, and how they measure leader effectiveness (Ronay et al., 2019). Other scholars claim that the type of firm, the culture of the organisation and national culture among others, influence followers' interpretation of the prevailing circumstance they use to produce leadership types (Russell et al., 2021; Schnatterly et al., 2018).

Importantly for the study is the understanding of the perceptions of employees toward CEOs during crisis and how these perceptions can be influenced through leadership responses to contextual factors (Baert et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2014; Hannah et al., 2009; Oc, 2018). With scholars who claim that leadership styles such as charismatic leadership are likely to emerge during a time of organizational turmoil or complex market conditions, and that leadership can emerge differently in varying contexts such as stable, crisis, dynamic and edge of chaos and consequently influence firm performance (Osborn et al., 2002), the study reviews leadership traits and styles common to crisis in the next two sections.

2.5.3 Crisis leadership traits

The review of literature found that prior researchers focused on numerous key leadership approaches noted crucial to crisis leadership, which this study will anchor on the pillars of strategic leadership classified by (Crossan et al., 2008) as (i) leadership of self: high emotional intelligence and calm, (ii) leadership of others: problem solving skills and effective communication; and (iii) leadership of the organization: a sense of urgency and agility in decision making and strategic intent (Dasborough et al., 2021; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020; Teece et al., 2016; Tokakis et al., 2019). Communication was found to be the common theme from many scholars, both precrisis and during crises, and that such communication is accurate, realistic, easy to understand and accessible (Fusch et al., 2018; B. Liu et al., 2016).

2.5.4 Crisis leadership styles

Key to crisis leadership is to explore leader interpretations of the crisis, to understand how leaders shape employees' stress points, perceptions and actions (Bundy et al., 2017). Leaders face insurmountable challenge to their personal lives, and business. Holistic and flexible strategies are required to manage the disruptive and chaotic impact of crisis (Garretsen et al., 2022) and while companies have risk management processes in place, in a crises tantamount to major disruption as the pandemic and the political unrest were; leaders are required to shift radically from disciplines of risk management to crisis leadership, and to focus on coping mechanisms (Hatami et al., 2020).

There are varying styles of leadership which CEOs can tap into during crisis (Alkaway, 2019) and different leaders tap into different styles which include compassionate or caring leadership, closely linked by others to empathy "the capacity to be affected by and to share the emotional state of another individual, where in the perception of such emotional state automatically activates shared representations and evokes a matching emotional state in the observer" (Meyza & Knapska, 2018, p. 15), to inclusive leadership or the more traditional styles such as top down and 'leading from the front' (Russell et al., 2021), and in some cases charismatic styles (Peck & Hogue, 2018). While the researcher cannot exhaust all, a few which have been found common in literature are explored.

Compassionate leadership, described as caring or empathic leadership by other scholars is one of the most widely studied styles, with many scholars highlighting the positive effects of CEO empathy in a crisis (Coombs, 2014). Trait empathy is claimed to be symbiotic to sensemaking; the ability of a leader to sense how others are feeling and connect to those feelings themselves as if they were experiencing them in their person (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). These leaders have been claimed to be better equipped to deal with crisis. Adding a different perspective, Einwiller implied that through the use of messages of credibility among others, to affiliate to a particular group such as employees during crisis, CEOs can engender positive emotions (Einwiller et al., 2017), a strategy the researcher claims tantamount to compassionate leadership. König et al., (2020) had differing findings, while they did not entirely disagree with earlier findings of the crucial role of an empathic leader during crisis; they added that empathy shapes how CEOs perceive crisis and that while empathy may assist CEOs in resolving crisis through positive influence of employees, too much empathy can also bring too much reliance on sentiments and prejudice in some of the decisions a CEO makes.

Transformational leadership is also acclaimed as the most effective leadership style during a crisis. Categorized within four dimensions of (i) intellectual stimulation where they empower employees to bring ideas (ii) inspirational motivation which is inspiring those led (iii) idealised influence which informs visible courage, clear communication and values for others needs and (iv) individualises consideration involving coaching, supporting and giving constructive feedback as necessary (Besieux et al., 2018), transformational leaders are quick to respond in a manner of influence, which motivates and brings hope to a challenging situation (Asree et al., 2019; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Dehghanan et al., 2021). Transformational leadership goes hand in hand with a leader who is charismatic and can drive positive behaviour (Peck & Hogue, 2018). These type of leaders are bold, self-confident, captivating, enchanting, sharp and able to convince and draw many to their cause (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). Others challenge these findings. Arguing that vulnerability in charismatic leadership may be crucial to strengthen relationships with employees and increase the provenance of charisma, these scholars state that leaders who show feelings “create opportunities for followers to connect ... followers, in turn, may perceive increased psychological safety, be more willing to trust ... be more motivated to engage in building a more egalitarian leader–follower relationship” (Al & Bligh, 2017, p. 67).

Autocratic leadership, sometimes referred to as authoritarian leadership, is defined with power concentration in one person and refers to an officious style of leadership (Harms et al., 2018). Scholars postulate that autocratic leadership often is advanced in challenging settings, where strong leadership may be professed an answer to problems (Harms et al., 2018; Petersen & Laustsen, 2020). Drawing on evolutionary theory which place power and status as twin paths to leadership, scholars argue that in situations such as crisis and economic downturn, ripe with destitution, uncertainty, confusion, lack of control and emotional stress, followers have been found to develop bias and preference toward an authoritarian leader, who they believe has the capacity to see them through the difficulty and thus increase their chances of success (Harms et al., 2018; Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). Petersen & Laustsen, (2020) in their review of why supporters vote certain leaders into power support the finding. Using theories of authoritarianism, they found that preference for dominant leaders is regarded part of a steady subservient character, and claimed that due to the perceived character of aggressiveness, strength and negotiating capabilities, authoritarian leaders display skill and are therefore able to resolve crisis expediently, which draws followers to vote them into key positions of leadership (Petersen & Laustsen, 2020).

Bureaucratic leadership, sometimes closely linked with authoritarian leadership due to its dictates of processes, policies and laid out rigid and inflexible procedures, is said to be

suffocating and potentially challenging to employee's ability to perform (McLarty et al., 2021). Commonly referred 'leadership by the book', bureaucratic leadership dictates are procedural, and policy driven. CEOs and managers use set plans to drive certain behaviours and are often seen as sticklers for detail and therefore prohibitive to new ideas (Saqib Khan et al., 2015). Scholars who support more social type of relationships, claim that social interactions between leader and follower encourage close relations, which provoke better performing employees. They argue that bureaucratic leadership is best suited to prisons, where clear and unyielding process is critical to ensuring fair treatment, respect and obedience (Harms et al., 2018), to settings where delicate or dangerous equipment is used, in cash handling businesses or during training sessions that require rigid, clearly articulated and repetitive rules; but that as a style of leadership, it is demoralizing and constraining to employees who seek innovations, agility and flexibility to effect change (McLarty et al., 2021; Saqib Khan et al., 2015).

Transactional leadership involves the negotiated reward to employees, based on an accomplishment of a specified task. The CEO sets the tone and outlines the project to be accomplished with set deliverables which employees agree to. Support is given based on necessity, and on completion of the set task, the employees get rewarded (Dehghanan et al., 2021). Incentives are arguably a tool which a leader can use within an existing system to improve an organization's culture and strategy (Vera & Crossan, 2004), although opposing findings detect that in a changing environment such as a crisis, transactional leadership is not as effective (Jansen et al., 2009).

While there is no consensus in style during crisis, there are traits that have been found common among leaders, and more importantly which are required by followers to ensure that they remain engaged and influenced positively during crisis (Besieux et al., 2018; Coombs & Laufer, 2018). These primarily include sensemaking, decision making, communication, empowerment and motivation, resilience to withstand the crisis and most importantly, "restore normalcy and implement lessons learned from the crisis" (König et al., 2020, p. 132).

2.6 Shaping perceptions (impression management)

Human beings often subconsciously evaluate themselves, others and groups in society and set labels about characters and expected behaviours from those around them (Mende-Siedlecki, 2018). The ability to 'expect' is argued to be crucial for survival, for it empowers humans to compare each other, set similarity traits, define who they trust and not, who fits in their group, who is esteemed and safe and who is potentially unsafe (Rosenfeld et al., 1994; Sezer, 2022). The premise at which people evaluate each other varies, and these variances,

and how they can be identified and distinguished dictate the responses received (Abele et al., 2020). Questions on how humans distinguish between others to guide reactions and responses to them, how employees view leaders, and how leaders perceive employees, have been posed by many researchers (Cone et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2014). In a world where people are by nature anticipatory in their beliefs and behaviours (Robert, 2012), with a view of the world as a system whose variations depend on future conditions rather than purely the present or the past, humans hypothesise behaviours and form opinions of the environment and each other based on what they perceive (de Lange et al., 2018). What perceptions therefore, influence how we see each other as human beings, and can these perceptions be changed?

2.6.1 A review of perceptions

A quick google search defines “perception” as the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted: a process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impression to give meaning to their environment (Wikipedia, 2022) and prior knowledge has huge impact on how people perceive the world around them (de Lange et al., 2018). According to Aru and others, perceptions and the ability to make perceptual judgments about a thing (or person) is supported by the pre-existence sense of what is known of the environment, the person and their behaviour (Aru et al., 2018; de Lange et al., 2018). Other scholars call this affect control theory, a theory which supports findings by Aru, and expands these to not just limit perceptions to judgements, but also to how humans interact in society. Shank and Burns propose that social interactions depend on the pre-existence beliefs about the ‘actors’ interacting, and expands to add that impressions formed change rapidly in a social context (Shank & Burns, 2022). Differentiating between perceptions and sentiments, Shank and Burns explain that sentiment are “culturally shared impressions people hold about an entity outside of any specific interaction context, such as people believing in general that *a library* is good and quiet, and *a tobacco company* is bad and powerful, while impressions develop in ‘context of’ a thing.” (Shank & Burns, 2022, p. 2)

There are benefits to tapping into prior perceptions to compute expected actions or results, but scholars detect the existence of multitudes of other explanations (Bolino et al., 2016; Bundy et al., 2017) to what is perceived, even during organizational crises. Importantly, studies find that perceptions, realities and perspectives can be shaped (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). The question of the ‘how’ perceptions be shaped however is not a simplistic one, especially given the following yardsticks extracted from literature:

1. A meta-perception as defined by (Grutterink & Meister, 2022) *“is a given person’s (perceiver’s) belief regarding the view that another person or group of people (target) holds of him or her, regarding a specific type of content.”* (p. 330). If the perceived holds a certain perception about himself, his own view of what he perceives and his capability to lead and/or change, may impair their ability to influence others.
2. What is known and perceived about a person or thing is a function of a predefined idea about what is known of it (Aru et al., 2018). If perceptions are formed of ideas, the perceiver may struggle to change their idea about what they believe to be ‘truth’ about the perceived, even as circumstances change.
3. Individuals use perceptions of self to measure others and often find it a challenge to adjust (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Hu et al., 2014). When we judge others according to who we believe ourselves to be, our ability to change those beliefs arguably depend on our own ability to change, and change is not easy (Shank & Burns, 2022).

Scholars such as König bring in a different perspective to explain why shifting perceptions is not easy, stating that, where employee perceptions of CEOs have developed over observed traits and repeated action (König et al., 2021) it is not easy to influence change on the perceptions. Noting some of the challenges, others such as Kibler identified slight yet effective adjustments CEOs can implement to shape perceptions (Kibler et al., 2021). These adjustments include the act of eye directed gazing (Maran et al., 2019), CEO belief in what they possess, who they are, and how they translate and interpret distinctive signals in situations they encounter, claiming that these interpretations activate personalities which in turn shape the individual to react in a manner suited to their personalities (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020), thus supporting authentic delivery of leadership which is claimed to positively influence followers such as employees (Dehghanan et al., 2021; Peck & Hogue, 2018). The researcher delves further in literature over the next few topics for context to support this exploratory study.

2.6.2 First impressions

Implicit impressions formed about individuals influence how we behave toward them as well as what we expect of them (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Cone et al., 2017). First impressions are those initial impressions humans form of each other, formed from what is seen, heard, or read about the object of the perception, which by nature is evolving (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017). Many scholars claim that these impressions are formed incrementally over time, and

posit that impressions formed are influenced by time, the context of measurement including how someone looks (facial expressions) or the mood of the perceiver. This implies that perceptions can be misleading when interpretation of the influencer is inaccurate (Aru et al., 2018). These scholars also identify external factors such as the environment in which perceptions are being formed (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Cone et al., 2017; Luttrell et al., 2022) as potential to shape perceptions.

First impressions are claimed to linger. Even where evidence that gives the perceiver opportunity to query first impressions, changing perceptions about people is suggested as challenging (Cone et al., 2021). Cone qualifies this finding to state that amidst the noted difficulties, compelling evidence which may be difficult to ignore sometimes can occur and force perceptions to change, and that in that case, the element of surprise overwhelms the resistance to hold on to the first impression and perceivers are forced to then reevaluate their impressions. What therefore are some of the traits or cues which can shape impressions?

2.6.3 The Target

According to Luttrell and others, theories of perception propose two dimensions to social evaluations; these being the 'warmth dimension' which identifies the targets' negative and positive goals, and their palpable aptitudes and the 'competence dimension' which measures the targets capacity to implement their purpose by tapping into their calm, confident abilities (Luttrell et al., 2022). Expanding on the concept of warmth, Goodwin, Abele and others emphasize that warmth encompass' sociability and morality' and proposed that sociability is the targets ability to be liked, and that morality measures the targets degree of honesty and trustworthiness (Abele et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2015). Luttrell et al. (2022) argued that a target's virtue is more influential than information about competency or sociability and claimed that perceptions shift more pronouncedly when the perceiver receives updated information pertaining to the target's morality, than they do on information about their capabilities.

Developing from scholars who outline four features of authentic leadership to include the "internalized moral perspective which represents a form of self-regulation whereby internalized morals and values guide decision-making processes" (Boekhorst, 2015, p. 248), the researcher claims that the warmth dimension as described by scholars is a function of authentic leadership. Authentic leadership is crucial to shaping how leaders are perceived (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019; Peck & Hogue, 2018). "All three dimensions – morality, sociability, and competence-account for variance in social evaluations" (Luttrell et al., 2022, p.

2). A leader's application of authentic leadership will shape the impressions formed of them (Abele et al., 2020).

New evidence of impression updating points to dimensions of diagnostic and believability, which argue that prior dimensions were fleeting. The idea of durability claims a rare and extreme trait or action which shapes what we perceive will be future behaviour, thus generating durable influences on updated implicit impressions (Cone et al., 2021)

2.6.4 The perceiver

Studies have long accentuated the role of employees and their behaviours in firm efficacy. This role is also crucial in determining the role of employees in shaping perceptions. As Mazzei claims "employees' behaviours are especially important during the periods of corporate crises" (Mazzei et al., 2019). Because employees are not the same, and will potentially influence CEOs differently, it is crucial for a leader to also understand how employee perceptions and behaviours influence his leadership (Matthews et al., 2021).

One key driver to how the perceiver responds to initiatives a CEO put in place to shape perceptions is that of 'trust'. How much does the employee trust their leaders? During a crisis, employee emotions of uncertainty and vulnerability are heightened and mistrust and sometimes blame come to the fore (Blomqvist et al., 2021; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Employee trust plays a critical role in organization as studies have shown that trusting employees encourages more commitment and passion, especially to a leader who is willing to make sacrifices of themselves (Johnson, 2021).

A CEO who seeks to shape employee perceptions must understand that employees have biases and perceptions which they form about the firm, the crises, and the leader, and implement measures to restore trust. As proposed by scholars, employees' assess firm and leader trustworthiness based on capabilities to meet their needs, how well they are taken care of and committed, and on honest, fair and virtuous conducts" (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009), employee's own attitudes, interests and needs, and experiences and expectations affect how a CEO can influence positive behaviours (Aru et al., 2018). As emphasized by de Lange et al., (2018) perception and perceptual decision-making are strongly facilitated by prior knowledge about the probabilistic structure of what we believe of those we perceive, and of the world.

2.6.5 The perception context

Previous studies highlight the situatedness and context (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Paraskevas & Quek, 2019; Rapley, 2018) of a crisis and recommend a process view concept, stating that for crisis management to reduce the prospect of crisis, lessen losses and exploit opportunity (Bracht et al., 2021), it must be framed in its three stages encompassing; the before, during and after crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Karam, 2018; Wu et al., 2021). This is found to be important because CEOs have distinct perceptions of crisis management; with some viewing it, not only as a challenge but as a prospect to be fluid, pioneering and artistic enough to craft innovations that support social change (Fusch et al., 2018; Krause & Miller, 2020). For CEOs to fully exploit crises, each stage demands varying interpretations and responses (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Paraskevas & Quek, 2019). The researcher will situate this exploratory study in the 'during' crises stage and review how firms and employees were affected.

2.7 Employee engagement

Scholars (Oc, 2018; Rapley, 2018) suggest that leadership does not occur in a vacuum. The setting of a crisis shapes how leaders behaves, and that leadership behaviour, coupled with how leaders perceive crisis, CEO personalities and styles, have significant impact on the firm (Oc, 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021). Oc (2018) adds that leadership occurs in a complex context "at the omnibus level *where, when* and *who* is being led, and that at the discreet level, the *task, social, physical* and *temporal* aspects of the context" (p.223) dictates the leadership strategies relevant to each setting. (Snowden & Boone, 2007a) developed the *cynefin* framework to categorize issues facing leaders, characterized by the relationship between cause and effect; being the simple, complicated, complex, chaotic and disorder contexts, with each context faced requiring a differing set of leadership qualities.

Arguably, the most crucial stakeholder to the successful transition of a firm through crisis is the employee (Emmett et al., 2021; Leta & Chan, 2021). Employees are crucial in an organizational crisis. Kranz and Steger (2013), in his study of an economic crisis, argued that at organisation level, when a crisis turns into a firm crisis, it leads to clear variances in decision making and employee engagement. Studies have also found that, at the core of most firm crises are employees who knew nothing, who willingly participated or who were coerced through incentives to partake in practises that compromise them and the firms (Fusch et al., 2018; Johansen et al., 2012; Kwon & Kim, 2020; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018).

On one end, it is argued that leaders who continuously disregard employees during a crisis hamper the firm's ability to navigate out of a crisis and inadvertently drive employees to negative perceptions of the leader and firm (Boman & Schneider, 2021; Johansen et al., 2012; McLarty et al., 2021; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019). On the other, CEO influence can drive performance during and after a crisis (Ahlquist & Levi, 2011; König et al., 2020; Vera & Crossan, 2004), and as Cockerill, (2021) asserts; over twenty percent of employee performance is accredited to leaders. Depending on the level of decisions made, CEOs can influence employee effectiveness. CEOs who are seen to be interfering and perceived to be strong headed however, can compromise employees and the firm (Bracht et al., 2021; Sadler-Smith et al., 2017; Schnatterly et al., 2018).

There is an implicit strategic leadership aptitude therefore which CEOs must possess to exert the requisite influence required to shape perceptions without being seen as hubristic leaders (Sadler-Smith et al., 2017). A CEO leads a team. As (Carrington et al., 2019) emphasize, to focus on leader perceptions without follower contributions, is incomplete. The follow-on review concentrates on employees who resist leadership strategic intentions to influence change and briefly delves into what makes employees be resistant to change.

2.7.1 Managing employee resistance to change

In this contemporary age, where everything including firms, systems, technology and people change, simply because change is all around (Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021), a CEO who seeks to successfully lead organisations and employees through crises, who endeavours to shape perceptions of the firm and employees, needs to shift focus from the cause and depressing state of the extreme context of crisis (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019). This CEO must instead work to inspire a new belief system in his employees for a better tomorrow (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020), must learn dexterity, agility and tact to empower (Stouten et al., 2018; Tskhay et al., 2014) through accurate strategic and deemed relevant information management distribution to employees (Samimi et al., 2020) during crises.

Flexibility (Christofi et al., 2021; Fusch et al., 2018) among other traits, is also needed to support the requisite change. As employees become dynamic in expectations and views (Gillespie et al., 2014), it is no longer enough to just be good; nowadays companies and employees require strategic and dynamic leadership (Samimi et al., 2020; Schoemaker et al., 2018), which becomes more enhanced during a crisis (Paixão et al., 2020). A CEO also requires insight and a developed sense of foresight (Crossan et al., 2008; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to know that he cannot forcefully effect the desired change.

Kurt Lewis (1951) (as cited in Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021) introduced the concept of forcefield analysis to examine the driving and resisting forces in an environment of change. His concept idea through his findings was not that, to effect change a leader must exert force, rather his idea was strategic and tactical. He suggested that two forces should be used against each other (interplayed) to attain equilibrium, a place where positive force will influence the desired results through (i) an increase of the force which directs behaviours away from the existing status quo of resistance, (ii) reduction of the force that negatively affects movement from the existing resistance and (iii) a combination of the two (Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021).

Literature further draws parallels between strategies suggested by (John-Eke & Eke, 2020) to manage employee resistance to change and those of (Stouten et al., 2018) who used prescriptive models to view change at organizational level. Both scholars suggest tools to shift employee resistance to change through practices such as; motivation, transparency to the reasons that drive change, clarity of vision, effective timely and accurate information flow, and collaborations with employees (Stouten et al., 2018; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021). The scholars attest to the struggle that firms and CEOs face in effecting forceful change and conclude that forceful change could be detrimental to an organization, even if achieved. This strategic leadership role to foster change therefore lies with the CEO (Ahlquist & Levi, 2011).

2.8 Theoretical frameworks

The researcher drew from reintegration (Pfarrer et al., 2008), organizational trust repair (Gillespie & Dietz, 2009) and impression management (Rosenfeld et al., 1994) to design questions to answer 'how CEOs shape perceptions of employees during crises' (Schaedler et al., 2021)? Common among the frameworks is the primal usage by other scholars to respond to the 'how' question, which most studies address through an explorative method.

2.8.1 Reintegration and organizational trust repair framework

In attempt to use case study methods to response to 'how' a firm fraught with a transgression of fraud and scandal can shape perceptions of its stakeholders including employees, to potentially rebuild and restore trust and credibility, (Gillespie et al., 2014) drew from conceptual frameworks of reintegration and organizational trust repair, also studied by others (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2014; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Kähkönen et al., 2021; Pfarrer et al., 2008). Many of the studies proposed themes of approaches for reintegration, which were found to include transparency, clarifications, ownership, apology, and atonement. These were proposed through commitment to reforms and innovative focus on the role of the organization

and its leaders (Palladan et al., 2016; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020) to reshape their identity (Krause & Miller, 2020; McLarty et al., 2021; Pitelis & Wagner, 2019), introduce cultural and social reforms and networks (Eden, 2021; Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Schnatterly et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2021) and practise authentic leadership (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019; Kiersch & Peters, 2017) through accuracy and corrective nature of onward decision making (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Hersel et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014).

The reintegration model developed by (Pfarrer et al., 2008) proposed that an organization is most likely to effect change and manage crisis if it responds to its most central stakeholder who holds power to shape the narrative of crisis, and influence other stakeholder perceptions. The researcher identifies employees as key. The organizational trust repair model similarly, proposed the use of process founded on internal components of a firm “its leadership and management practices, culture and climate, strategy and systems’ (Gillespie et al., 2014; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009) to repair trust, an enabler that CEOs could leverage off to influence employee perceptions.

Literature established linkages between organizational crises (a crisis internally wove such as fraud and scandal) and a CEO who bears the brunch of blame (Gilbert, 2021) as both influence stakeholders. A CEO is expected to drive integral strategic and leadership reforms (Carrington et al., 2019; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Petriglieri, 2020) to manage the organization out of crisis. Reintegration requires a CEO to address key questions at stages of ‘detection, clarification, penance and reform’ (Gillespie et al., 2014) and these stages may be core to shaping employee perceptions during a crisis. As (Gillespie et al., 2014) state, “*signals and cues emanating from these components govern employee actions ... as well as the perceptions of ... trustworthiness*” (p. 374). Drawing parallels from the theoretical frameworks, CEOs can use suggested implements to reintegrate and repair trust in themselves and the firm, thus achieving the desired outcome to shape employee perceptions.

2.8.2 Impression Management framework

Understanding others ‘impression management’ (IM) behaviours can serve as the bridge to smoother interaction among people such as CEOs and employees of different status, race or positions (Peck & Hogue, 2018; Rosenfeld et al., 1994). In the context of a firm where employees, and in most cases the management teams and CEO are concerned with how they are seen by others, IM is viewed as a means of impacting followers’ understanding of the ideal leader (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Rosenfeld et al. (1994) states that “one way to better understand

the underlying motives of individuals and organization is through impression management theory (also known as self-presentation theory)” (p. 602).

Literature centres the definition of IM around Goffman’s book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* which he presented a theory which likens social interactions to theatre, where individuals are seen as actors, audiences and outsiders acting on a stage with the sole intention to manage how others view them. He claimed that people do this through conscious decision to reveal certain aspects of self and to conceal others, just as actors do on stage. Erving Goffman (1922-1982) argues that IM does not just influence how one is perceived and treated; it is an essential part of social interaction.

IM focuses on self-presentation, a process to control how one behaves and to attempt to control perceptions formed of them by an audience (Goffman, 2021; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Scholars proposed an IM model where ‘actors’ participates in IM activities and an ‘audience’ communicates with the actors under varying contexts (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016), while impression management was introduced in the firm environment to detect behaviours employees and leaders display to be favoured at work (Carlson et al., 2019). The theory anchors on the assumption that people at a basic level seek to be desired, and thus dedicate huge effort to make positive impressions on others, and that even at organizational level, they adopt certain behaviours to be regarded as CEO favourites (Carlson et al., 2019).

Finding from Rosenfeld et al., (1994) which defines IM as “*the many ways by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others have of them: their behaviour, motivations, morality, and a hist of personal attributes like dependability, intelligence, and future potential.*” (p. 602) illuminates varying individual endeavours utilized to manage perceptions, which include a version of self in social interactions (Peck & Hogue, 2018), an active effort for CEOs to transform themselves into strategic leaders (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Metz, 2020). This definition best attests to the capacity for CEOs to shape employee perceptions, and his capacity to inclusively lead through commitment to excellence (Russell et al., 2021).

Many scholars have also studied how impressions can be managed through internet based communications such as social media platforms instead of face to face (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Rui & Stefanone, 2013), arguably allowing individuals to participate more actively in the act of self-presentation. In the work environment employees have used social media to create positive professional images using visibility of their personal lives, and that such impressions and behaviours by employees can affect how an organisation is viewed by others (Shank & Burns, 2022). Studies have also claimed that social media is critical for

employees and potential employees to communicate with teams, prospective employers, collaborators, and others successfully (Paliszkievicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016) and that a good self-image can boost confidence and support a good personal sense of belonging for 'actors' who seek to shape how they are perceived (Zhou et al., 2019).

Other scholars apportion a cadre of IM tools that can be used to influence perceptions, including but not limited to humour (Bitterly & Schweitzer, 2019), social norms through framed incentives (Lieberman et al., 2019), employee engagement (Kwon & Kim, 2020; Mazzei et al., 2019), internal crisis communication (Mazzei et al., 2012; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Tokakis et al., 2019) and the character and leadership traits displayed by the CEO during crises (Bracht et al., 2021; O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021; You et al., 2020). The foundation of a leader's ability to shape perceptions is grounded in his ability to acquire skill to manage employee resistance to change (Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021).

These tools are compared to experiences, with the interplay between perceptions and experiences determining the level of shift and consequently the measure of influence. These frameworks are important for this study. First, they assist with the determination of levels at which employees can repair trust in a leader during crisis, what tools a leader can use to shift perceptions once trust is repaired and further present a framework for areas of improvement and opportunities for positive and collective resolution of crisis.

2.9 Literature review findings

To integrate and bring objectivity, scholars produced theoretical perceptions, observed findings, and proposed research agendas for advancements in different parts of crisis and crisis management (Bundy et al., 2017 ; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Eismann et al., 2021; Schaedler et al., 2021), advancements which give context to this study which integrates strategic leadership, organizational crisis, stakeholder management and crisis leadership. The attempt of the study in part was to explore CEO's strategic leadership roles and tools which influenced the management of the crisis (Buyl et al., 2019; Stocker et al., 2019) in Eswatini and which, if executed with clarity of vision (Petriglieri, 2020), and a cyclic emotion channelling focus (Sy et al., 2018), could serve CEOs to forge expectations and shape employee perceptions (de Lange et al., 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021).

Literature suggested that crisis can develop from internal or external to a firm, and that either can have lasting and profound impact on a company, its leaders and employees (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Coombs, 2014), and that organisational crisis is highly collated with negative

emotions (Birkeland et al., 2017) and that employee emotions are arguably more affected than all the other stakeholders (Landry et al., 2014; Paraskevas & Quek, 2019). Literature on strategic leadership during crisis was explored with findings which suggest that the increase in the number of crises over the last few years has brought extensive demands on leaders who are found unprepared and ill equipped to lead. It takes leaders to embrace and rise about the norms to consider the uniqueness of crisis for them to understand the potential impact of crisis and what is required of them.

Literature purposes that deeper social evaluations perspective CEO focused research on perceptions of employees could result in a shift of perspectives which could potentially shift organization leverage (Detjen & Webber, 2017) and develop consensus of beliefs that will steer the firm to quicker crisis resolution and organizational success (Carrington et al., 2019). CEOs, varying their levels of commitment, set up and actions, can inspire negative or positive perceptions during crises and create differing perspectives of a phenomenon (König et al., 2021). It is crucial for CEOs to sense and explore diverse viewpoints for suitability, understand and anticipate employee reactions' and potential impact (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), if they are to shape employee perceptions during crises (Schaedler et al., 2021).

The study aimed therefore to explore the gap as identified in how CEOs can shape employee perceptions during crises, to address the internal perspective which has been lagging as most scholars have extensively reviewed the external perspective of crisis and crisis leadership.

Chapter 3: Research questions

3.1 Background to the research problem

For decades, the world has faced increasingly erratic disruptive crises, whose overwhelming effects have caused major risks to economies, firms, and stakeholders such as leaders and employees (K. Bailey & Breslin, 2021; Paraskevas & Quek, 2019; Wu et al., 2021). These crises essentially shift human perceptions of the world, and of each other (Coombs, 2014; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is an example. The pandemic has been the worst crisis the world has experienced in decades (Smet & D'Auria, 2020). Its impact staggering and shocking to unprepared leaders (Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021) and employees at all levels. Eswatini was not spared. The pandemic ravaged and threatened business, leaders, employees, and communities. As the country worked to manage the pandemic, a new crisis in form of political unrest and anarchy emerged, and put added pressure on organizations, leaders, and employees. Fearing threats of job losses, infections and death, employees in Eswatini faced the uncertainty with anxiety, panic, and worry. CEOs were expected to lead, and lead effectively (Firestone, 2020; B. Liu et al., 2016; Pertuz & Pérez, 2021) and societal expectations from employees seeking guidance from CEOs increased (Birkeland et al., 2017; de Lange et al., 2018; Krause & Miller, 2020).

According to literature, crises of profound unpredictability and uncertainty, of the impact both the pandemic and unrest had, finds leaders (CEOs) unprepared (Dale Oen et al., 2022; Hatami et al., 2020). As leaders grapple with existential, sustainability, health, and social challenges (Alexander et al., 2020; Smet & D'Auria, 2020), varying perceptions of their abilities and personalities, and leadership, are formed by employees (Aru et al., 2018; Baert et al., 2022; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009).

3.2 Definition of research problem

The researcher's interest was to explore the perceptions formed by employees about CEOs, in the context of the crises of (i) COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) the political riots, which occurred in Eswatini. Emphasis was to understand how employees perceived CEOs' strategic leadership during the crises, and to study how employee perceptions can be positively shaped by CEOs during crisis.

To determine perceptions of leadership during crises, the researcher sequentially structured this exploratory study. First, was to establish CEOs' strategic leadership role on a day-to-day

basis, with focus on the styles and traits of leadership that are apparent in Eswatini CEOs, and how employees experience and value the leadership. The researcher also reviewed employees first impressions of CEOs, with the aim to understand how perceptions are formed, and what influences the shift in impressions. The context of crisis was then explored to understand how employees categorized both events, and the impact the crises had on business, and on employees. Thereafter the study focused on CEO leadership response during the crises, how CEOs used the strategic leadership role to lead through the crises. Leadership styles adopted during the crises, and impressions formed were interrogated. The researcher then followed with an exploration of perceptions formed of CEO crisis leadership. The aim was to determine whether impressions formed during the crises were different from first impressions and if different, what contributed to the impression change. Employees were then requested to detail preferred leadership styles during a crisis. Lastly, the study explored how CEOs can shape or influence employee perception during crises, to foster collaboration and effective crises resolution.

The research questions were core to the process which the researcher followed to address employee lived experiences of both crises. Based on the literature review in chapter 2, the researcher established a gap in the study of employee perceptions during crisis, a gap which necessitated further research. The process therefore aims to expand and to contribute to literature, by providing new insights into the topic being researched. This research seeks to explore answers to the primary and secondary research questions outlined below:

3.3 The primary and secondary research questions

Noting CEO's role in organizational crisis leadership through the internal perspectives' lens, the main research problem was to investigate perceptions, in particular the role CEOs can play in shaping employee perceptions during a crisis, with a view to propose a framework to foster enhanced perceptions to support the CEOs ability to successfully resolve crisis.

3.3.1 The primary research question

The primary question will be: what role does a CEO play in shaping the perceptions of employees during a crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021) and what tools, characteristics or behaviours could the CEO use to foster coherence with employees that would induce effective outcomes during crises (Wu et al., 2021)? The research question seeks to better understand the strategic leadership role of CEOs during crisis, employee expectations, and the tools which CEOs can use to lead employees to support effective and timely resolution of crisis.

Understanding these factors is important for CEOs during crisis if they are to lead employees successfully, as literature reveals that CEOs are faced with numerous challenges, especially with respect to leading, inspiring, and supporting employees through a crisis, a process and function which is rather crucial for CEOs to master for crisis resolution and business sustainability.

3.3.1.1 Secondary research question 1:

What perceptions do employees have on CEOs during crises and do prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Mazzei et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014)?

This secondary research question sought to understand impressions formed by employees of CEOs during crisis, and whether perceptions formed during crises develop from prior perceptions formed. Literature reveals that while impressions are formed implicitly, implicit impressions can be updated under varying circumstances and through the impact of differing influencers. Understanding these factors will bring deeper insights into impression management theory from the perceivers lived experiences and expand knowledge on the impact that context has on shaping employee impressions, thus providing greater understanding of the topic.

3.3.1.2 Secondary research question 2:

How should CEO's leadership roles during crises adapt to shape positive employees' perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to the resolution of crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018)?

This research questions sought to explore CEO crisis leadership and effective leadership traits during crises. The aim was to understand how CEOs can change leadership styles and traits during crisis to positively influence employees to support them resolve the crisis. Literature reveals that human beings can control the impressions others have of them. This research questions aims to delve into the impressions formed by employees during crises and explore how employees believe CEOs can influence them and how employees would want to be lead during a crisis to motivate them to be supportive of the CEO.

The researcher argues that such an exploratory study will contribute and provide deeper insights into the topic.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Choice of methodology

The study purposed to interrogate how CEOs of banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals in Eswatini lead during crises (Wu et al., 2021). The sectors were dubbed 'essential' during the crises in Eswatini (Ministry of Commerce, 2020) and were operational as other businesses were required to close under lock down protocol. Crises in the study refers to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent political unrest, together 'the crises' which blindsided leaders, employees, and the community in 2021. The crises affected multitudes of businesses, leaders, and employees (Harber, 2021). The study focused on lived experiences of line manager perceptions of CEO strategic leadership during the crises, and primarily sought to answer the 'how' CEOs can strategically lead to shape employee perceptions during a crisis (Samimi et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021) in order to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution (Wu et al., 2021).

Researchers form assumptions which inform the categorization and summations they make about the nature of an organisation, its problems, the world around it, and how that organisation will consequently be studied (Bell et al., 2019; Rahi, 2017). Scholars such as (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Myers, 1997) argued that the validity of research lies in the path researchers follow through a defined paradigm. This paradigm is arguably crucial because, when researchers follow a set paradigm, they reduce reliance on philosophical knowledge, and instead make better findings, relative to other alternatives (Rahi, 2017). Authors such as (Bell et al., 2019; Khaldi, 2017; Rahi, 2017) detail four major paradigms that organisations can base their study and summation of situations on. These paradigms are termed (i) positivist, (ii) advocacy/participatory, (iii) interpretive and (iv) pragmatism. These theories (paradigms) guide how research is carried out (Myers, 1997).

For the study, the researcher used the qualitative approach to collect in-depth details from participants, by assuming that a single experience represents many other views of the same experience and that employee emotions are important to describing the events of study (Rahi, 2017). The research design of an interpretive phenomenology approach was chosen due to its ability to describe, understand and interpret participants experiences (Tuohy et al., 2013), provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial human issues and answer the 'whys?' and 'how' questions (Miles, M. B., & Huberman, 1994). This approach is founded on an inductive holistic philosophy (Byrne, 2001), and on the belief that real knowledge can

only be attained through intense analysis and interpretation of a subject (Rahi, 2017), one which is carried out based on participants' account of the experience.

The exploratory nature of the research focused on questions which attempted to understand participants lived experiences (Frechette et al., 2020) of the crises as was lived. By adopting an interpretive epistemology (Bell et al., 2019) and applying discernments of how line manager participants perceived lived experiences of CEO's strategic leadership during the crises, the researcher purposed this exploratory study to pursue new perceptions and find out what occurred (Gough & Lyons, 2016; Rahi, 2017), and how it impacted the employees who are ordinarily ignored (Schaedler et al., 2021). The intent objective was to gain insight which could be used to better anticipate responses CEOs could use to positively influence employee perceptions during crises (Landry et al., 2014; Schaedler et al., 2021).

Although the crises was studied from its direct impact to managers in banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals with participating line managers being core to the sample, the researcher recognised that each employee's world only provides part of the story (Frechette et al., 2020). Therefore, the researcher purposefully encouraged participants to freely utilize their distinguishing ability to talk, ask questions and expand on responses and abilities which, according to (Myers, 1997), sets humans apart from the natural world, and places the right tone for an interpretivism study.

The study took an ontological position of a constructionist and engaged in activity consistent with interpretivist view to unearth fundamental beliefs and values (Azungah, 2018; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). In the constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm, it is argued that multiple realities depend on individuals influenced by lived and shared experiences (Moon, 2019; Rashid et al., 2019). The primary method the researcher used was to gain understanding of the social and organizational crisis phenomena (Eisenhardt, 2021), by giving 'voice' to line managers in their own right as supervisor to junior staff and at the same time, in their capacity as followers to CEOs (Prouska & Psychogios, 2019) .

Interpretivism is based on social sciences which factors in the belief that social reality makes sense for people and can influence meaningful action. It further presents a unique methodology for inquiring into lived and logical experiences (Frechette et al., 2020; Romani et al., 2018). A collection of logical experiences founded at the core of interpretive studies (Romani et al., 2018) are crucial to ensure that the study is carried out with focus to gain insight on the right sample. As stated by (C. Williams, 2007), factors that constitute qualitative research involve purposeful use for describing, explaining, and interpreting collected data.

4.2 Population and research setting

Population in this context of a study refers to the target group who possess the characteristics of the research question, from whom the researcher could remotely collect the data from (Reñosa et al., 2021). The study targeted line managers from essential service sectors during the crises in Eswatini. These sectors were arguably more affected and from the perspective of the political unrest crisis, culminated to internet shut downs (Ebrahim, 2021) with major impact to internet banking, communication among leaders, and/or employees. Email services, social media apps such as WhatsApp and other, were non-functional, which affected point of sales in all retail and consumer goods outlets.

Scholars further assert that employees, especially those in essential services firms, faced significant issues of employee burnout and in some cases misconduct (Coggins et al., 2021; Hersel et al., 2019), fear and panic (Emmett et al., 2020; Leta & Chan, 2021) during the crises. The researcher therefore based the study on the supposition that employees in banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals as sectors whose employees had front line essential service areas, were most affected, and consequently exposed to more risk and concerns, due to the requirement to stay open throughout the crises.

4.3 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was identified as the person from which the researcher directly collected the data (Kumar, 2018). For the study, the unit of analysis was line managers in varying companies within the banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals of Eswatini firms, sectors which were affected by the crises. Line managers were spread among many businesses in the sectors chosen and included for validity and rigour as the researcher sought to understand varied viewpoints and test it against lived experiences of others (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Seale & Silverman, 1997).

The analysis purposefully targeted line managers. This was due to line manager's direct involvement in a crisis and the assertion that line managers have unique and interesting experience both as leader and as follower, due to their position in organizations (Prouska & Psychogios, 2019). The unique experience of line managers was therefore key to enhance the quality of the research, bring robustness, rigor and validity (Chidlow et al., 2015) by

encompassing lived experience during the crises from both perspectives as employer and as direct line reporting employees ‘follower’ to CEOs.

The researcher put emphasis on naturalism by seeking to understand the social reality of each participant in their own terms (Yannis & Nikolaos, 2018), concentrating on settings which were not influenced by the researcher (Bell et al., 2019). This also meant that line managers who report directly to the researcher were excluded from the sample.

4.4 Sampling

The researcher’s design of a sample was structured to be non-probability purposeful (C. Williams, 2007), and drawn from a representative sample of line managers of companies in essential services for diversity of account of the lived crisis experience (Frechette et al., 2020) during the crises. Focus was to understand the varying and lived experiences and perspectives, first of CEOs strategic leadership capability, perceptions that they held of CEOs during the crisis, and to further explore ways in which CEOs can shape employee perceptions during crisis.

The criteria for the sample included participants who (i) led teams through both crises, (ii) are line managers, (iii) report directly to CEO, (iv) have over 3 years’ experience in the line manager position, and (v) have at least 3 staff reporting directly to them. Line managers were chosen with consideration to work space and schedules during the crises, whether they mostly worked in office and had direct dealings with employees and CEOs during the crises instead of working from home, their diverse nature and skills set and their ability to host remote interviews (Chai et al., 2021). The study purposed to stage the setting for the interviews, with critical awareness to the need to consider context, and foster trustworthiness from participants during the interview sessions (McGinley et al., 2021). Purposive sampling with consideration to position, availability and willingness to participate, and access to communication platforms such as Teams, and/or Zoom and data was used (Chai et al., 2021) and 23 participants were interviewed.

The researcher proceeded in the following stages,

1. Drew a list of companies in banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals, essential service sectors whose employees were frontline and arguably most affected by the crises,
2. Used google search and/or LinkedIn to get company and/or TMT contact details,

3. Sent email request to key managers to seek approval to conduct the study using line managers as participants, and to request for email addresses of all line managers,
4. Followed up with calls to confirm and/or source the list and email addresses of potential participants who fit the required sample of line managers,
5. The objects of the study were clearly outlined. The consent form was included to emphasize that interviews would be recorded; verbatim quotations from the interview would be used provided that such quotations are not identified with participant name or that of the organisation; data to be used as part of a report would be publicly availed once the examination process has been completed; and that data would be recorded and stored without company or participant identifier,
6. The researcher was not requested to sign a confidentiality agreement binding them to specific consent and non-disclosure terms,
7. Through the email address list received, potential participants were contacted with a clear messaging that detailed that,
 - a. the researcher was conducting a study on CEO's strategic leadership influence during crises: Shaping employee perceptions and was therefore inviting each participant to participate in the study through an interview process,
 - b. the interviews were expected to last 1 hour and would assist the researcher to understand how employees perceived CEO strategic leadership before and during the crises, and how CEOs can shape employee perceptions during crises to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution,
 - c. participation was voluntary, and could be withdrawn at any time without penalty,
 - d. unless approval was granted by the participant, evidenced by a response to the email from the researcher, confirming willingness to participate, no further communication was to be sent to the participant's email address.

The researcher had overwhelming responses from participants who showed enthusiasm to participate in the study. This is claimed to reinforce the relevance of the topic, its potential impact to business, leaders, and to employees. The researcher suggests that employees in Eswatini's apparent need to share their experiences and perceptions of CEOs further signifies the gap that exists in social evaluation research to prioritize employees. As detailed in the invitation which suggested that scholars extend the social evaluations perspectives of CEO focused research to include CEO influence on employees, the study sought to determine CEOs role in shaping employee perceptions during crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021).

After initial review of first responder contributions from the preliminary questionnaire responses, and removing incomplete or declined responses, the sampled participants were

screened and grouped to ensure that they are of a number that is practical to manage but would still be representative of line managers from the chosen sectors (Roberts et al., 2019). The sample targeted 23-line manager participants within organizations in the defined sectors of banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals. The number of participants was influenced by the time factor to collect the data, and the nature and length of the interviews, which averaged under one hour each.

4.5 Research instrument – interview protocol

The researcher used standardised open-ended semi structured online 'Teams' interviews to collect the data. The design of the questionnaire had the intent objective to capture perceptions of line manager participants' (Jeong & Harrison, 2017) for qualitative viewpoints (Roberts et al., 2019) of the strategic role of CEOs during crises. The questionnaire further interrogated how perceptions held by line managers of CEOs strategic leadership during a crisis, could be shaped. The interview protocol attached as an appendix sought to explore CEO's strategic leadership and crisis leadership roles. The questions further investigated perceptions employees held of CEOs prior to the crisis, and sought to interrogate whether pre-crisis perceptions influence perceptions held during crises; and importantly explore traits CEOs can adopt, if any, to shape employee perceptions during crises (Schaedler et al., 2021).

4.5.1 Participants' potential risk and risk mitigation measure

Due to the nature of the questions, which among others, sought to determine perceptions held by participants on CEO leadership style before and during crises, as well as challenges that may exist in the relationship held between the leader (CEO) and follower (Carrington et al., 2019), the researcher acknowledged the potential reputational and financial risks which could have existed were participants' identities to be revealed to CEO's of companies affected by the crises. Leaders, armed with feedback that does not support the style of leadership could, instead of using feedback to drive positive transformational change, be vindictive, abuse and exploit line managers (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020) through measures that could include poor performance reviews that result in withdrawn incentives (financial risk) or outright emotional abuse that ultimately affect employee performance and reputation within the firms (Grutterink & Meister, 2022). To mitigate these risks, the researcher ensured that:

1. questions were sent prior to the interview date to ensure participants comfort and willingness, having considered all in detail,

2. participating line manager were assured of their right to withdraw at any time they felt uncomfortable with the line of questions,
3. details of participants were kept confidential,
4. no direct company results from the study were or will be shared with CEOs, and
5. that data collected was transcribed by the researcher, populated, and stored without company nor participant identifiers.

4.6 Data gathering process

The researcher arranged online interviews using platforms such as Teams or Zoom to carry out interviews. 23 participants were interviewed. The interview sessions were recorded to aid the researcher's ability to recollect discussions held as attempts were made to find meaning from the data collected (Wellard & McKenna, 2001).

Human knowledge and styles, and interpretation of experiences is always evolving over time (Carter & Greer, 2013). To manage the accuracy of information collected from research data and ensure that the data collected correctly captures the events under scrutiny, different methods were used. Triangulation is one of such methods used to augment the validity, reliability, and legitimation (Moon, 2019), a process which encompasses credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of research findings (McGinley et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2016). Triangulation is a research methods strategy that uses multiple data sources, researchers, theories, or research methods to ensure that the data, analysis, and conclusions of a research study are as comprehensive and accurate as possible. This process further (i) assists in identifying areas that need further study, (ii) presents a more robust picture of variables that may inform variation in participants' account of the phenomena and (iii) assist the researcher to better understand the facts as presented about the event (Moon, 2019).

As one form of triangulation, the researcher initiated the process of data gathering through a pilot study. A pilot study refers to a small scale feasibility study which can be viewed as a trial run of the methodology, carried out with the intent to guide the development of the research plan and informs the extend and the nature of the focal research (Kim, 2011; Muhammad Takiyuddin Abdul Ghani et al., 2019). Researchers use pilot studies in qualitative studies to identify concerns and learnings which build competencies in the research. Through the pilot study, a researcher gains significant insight of the method, the interview guide and technical challenges and will use these to make modifications and adjustments prior to the main interviews (Kim, 2011).

The researcher identified one participant for the pilot. The pilot study served as a trial-and-error method test that increased the validity of the research protocols, which in turn influenced the validity of the data collection process. The pilot however was not recorded, but suggestions were interrogated. Findings suggested that some of the questions from the interview guide needed to be expanded for better clarity as the participants could not respond to some questions citing that they were not clear. Changes as suggested were made to allow for better exploration. The transcript of the pilot sessions was shared with the participant to test and increase validity and reliability of interpreted data (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Moon, 2019). Once the pilot results were analysed and sorted, with the goal to ensure that interview questions were improved and confirmed to be the best suiting to answer the 'how' of the research problem (Kim, 2011), the researcher used the learnings to improve the interviews with semi structured open-ended questions distributed to the rest of the participants. Questions were distributed via email prior to scheduling of interview sessions, to allow the participants time to reflect on their experience and ensure accuracy of lived experience during the scheduled times (Frechette et al., 2020). Due to the subjectivity of qualitative research, and to encourage rich detailed answers, a degree of flexibility was allowed (Anderson et al., 2014). Scholars purport that flexibility, agility and continuous adjustments to interview and research style promote effective qualitative research (Chai et al., 2021; Christofi et al., 2021).

Discussions around questions not included in the interview guide were encouraged and included as a consequence of responses from participants who needed further propping, with the use of similar wording from one participant to the other (Bell et al., 2019). To enlarge the distinction and comparability of data, effort was made to ensure that data-collection dealings were dependable across the various participants (Rashid et al., 2019).

4.7 Data analysis approach

Data analysis began with sorting (Roberts et al., 2019) to identify inconsistent and flared with error data to improve the quality of the data analysed. The researcher reviewed, analysed, detected, modified, and removed inconsistent or irrelevant data. As stated by Kirkman, for data to achieve rigor and result in good research, it must be consistent, complete, and accurate (Kirkman, 2008). Transcription is the practice of turning audio-recorded interviews into text. These recordings are at a later transliterated into written form for more robust interpretation and further scrutiny (Seale & Silverman, 1997; Wellard & McKenna, 2001). Transcription happens in stages and involves the process of determining what level of data to include in the analysis, such as omitting implied indistinct exchanges, distinguishing and building clarity of words that may sound similar and representing and enhancing data accuracy

to form methodical formative patterns (J. Bailey, 2008; Seale & Silverman, 1997), who should transcribe the data, the determination of the level of detail required, how this data should be presented and the level of equipment needed to capture the data (J. Bailey, 2008). Bailey (2008) further asserts that the methodological assumptions underpinning the specific research area of study and topic guide the decisions about transcribing.

The researcher carried out their own process of transcription and while this process was tiresome and extended the period of data sorting, the researcher's primary concern was to avoid misrepresentation of fact and interpretation in meaning (J. Bailey, 2008; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006), as data collected in context may carry varying meaning to each transcriber. The researcher recognised their own risk to interpolate the data, but was confident that the benefits of self-transcription would allow for better interaction with the data, through repetitive listening which improves the ability to bring rigour and credibility to research (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). While visual data was not included, recorded data was transcribed in a way as to capture emphasis of speech, tone, and voice sounds, pauses in between responses to best interpret participants' accounts of the crises. Recording quality where a challenge to interpret or transcribe, was confirmed through further interrogation with the participants. To best represent the transcribed data and improve readability, grammar and spelling convention of standard UK English was used (J. Bailey, 2008; Moon et al., 2016). All recorded and transcribed data was backed up in cloud computing for redundancy and to ensure safety and prospective duplication of research should it be of interest to others.

Through the process of triangulation, defined as "research methods strategy that uses multiple data sources, researchers, theories, or research methods to ensure that the data, analysis, and conclusions of a research study are as comprehensive and accurate as possible" (Moon, 2019, p. 113), the researchers' shared lens (viewpoint) to establish validity, included that of the participants themselves. This was done through follow on involvement of the participants as a measure to confirm that the researcher captures their account of the crises, through checks to confirm that accounts of the events and experience lived are accurately narrated (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To analyse data, the researcher used a process to identify themes and constructs relevant to the research question. This approach allows for data to be interpreted for meaning (Anderson et al., 2014) in a process called thematic analysis. Roberts et al. (2019) states that thematic analysis is a simplistic technique of conducting hermeneutic analysis which is from a group of analyses that are designed for qualitative data. Through thematic, construct were collated to reframe, reproduce and link elements of the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020) to develop patterns which were used to create or craft themes (or codes) that served as categories for the research analysis. Thematic analysis dictates that materials

collated can only be understood by reviewing its parts and that the parts cannot be considered except in relation to the whole (Anderson et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2019).

The researcher employed the inductive approach (Azungah, 2018) from participant experiences captured in interviews to drive the analysis, triangulate data from CEOs and line manager employees and carry out cross analysis (Moon, 2019). Investigations and processes are supported by the interpretivist acknowledgement that participant's account of lived experiences and the patterns identified reflect participant's' realities and perceptions of strategic leadership during crises but do not inform that participants' account of these experiences should be taken as absolute truths (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

The use of Atlas.ti, a computer assisted qualitative package which facilitates the analysis of data for both qualitative and quantitative research by qualitative researchers started about three decades ago. Studies infer that analytical software programmes have over time developed and today work, not just as data analysis tools, but increasingly will be used to perform other functions such as project management, literature reviews, data collection, and report writing (Adelowotan, 2021; Sciences, 2018). Manual coding was commonly used in many of prior studies. The manual approach involved intense time commitment and paperwork given its associated complexity in coding and recoding. Nevertheless, computer software's such as Atlas.ti allow for easy coding and recoding and for the creation of links that detail how codes and themes interact in a complex manner, and therefore enhance the research interpretation process (Adelowotan, 2021).

Atlas.ti consolidates large volumes of documents, transcribes and tracks notes, codes, and memos in form of text, images audio video and geo data (Adelowotan, 2021; Sciences, 2018). It further provides analytical and visualization tools designed to unlock new interpretative views (Adelowotan, 2021) thus giving the researcher capability to identify, code and interpret findings from primary data, assess and determine data significance to the study and the ability to visualise the otherwise complex relations between the varying accounts and their consequent findings (Sciences, 2018). A differing school of thought argues that by adopting a perspective that softwares are grounded in study of how societies influence the world around them, rather than as methodological process, researchers are better able to speak of the otherwise hardly rational process of qualitative analysis more accountably, and with enhanced conviction. Further, the suppositions that software's are not purely methodological infer that result from "software packages are better understood, not only as 'mere tools' for coding and retrieving, but also as complex virtual environments for embodied and practice-based knowledge making" (Sciences, 2018, p. 277).

To achieve thematic content analysis of the data systematically, quicker and with enhanced accuracy, the researcher used Atlas.ti. The software assisted the researcher to unearth, and methodically examine the complex phenomena hidden in the exploratory data collected from the participants through the analysis of the transcriptions of the questions from the interviews, including descriptive variables to compare and contrast participants' answers. Audio files were transcribed in Word Transcriber and transcripts were imported into Atlas.ti for coding.

4.8 Research quality

Research aims to govern the relationship between what is known and what is applied through the demonstration of rigor, validity and reliability (Bell et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019). Studies suggest clear articulation of processes and following procedures to inform validity, rigor and transparency (Moon, 2019). Prior studies developed a criterion for testing the trustworthiness of research conducted in the natural exploratory paradigm, suggesting that there are four key areas researchers could use to test trustworthiness; being internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (Egon et al., 1981).

Internal validity involves testing for *credibility* of the research through the participants, while external validity involves the researchers focus to carry out the study in a way that makes situational and characteristic's variations irrelevant to the study (Egon et al., 1981; Moon et al., 2016). In the naturalistic exploratory realm, credibility is not easy to achieve since context to a large degree dictates the experience of participants, such that there are varying realities outlined. These realities, however, commonly have a degree of *transferability* within varied contexts. This transferability is centred on the understanding that experience of the same phenomenon holds strong degree of similarities even in different contexts (Kirkman, 2008; McGinley et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2019).

Interpretivists believe in multiple realities and use humans as instruments. Humans get tired, and may evolve in insights, sensitivities and account of a phenomenon over time (Egon et al., 1981; Moon et al., 2016). The concept of *consistency* in exploratory research is thus measured through dependability. *Dependability* is a concept which embraces elements of the requisite stability implied by quantitative researchers and trackability required by changes that can be explained in human behaviour. The concern for *consistency* of research grows from the fact that instruments, even if human, must produce stable results for findings to be meaningful (Kirkman, 2008; McGinley et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2016). The last measure of rigor that outlines quality of research in the naturalistic paradigm is objectivity, which is presumed to be guaranteed by the methodology. If methods are clarified, open to scrutiny, can be reproduced

and found to be devoid of direct researcher participant contact, studies believe that biases of the researcher are removed, leaving the research to be objective (Frechette et al., 2020; McGinley et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2019).

The study focused on credibility, and dependability by filing scribes and recordings of all research data to ensure data confirmation and scrutiny, replicability, and proof of rigor where necessary. As studies have found, good quality research provides robust ethical evidence which can withstand scrutiny and verification (Chai et al., 2021; Daniel & Harland, 2018).

4.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration is critical to all research. Proper steps were taken to ensure that participants are fully aware of the participation and role in the study. No incentives nor coercions were provided to participants. Particular focus was made to ensure confidentiality of (i) names (ii) firm data and account of perceptions held about CEOs, and (iii) that they are provided with consent forms (Bell et al., 2019). The consent forms articulated the voluntary nature of the interviews and informed participants of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. Emphasis was made to ensure that each form was signed prior to the start of the interview and that participants were made aware that signing was giving consent for the interview sessions to be recorded and transcribed by the researcher; that verbatim quotations from the interviews would be used in the final report provided that participant or organization name is not disclosed, that data collected would be used as part of a report which would be publicly available once the examination process was completed and, that all data reported would be stored without identifiers.

4.10 Limitations of the research design and methods

To understand the social world through the 'lens' of participants, the realist epistemology admits that although data can reveal something about participants' "real world", the accounts purely reflect personal experience (Gough & Lyons, 2016) and may not capture these accounts objectively. Because findings of qualitative research are not tested for statistical significance or whether they are due to chance, it is arguable that the study cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses allows (Atieno, 2009). While the researcher used specific key words to search for articles through google scholar, some which could have been relevant were not available for download. Further to these, and similarly to findings by (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016), the researcher used keywords which were not set specifically for qualitative articles, and therefore

some articles or journals were not included in the data. Although various keywords, and in some cases combinations of keywords were used to improve the scope of research for the literature review, the researcher could only know for certain if all the journals and suggested related articles were also manually scoped for findings and recommendations that could inform and enhance the golden thread. This process was not carried out extensively. Another limitation was that, since the study focused on qualitative analysis as a methodology, the researcher could not compare qualitative designs with mixed methods, ethnography, or quantitative research as a way of triangulation.

Due to time limitations to complete the study, the sample size was limited to 23 participants. In a crisis that affected the whole country and organizations at varying sectors and geography of Eswatini, the number of participants may not have fully represented the population's views of the phenomenon. Further to this, the time lag effect from when the crises occurred to the interviews may have distorted participants' account of their lived experiences during the crises.

Finally, participants are not experts on own experience, because own explanations and perceptions of CEOs strategic leadership capabilities prior to crises are likely to include a measure of distortion and error (Azungah, 2018) . As a result, the researcher cannot restrict the data analysis exercise to considering participants purely from own point of view, but rather will seek to interpret and unearth what is unsaid (Ivey, 2022) and that process in itself is subject to limitations of the researchers' biases.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 is a representation of the findings from the in-depth analysis of the interviews conducted as per the outline of chapter 4. This study sought to explore how CEO can shape employee perceptions positively during crisis. Participants were chosen from a population which experienced two forms of crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the political unrest. Participants had at least 3 years' experience as direct reports to CEOs. This was to allow for an all-round view due to the line manager position of leader and follower. The guiding process was premised on analysing participant's lived experiences. The objective was to present, in an organized format, representation of experiences collated through semi-structured interviews on how CEOs can shape employee perceptions positively during crisis.

5.2 Participants data

There was overwhelming interest from the participants. In total, thirty-one (31) people agreed to participate in the semi structured interviews. Of these, twenty-three (23) interviews were undertaken and 8 people were excluded. One was excluded due to potential conflict. Three (3) were excluded after stating discomfort with some of the questions. Two (2) people indicated potential bias due to recent altercations with CEOs and three (3) persons were excluded at the request of the researcher due to time constraints and because the targeted sample size, originally set at twenty (20) was achieved.

Table 5.1: Outline of the sector's spread of participants

Participant sector spread	
<u>Banking (financial services)</u>	<u>Nonbank financial services</u>
Participant 1	Participant 9
Participant 14	Participant 17
Participant 5	Participant 19
Participant 13	Participant 15
Participant 21	Participant 12
Participant 10	Participant 6
Participant 7	Participant 4
Participant 2	Participant 8
	Participant 22
<u>Consumer goods services</u>	<u>Quasi-government</u>
Participant 3	Participant 11
Participant 20	Participant 18
Participant 23	

The twenty-three (23) participants were representative of ten companies from four essential services sectors in Table 5.1, which included banking and non-bank financial services, consumer services and service centre parastatals. Interviews were scheduled over twelve days and lasted on average around one hour each (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Schedule of interviews

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Date of interview</u>	<u>Time of interview</u>	<u>Length of interview</u>
Participant 1	09-Aug-22	13h01	00:36:02
Participant 2	10-Aug-22	18h01	00:59:44
Participant 3	12-Aug-22	16h04	01:14:55
Participant 4	16-Aug-22	15h04	00:46:19
Participant 5	16-Aug-22	16h02	00:45:14
Participant 6	12-Aug-22	08:10	00:46:52
Participant 7	12-Aug-22	12h31	00:45:19
Participant 8	11-Aug-22	10h37	00:40:20
Participant 9	13-Aug-22	08:09	00:38:25
Participant 10	16-Aug-22	18:07	00:58:41
Participant 11	12-Aug-22	11h10	00:35:01
Participant 12	12-Aug-22	10h20	00:35:22
Participant 13	17-Aug-22	10h32	00:42:40
Participant 14	17-Aug-22	14h04	00:39:59
Participant 15	15-Aug-22	09h06	00:34:27
Participant 16	15-Aug-22	10h03	00:36:03
Participant 17	15-Aug-22	15h38	00:37:42
Participant 18	15-Aug-22	11h25	00:48:15
Participant 19	16-Aug-22	09h35	00:44:34
Participant 20	15-Aug-22	12h34	00:39:54
Participant 21	22-Aug-22	16h06	00:44:46
Participant 22	no audio		direct transcription
Participant 23	15-Aug-22	11h25	00:48:15

The study was anchored on four constructs of (i) CEO strategic leadership, (ii) Crisis (iii) CEO crisis leadership, and (iv) Employee perceptions of CEOs during crisis. The constructs were structured to explore the primary research question: what role does a CEO play in shaping the perceptions of employees during a crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021) and what tools, characteristics or behaviours could the CEO use to foster coherence with employees that would induce effective outcomes during crises (Wu et al., 2021)? To address this question, participants explored the strategic leadership role of the CEO prior to crisis, the categorisation and experience of the crises and its impact, how CEOs led through the crises, the approach used to bring calm and perceptions formed by employees. For a critical and robust interpretation, participants were also asked to detail their preferred leadership style during crisis, and to list, in order of priority, conducts and/or styles of leadership required from CEOs during crisis to shape perceptions positively for the resolve of crisis.

A total of two hundred and three (203) codes were created. Figure 5.1 details codes distribution frequency by participant. After first order codes, merging and deletion of duplicate codes commenced, the list reduced to 115 codes detailed in Appendix 3.

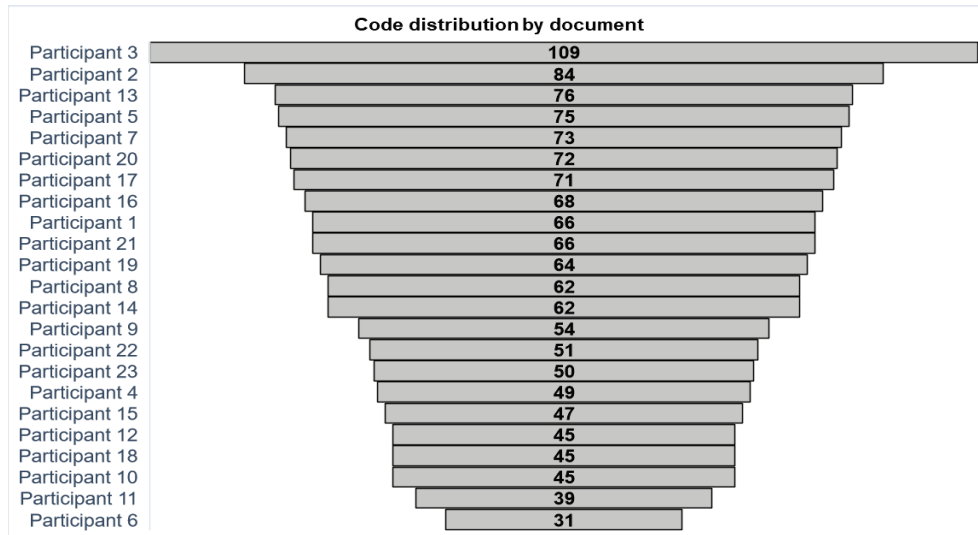


Figure 5.1: Code distribution by participant

Table 5.3: Themes

Themes
Strategic leadership role of the CEO
First impressions
Crisis
Crisis leadership
Employee perception
Preferred leadership during crisis
Shaping employee perception during crisis

From the 115 codes, 46 categories were established, and 8 themes outlined in Table 5.3 were created. Each theme developed from categories and codes outlined graphically in sections 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6 below. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into sections which represent themes and constructs. Each reflects the results arising from the interviews. The results are supported with rich participant quotations and graphical displays which give visual content and establishes building blocks to a framework of key findings.

Chapter 5 does not discuss any of the findings in reference to literature review, but states as a matter of element, findings supported by data in form of quotations and graphical representation of the extensive coding and analysis done using Atlas.ti.

5.3 Findings for Secondary Research Question 1

Secondary research question 1 was: what perceptions do employees have on CEOs during crisis and do prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Mazzei et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014)? Five (5) themes emerged from codes and categories associated with this research question. The themes are the strategic leadership role of the CEO, first impressions, crisis, crisis leadership and employee perceptions. Each is presented in sections 5.3.1 to 5.3.4 below and are enriched with illustrative quotations.

5.3.1 Strategic leadership role of the CEO

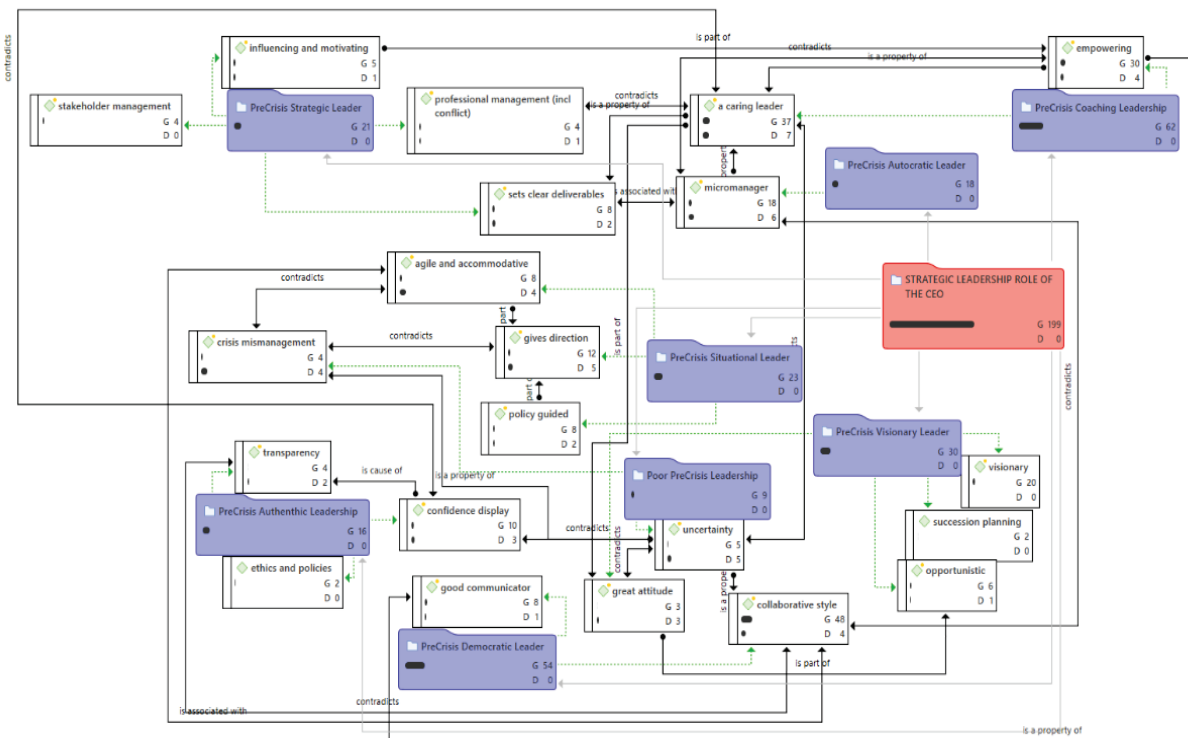


Figure 5.2: Codes categories and CEO strategic leadership themes

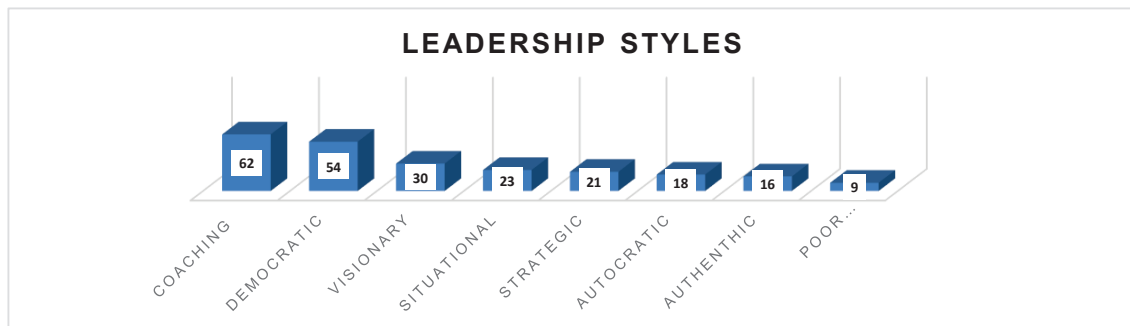


Figure 5.3: Categories – CEO Leadership Styles

Figure 5.2 depicts and links strategic leadership codes from Atlas.ti to the 8 CEO leadership style categories displayed in Figure 5.3.

Leadership traits

When asked about the nature and quality of relationship employees have with CEOs, they mentioned both positive and negative characteristics, some as outlined in Figure 5.4.

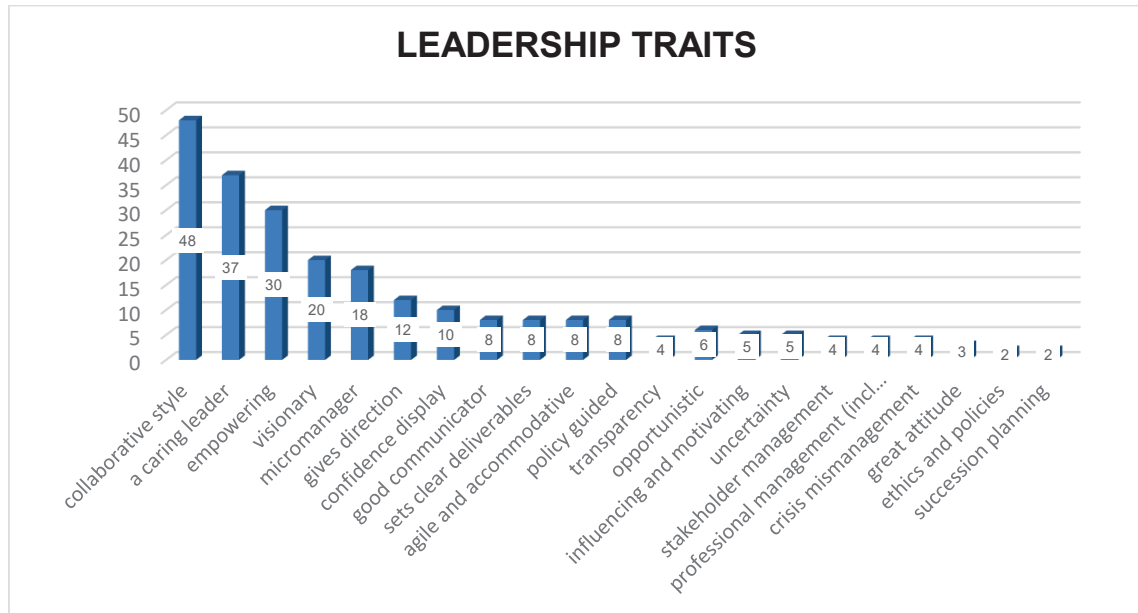


Figure 5.4: Leadership traits of CEOs

Positive leadership traits

Participants detailed positive traits and mentioned that the quality of the relationship’s employees have with the CEOs were incredibly engaged and motivated. They described leadership qualities which associated with a ‘collaborative style’ and ‘a caring leader’, also seen in Figure 5.4. When asked what they value most from the engagements with CEOs, one participant stated:

“It’s his collaborative leadership style. What it does is also bring collective ownership and support, depending on the type of decision.” (11:4 p 1 in Participant 7).

In describing characteristics of a collaborative leader, participants complemented the ability of CEOs to build strategic solutions from ideas solicited and developed through robust and collective team engagements, targeted at ensuring that a company thrives from concerted

inputs from employees. One participant supported this stating that his collaborative natured CEO inspired executive ability to harness value and foster solutions from their engagements:

“What I value most is that CEO is accommodative and understands the team. Where one member has challenges in addressing issues, CEO can engage other team members to assess, solicit and harness solutions (5:10 p 1 in Participant 1).

Collaborative leadership’s effectiveness is pronounced in an environment where the CEO is a caring leader. Care or empathy was pointed out as a quality evident in CEOs and it was mentioned that CEOs influence employee perceptions when among other attributes, when they collaborate leadership efforts, are open and caring in nature. One participant stated:

“He truly pays attention to his people. That’s what I can say is an open and caring leader. I mean his people come first more than anything. He will tell you that if the people are not happy, they will not deliver, and that happy people work as a team, support each other and their leader” (9:62 p 8 in Participant 5)

Other positive leadership traits mentioned by participants, included a CEO who empowers employees, one who is a visionary and leads with clarity of direction, and can display confidence in ability to lead. Emphasizing the proclamations of a good relationship, coupled with good quality engagements, confidence in employee abilities and strategic focus, one respondent said:

“It is a relationship of mutual respect, open communication, and mutual desire to see the organisation prosper. What I value the most is that he does not micro – manage, he allows you to do your work and has an open-door policy for any issues that need to be discussed. I also value that he shows genuine concern for his staff” (22:1 p 1 in Participant 22).

Echoing views of open-door policy and caring nature, which also included caring not just for some but for all employees, one participant said:

“he really cares about us as well in the leadership position, making sure that the people below us feel the same way that we feel we do, meaning there mustn’t be lines to demarcate that I sit in EXCO, you are staff. So even with anything that is done ... he tries to mirror it across so that no one feels they’re superior over the other.” (12:58 p 1 in Participant 8).

In support of the positive attributes of collaboration and a caring CEO, and the positive influence that a caring CEO has on employees, one participant included CEO ability to listen, and contributed to that, a collaborative and caring CEO does not just foster a team who are energized, feel cared for, and are supported, but that the CEO listens to his employees. Adding that listening earns a CEO loyalty from employees, one participant stated:

“he fosters an environment that cares about people, he doesn’t make it just about business, he cares and listens to us, and this has earned him loyalty.” (22:14 p 2 in Participant 22).
Summing up findings which as outlined in Figure 5.4 prominently claims bias to a collaborative and a caring CEO, a statement by one participant expanded findings to say:

“I think the culture is bred by the process that people know that you care genuinely for them, you support them whenever you can and whenever they are in need. They know they can count on you. You know people are not afraid to call and say ... I think I might need a day or two off. And without skipping a beat, you know, you’re like, OK ... that is then reciprocated by your team members. They don’t want to let you down because you don’t let them down. I believe that if you put your people first, people will ... generally always want to do the right thing where you are concerned.” (8:76 p 8 in Participant 4).

One participant detailed varying styles CEOs adopt when dealing with employees on a one on one, compared to larger groups. The participant revealed that on one-on-one, CEOs communicate for commitment, vision and strategy, and that CEOs adapt their style to share power and empower employees in larger groups. The participant stated:

“He comes in two folds, there are things that he wants as a leader and when you have a one-on-one engagement, you feel the commitment, vision, and strategy. He can articulate it very well.” (p 1 Participant 11) and continued to state that *“... once now he’s in a pool of people ... he tends to shy away from taking his lead role and expects every expert or employee to take a lead role in whatever field they are in, and he takes a step back ...”* (1.52).

Apart from positive traits of CEOs to internal stakeholders, the critical strategic leadership role of CEOs to manage external stakeholders was noted by one participant who stated:

“I would say the nature of the jobs we are in, and the politics involved, I understand that the CEO needs to be on top of their game for their stakeholders as well, they need to know what is happening for them to ... I think given the political climate we are in, there’s a big bearing on how CEOs are doing ...” (3:3 p 1 in Participant 18).

Negative leadership traits

In terms of negative leadership traits, participants pointed to CEO lack of confidence, claimed to result in poor CEO behaviour such as micromanagement, CEO inability to effectively manage conflict, uncertainty in decision making and an individualist approach to leadership. The individualist approach was stated as an authoritative style from CEOs who wield power with rigidity and an unwillingness to listen or be challenged. One participant said:

The style that my CE now has is a style of micromanaging. And more often an individualistic approach than a group approach ... There was the feeling of, ill say, insecurity and being a little bit uncomfortable with my relationship with the board and a visible lack of confidence” (6:5 p 1 in Participant 2).

Another participant, adding CEO superiority and an inability to listen to employees with understanding as a negative leadership trait, said:

“The CEO can be condescending, wanting to be correct all the time, and leaves everyone behind as they refuse to be corrected ... If they even allow the audience to talk, you will talk but the CEO will lead you in the direction which they want.” (14:6 p 1 in Participant 10).

Challenging CEO decision results in negative consequences. Expanding on this point, a participant provided views about how challenging CEO decisions can incite negative and insecure responses which become visibly more when it is a dynamic and young team demanding information on decisions making. The participant stated:

“The most challenging part in respect of the CEO leadership style is the fact that when you are dealing with a dynamic team, you will face certain individuals that will ... challenge you in the way in which you view and position your strategic intent. The most difficult challenge the CEO faces is when, there's no consensus among the team in terms of the steps that need to be taken for certain critical issues” (5:11 p 1 in Participant 1).

Participants further articulated how authoritarian CEOs tend to have a more rigid and uncompromising stance in decision-making capabilities, refusing to listen or to take counsel from the management team. Emphasizing on the autocratic approach observed in CEOs who struggle to manage young dynamic teams, one participant stated:

“It is very much a top-down style. There's certain engagement and consideration given, but I don't think once the decision has been made there's much swaying from that decision. Often a decision has been made before any input and asking becomes about just going through the motions. So very much a top-down approach.” (18:5 p 1 in Participant 16).

Participants who stated that when CEOs are not strategic but rather technical in their orientation, they may display a lack of confidence which results in bias toward their area of expertise in decision making rather than focus on strategic pillars which drive firm performance put forward the following argument:

“Our CEO is an auditor. Skewness of the business now becomes about audit and anything that has to do with their area of expertise takes interest and the strategy then becomes about that. This results in our core business suffering because the strength of the CEO is aligned to their area of expertise’ (6:17 p 2 in Participant 2).

5.3.2 First impressions and its transition

When asked about first impressions and changes in perception of the CEO, participants tended to be reflective, claiming that first impressions are hardly formed before observed traits.

Participants stated that perceptions are formed from influencing factors such as the environment, the perceivers experience, expectations and in some cases, attitudes displayed by the perceived. Attitudes may include the ability to display traits of openness and approachability and as graphically depicted in Figure 5.5, care to listen and guide (traits of a caring CEO), qualities which were evident in most CEOs.

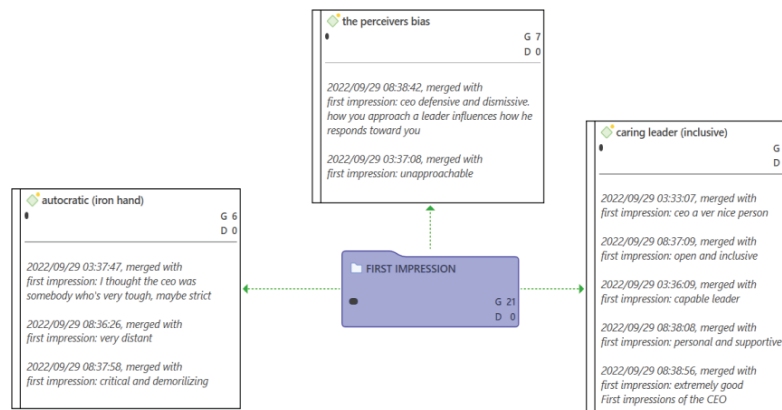


Figure 5.5: First impressions

In several discussions, participants mentioned biases formed from (i) what ‘we hear’, and (ii) the approach used to engage to be determining influencers to responses and consequent impressions formed. One participant, expanding on this argument said:

“My impression was that he was very defensive and dismissive. Again, maybe it could be linked to the first approach to say it's about how you approach him. Maybe it was my approach, that's why I received such a such a response ... that made me get this impression or that made me get this reaction.” (10:5 p 1 in Participant 6).

Emphasizing on approach as influencer to impressions formed, a participant said:

“The CEO approach has always been very close to human capital, and very close to marketing. He's thinking is that human capital gives him a view of his internal customers, which is employees, and then marketing gives him a perspective of external customers which is marketing.” (16:2 p 1 in Participant 14).

5.3.2.1 Summary of findings on CEO strategic leadership role and first impressions

The primary objective of this section was to interrogate the strategic leadership role of the CEO precrisis to gain understanding of how participants experience CEOs leadership. The researcher also investigated how first impressions changed over time and why. The salient findings of the study revealed that CEOs lead through varying styles which include the ability to nurture and drive a clear vision. Using collaborative means and delegation to team

networks, CEOs drive strategic inputs and successfully manage stakeholders. When required, CEOs transform leadership with agility and adaptability. They vary leadership styles to respond to the changing situations. Through accommodative means and accessibility, a culture of understanding and good teamwork within employees is fostered. Strategic leadership while may sometimes be implied in other leadership styles, was also observed as an enabler to influence, and motivate employees through, among others, leadership which advance clarity of direction. While the study also revealed that first impressions were primarily of caring CEOs, impressions were found to form from influencing factors such as the environment, the perceivers experience, expectations, and attitudes. As impression influencers change, shifts in impressions of CEOs were observed.

5.3.3 Findings on crisis

The study explored crisis as a setting for employee perceptions during crisis. Participants were asked to categorize the events of COVID-19 pandemic and the political unrest, and to detail their perception of the impact the events had. Participants' interpretations were key to exploring how CEOs lead employees. Focus was on interpretations and emotions which the events impelled from employees. 9 categories emerged from the crisis theme. Findings in Figure 5.6 were that the events had major negative impact on employees, and that the events were classified as black swans. Impact on business while evident, was viewed less traumatic than impact on employees.

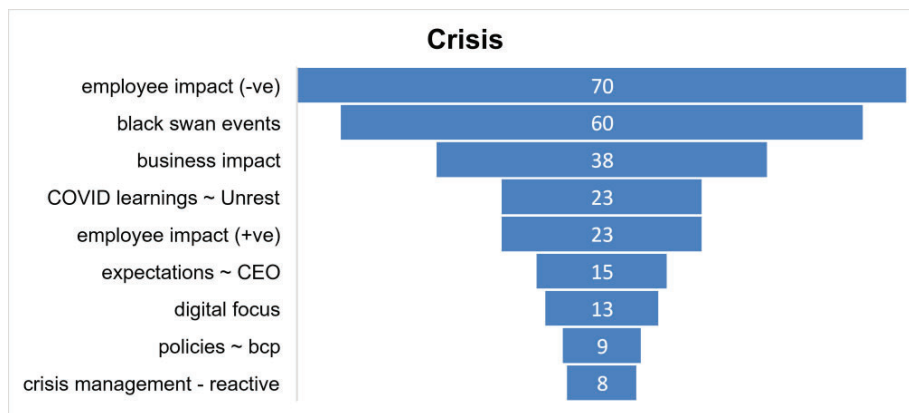


Figure 5.6: crisis categories

Outlining impact, participants referred to varied experiences which expanded on the crisis 'black swan' categorization, learnings from one crisis applied to the other, focus of digital platforms and other included in key quotations captured per category in Figure 5.7.

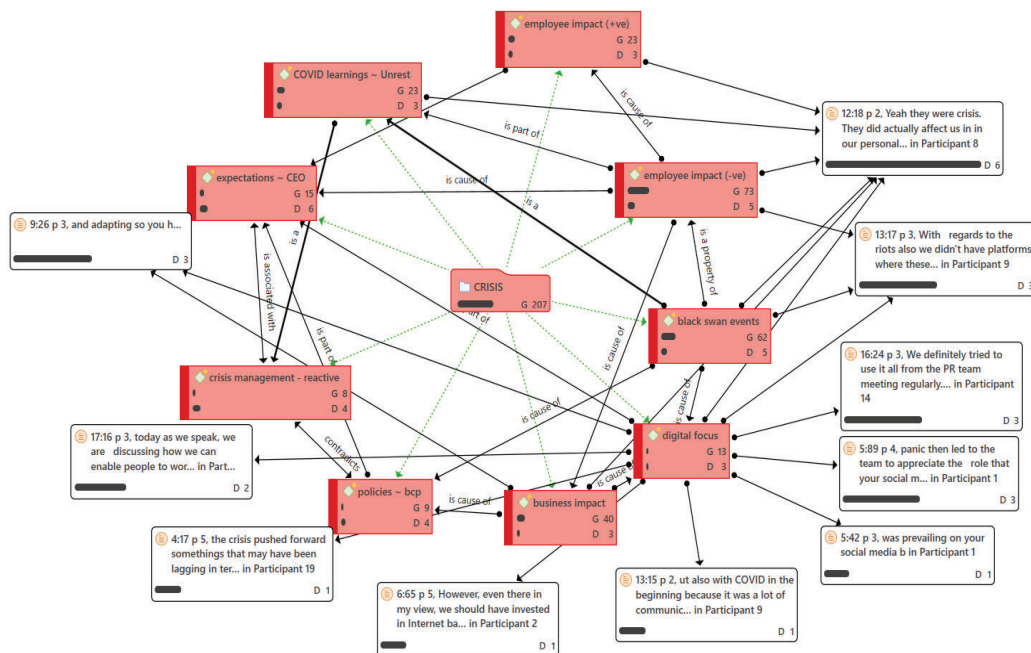


Figure 5.7: Crisis depicted graphically with key participants quotations

Participants further noted the need for business to digitize and formulate policies to guide the ability of CEOs to adequately manage crisis, stating that:

“the crises pushed forward somethings that may have been lagging in terms of our digital stuff, but then it just pushed us to do things quicker.” (4:17 p 5 in Participant 19).

Digitization was the highest linked output depicted by its nodes linking it to all other categories in Figure 5.7. The linkages suggest the critical impact technology has on crisis, and the ability of CEOs to manage it. Figure 5.7 further outline quotations which progress this critical need for business to digitize during crisis.

The role of social media was pointed out as an enabler to innovation and sustainability. Importantly, social media was said to be a tool leaders should use to influence the younger generation. One participant, referring to how crisis, especially the political unrest shone a light on the role of social media, more especially when CEOs were not forthcoming with communication, said:

“panic then led to the team to appreciate the role that your social media plays in us taking decision because, I think when we then had the other riots, we were then able to then effectively change the BCP and come try to incorporate and support the team that were supposed to come into the office to work.” (5:89 p 4 in Participant 1).

Findings suggested that while communication existed, it lagged, and consequently failed to calm employees. This perception was perpetuated by varying narratives abuzz in social media which spread fear as CEOs chose to ignore social media messages, thus leaving employees to make their own deductions and interpretations of what was prevailing. Ignoring social media as a credible source of information is, as stated, a detractor to effective crisis resolution:

“Even though we may not be aligned in terms of the expectation, it is critical that we then take a learning from this occurrence of the crisis, because these things were always everywhere on the Internet, but we just decided to try and just turn a blind eye and I think that created a bit of fear within the teams, to say what are you guys doing?” (5:48 p 4, in Participant 1).

Other experiences were veiled to include ‘business continuity policies’ depicted critical to formulate or amend to respond to the changing landscape, ‘expectations ~ CEO’ mainly outlining the critical demands employees placed on CEOs’ abilities to lead during crisis, ‘crisis management’ and the ‘positive impact of crisis’. Participants who claimed that crisis fostered growth and personal connections between CEOs and employees stated that:

“The crisis which happened brought us closer to talking more, calling each other more, texting each other more, so that we could get the business running and share ideas with our outside stakeholders.” (9:59 p 8 in Participant 5).

“What the crisis did is it removed the boss hat and brought out the human being and it was no longer the CEO, but his ability to come down to our level and be concerned about employees and their families.” (11:70 p 5 in Participant 7).

Crisis that closely follow each other test the true nature and resilience of leaders and businesses in terms of adequacy of structures and policies, and communication tools. Claiming positive outcome from crisis that hit organisations within close periods one participant said:

“while recovering from one, which was long term, the riots hit ... It was like a graduation from one thing. It then just sealed it in terms of how tough you are as a company, how tough are your people?”

The silver lining was, if the riots had come in nanny state of mind and childishness ... of being relaxed about structures and policies, communications, and our ability to function without physically being in office, we would not have been okay as companies during that period. (4:12 p 4 in Participant 19).

Other participants emphasized ‘COVID learnings ~ unrest’, learning from the pandemic which were applied during the second crisis. One participant also claimed that the unrest while more traumatic than COVID, was managed better through the utilization of crisis management tools and lessons acquired from the pandemic:

"It was beneficial that we had had the pandemic first. There were certain impacts that we didn't respond to in the case of the pandemic that we possibly should have, but that were taken care of better in the case of the riots as we had learned." (15:30 p 4 in Participant 13).

Participant continued to say:

"It would have been a lot more traumatic for the company if the unrest hadn't found that COVID had already prepared us and made us more aware." (4:13 p 4 in Participant 19).

Apart from learnings from the pandemic applied during the political unrest, there was still observed trauma, fear and panic which the political unrest brought. One participant said:

"With time the pandemic normalises. As humans, we are adaptable. You realize that those challenges can be managed. The riots however were a complete shock because it was something I don't think any of us ever could imagine happening ... seeing that destruction and violence from a fellow person was something that we've never lived through. So, it was just a huge shock to the system seeing that first hand." (18:23 p 3 in Participant 16).

Participants agreed that the events were crises. There were however variances in the degree of impact each crisis had on employees. One participant put it this way:

"I think the impacts were different. For me COVID-19 because it was prolonged and represented a lot of uncertainty, as people didn't know what to do. There was risk of losing your life. The riots happened quickly and after, died down. So, I think riots were a shock and passed and after that you dealt with it. Yet COVID was a stare of long gloom all the time." (14:13 p 2 in Participant 10).

5.3.3.1 Summary of findings on crisis

The objective of this section was to reconnoitre participants' classification of the events and its impact on employees. Findings pointed out that both events were classified as crises which are 'black swan' in nature. Black swan events were detailed by participants as events which are unplanned, unpredictable with potential dire consequences. As one participant stated about COVID-19 pandemic: *"... classify it as a Black Swan because it's a situation where you don't know what's going to happen and when it's going to end, so it's an unplanned situation."* (9:19 p 3 in Participant 5).

The impact of both events was critical to employees and the business and included emotional impact to employee. Emotions of the crises were submitted: *"It was a more emotional period, one that I've never seen in my life."* (7:131 p 12 in Participant 3), and another who said: *"for me the emotion of this whole thing was I felt like I'm in a prison."* (23:19 p 4 in Participant 23).

Findings also pointed to positive spinoffs emanating from the crises which benefitted both employees and business. Benefits included digitization, flexibility on employees to work from home, which participants pointed out to have assisted in emotional stability, calm and crisis management skills which were became evident during the management of the second crisis. Further outlining positive outcomes, one participant stated:

“One of the big things I’ve seen is that our people are committed ... I do appreciate that ... and because they are committed to the business, I know that we can take them very far in the future in the business. And that would make it a lot more open to work with them in this business going forward. And I’ve seen that people maybe a lot stronger than what sometimes we think they are. Because we can all deal with a crisis.” 23:15 p 3 in Participant 23.

5.3.4 Findings on crisis leadership

Participants were requested to consider leadership styles applied by CEOs during the crises and outline their interpretations. Questions posed enquired how CEOs led employees, whether CEOs took charge and ownership of the role, what skill or approach was evident, how calm was promoted and how CEO leadership initiatives made employees feel? Table 5.4 details the 12 categories of leadership styles from the crisis leadership theme, outlined per frequency, deduced from the construal of findings.

Table 5.4: Leadership styles evident during crises

Crisis leadership	Grounding
Crisis Caring CEO	49
Crisis Authentic CEO	48
Crisis Failure to Lead	41
Crisis Democratic CEO	38
Crisis Autocratic CEO	31
Crisis Transactional CEO	30
Crisis Situational CEO	26
Crisis Strategic CEO	21
Crisis Coaching CEO	18
Crisis Vulnerable CEO	18
Crisis Transformational CEO	3
Crisis Bureaucratic CEO	3
Total	326

Participants varied in their account of CEO crisis leadership. Whilst majority of participants proposed that employees were led with care and authenticity as outlined in Table 5.4, through consultative channels which fostered teams, like the strategic leadership role of the CEO theme in section 5.3.1, others experienced CEOs failure to lead during the crises. CEOs were said to have been emotional and panicky. Detailed under the ‘Crisis Failure to Launch’ category in Figure 5.8 below, are impeders to CEO effective crisis leadership.

One participant pointed out that ‘time to prepare and respond’ for crisis was challenging to CEOs and that due to crisis being random, chaotic, and erratic, some CEOs were ill prepared:

“The biggest problem was that there was no time to prepare anyone for that situation, and as much as we are used to doing trainings to prepare people ... with both crises we simply were blindsided” (9:25 p 3 in Participant 5).

Impeders to crisis leadership

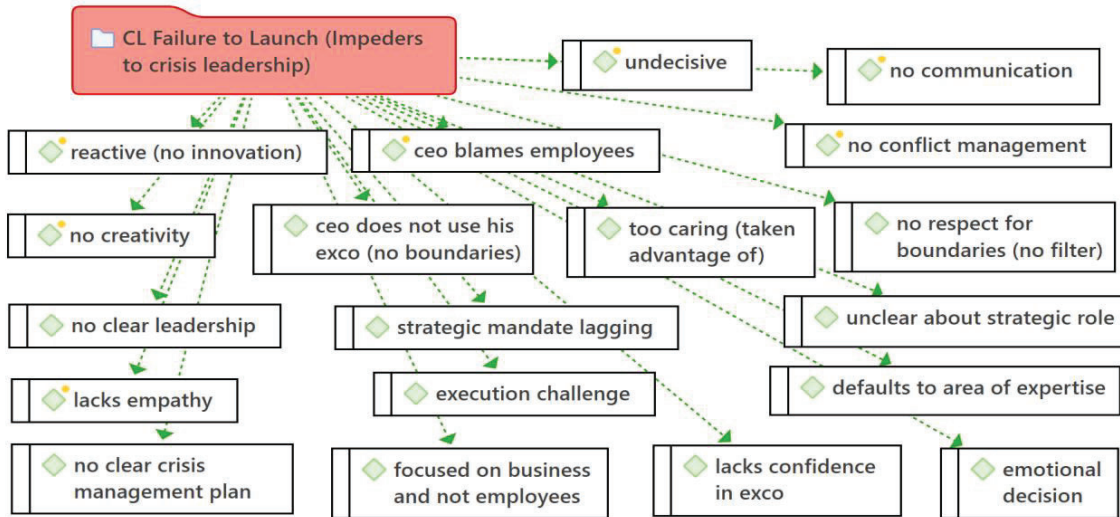


Figure 5.8: Failure to Launch (a depiction of CEO crisis leadership failure)

Participants pointed out traits which were ineffective in serving employees during crisis and as detailed in Figure 5.8. Traits included CEO inability to communicate, indecisiveness, reactionary and ambiguous responses, lack of crisis management capabilities and lack of creativity. CEOs were also prone to blame employees for some of the outcomes of the crisis.

Due to CEO inability to lead effectively through empathy, care and understanding, participants mentioned how CEOs responded negatively, some to the point of stigmatizing and trying to keep the pandemic a secret:

“The CEO was reactive, and the reaction was actually more in the negative in terms of actually blaming the employees for not taking the necessary precautionary measures to mitigate the surge of the of the COVID.” (6:40 p 4 in Participant 2).

“When the pandemic started, ... there were too many different views or standpoint. Some of us, were of the view that the pandemic should not be stigmatized. The view of the CEO tended to be different. It was more like reserved and like he wanted things to be kept as a secret. (10:14 p 2 in Participant 6).

Describing the tumultuous challenges that lay on CEO shoulders to comprehend crisis, continue to offer quality service to customers during testing and incredibly fluid and unpredictable time, comply with legislative requirements, and at the same time balance external stakeholder and employee demands for quality leadership which effectuates relevant, timely and effective decisions, one participant said:

“The crises we experienced were a real test of the you know, on the strategic cap and leadership style.” (14:47 p 2 in Participant 10).

“The crises became a litmus test in terms of flexibility of your company, flexibility of thinking of your leadership, right down to your policies and how you approach things, how you view culture, deal and communicate with stakeholders, and what you want to build.” (4:8 p 3 in Participant 19).

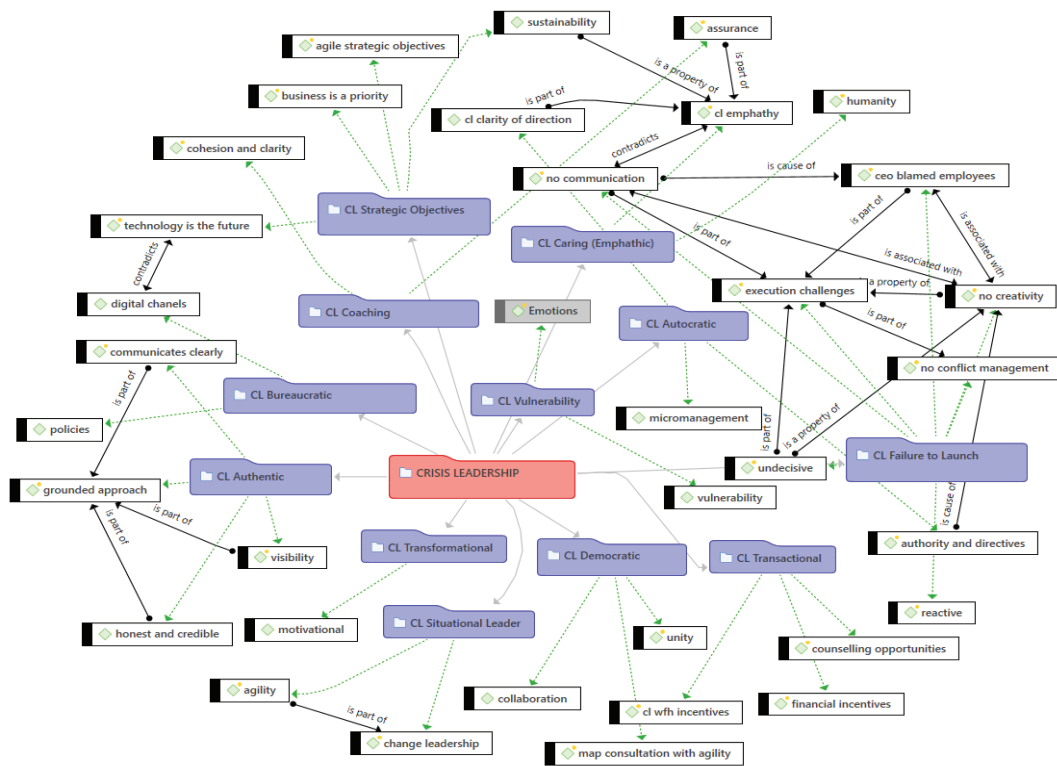


Figure 5.9: CEO leadership styles and evident traits from CEOs during crises

Participants were unanimous in asserting that to their knowledge, CEO leadership capabilities were tested beyond any other prior experience. One participant, indicating how the political unrest bore a high level of risk, not just to business but to CEO credibility and reputation with political stakeholders stated:

“In terms of the political disaster, that's where several CEOs were tested in terms of providing the correct leadership, taking the difficult decisions in respect of the business needs than the

political needs, because they swayed more into what were perceptions on the ground, that if I'm seen to be closing my business, I'll be seen to be supporting the politicians on the ground. At the same time, if I open the business, the business will be subjected to extreme vandalism.” (6:60 p 5 in Participant 2).

In response to challenges outlined, as well the outline on traits of leadership styles demonstrated in Figure 5.9 and the comparatives in Table 5.5, which liken leadership styles used by CEOs during crisis to leadership styles displayed prior to the crises, CEOs expanded leadership capabilities and traits by tapping into other styles which they had not actively used prior to the crises.

Crisis leadership styles

Styles evident during crisis which were not observed in the strategic leadership styles prior to the crises included empathic leadership (a caring CEO), transactional leadership (a CEO who use gifts and incentives), transformational leadership (an inspiring CEO), bureaucratic (a CEO whose decisions are policy driven), and the novel insight of a vulnerable CEO.

Table 5.5: Comparative leadership styles during crises and precrisis

Strategic leadership	Frequency	Crisis leadership	Frequency
		Caring CEO	49
Authentic CEO	14	Authentic CEO	48
Poor Leadership	8	Crisis Failure to Lead	41
Democratic CEO	54	Democratic CEO	38
Autocratic CEO	16	Autocratic CEO	31
		Transactional CEO	30
Situational CEO	24	Situational CEO	26
Strategic CEO	21	Strategic CEO	21
Coaching CEO	69	Coaching CEO	18
		Vulnerable CEO	18
		Tranformational CEO	3
		Bereaucratic CEO	3
Visionary CEO	30		

Table 5.5 and Figure 5:10 compare styles of leadership portrayed during crisis, to those in existence prior. Surprisingly to the researcher, visionary leadership was not evident during crisis. Findings pointed out that during the crises, CEOs led with systematic balance of care and honesty. Coaching leadership which had served CEO well precrisis worked well during crisis. Additional leadership traits included CEOs becoming more process and policy driven, use of incentives, and caring leadership to drive and manage change brought about by the

crises. Caring leadership ranked highest during the crises. Some of the affirmation of ‘caring leadership’ shared by participants were:

“During the crisis, how the CEO cared really moved and made me see him as a Human being more than before, I’m not saying he wasn’t before, but now in your crisis, that really cements your perception of him as a Human being and you.” (4:24 p 7 in Participant 19).

Participants interchanged between the word ‘caring’ and ‘empathy’ to refer a style affixed to practises which include communicating to employees more frequently, listening empathically to suggestions and responding with consideration, care, and support, as well as providing assurance as required. Articulating what care and empathy means, one participant stated:

“I think it was just communicating, telling employees we expect they be responsible because we’ve got a business to run. It was mostly communication to also say, we do not want to end up having to retrench employees but want to retain everyone, so the CEO urged everyone to be honest with their work and to the employer. Working from home became a priority.” (2:31 p 6 in Participant 12).

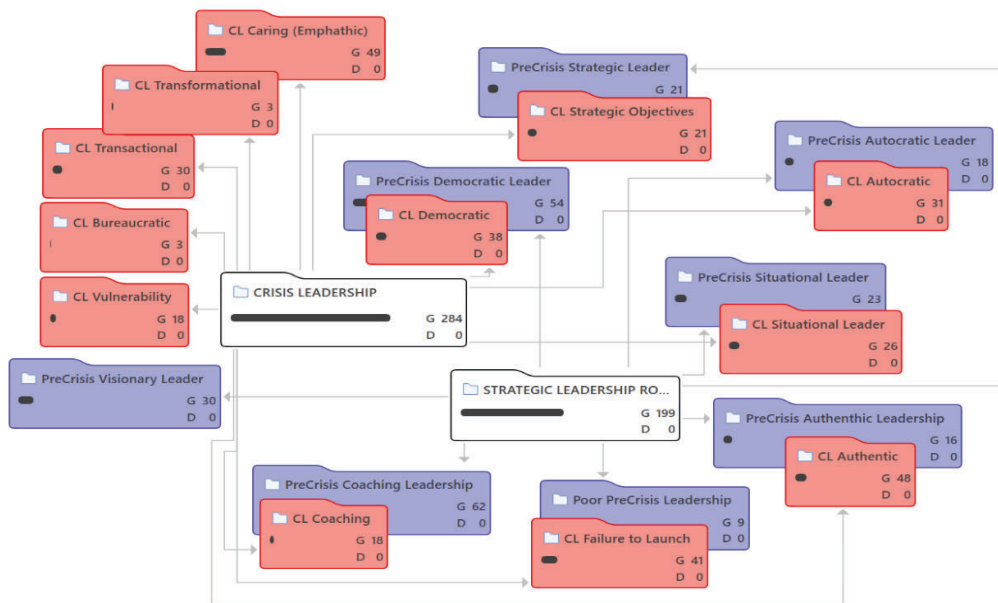


Figure 5.10: Graphical comparatives of CEO leadership styles pre and during crises

Another added visibility to the concept of care and empathy displayed by CEOs and said:

“The CE did a series of physical road shows ... all of them opened with; can we take a moment and just reflect on my goodness, what a time it’s been ... that also just stands out to me. Every one of them, he took a moment to literally send condolences for the loss you know, the changes, disruption, difficulty, and any issues ...” 15:35 p 5 in Participant 13

Emphasizing the shift of CEO leadership from styles displayed prior to the crises, to a more empathic caring style during crisis and recollecting behaviours which exhibited kindness, support and understanding by CEOs who communicated frequently two participants stated:

“Certainly, a lot more empathy came through ... obviously understanding what was happening, and instant communication, checking in to seeing what the current situation on the ground was, how staff were doing. Enquiring on whether everyone safe, home? Doing all they could to ensure employees were OK.” (18:25 p 3 in Participant 16)

“He led with empathy through the crisis ... Literally took care of us like children. He would call: how are you, how is family, didn't you get affected? I remember during the political unrest; I was caught up amid the chaos. He was checking in from time to time while I was on the road till, he felt OK, you are home, nothing happened.” (12:24 p 3 in Participant 8).

The change of leadership styles mentioned were parroted as having abetted employees to maintain calm during the crises. The initiatives of warmth, care and concern demonstrated by CEOs during the crises enhanced trust and confidence from employees. Articulating the sentiment of humanity and positive perceptions of the CEO because of empathy during crisis, a participant said:

‘CEO leadership during crisis was better. The CEO cared, lead with more empathy, and sought guidance through the crisis. CEO would ask, ‘what do you think of this? How is it going to affect the business? What do you think people could do? You think we should ... and these helped us see him as a better human.’ (12:72 p 6 in Participant 8).

Even where participants noted resistance for CEOs to communicate candidly and effectively with utmost honesty, there was still mention of caring leadership:

“I did think I could see that there's a little bit of sense of bearing the head in the sand, but at the same time, leadership styles like caring and Ubuntu did take over, with the CEO Still wanting to make sure that people (employees) are safe.” (21:31 p 5 in Participant 21).

Other styles prominently exhibited by CEOs during crises included transactional leadership and vulnerability, with several participants citing positive outcomes fostered using the transactional style of leadership which is incentive driven:

“... Incentives, it is one thing that employees value the most. I don't know why. Maybe we love money. The minute you speak much about incentives, you have won people, and they want money. You can't even suggest vacations.” (9:69 p 10 in Participant 5).

Other incentives were pertinent to motivate, and more appropriately, appreciate the commitment, hard work and risk that employees were willing to take. However, there were

mixed emotions on what form of incentives worked during crisis, with varying accounts and several participants qualifying the loose use of incentives:

"I think you know incentives are always a tool that can be used to help motivate people, but I think those are always short term in nature. People have very short memories, so if you give someone an incentive of money today, in a week's time, they wouldn't have addressed their core anxiety or reason that they are feeling unhappy or anxious." (18:40 p 6 in Participant 16).

Other incentives mentioned were not of monetary value:

"Some incentives should be social", one participant said. Stating the need for CEOs to understand employees to best determine the type of incentives which suit said:

"In some instances, you are taken to emotional intelligence workshops as CEOs so that you understand that employees are different. Once you make someone feel at ease and calm, I think you would have done a good job. That person will always know that you care, even if the pay is not as good. That person will enjoy his/her job and even like the company." (3:32 p 7 in Participant 18).

Incentives were also seen as a function of performance, and it was stated that they should only be offered during crisis based on the performance of the business and not purely as a motivator. Further proposing that, it was more important to ensure that employees retained employment and were safe during crises than paying incentives, one participant expanded:

"Incentives will come if the business is performing. But in a time of crisis, it's more about ensuring stability, job security, helping people with getting through their day-to-day lives just making sure that, people can function. That's more important than trying to incentivize people in a crisis at least." (18:44 p 6 in Participant 16).

Interestingly, vulnerability as an alternative to transactional leadership (incentives), and sometimes to support and enhance calm and motivate employees during crises was resonated by participants who on account of how they were led, mentioned:

"I saw more vulnerability and consultation. Where he would normally decide, he was asking more" (19:28 p 4 in Participant 17). One participant went as far as to state:
For me it's about honesty and vulnerability ... A CEO telling me that, you know, tomorrow the sun will rise, I know that ... I don't need to have a monologue about the world is going to keep turning and it's going to be a beautiful day and ... It's about honesty and vulnerability. Saying that this is a challenge, we sympathize, we empathize what you're going through, we ourselves are also finding it challenging but ... let's work together ... rather than a minute monologue video of how the world's going to be a better place tomorrow." (18:49 p 6 in Participant 16).

Vulnerable leadership was in some cases cited by participants account of honest and credible acknowledgment of the status quo (authentic leadership). For CEOs to be vulnerable they

need to first be honest with themselves, with their capabilities and with what they know and don't. To ensure that they portray the same honesty and vulnerability in engagements with employees, where there is admittance of what they may not yet be certain of, especially during the initial stages of a crisis, CEO should not pretend:

"I think there was an immediate reaction and that was important ... an immediate acknowledgement that, OK, something is happening, and we need to respond, yet we do not know how. I think that was that was important. There was just no pretence." (15:30 p 4 in Participant 13). The participant elaborated to state: *"I remember it in even at the time, reflecting thinking this was this was very honest because there were also some questions that CEO and his executive didn't have answers too and we were clear about what those were."* (15:74 p 4 in Participant 13).

Contrary to findings on strategic leadership before crisis which pivoted on coaching, crisis leadership highlighted that during crisis styles such as coaching are applied less frequently. Participants rather expressed experiencing a shift to autocratic leadership (iron hand and single source type of leadership) during crises. The shift in style was noted to be a result of CEOs who tend to adjust the leadership style from a softer, more nurturing style to one which is decisive and authoritative, and was expressed positively by participants who stated that preference during crisis is a leader who is decisive:

"During a crisis I prefer a person who's going to lead to, to take on whatever is given from the horns and just give directions. You know when it's time for crisis, we can't be democratic, and be asking do you want to stay, don't you want to stay? ... It can't be a debate; it can't be democratic. There clearly needs to be someone who says, I am the leader, this is what needs to happen." (16:42 p 7 in Participant 14),

Further articulating preference for autocratic leadership compared to collaborative styles such as democratic during crisis were references that the fluid and erratic nature of crisis provides no time for a leader to be consulting for decisions. Several participants emphasized challenges of delayed or no decision making due to the varying and sometimes conflicting opinions that arise from consultations with employees who bring confusion and disorder, and said:

"I prefer the stand to say, I decide to follow the approach of saying, we will do 1, 2 and 3, then we must stand by 1, 2 and 3 and that's the end." (5:97 p 5 in Participant 1).

"I prefer authoritarian during crises because it's decisive and you know what is expected. The minute you give people voices, they will give you voices. You will end up being confused as to which one to use." (1:53 p 5 in Participant 11).

One participant echoed the expressions and added that it wasn't enough to make decisions during crisis, what was also crucial was to ensure that decisions made were immediately actioned into clear deliverables: *"In making decisions, be decisive and follow through with whatever decision you have made."* (8:77 p 8 in Participant 4).

5.3.4.1 Summary of findings on crisis leadership

The primary objection of the section was to interrogate CEO crisis leadership. Findings from pointed to that CEOs tap into many aspects of leadership during crisis to deliver good results.

Leadership styles not active in strategic leadership prior to the crisis were observed to be transactional leadership, caring leadership, bureaucratic leadership, and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership while an enabler of employee support, incited variances in interpretation and impact to employees. Some findings suggested that it was not safe to use 'money' as an incentive during crises as humans have short memories, and employees could risk their lives for monetary benefit. Participants also mentioned that CEOs should show vulnerability during crises, a proposition the researcher termed 'vulnerable leadership'.

Honest acknowledgment that first, crisis exists, and that CEOs do not have all the answers was found key to building trust and helping employees to be calm during crisis. Authoritative leadership was critical during crisis and collaborative styles such as democratic leadership, which were crucial prior to the crises did not get mention during crisis. Reasons for the omission were suggested to be that employees require clarity of direction and urgent execution during crisis while consultative styles cause delays and may result in lack of accountability.

Accounts of poor leadership, presented as panic and worry, no communication and in some cases lack of visibility and stigmatization were concerning to employees during the crises and resulted in employee mistrust. Poor leadership traits result in employee perception that CEOs do not care about them.

CEOs for the most part were firm and resolute in decision making. The authoritative style was blended with concern, care, and agility in responses to employee needs. While there was support for authoritative leadership, participants suggested need for leadership styles and approaches during crisis to include use of incentives, motivation to manage emotions of panic, confusion and uncertainty that were apparent, and vulnerability to encourage employees to be authentic and supportive of CEOs.

5.3.5 Findings on employee perception of CEO leadership during crises

When asked about employee emotions, how employee emotions could have been supported and what perceptions were consequently formed of CEOs, participants varied in the account and raised both positive and negative experiences and perceptions. Having identified a causal loop relationship between crisis leadership and employee perceptions, participants'

interpretation of CEO crisis leadership tended to influence their perceptions. Participants explored how employees felt, whether there was support and what perceptions were formed of CEO crisis leadership. The researcher sought to consider whether perceptions formed during crisis vary from perceptions prior to crisis and what informs shifts, where identified. The objective was to investigate perceptions of CEO leadership during events which had already been categorised as 'black swans' and as previously described by participants lamenting on feelings: "The crises were a nightmare" (5:47 p 4 in Participant 1) and "a more emotional period, one that I've never seen in my life" (7:131 p 12 in Participant 3).

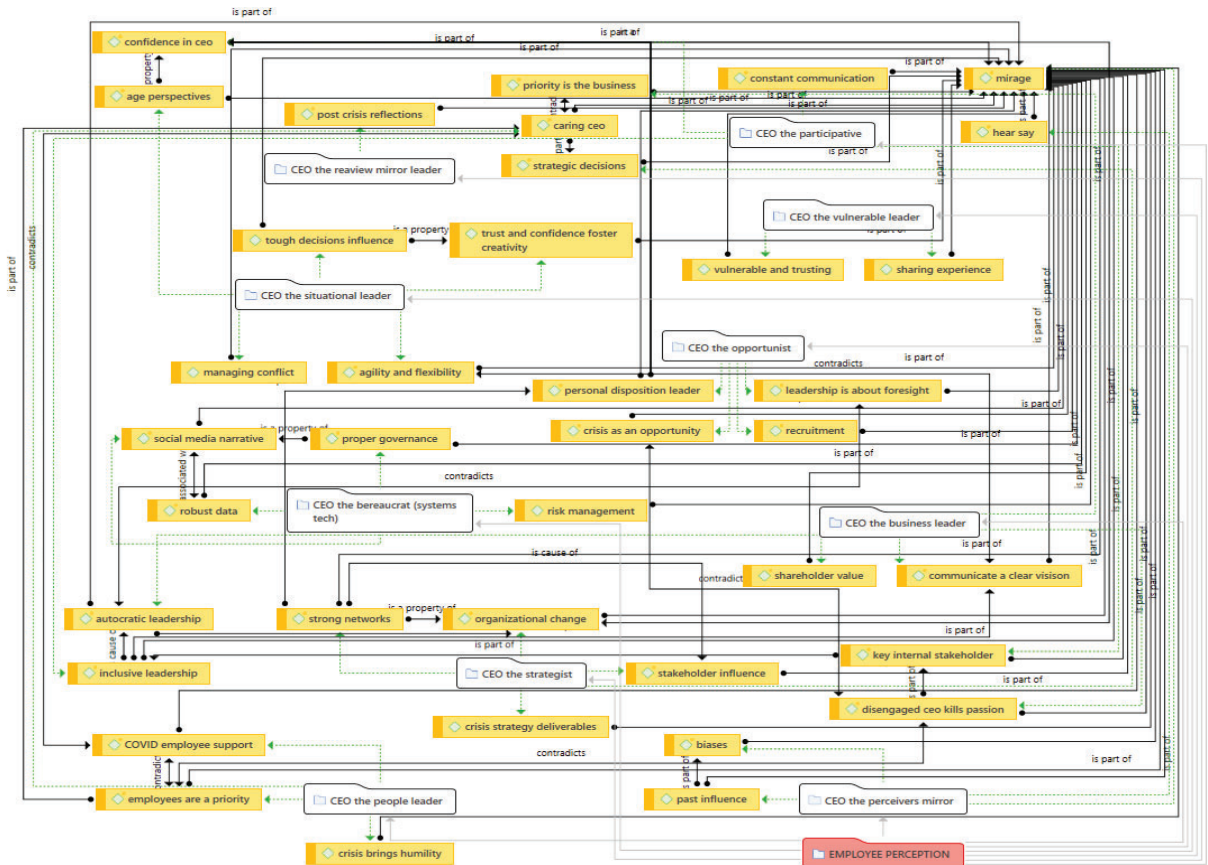


Figure 5.11: Employee perceptions of the CEO

10 CEO perception categories emerged from codes on the Employee Perception theme. Codes and categories outlined in Figure 5.11 include a participative and communicative CEO, a CEO identifies opportunity in crisis and creates shareholder value, a CEO who is people oriented and leads with humility, a CEO who is strategic and sets clear strategic deliverables, a CEO who is a bureaucrat and leads through policies and procedures, a situational CEO who adjusts their style of leadership as required, a vulnerable CEO, a reflective CEO who takes

lessons from one crisis to apply in the next, and a business oriented CEO who leads with foresight and seeks to drive business performance.

5.3.5.1 Perception influencers

Positive influencers

Participants mentioned feelings of support and care from CEOs, and a shift from prior perceptions. Changes were influenced by CEOs' behavioural changes. Some of the changes were to situational style of leadership applied through agility, flexibility, and effective crisis management. The result were employees who felt inspired, prioritized, and confident in the ability of the firm to navigate out of crisis. One line manager specifically stated that:

"I felt supported and was very impressed with the company and the CEOs agility. I got to appreciate that I do work for a company that has a heart that has its staff come as a priority. (12:38 p 5 in Participant 8).

Several participants noted the 'during crisis' setting as a time where they could not process their own feelings. Owing to the fast-paced nature of crisis and the demands that crisis places on a leader, as executive committee members themselves, they bore the responsibility to lead others (junior staff employees) through the crisis. The participants therefore implied that, to take time to embrace and process emotions at the height of the crises, felt like a luxury they could not afford, adding that:

"I think for me it's a difficult one. I've never processed how I felt, and I'll tell you why. Because at that time all I was thinking about, to be honest, was my team. It was also about, how do I keep operations going?" (8:75 pp 6 in Participant 4).

The quotation (8:75 pp 6 in Participant 4) provides novel insight into how CEOs may also feel as leaders during crises. The potential impact of CEOs who believe they cannot show emotion provides context for the researcher to consider CEO belief system and interpretation of a situation, and what CEO perceive as 'expected' behaviour, how these may affect how they lead during a crisis. The researcher suggests therefore that there may be need for business to introduce supporting structures and counselling for CEOs and other leaders, to equip CEOs with the requisite support and capabilities for them to be better leaders. A participant, lamenting on his observation of what CEOs face during crises said:

"The mental wellness of leaders is never considered and that for me is a tragedy, for they get really stressed. Some decisions eat at their heart. For me, honestly, I think we really need to

consider mental wellness, not coaching, mental wellness for CEOs. To say: are you coping with the pain and with the stress, what do you need?" (20:52 p 5 in Participant 20)

One participant noted how his concern was not for self or other employees' safety, but was encompassing of the operating environment, business sustainability and opportunities which could potentially shape the future of the country and its people. Interpretation of the crises and CEO crisis leadership was based on biases and beliefs that the CEO was not equipped to support employees through the crisis, biased echoed by another participant who said:

".. did I feel supported? I didn't expect much. When you're in an environment where it's difficult to provide an answer. No one knows what tomorrow is going to be like, then you can't expect too much from them (CEOs)." (19:27 p 4 in Participant 17).

Having used personal bias to judge and make conclusions about CEO capabilities, and consequently embracing perception as own reality to conclude that "you can't expect much from them", participants shifted focus from 'expectation' and instead scoped the environment and make assessments which harnessed focus from what was a challenge at the time, to potential opportunities that could be exploited. The participant's ability to be forward thinking and search for innovations and opportunities, even during crisis said:

I started asking myself ... where are we going really, not just as an organization ... Where are we going as a country in terms of the operating environment, what will it look like a few years from now? What does it mean? What are the consequences? ... what are we going to do now to make sure that the future that we are going into, we're prepared for, we're ready for it ... and that we still thrive, we still in existence and we are still doing well, rather than be victims of circumstances." (19:26 p 4 in Participant 17).

Another participant took the notion of concern for the business landscape and future sustainability further, and stated how the business community and its leaders, including CEOs, did not do enough to leverage off the opportunities brought about by the crisis to innovate and respond to change by positioning for the future, stating:

"I felt that we could leverage of the impact of the pandemic; we were not innovative. Or engaging, I believe there is something that could have been done differently". (14:30 p 4 in Participant 10).

Several participants mentioned a perspective which varies from the notion of influencing perception through understanding context (operating environment), to one where influence is driven by behaviours of the perceived. Such attitude from a CEO could incite feelings which have potential to shape perceptions. Adding that support from CEOs was apparent and shared through leadership traits which included calm, communication, visibility, and incentives, the participants went on to state that they felt:

“That the CEO understands what leadership is, he remained calm throughout the process and optimistic, which was transferred to the entire office, and that he is a good communicator, who fosters an environment that cares about people, he doesn’t make it just about the business, and this has earned him loyalty.: (22:13 p 2 in Participant 22).

The same participant went on to raise two novel ideas to potentially influence perceptions. These included ‘routine’ and ‘job assurance’, both of which are managed through a CEO who is visible and communicating well to employees. The participant, citing the result of having has a CEO who understands leadership stated:

“I was therefore calm during the crisis and was happy with the way the team was working, we were all happy to still have jobs .. to still receive our full salaries; and that ... because of a limitation in our systems in my field, I had to be at work every day, this limited any anxiety I might have had, because my routine was not broken. 22:12 p 2 in Participant 22

It may be argued that the two novel perceptions are susceptible to being easily changed as they themselves are fluid in nature, especially given that ‘job security’ and equally ‘routine’ during a crisis, is not always a possibility. Due to the unpredictability and uncertainty of a crisis, perceptions could result in more sustainable outputs if CEOs actively pursued settings, even during crises, which promote some form of stability.

Another influencing trait to shaping perceptions is revealed to include time to get to know the object of your perception better. This concept that it is sometimes our understanding of the object that allows us to perceive it in a way which potentially differs from what we would have perceived off it prior to our experience of it was articulated as follows.

“I think I was very well supported, and I’ve got a lot of one-on-one discussions with you know with the leadership and kind of understood you know we’ve you know what the thinking was and why the thinking was there.” (18:33 p 5 in Participant 16).

Building from the notion of support through crisis, one participant who was well supported by the CEO advanced an argument that influencers to perceptions are sometimes better achieved through teamwork, underscoring the collaborative leadership style (democratic) which CEOs use as a day-to-day strategic leadership style which can potentially be mirrored or adapted during crisis. Using a network of team to present facts and updates in a manner which adequately responds to employee need and theoretically depicts understanding during crisis, CEOs can influence perceptions. The participant noted the absence of collaboration in their team to have been a challenge during the crises, stating:

“I felt supported and cared for by the CEO. However, I just generally feel one of the areas where we need to take stock is, I have never felt us work as a team as an executive ... you

can even pick it during crisis that each is a manager only cares about their team, there is no oneness ... You sort of get the sense that in crises we act in silos not as a team and that makes the process to resolve crisis that much harder.” (20:47 p 4 in Participant 20).

Negative influencers

Other participants differed on how they felt during the crises, advancing sentiments of no support. The point raised was that feelings of no support were resultant of CEOs who refused to adapt to changes that crisis demands from leaders, but instead demanded the same level of service from employees who were in some cases, unwell. Insight garnered from participants who felt unsupported was biased on perceptions rooted on prior experience and resultant perception of ‘I know the CEO, they are who they are’, as leaders known to be incapable of change. These perceptions fostered feelings of resigned defeat and in some cases, of zero expectation of support from those tasked with the responsibility to strategically lead employees through crises (CEOs). One participant’s reasons for not expecting support from CEOs was interestingly uncertain in its own motive and alluded to biases toward participant’s attitudes and understanding of who they themselves perceive themselves to be, and the context of the crisis which demanded a new level of understanding for what CEOs were going through as leaders. The participant summed up their uncertainty and lack of expectations to:

“We did personality tests, and I came out as an active controller, someone who doesn’t like being pitied, they don’t like to feel out of control. I don’t know if my reason for not expecting was because I don’t like pity or in my head it also just feels like, the CEO, he is one man. How would I expect him to solve all our issues? Just find a way.” (16:38 p 6 in Participant 14).

5.3.5.1 Summary of findings on employee perception

When asked about how employee emotions could have been supported and what perceptions were consequently formed of CEOs, participants varied in the account. Observed feelings of anxiety and fear can be supported through different situational leadership traits. Perceptions inspired by influencers included employee (the perceivers) own biases and expectations, context and environment from which they observe from. Perceptions inspired by the perceived included actions from/by CEOs which inspire certain responses, time and how well a CEO is known by the perceiver and their own interpretation of what is expected of them. Two novel ideas of influencers to employee perceptions emerged to include maintaining ‘routine’ and ‘job assurance’ during crisis, both of which are best managed by CEOs who lead with visibility and clear communication during crisis. Findings suggest that employee perceptions during crisis shift from those which exist prior to a crisis.

5.4 Findings for Secondary Research Question 2

Secondary research question 2 was: how should CEO leadership roles during crises adapt to shape positive employees' perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to the resolution of crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018)? Two themes emerged from codes and categories associated with research question 2. The themes are preferred style of leadership and shaping employee perceptions during crisis. Each is presented in sections 5.4.1, 5.4.2, below and enriched with illustrative quotes.

5.4.1 Findings on preferred style of leadership during crises

Asked to state their preferred style of leadership during crises, Figure 5.12 outlines participants responses through quotations and establishes situational leadership to be preferred, followed by caring leadership. Coaching and autocratic leadership were mentioned less frequently. While authentic leadership came up, democratic leadership was not stated, further advancing the claim that, while some level of collaboration is expected from CEOs as reflected in Figure 5.10 under caring leadership, during crisis employees seek authoritative direction, guidance, agility, and flexible decisions.

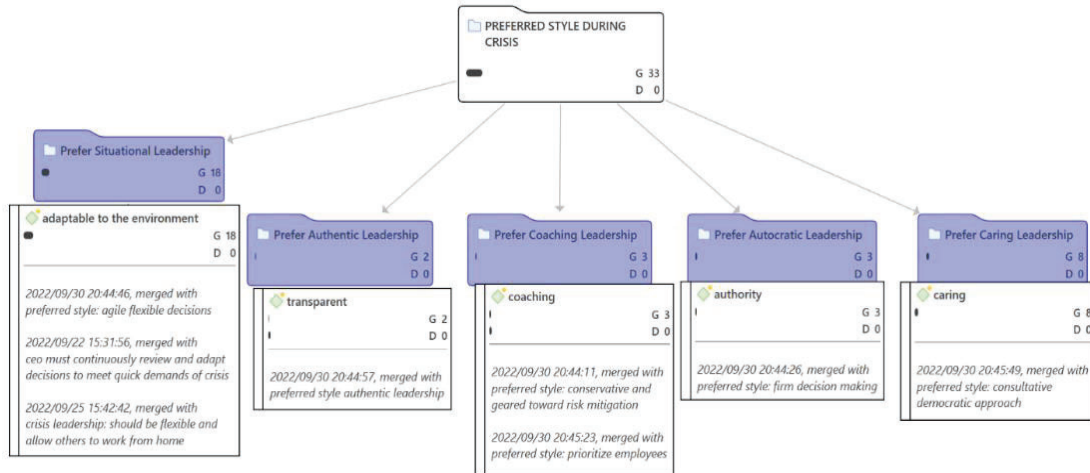


Figure 5.12: Participant graphical outline of their preferred leadership styles

Findings further suggested that employees prefer leadership styles during crisis which allow for agile and flexible decisions that are continuously being adapted to suit the changing environment. Participants apportioned agility and the alignment of decision-making during crisis to a 'professional approach' and an understanding of the environment, and claimed that, continuous adaptation of decision making, coupled with step-by-step communication to

employees is paramount for CEOs to effect leadership that will not just benefit a firm but will also serve the interests of employees. Participants echoed these by stating that:

“Professional approach would be preferred. You expect the leadership style to align ... to look at the environment, look at the situation and align accordingly. It shouldn't be static ... when the environment changes ... it should be agile.” (10:29 p 5 in Participant 6).

“equally communicating to the employees each and every step in terms of what decision we've taken now to deal with the situation and where the situation is panning out to be, while equally still opening that line to say, if you've got a way that we can quickly probably arrest this situation or rather deal with it in a much faster and better way ...” (7:71 p 8 in Participant 3).

5.4.1.1 Summary of findings of preferred style of leadership during crisis

5 categories emerged from the preferred style leadership theme as depicted in Figure 5.12 and Figure 5.13. Categories included leadership styles which in order of frequency outlined in Figure 5.13 included situational, caring, autocratic, coaching, and authentic leadership.

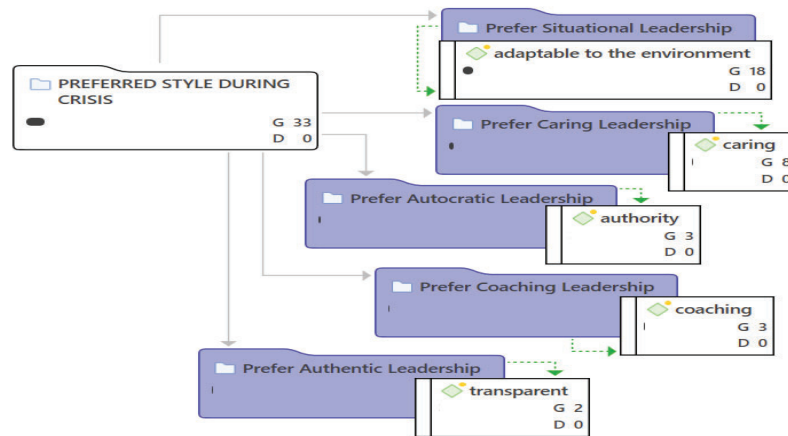


Figure 5.13: Participant preferred leadership styles frequency graph

Findings suggested that employees prefer a leadership style which is flexible and adaptable during crisis. CEOs must continuously review and adapt their decisions to meet the changing demands of a crisis.

5.4.2 Findings on shaping employee perceptions

Asked to list, in order of priority, traits or approaches of leadership which CEOs could use to shape perceptions and keep employees motivated during crisis, participants offered views freely and methodically without too much of the reflections of previous accounts. 11 categories were generated and shown in Table 5.6 in order of frequency and Figure 5.14 enriches these

with quotations which embody leadership traits of CEOs well equipped to shape employee perceptions during crises.

Table 5.6: Order of priority – shaping employee perceptions

Shaping perceptions	Frequency
Care and empathy	46
Communication	32
Decisiveness	28
Agility	14
Attitude (positive)	10
Calm	9
Vulnerability	7
Honesty	5
Incentives	4
Listen	3
Policies	3

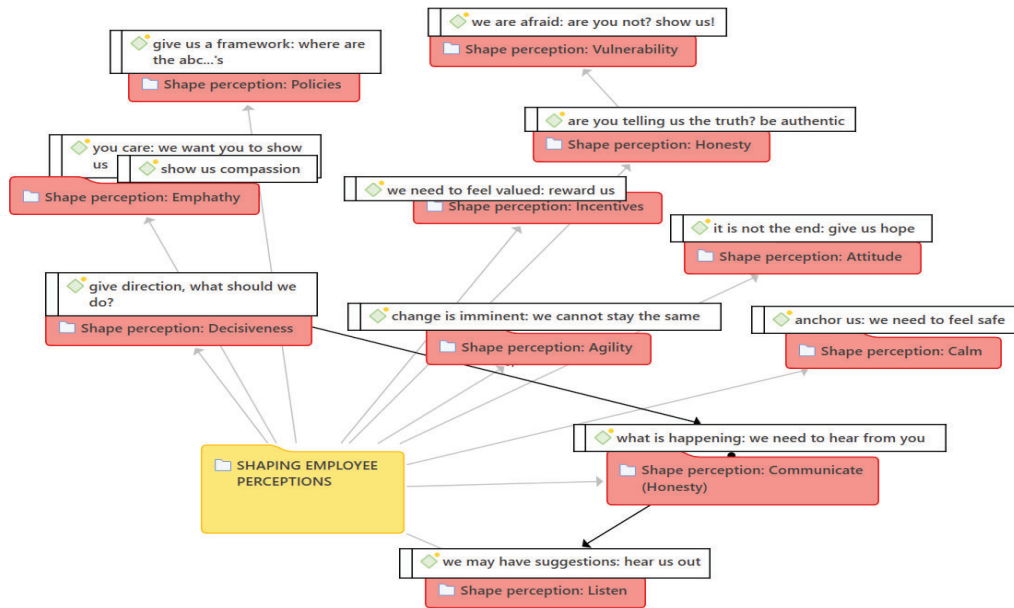


Figure 5.14: Shaping employee perception

5.4.2.1 Summary of findings of employee perceptions during crisis

The objective of this section was to investigate what CEOs can do during crisis to positively shape employee perceptions to effectively resolve crisis. Findings outlined qualities (traits of a CEO) summarised in order of priority (frequency) in Table 5.6. The researcher substantiated the findings with one verbatim from respective participants and through Figure 5.15 proposes a framework which paths findings outlining how employee perceptions transition from before to during crisis and what influencers drive employee perceptions during crisis.

You care: we want you to show us compassion (care and empathy):

"We require CEOs who are empathetic, get to understand and appreciate the situation and probably put themselves in the other's shoes." (17:34 p 8 in Participant 15).

What is happening: we need to hear from you (communication):

"Speak: Explain what's happening. We want to hear from you." (21:36 p 6 in Participant 21).

Give us direction: what should we do? (Decisiveness):

"A leader must make decisions. Are we going? Yes. Are we staying? Yes. Not ask, what do you think? Because at the point I'm asking, we are in crisis. Say yes or no. I've thought about it. I've reasoned. I've looked at the facts. I've understood. And I'm ready to make the decision. All information I needed is in front of me." (20:36 p 5 in Participant 20).

Change is imminent: we cannot stay the same (Agility):

"CEOs must be quick to react to situations and don't wait until it gets worse." (17:34 p 8 in Participant 15).

It is not the end: give us hope (Attitude):

"It must start with positivity on his side. Eliminating the negatives, ... problems in talk and Silver Linings on those situations. Communicating and reminding people, who we are and what we stand for in a positive way. Revising the mission and vision to have more positive light as well as engagement. Engagement with the lowest employee so they feel the presence of the leader. Being present, communication and transparency." (1:36 p 6 in Participant 11).

Anchor us: we need to feel safe (Calm):

"They must be that anchor or that rock that brings calmness and composure during a crisis." (13:41 p 6 in Participant 9).

We are afraid: You? Show us (vulnerability):

"I don't think from leadership you have to show that you have all the answers all the time. It's OK to show vulnerability from time to time. I think that just comes to honesty. For me it's more about honest feedback around where the business is at what the things being worked on are and where people see things going?" (18:38 p 5 in Participant 16).

Are you telling us the truth: be authentic:

"CEOs should give assurances, honest talk. They can't make promises for the future, so honest talk that they can't promise, and assurance that for now jobs are secure." (11:56 p 8 in Participant 7).

We need to feel valued: reward us (incentives):

"Well, money. Think about it, everyone wants money." (16:47 p 7 in Participant 14).

We may have suggestions: hear us out (listening):

"It is possible to make people feel supported, and the key there is just to let everybody share their opinion, make sure that everyone feels they can use their voice and that their voice is heard ... I've learned that people want to feel like they spoke, and you heard them. And you are considering their point of views." (15:61 p 9 in Participant 13).

Give us the framework: where are the abc's:

"A framework that allows the CEO to know with almost certainty, if it's a biological or a political or an economic disaster were to happen this is how he would fairly respond to it." (6:95 p 8 in Participant 2).

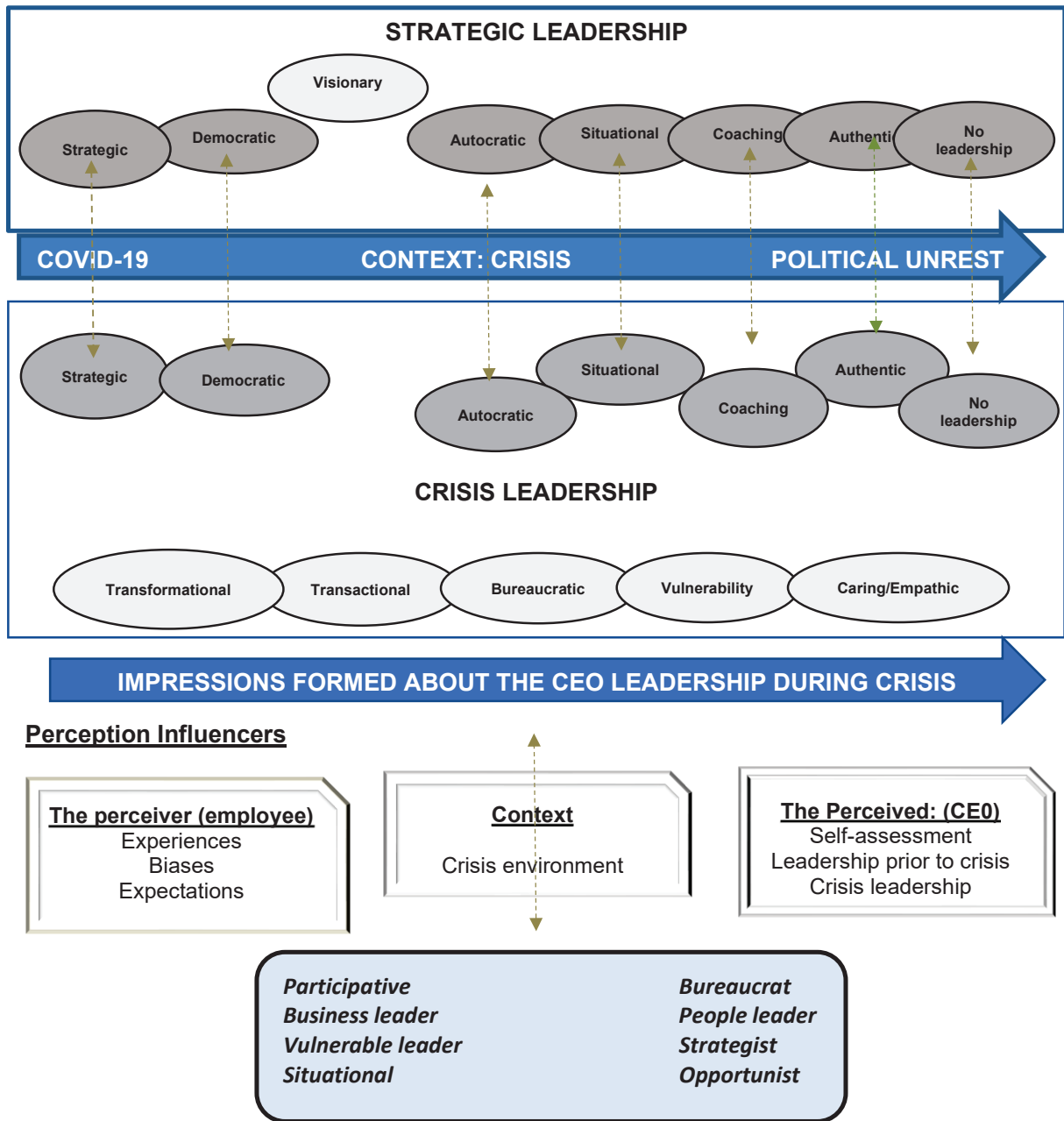


Figure 5.15: Impression transition of CEO leadership from pre to during crisis

Source: Authors own

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter was presented using constructs of the strategic leadership role of the CEO, crisis, crisis leadership and employee perceptions, which served as the foundation of the study. Interview questions were used as building blocks for exploring the topic. Two secondary research questions shaped the focal point and through data collected through semi structured interview instrument, the analysis and interpretation of the 23 transcripts, using Atlas ti was done. Findings presented were representative of participants views and each construct summary of findings section served as a synopsis of findings. Core to the analysis was to explore how CEOs can shape perceptions of employees during crisis. This analysis of 'shaping perceptions' varied slightly in approach and presentation of findings in the chapter. Focus was on sequence and listing, in order of priority, leadership traits found to be critical to shape perceptions of employees during a crisis. Findings from this part of the interview were aggregated to determine order of priority and presented simplistically in the order in which they were prioritized by the participants.

Overall, participants in the interview raised pertinent and interesting perspectives of experiences, first to leadership prior to a crisis, followed by two forms of crisis dupped black swam events. Views shared were in the context of CEO leadership and the perceptions formed which were responses to direct questions and views developing from probes which were part of the semi structured interview discussions. Views shared varied, were richly discussed, and openly presented allowing for comparison. While participants were of similar profile and consequent relationship with CEOs as line managers with direct reporting lines and could potentially have similar type context to perceptions that could have been limiting in providing quality and interesting varied learnings, the mix and age group spread, level of exposure to leadership, allowed for a solid lens of mature and young executives. The younger executives provided novel insights which may serve as potential future research areas.

The finding as presented in Figure 5.15 which summarises the transition of impressions of CEO leadership from pre to during crisis, indicate an attempt to not only compare with findings from literature to support ideas developed by other scholars, but seeks to extend some of those ideas and contribute to knowledge which could assist practitioners and other interested stakeholders in pathing a framework to apply during crisis to lead effectively. Linkages between constructs, suggested relevance, and interest on topic of discussion, together with these findings present a good premise for the discussions chapter which follows, where the researcher will further interpret, compare, and contextualise findings against current literature.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presents a discussion for semi structured interview results outlined in chapter 5. Having anchored the study on employee impressions of CEOs, pre and during crisis, the study discusses findings per construct (i) CEO strategic leadership role (ii) crisis (iii) CEO leadership during crisis 'crisis leadership' and (iv) shaping employee perceptions 'impression management' during crisis, compares the findings with the literature review in chapter 2 and provides in-depth considerations of conducts CEOs can adopt to shape employee perceptions positively during a crisis.

6.2 Discussion: Strategic leadership role of the CEO

6.2.1 Strategic leadership role of the CEO

The first construct 'the strategic leadership role of the CEO' investigated how participants experienced CEO leadership precrisis. The objective was to interrogate perceptions employees have on CEOs as apex leaders prior to a crisis.

Notable from the findings was that participants outlined both negative and positive traits of leadership applied by CEOs. Even though there were limitations, due to participants' account of experiences which lacked clear distinction between general leadership traits and strategic leadership, the researcher proposes that findings can be generalised to the context of the strategic leadership role of the CEO, and opinions that results provide adequate and appropriate insights expressive to the role of a strategic leader.

Several deductions can be drawn from the results presented in chapter 5 in relation to the strategic leadership role of the CEO. Absorptive capacity, described as the ability of a leader to identify new information, assimilate and apply it as required, a process which requires an adjustment of behaviour, or modification and adoption of new behaviours (Hooijberg & Lane, 2014) best describes the findings. First, the researcher argues that the meaningful and interesting outcomes suggesting that CEOs lead through varying abilities, which include the ability to adapt to different styles as required are consisted with the absorptive capacity of a leader, and the classification of strategic leadership by authors who stated that the essence of strategic leadership "involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom" (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 515). Second, findings that strategic CEOs nurture and

drive a clear vision are consistent with characteristics of transformational leadership, posited to be a leaders' capability to deliver a clear vision of the future (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020).

Findings from chapter 5 also suggested that CEOs in Eswatini often use collaborative leadership and delegation of powers to encourage employees to work as teams. A collaborative style fosters ideas from teams and inspires innovations centred on the drive to create team experiences that are meaningful and enjoyable (Emmett et al., 2021). The collaborative style of leadership further details how influence is often shared among the executive teams who function as a unit that is aligned and focused on similar or collective targets (Zhu et al., 2018) and principally anchor on a CEO who is accommodative, understanding, accessible and willing to listen (Hersel et al., 2019; Kapucu & Ustun, 2018; Stouten et al., 2018).

It was suggested that collaboration results in employees who support CEOs to execute on strategic inputs and carry out stakeholder management. Samimi et al. (2020) defines one of the roles of a strategic leader as that of, making strategic decisions, which they posit includes decisions about innovation, acquisitions, strategic change, and diversification. While findings in chapter 5 did not specifically detail the above, execution on strategic inputs outlined in the findings can be argued to be broadly inclusive. Findings were also consistent with the suggested team practises from scholars who posit that "teams rely on shared leadership with dynamically shifting leader–follower roles as the problems to be solved change and as team members possessing the most relevant information and expertise emerge to take on those roles" (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016, p. 24), as well as Samimi et al. (2020) who posit that strategic leadership is broadly used to refer to those at the top level of a company who exert influence, such as the CEO and his top management team.

Findings suggested varied definitions and traits of a collaborative style, with participants attaching the 'caring leader' style, 'democratic style' and in some cases 'shared leadership' to a collaborative style of leadership. Caring leadership was expanded by O'Reilly & Chatman (2020) as a form of 'transformational leadership' and defined as, a leadership style which postulate characteristics which include the ability of a leader to inspire teams to surpass self-interests and rather pursue a collective goal, which is also a key trait of a democratic leader (Eden, 2021).

Notably among findings of the collaborative style of leadership in essential service sector companies Eswatini were suggestions that these CEOs:

- (i) influence executive teams through shared leadership and encourages them to function as a unit that is aligned and focused on similar or collective targets, a finding consistent with (Zhu et al., 2018) in their interpretation of shared leadership,
- (ii) are accommodative, understanding, accessible and willing to listen, a finding consistent with suggested behaviours for leaders who seek to shift leverage and gain lower level employee support (Detjen & Webber, 2017),
- (iii) bring collective ownership and support between employees and the CEO, a finding consisted with claims that collaboration leads to collective task engagement, which results in positive team performance (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2017),
- (iv) foster ideas from teams and inspire innovations centred on the drive to create team experiences that are meaningful and enjoyable, a finding consistent to claims by Emmett et al., (2021), and
- (v) inspire executive ability to harness value and foster solutions from own engagements with teams, ideas which support the development of strategic solutions from robust and collective team contributions. This finding is consisted with the idea of clans which functions through distributed strategic leadership among top management teams (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016).

Participants further stated that CEOs adjust their style of leadership in response to an apparent need, and that CEOs' strategic leadership style can vary from the side of autocratic leadership to democratic leadership based on situational need. Further outlining how CEOs were systematically practising situational leadership by shifting into agile and adaptable styles whenever required to respond to changing situations, participants' accounts indicated consistency with definitions of strategic leadership which states that, "the essence of strategic leadership involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, and managerial wisdom (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001, p. 516).

Strategic leadership was pronounced as a style used to influence and motivate employees, especially where CEOs leads with clarity of direction, has good quality values, is empowering, and a visionary. The finding extends literature by scholars who suggested that a strategic leader is tasked with leadership functions which include leading effectively (Busenbark et al., 2016), making strategic decisions (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Schaedler et al., 2021) and carrying out strategic actions to influence firm outcome (Samdanis & Özbilgin, 2020; Samimi

et al., 2020), and in particular evaluations which identify the CEO role as being crucial for firm's successes or failures (Altarawneh et al., 2020).

Chapter 5 detailed positive traits of CEOs who, support and nurture growth, encourage ideas through openness and a willingness for teams to attempt new things, and fosters innovations. Positive CEO traits were claimed to result in 'value' accredited to CEOs and in incredibly engaged and motivated employees who function as a concerted team, steered by a good leader, to drive company success. These findings build on existing evidence by Kosfeld (2020) who in the study of approaches used by leaders suggested that leaders must motivate both motivated and demotivated employees. Kosfeld (202) argued that cooperation is conditional 'CC strategy' and that therefore CEOs can tap into and apply strategic leadership traits which anchor on trust that motivated teams will stay motivated, on punishing uncooperating teams to ensure that motivated and cooperating teams stay motivated, and on attracting cooperative individuals (Kosfeld, 2020). The CC strategy suggests that leaders can apply varying leadership traits to induce the 'right' type of behaviour from employees (Kosfeld, 2020; Tannenbaum et al., 2013).

Behavioural impeders to strategic leadership were also observed out of findings from participants. Claimed disparaging conducts included (i) CEO lack of confidence, which resulted in pedant CEOs who displayed traits of micromanagement (ii) CEO inability to effectively manage employee conflict and (iii) CEOs who applies an individualist approach to leadership which was found to be autocratic. These obstructors were not just listed as stand-alone but outlined impact on employee perceptions of the strategic leadership role of the CEO, and the negative impact they have on employee performance. Literature supports the findings. Toegel & Barsoux (2012) for example, remarking on negative consequences of perfectionism in a leader stated that, employees, sensing that the boss was inclined to micromanage, developed reluctance to raise issues of impact (Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). Another negative consequence claimed by prior scholars was narcissism. While narcissism was claimed to, on occasion, reap positive dictates such as persuasion and risk taking, it also results in poor listening skills, sensitivity of a leader to criticism, and lack of empathy (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020), traits which the researcher argues demonstrates a correlation with the individualist monocratic approach found in the leadership styles of some CEOs Eswatini.

Authoritarian CEOs were stated to wield power with rigidity and an unwillingness to listen, which was posited to result in unmotivated employees who lack passion for the business. The findings, tabled only as negative traits resulting from authoritarian leaders contradict literature by scholars who suggest that some employees embrace and prefer authoritarian leaders,

although this claim on the preference of autocratic style was argued in the context of a crisis (Harms et al., 2018). The researcher deduces therefore that while authoritarian leadership is mostly unsuited in a strategic leader, there are situations where authoritarian leadership becomes the preferred and arguably better style of leadership and that findings in chapter 5 are by and large, consistent with the literature review in chapter 2.

The researcher further claims that most CEOs in Eswatini adapt leadership styles to respond to situations and apply strategic leadership as the management style anchored primarily on caring, collaborative and democratic leadership traits, which employees view positively.

6.2.2 First impressions and its transition

Findings suggested that first impressions and changes in participants' perceptions of CEOs were not always immediate or at the absence of influence, but that they were formed based on certain observed traits, which may be incremental in their occurrence or state of observation. Although limited by the passage of time since first meetings between CEOs and participants, time which could have influenced the memory participants have of their first impressions of CEOs, the researcher believes that participants' account of implicit impressions formed still gave expressive intuitions to the study.

The participants tended to believe that perceptions were formed based on influencing factors such as the environment, the perceivers own experience or expectations, and in some cases, attitudes displayed by the perceived. The findings demonstrate a correlation to scholars who state their views to be that "initial perceptions dynamically emerge after some amount of relatively minimal and uniform evidence" (Cone et al., 2017, p. 134).

Traits which influence first impressions included CEO ability to display openness and approachability, care to listen and guide (a caring CEO), qualities which were evident in most CEOs. Biases such as what 'we hear' and the approach used to engage also influence other people's reactions, as well as the consequent impressions formed about them. The results are consistent with reviews which claim that there are attitudes and evaluations made about others which inform impressions of them, and these evaluations are a 'general currency' which can support predictions and biases, about what others are likely to do or they are (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Cone et al., 2017; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Mende-Siedlecki, 2018).

Findings in chapter 5 which identified shifts in impressions formed over time, influenced by factors which include knowing the subject of our impressions better, developing confidence in

their abilities and strengthened relationships confirm findings by authors who posit that what is heard or believed about others evolves (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017) and can be shaped by many variables which include facial expression (Gomulya et al., 2017), mood and expressed passion (Jachimowicz et al., 2019), the environment (Cone et al., 2017; Luttrell et al., 2022) and other. The study also revealed that participants' first impressions of CEOs were primarily of caring CEOs, and that perceptions, in line with impression management theory findings, can through certain behaviours and traits, be influenced positively or negatively over time (Rosenfeld et al., 1994).

6.3 Discussion crisis

6.3.1 Classification of crisis

Two critical classifications emerged from the findings presented in chapter 5 on the events of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the political unrest which resulted in looting and burning of infrastructure. Both events caused major interruptions to business operations, which was evidenced by internet shutdowns, companies' shutdowns and in some cases job losses. The events did not have equal or the same impact. Participants however, argued that both were crisis, and that their nature was that they were (i) highly uncertain and impactful, and consequently categorised them as (ii) black swan events.

Defining black swan as high risk, highly volatile, disruptive with high level of uncertainty, the crises were found to have been highly unexpected and emotionally strenuous on employees and other stakeholders. Literature supports this definition of black swan events. Grandori (2020) for example, remarked that firms sometimes face internal or externally driven erratic and uncommon events whose consequence is highly impactful to the business, to leaders, and to employees. These events are so rare, complex and volatile that they find companies and leaders unprepared (Bundy et al., 2017) except in hindsight after the event(s) have befallen. Such volatile extraordinary events have societal, communal and company impact often found to be life changing and far reaching (Garretsen et al., 2022; Leta & Chan, 2021). These events are commonly classified as social systems which rarely revert to past states without fundamental shifts, particularly because of their disruptive features of 'black swans' (Grandori, 2020; Kanungo, 2020).

Bundy et al. (2017) extended the classification of black swans to study the impact such events have on business, and called such black swan events which affect business 'organizational crisis', describing such events as "*an event perceived by managers and stakeholders as highly*

salient, unexpected, and potentially disruptive—can threaten an organization's goals ... (p. 1662). Whether internal or external, such events were found to have lasting impact which could threaten firm existence (Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021). In slight contrast to this review, participants suggested that impact from the crises was less traumatic on businesses than it was on employees, a finding which posit that crisis in Eswatini threatened employees more than it did businesses. Extending the argument that business was less impacted by the crises are claims of heightened opportunities to innovate which findings suggested were resultant from the pandemic more especially, and afforded some businesses prospects to demonstrate resilience, agility and relevance to shareholders (Donthu & Gustaffson, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021).

6.3.2 The role of social media in crisis

Whilst varying narratives and perceptions were abuzz in social media during the crises in Eswatini, and scholars such as (Eriksson, 2018; Saroj & Pal, 2020; Tsoy et al., 2021) increasingly advance the critical and risk averse potential role that social media can play in a crisis, many CEOs in Eswatini, in contradiction to the growing literature which supports the use of social media, struggled to adapt their beliefs and tools to include social media as a core communication tool which companies could use to either drive or shape their own narrative, respond and/or clarify and address the growing and sometimes inaccurate and concerning 'blow by blow' developments that were occurring through social media platform such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. CEOs in Eswatini were instead not supportive and lacking in understanding of the crucial role of social media platforms, and instead abandoned employees to make their own deductions of what prevailed from the crises, and to how the crises were impacting firms, other employees, and the public. Ignoring social media as a credible source of information was noted a detractor to effective crisis resolution and collaboration from employees. This finding is consistent with claims that social media is more influential than traditional media, and that business and leaders cannot afford to ignore both the risks and the consequent opportunities of influence that social media represents to effective crisis management and resolution (Tsoy et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2019).

Most scholars however identify the existence of positives and negative outcomes to the use of social media during crisis and posit that ignoring social media is not an option which leaders can benefit from (Eriksson, 2018; Mirbabaie et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2017). The researcher confirms this claim and contends that flexibility in the use of social media is not in whether social media is a tool to use to communicate during crisis, but rather that social media must be understood, so that leaders learn 'how' to best use it to support effective communication to

manage risk, and to influence perceptions of both internal and external stakeholders, self-images and discernments about the crisis, CEOs and the firm, all of which when managed effectually, support crisis management strategies (Paliszkiwicz & Madra-Sawicka, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017; Tsoy et al., 2021). Social media is also claimed to enhance innovation and business sustainability, and importantly can be a critical tool which CEOs can use to influence the younger generation of employee (Stewart et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2019).

Apart from social media, the role of technology in respect of business systems automation and the provision of remote accessibility to employees during crisis was impressed upon by participants as highly impactful on the ability of CEOs and employees to manage crisis. Whilst the researcher did not include these scholars in the literature review chapter, the findings from participants are consistent with Baert et al. (2020) who claimed positive perceptions of 'telework' on employees' personal and professional lives during COVID-19, suggesting that technology improved productivity, and reduced employee fatigue (Baert et al., 2022). The same scholars identified challenges on the relationship between businesses and employees but noted that positive effects, which included the reduced rate of burnout, surpass the negative effects of the technologies which enabled telework (Baert et al., 2022; Olsson & Bosch, 2020; Vargo et al., 2021).

6.3.3 Crisis impact

Consistent to Leta & Chan (2021) who in their study of crisis management in hospitality firms noted both positive and negative effects emanating from a crisis, participants pointed out the uniqueness of dealing with two crises which follow each other closely, citing positive spinoffs and opportunities which stem from these. Suggestions were also that COVID-19 equipped leaders with skill such as crisis leadership and crisis management capabilities, which CEOs exploited and deployed to manage the political unrest. The findings are consistent with scholars who suggested that hospitality firms adopted a variety of response strategies. Certain behaviours arguably influence the impact of crises positively, such being the inclusion of new business lines, enhanced performance which become priority during crises and improved management techniques which serve well even after crisis (Leta & Chan, 2021).

Other positive effects of crisis in chapter 5, which included (i) the enactment of policies which companies require as part of risk management tools (ii) strengthened leadership capabilities (iii) improved crisis management skills which are enforced as CEOs and the top management teams work collectively to support employees, (iii) better-quality relationships between the CEO and employees through the evidence of caring leadership and empathy and (i) agility of

employees and CEOs, which included the flexibility for employees to work from home. These were claimed to have improved the emotional state of employees and resulted in committed and passionate employees. The findings are consistent with insights which state positive effects of caring or empathic and transformational leadership to inspire, motivate and empower employees (Fusch et al., 2018; O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020; Peck & Hogue, 2018). Qualities of a transformational or charismatic leader result in strengthened employee engagements (Besieux et al., 2018; Kwon & Kim, 2020) and as suggested by scholars who argue that employee trust can be enhanced by the good interpersonal relations employees have with others in the firm who include leaders (Kähkönen et al., 2021), this analysis further supports the theory of trust repair, and highlights the positive and negative impact of crisis.

As mentioned in chapter 5, crisis can be extremely emotional to employees and consequently raise expectations set on CEO capacity to lead. Surprisingly, and in contrast to most findings, some employees did not place any expectations on CEOs during the crises. This was most interesting to the researcher as studies find that, people turn to form illusory expectations (Aru et al., 2018). The claim of illusory expectations creates an enquiry in the researcher's mind. If it is true that people can form illusory expectations where there are no stimuli, is it also possible to not form any expectation, and more so during an erratic, disorderly and uncertain event such as a crisis? The researcher recommends the exploration of this question as a prospect of future studies. Without evidence of findings, as the researcher did not interrogate the absence of expectation, the researcher suggests that perhaps where participants claimed to have not expected anything from CEOs, expectation did exist, only that it was an expectation that the CEO would not support them due to leadership 'failures' exhibited precrisis.

6.4 Discussion: crisis leadership

As previously outlined, scholars posit that crises are unexpected, "unusual and abnormal events that occur infrequently, for which organizations and leaders have little preparation and experience in managing" (Wu et al., 2021, p. 2). Due to the impact crisis has on business, employees and other stakeholders, huge expectation rests on CEOs to reduce the probability of crisis occurring, and at the same time strengthen company responses through enhanced preparedness and adequate risk protocols (Beilstein et al., 2021; Hatami et al., 2020).

There are consistencies among claims that, crisis requires pioneering and active leadership (Schoemaker et al., 2018; Wenzel et al., 2021) to manage varying and challenging demands from stakeholders (Pfarrer et al., 2008; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021), and those that state that, should CEOs fail to anticipate the dangers linked to crisis or to respond with resolute

implements that are geared to tackle high priority and direct risks, crisis may exacerbate and overwhelm CEOs, threaten business sustainability, and negatively impact stakeholders (Leta & Chan, 2021; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Given its perceived impact and the urgent nature that crisis is, leaders are often confronted with insurmountable time and risk pressures, and demands from stakeholders which bring uncertainties in the decision making process (Garretsen et al., 2022; Nyenswah, 2016; Wu et al., 2021).

Findings in chapter 5 were consistent with the literature, and participants proclaimed that CEO leadership capabilities during the crises were tested beyond the norm, and that decisions which required leadership boldness were high risk, not just to business, but to employee lives. There were further claims that the level of risk on employees and business resulted in great challenges for CEOs who were expected to balance varying stakeholder demands and expectations. The finding was consistent with literature claims that external crisis is more demanding than any other organizational crisis and demands CEOs who will not just strengthen skills in reducing impact and disruptions, but will identify and exploit prospects for constructive transformations as they craft ways to steady conflicting demands which may even threaten lives (Bundy et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2021).

Building on the existing claims by scholars such as Wu et al (2021) and Bundy et al (2017), participants posited that the crises became a litmus test on the strategic capabilities, leadership styles and leadership flexibility. Other testing company practises were suggested to be the relevance of company policies, a finding consistent with suggestions by Drucker in his account of how leaders can become effective through formulating clear intentions (action plan) which align to company policies (Drucker, 2004). While Drucker's setting was not during a crisis, the researcher claims that his recommendation is just as crucial during crisis. Employee commitment and understanding of the culture and strategic intent of the company are additional challenges which test the strength of a leader, precrisis and during crises.

Participants also described the tumultuous challenge on CEO shoulders to swiftly comprehend the operational landscape, ensure that business continues to offer quality service to customers during the incredibly fluid and unpredictable period, comply to legislative requirements, and at the same time balance stakeholder needs, and employee demands for quality directive leadership. The findings support the claims of intricacies and complexities on the crisis leadership role which place dynamic requirements on CEOs (Samimi et al., 2020; Schoemaker et al., 2018). Claims from other scholars which suggest that crisis leadership requires a combination of evolving behaviours (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Krause & Miller, 2020) which may include the ability of a CEO to motivate and influence employees to be his closest allies (F.

Liu et al., 2021) to ensure that the complex and otherwise challenging crisis is managed and resolved effectively (Bundy et al., 2017; Stouten et al., 2018) further augment the uniformity of the findings. Participants further stated that effective crisis leadership is achieved, among others, through the application of relevant, timely and effective decision making.

Several scholars postulate that the ability of a CEO to exert influence on an employee toward a shared goal defines the quality of leadership (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Georgakakis et al., 2019; Oc, 2018; You et al., 2020). Employees form perceptions about leaders. Characteristics, behaviours and more importantly, the 'context' in which the influencing is being carried out (Oc, 2018) prescribe how employees perceive CEO. Findings in chapter 5 which suggested that demands placed on CEOs required them to adjust leadership styles to include inventive measures, and that in response to the context of crisis, coupled with CEO focus to effectively manage the crises and gain employee support, CEOs expanded leadership styles to include styles not evident prior to the crises, were consistent with the literature claims above.

The effects of context were established through contingency theory by Fiedler, who claimed that situational factors create context which dictate the type of leadership style suited to effectively influence behaviours. In detailing context, literature included the type and quality of relationship between leader and follower, leader power status and the clarity in which tasks are structured to support leader efficiency (Fiedler, 1978; Oc, 2018). Implicit leadership theories on the other hand, proposed that employee perceptions of the influence leaders can exert affect leader effectiveness (Eden, 2021; Ronay et al., 2019). Importantly, literature claimed that the conduct and style of leadership as perceived and expected by employees in a specific situation, shapes how employees assess and respond to the leader, and how they measure leader effectiveness (Ronay et al., 2019).

Literature therefore suggests that there are varying styles of leadership which CEOs can tap into during crisis (Alknawy, 2019) and that different leaders tap into different styles, which include compassionate or caring leadership, closely linked by others to empathy "the capacity to be affected by and to share the emotional state of another individual, where in the perception of such emotional state automatically activates shared representations and evokes a matching emotional state in the observer" (Meyza & Knapska, 2018, p. 15), to inclusive leadership, or the more traditional styles such as top down and 'leading from the front' (Russell et al., 2021), and in some cases charismatic styles (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Describing how during the crises in Eswatini, CEOs primarily led with care and authenticity, using consultative practices which fostered teamwork, findings were consistent with the literature.

Styles particularly evident from CEOs but not utilised prior to the crises included caring CEOs (empathic leadership), CEOs who uses gifts and incentives (transactional leadership), inspiring and motivational CEOs (transformational leadership) and CEOs who anchor decisions on policies (bureaucratic leadership). Surprising to the researcher was the inclusion of 'vulnerability' which, while not a style of leadership but an emotional state, was found evident during the crises, with the suggestions that vulnerability in leadership, together with the other styles; transformational and transactional which had contrasting views, and empathic and bureaucratic leadership were positively perceived by employees during crisis.

Transformational leadership was praised as the most effective leadership style during a crisis due to the ability of the leader to respond through motivation, influence and inspiration to a challenging situation (Asree et al., 2019; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Dehghanan et al., 2021). Scholars equate transformational leadership to charismatic leadership, and claim that both drive positive behaviour (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Transformational leaders are claimed to be bold, self-confident, captivating, enchanting, sharp and possessing of abilities which draw many toward the cause (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). Findings which conveyed how CEOs inspired and motivated employees during the crises confirm and are consistent with literature.

In discussing caring leadership, participants interchanged between the word 'caring' and 'empathy', to reference a style affixed to practises which included among others, frequent communication, empathic and attentive listening, considerate responses, and supportive feedback. Coupled with assurances of resolve and job security, as well as flexibility for employees to work from home as required, CEOs in Eswatini primarily led with care. Other traits evident in caring leadership included CEO visibility, patience, and humility to understand and connect with employees. Literature supports these findings and sometimes describes empathic as caring leadership, which is postulated to display a paradigm of prosocial behaviours which may include qualities of a caring, humanitarian, unselfish, sensitive, intelligent and dynamic CEO (Peck & Hogue, 2018).

Empathic leadership is well equipped to deal with crisis and is further claimed to result in positive outcomes and behaviours from employees during crisis (Coombs, 2014). Additional to that, empathy is stated to be symbiotic to sensemaking, which is an ability for a CEO to sense others' emotions and connect to them as if they too were experiencing them first hand (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). Adding a different perspective to caring leadership, Einwiller and other scholars claimed that the use of messages of credibility, a behavioural trait of authentic leadership, assist CEOs to conjure positive emotions from employees (Einwiller et al., 2017), a trait of a caring leader. An authentic leader also acts with integrity and openness, impartiality,

strength of character, credibility, truthfulness, and an ability to admit mistakes, all of which arguably have stronger influences on employee perceptions (Peck & Hogue, 2018).

Some CEOs however were slow to communicate candidly, effectively, nor with utmost honesty during crises. Findings however suggested that, even in cases where there was poor communication, some measure of caring leadership which participants also referred as the spirit of 'Ubuntu' was apparent, suggesting and further supporting the claims that during the crises', caring leadership was most apparent.

The shift of CEO leadership from styles displayed prior to the crises to more empathic and caring leadership styles during crisis was evidenced by behaviour exhibiting kindness, support and understanding, which were visibly displayed through frequent communication and ad hoc checks on employee welfare. The transition of leadership styles supported employees to maintain calm during the crises. Warmth, care, and concern demonstrated by CEOs enhanced trust and instilled confidence from employees who were also inspired by the show of humility, humanity, and empathy. The findings were consistent with König et al. (2020) who claim that empathy assists CEOs to recognize and gain quicker access to information which is critical to manage both employees and the crisis, and that through compassion, the CEO is able to build stakeholder confidence and trust. König et al. (2020) also holds a different view which balance their claim. They state that, while on one end empathy has positive outcomes, it can also serve as a negator to effective leadership and crisis resolution, suggesting that the risk from a leader who displays too much empathy during a crisis and consequently relies on sentiment, may prejudice, and compromise the decisions CEOs make during crisis.

Another style of leadership that was prominent during the crises was transactional leadership. As a show of appreciation for the commitment, hard work and willingness to bear the risk displayed and to motivate employees, incentives were used. Incentives included non-monetary value items which included social incentives such as training and workshops, consultations and even working from home. There is a need for CEOs to understand their employees to best determine the type of incentive which can be used, and how these could be leveraged to maintain calm and drive a culture of passionate commitment and be able to shape employee perceptions positively during crisis. Incentives therefore carried mixed emotions for employees. Emotions centred on (i) form of incentives which best suits, hence the need to interrogate rewards that best qualifies as an incentive during crisis, (ii) impact which incentives have on employees for they can be short term in their influencing capability and are said to not address the core anxiety or reason for employees to be in a particular state

of mind, and (iii) how safe incentives are as a motivator, raising the risk that employees, wanting to get monetary rewards could risk their life without due process.

Contrasting views were that incentives do not always drive effective crisis resolutions, that they are riskier, and that, even considered as a tool to use during crisis, consideration should only be done as a function of company performance and reward must be granted based on performance of the business and not purely as a motivator for employees to be at work. It was noted more importantly, that to ensure business stability and sustainability, employee retention and general well-being support more during crises, than paying incentives. Literature also identifies negative and the positive results of transactional leadership during crisis, and argue that rewards can be a tool for a leader who within an existing system seeks to improve an organization's culture and strategy (Vera & Crossan, 2004), while others claim that, in a changing environment such as crisis, transactional leadership is not as effective (Jansen et al., 2009). Hooijberg & Lane (2014) supported the use of transactional leadership and claimed that CEOs (leaders) could use rewards to cascade the vision of a company to employees, although the argument was not in the context of a crisis.

Bureaucratic leadership was found to be actively applied by leaders during the crises with participants suggesting that business and leaders needed to expand policy frameworks to guide employees as they navigate and work to support CEOs to manage crisis. Several participants blamed CEOs for not having prioritized policies and frameworks which address risks such as crisis and argued that the lack of clearly defined procedures to follow during crisis does not build a conducive environment for employees. This finding contrasted with literature review which instead supports a more social interactive style of leadership, arguing that bureaucratic leadership is similar to authoritarian leadership in its rigidity and unyielding and inflexible practises which suffocate and smother the ability of employees to find innovative solutions which drive company performance (McLarty et al., 2021). While some scholars find positives effects of bureaucratic leadership in certain types of businesses such as those that handle cash or use highly technical and potentially dangerous machinery, the style of leadership does not gain support and is instead said to dishearten and confine employees who seek innovations, agility and flexibility to be proactive and driven in their work delivery (McLarty et al., 2021; Saqib Khan et al., 2015).

Vulnerability in a leader was evident during crisis and was interestingly suggested as an alternative to transactional leadership. CEO who displayed vulnerability calmed, motivated, and emotionally supported employees. This was because CEOs, in vulnerability, tended to be engaging as they sought ideas from employees. Compassion, empathy, and authenticity to

admit that they did not have all the answers with a show of humanity, tended to inspire employees positively. Many scholars have over the years depicted vulnerability as a weakness. Findings however were consistent with literature which argues that vulnerability present a great opportunity for a leader to be open and adaptable to transformations, to admit and face weaknesses and share trials, thus encouraging others to also expose their own weaknesses, be honest and in the process relationship are strengthened through trust (Al & Bligh, 2017). Participants finding, being consistent to Al & Bling (2017), also stated that vulnerable leadership requires honest and credible acknowledgment of the status quo (authentic leadership) and that for a CEO to be vulnerable, they needed to be honest with themselves, their capabilities, what they know and don't, and to ensure that they portray the same honesty and vulnerability in engagements with employees.

Findings in chapter 5 further highlighted that some styles which were prominent prior to crisis were applied less frequently during crisis. Visionary leadership was not at all evident. Contrary to findings on strategic leadership before crisis, which pivoted on coaching and democratic collaborative responses, crisis leadership leaned toward the more emphatic hard 'iron hand one decider' style of an authoritarian leader. Authoritarian leadership is practised by a leader through firm and clear decision making. The shift was a result of CEOs who tend to adjust from a softer, more nurturing style, to one which is decisive and sets clear expectations and deliverables through the challenging times. Authoritarian leadership was claimed to yield positive contribution to crisis management and crisis resolution. Compared to more collaborative styles which were found to be positively impactful in strategic leadership prior to crisis, there was a contrary shift to align with authoritarian leadership with participants arguing that collaborative styles delayed critical decisions and often bring confusion and disorder to crisis and authoritarian on the other hand ensures that (i) clear decisions are made and that (ii) decisions are implemented immediately; both which are critical aspects of crisis leadership.

The findings are consistent with literature. Drawing on evolutionary theory of leadership development which place power and status as indistinguishable pathways to leadership, Kakkar & Sivanathan (2017) argue that crisis situations, due to the nature of uncertainty, misperceptions, disorder, and anxieties, cause some followers to shift bias and preference toward an authoritarian leader. Followers (employees), convinced of the leader capabilities to get them through the challenging period, drawn from the perception of over confidence from an authoritarian leader, deduce a positive chance of success (Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). Petersen & Laustsen (2020) used authoritarianism theory to claim that preferences for dominant leaders is regarded as part of a steady subservient character, and that due to the perceived ferociousness and strong negotiating capabilities, authoritarian leaders are believed

to be more skilled and therefore, able to resolve crisis expediently, which draws followers to prefer and vote them into positions of leadership (Petersen & Laustsen, 2020).

6.4.1 Failure to lead during crisis

Apart from the crisis leadership functions and tools which CEOs can use during crisis, the findings raised leadership traits which result in failures to the role and function of crisis leadership. Although literature provided reference to some of the noted challenges to crisis leaders, none focused on Eswatini. As already mentioned, crisis is an unexpected, 'unusual and an abnormal event that occurs infrequently, for which organizations and more so leaders, have little preparation and experiences in managing" (Wu et al., 2021, p. 2). The lack of foresight and crisis leadership expertise creates challenges in the ability of leaders to respond to crisis with effective leadership or crisis management (Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

Challenges outlined by participants included CEO's inability and fear to communicate, indecisiveness, reactionary ambiguous responses, lack of empathy and care, no teamwork, lack of crisis management capabilities and lack of creativity. CEOs were also prone to blame employees for some of the outcomes of the crisis, panicked and led with emotions which compromised the ability to prepare suited crisis management and crisis leadership responses which would enable them to lead effectively. Lack of leadership during crisis was claimed to have resulted in employees' mistrust of CEOs, centred on a belief that CEOs do not care for employees.

The researchers' findings on crisis leadership failure is consistent with varying scholars who on review detail both positive and inhibitor to effective crisis leadership. Literature includes studies which noted: lack of communication (Fusch et al., 2018); no decision making (Tokakis et al., 2019) and other. Authors who review CEO cognition illustrates most of the potentially damaging effects and deduce that, CEOs' failure to assume responsibility for a crisis hinder growth, that of employees and the firm, as represented by sensemaking inabilities during crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Combe & Carrington, 2015; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wolbers et al., 2018). Literature further outlines negative traits and outcomes from employees who lack support from CEOs, arguing that leaders who continuously disregard employees during a crisis negatively affect the firm's ability to navigate out of a crisis, and inadvertently drive employees to negative perceptions of them and the firm (Boman & Schneider, 2021; Johansen et al., 2012; McLarty et al., 2021; Prouska & Psychogios, 2019).

6.5 Discussion: employee perception of CEO leadership during crises

Findings from the context of strategic leadership and crisis leadership in chapter 5 pointed out that perception of a causal loop relationship between strategic leadership, crisis leadership and employee perceptions was probable. Participant's interpretation of CEO behaviour and leadership traits prior to crisis, influenced perceptions of crisis leadership. The findings were consistent with literature claiming that perceptions, and the ability to make perceptual judgments about a person is supported by the pre-existence sense of what is known of the person and their behaviour (Aru et al., 2018; de Lange et al., 2018).

Varying perceptions were formed of leaders during crisis. Several other findings emerged on employee perceptions of CEOs, and of traits or actions which influence perceptions. Emotions varied from anxiety and fear which according to participants were adequately supported through the varying leadership traits. Others accounts of perceptions were influenced by employee biases and expectations, the context of each crisis, the environment from which they each were observing the crisis from which included how others around seemed to have been impacted and external stakeholder level of influence, and how CEOs behaved. Supporting these findings is literature which claim that perception can be influenced through leadership responses to contextual factors which include style of leadership, employee experience of the leadership, own biases and the environment (Baert et al., 2022; Gillespie et al., 2014; Hannah et al., 2009; Oc, 2018). Perceptions were formed through a perceiver who are leaders in their own rights, acting as both follower to CEOs and leader to others. The researcher notes the unique position which line manager plays in the role as part of the top management team who arguably get a more robust and systematic view and experience which allows for a balanced perception. According to literature, line managers get to understand a wider view of business and employee needs, and that such leaders, once equipped to engage strategically get acquire an organization-wide, systemic viewpoint that transmits benefit and value (Detjen & Webber, 2017).

There were suggested compartments of support and care which influenced shift in perceptions from those previously held by employees. These demeanours were influenced by CEO change in behaviour during crisis, demonstrated through agility and flexibility to effect situational leadership to manage crisis. Employees perceived 'a company with a heart' and felt connected. Perceptions of care and support inspired positive emotions where employees felt prioritised, supported, confident and impressed by both CEOs crisis leadership and firm crisis responses. Findings demonstrate a correlation to the theory of implicit leadership which suggest that perceptions shape the idea of efficacy (Eden, 2021; Ronay et al., 2019) and how

employees perceive leader influence to leader effectiveness. Importantly, perceptions shape how employees perceive the leadership style that should be prominent in the contexts of a crisis. How employees perceive a leader, shapes how they assess and respond to the leaders' leadership, and how they quantify leader effectiveness (Ronay et al., 2019).

Some line managers on the other hand, consider crisis as a context in which they fail to process own emotions. Owing to the fast-paced nature of crisis, the demands to both be leader and follower, line managers shift more to leaders during crisis and consequently face demands and responsibilities like those of a CEO. Consequently, the processing of line manager emotions to 'expect' leadership at the height of the crises is a luxury they cannot afford and instead, line managers opt to prioritize their teams. While these findings were not fully explored, they establish novel insight and a brief lens to CEO emotions during crises and its potential impact, thus shaping prospects for other scholars to explore CEO emotions from their (CEO)'s own viewpoint and perspective, in connection to the situation, their interpretation of the situation, and how their interpretation affects crisis leadership.

Literature has commonly focused on external stakeholders in form of shareholders and the business at the exclusion of employees during crisis (Bundy et al., 2017). Many theories lenses have been used to shine light on leaders such as CEOs during crisis. Theories have included cognition, gender and role which reviewed areas of sensemaking, attribution agency, leader suitability and personality, social evaluations from the external lens and how others perceive leaders during crisis, agency theory which promotes the use of stock based compensation to inspire CEOs, CEO power and how they can exert will and manage the business and stakeholders during crisis, executive ethical leadership, all which review CEOs from an external perspective (König et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). The researcher could not find literature on CEO emotion during crisis. The findings revealed the need for business to provide mental support structures and counselling for CEOs and other leaders during crisis, to equip CEOs with the requisite support and capabilities for them to effect good crisis leadership.

During crisis there are vast opportunities for innovations. Building strong networks and partnerships between employees and CEOs and other stakeholders can advance opportunities, first for business resilience through the crisis, and for prospects which could potentially shape the future of the country of Eswatini and its people. Literature review on innovations during crisis is contradictory. Some scholars postulate that crisis such as the pandemic creates opportunities for business to get innovative ways to respond and manage the crises and that during crisis innovations which result in firm resilience bode well for

company shareholders (Donthu & Gustaffson, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021), Naudé and others instead argue that crisis is harmful to a firm's reputation, that it negatively alters relationships and perceptions of employees, shareholders and in some cases regulators (Naudé et al., 2018), although the studies were specific to company scandal which by nature, arguably bring enormous reputational risk to the firm (Loudenslager, 2020; Naudé et al., 2018).

Because of lack of confidence in CEOs, line managers formed biases that CEO were not equipped to support them through the crisis and developed individual resilience. The negative capability biases which centred on 'you can't expect much from CEOs', resulted in shifted focus from 'expectation' to 'resilience', to 'environment scoping for opportunities' and is supported by scholars who found that, resilience in the workplace is developed over time, and that it is a positive mental ability for the affected to ricochet from a moment of adversity and ambiguity to a positive view of the experience. In a process referred as mental fortitude, people develop mental endurance and self-control to manage unpleasant situations, and produce positive work-related outcomes such as innovations which drive positive change (Combe & Carrington, 2015; T. A. Williams et al., 2017). Contrasting findings suggested that innovations were not explored by leaders who instead focus on survival.

Moving from perceptions influenced by the context of crisis, findings suggested other perception influencers to include behaviours of the perceived such as CEO attitude. Crucial behaviours included calm, communication, visibility, and incentives, tools which were also identified core to strategic leadership prior to crisis. CEOs who understand their role, are calm and optimistic through crisis, attain loyalty from employees. Loyalty makes it easier to exert positive influence. Consistent to these findings is literature review which outlines two dimensions of the social evaluations theory, (i) the 'warmth dimension' which focus on the targets' negative or positive goals, their ability and behaviour, and the 'competence dimension' which measures the targets capacity to implement plans by tapping into their calm and skills (Luttrell et al., 2022). Expanding on the concept of warmth, Goodwin and Abele underscored that warmth encompass 'sociability and morality' and described sociability as the targets' ability to be liked, and amorality as a measure of the degree of honesty and trustworthiness of the target (Abele et al., 2020; Goodwin, 2015).

Two novelty ideas to potentially influence perceptions were also detailed to incorporate 'routine' and 'job assurance', both of which are managed through CEO visibility and clear communication. It may be argued that the two novel perceptions are susceptible to change easily due to the fluid nature given that 'job security' and 'routine' during a crisis, is not always feasible. Crisis as already stated is unpredictability and uncertain. Perceptions and routine are

often broken, and job assurance would be not always be possible. Consistent to the findings, daily routine is suggested as a means to replenish the mind and preserve mental stability during crisis (Hatami et al., 2020). This is contrary to literature which suggests that routine causes organizational inertia and anchor in firm structures and managers minds and activities, all which render firms less likely to innovate (König et al., 2021).

Another influencing trait to perceptions is 'time'. Time to get to know the object of perception. The concept that it is the gradual understanding of an object which shape how it is perceived, perceptions which vary over time dependent on how the object is experienced.

Other influencing factors included viewing the target through a network of teams. Teams were claimed to have larger impact on the perceptions formed, underscoring that impressions can be adjusted over time and that arguments that some perceptions are influenced by how others who are closer to the target experience them. CEOs who utilise teams to present facts and updates in a manner which adequately responds to employee needs, were found to be more influential and more equipped to influence employees' perceptions. Literature tabled this as shared leadership and argued that shared leadership supports the necessary resilience that firms need to weather storms (Martin et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2018), and that firms and leaders who practise shared leadership enhance their capabilities and outperform companies who are still applying the 'great man theory' model of leadership (Pitelis & Wagner, 2019).

The effects of no support were also detailed. The points raised included those feelings of no support resulted from (i) CEOs who refused to adapt to changes which crisis demands from them and instead expect and lead similarly to how they lead prior to crisis and (ii) perceptions rooted on prior experience and resultant perception of 'I know the CEO, they are who they are', as leaders known to be incapable of change. These perceptions fostered feelings of resigned defeat and in some cases, of zero expectation of support. These findings are consistent with literature which studied the science of leadership and claimed that, employees who believe that circumstances favour them are motivated to try harder and perform better while those who instead view themselves at a disadvantage, are demotivated and resigned to losing (Eden, 2021). Literature further makes suggestions for CEOs who seek to shift perceptions of employees who has formed prior negative bias, suggesting that CEOs must understand that biases exist, and may be negative. Where found to negative, implement measure that will restore trust (Blomqvist et al., 2021; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009) before they can attempt to drive positive behaviour.

6.6 Discussion: shaping employee perceptions

6.6.1 Preferred leadership during crisis

Findings suggested that situational, caring, coaching, autocratic and authentic leadership styles are preferred styles during crisis. Further advancing claim that, while some level of collaboration is required from CEOs during crisis, collaborative leadership is not preferred by employees in Eswatini during crisis. During crisis employees seek first, a leader who can adjust styles and decisions to suits the changing environment. Traits which are primal include communication, clarity and direction, agile and flexible decisions. Expanding on the styles preferred, participants apportioned agility and alignment of decision-making during crisis to a 'professional approach', which is described as the ability to understand the environment, and to continuously adapt in decision making, whilst communicating each step to employees. A CEO who implements these is effective during crisis and benefits the firm, and interests and needs of employees. It is thus clear that communicating effectively during crisis play a critical role in crisis leadership and crisis management. Without effective communication crisis cannot be resolved and employees lose confidence on a leader's ability to resolve crisis. Communicating during crises forms part of crisis communication, which is an essential part of managing and resolving crisis. Crisis communication involves active communicating with stakeholders to manage expectations, reduce impact and minimise damage to the firm (Daniels et al., 2022; Dhanesh & Sriramesh, 2018; Tsoy et al., 2021).

One of the common theories in crisis management posits that any act which can destabilise a company should be managed through image restoration of the firm (Gillespie et al., 2014; Pfarrer et al., 2008). While studies in restoration theory consider on internal organizational crisis usually, and propose strategic responses which include denying, evading, reducing impact, asking corrective action, and admitting mistakes and asking for forgiveness, the researcher claims that the same measures can be adapted to apply to manage crisis like COVID-19 and the political riots. Coombs suggested the concept of 'stealing the thunder' as first to communicate during crisis to manage the quality and accuracy of information (Coombs, 2014), arguing that timing what is said is, and by whom is crucial to crisis management, and consequently crisis management. Expectations on CEOs to communicate with accuracy demands mental focus, calm and clear decision-making capabilities, which also gives other stakeholders such as employees the courage to also be focused and calm during crisis (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Wu et al., 2021).

6.6.2 Shaping employee perceptions

The study of what CEOs can do during crisis to positively shape employee perceptions in Eswatini outlined many qualities and traits which CEO can adopt. While the study is limited and not representative of all essential services, nor all line managers in Eswatini, the researcher argues that findings can be comprehensively considered and proposes that the findings give credible insight to how employee perceptions can be positively influenced for effective crisis management and resolve. Findings from the study have already been discussed and compared to literature in varying aspects of the discussion chapter. The outline which follows therefore will build on those findings and reviews to outline employee suggestions on how CEOs can positively shape employee perceptions during crises.

Participants during the interviews revealed that employees form impressions of CEOs, the crisis and the leadership styles adopted, and that such impressions can be revised to form new one which may vary from the first impressions (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Mende-Siedlecki, 2018). Literature also supports this finding. Corne claimed the existence of certain situations in which impressions can be “instantly, durably, and robustly updated—even reversed in valence—given that the new information about the target is believable and diagnostic, and if it undoes the original evaluative meaning of the evidence” (Cone et al., 2021, p. 186). From professional to personal relationships, making good impress on others shapes critical long-term outcomes. Good impressions can further assist CEOs to boost self-confidence, positive emotions and self-satisfaction (Sezer, 2022). Because employees vary and require varying styles of leadership, it is imperative for CEOs to comprehend how employee perceptions and behaviours influence his leadership (Matthews et al., 2021) so they can predict and manage emotions, and the level of influence which will affect how they respond to employee needs.

A crucial effect of how the perceiver responds to initiatives CEOs put in place to shape perceptions is the level of ‘trust’ (Einwiller et al., 2017; Kähkönen et al., 2021). The level of trust that employees have during crisis determine how they want to be lead. During crisis, employee emotions of uncertainty and vulnerability are heightened, and mistrust and blame come to the fore (Blomqvist et al., 2021; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009). Employee trust plays a critical role in organization as studies have shown ‘trusted employees’ are more committed and passionate, especially to a leader who is swilling to make sacrifices (Johnson, 2021). Given the status of impressions in both professional and social interactions, people engage in many perception management approaches (Sezer, 2022). CEOs who seeks to shape perceptions of employees therefore must understand that employees have biases and

perceptions which they form about the firm, the crises, and the leader (Díez-Martín et al., 2022), and implement measures to restore trust.

Findings suggested leadership traits which CEOs can adopt in situational leadership to shape employee perceptions for positive resolution of crisis, and include the listed:

6.6.2.1 Care and empathy

Findings suggested that employees require CEOs who are empathic and caring during crisis. Described as “being empathetic and getting to understand and appreciate the situation and putting yourself in the other persons shoes” (17:34 p 8 in Participant 16), caring leadership is said to embody empathy. It is arguably the most impactful leadership trait which can positively influence employees during crisis to support CEOs manage and resolve crisis. Steinbinder & Sisneros (2020) claim that caring leadership encourages connections at all levels and develops trust between leader and follower. Through caring leadership, CEOs can positively and directly impact line managers, who in turn serve the rest of the employees with care and empathy (Steinbinder & Sisneros, 2020). As care spreads among members, the CEO positively influences how he is perceived.

6.6.2.2 Communication

Communicating to employees during crisis plays a crucial role in ensuring that perceptions are shaped positively. In crises situations, passable and appropriate information affect employee trust and obligation toward the crisis resolution (Fusch et al., 2018; Mazzei et al., 2019). Emphasizing the need for communication during crises one employee stated “speak out: explain what’s happening. we want to hear from you.” (21:36 p 6 in Participant 21). The researcher, building from literature claims that during crisis employees seek most to understand the status quo as it unfolds, potential impact and more importantly what is being done to manage and lead the company out of the crises (CERC, 2019; B. Liu et al., 2016). Scholars suggest that communication during crisis should be proactive, clear, and easily shared. It’s proactiveness addresses the many other competing communication platforms which exist and supports employees to gain trust as it corrects false information. By focusing on employee needs, giving feedback as it unfolds, addressing concerns and strategies on future plans (Beilstein et al., 2021) CEOs build confidence in employees. Confident and trusting employees support CEOs (Mazzei et al., 2019).

6.6.2.3 Decisiveness

“The one thing I need ... I love a leader that makes decisions. Are we going? Yes. Are we staying? Yes. Not the, what do you think? ... we are in crisis. You say yes or no. I've thought about it. I've reasoned. I've looked at the facts, I've understood it and I'm ready to make the decision” (20:36 p 6 in Participant 20). One of the critical acts during crisis is effective decision making. Without decisiveness, employees lose confidence in a leader (Snowden & Boone, 2007a) . Crisis requires CEOs who have the right character and personality. “They stay curious and flexible but can still make the tough calls, even if that makes them unpopular” (Alexander et al., 2020, p. 5). These types of leaders qualify as decisive leaders who make quick effective decisions without fear. They trust themselves to adjust decisions as required, and are effective at gaining insights on how best and when to adjust decision-making styles to respond to requirements of varying situations (Fusch et al., 2018; T. A. Williams et al., 2017). Snowden and Boon, in their review of what makes effective leadership explored leadership through the simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic contexts and found that context require different skills, varying decisions and responses. When CEOs identify the leading context, threat indicators, avert improper responses and make the right decisions (Snowden & Boone, 2007), in time and with clarity, employee perceptions are positively shaped.

6.6.2.4 Agility

The one certainty that exists in life is that of change, where change is imminent. Articulating the critical need for agile leadership during crisis one participant stated “...be quick to react to situations and don't wait until it gets worse.” (17:34 p 8 in Participant 16). Scholars have long argued that CEOs who plan to lead firms and employees through crises, who seek to positively influence employee perceptions find ways to shift employee focus from the depression state (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019). CEOs who inspire a new confidence in employees for a better tomorrow (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020) must learn dexterity, agility and tact to empower (Stouten et al., 2018; Tskhay et al., 2014) through accurate strategic and deemed relevant information management distribution to employees (Samimi et al., 2020). Flexibility (Christofi et al., 2021; Fusch et al., 2018) among others. There are pertinent to support the requisite change and shape perceptions of employees during crisis.

6.6.2.5 Attitude

Graham et al. (2013) in their review of CEOs found that the distinct difference to leader success was attitude, adding that CEOs who are more optimistic and hopeful, positive and inspirational, encourage others to believe and foster positive perceptions (Graham et al., 2013). While their study was not set during a crisis, their claims support arguments which merit transformational leadership as an effective style during crises. A transformational CEO is quick to respond in a manner of influence, which motivates and brings hope to a challenging situation (Asree et al., 2019; Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Dehghanan et al., 2021), and according to Peck & Chatman (2020) traits of charisma are naturally fitting in a leader who seeks to drive positive behaviour (Peck & Hogue, 2018) through bold, self-confident, captivating positive sentiments which convince others to their cause (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020). Stating the need for positive attitude to shape employee perceptions, one participant said "it must start with positivity on his side. Just eliminating negatives, eliminating problems in your talk ... reminding people, who we are, and what we stand for in a positive way (1:36 p 6 in Participant 11).

6.6.2.6 Calm

A tough leadership test during crisis is the ability of a leader to bring calm to employees. When the spotlight is on leaders who are expected to show calm and optimism (Hatami et al., 2020) as employees look up to them for direction and guidance, and leadership to secure grounds, the expectations demand mental focus, calm, clear decision making capabilities and communication to instil focus in stakeholders (Coombs & Laufer, 2018; Wu et al., 2021) as calm leaders themselves instil calm in employees. For leaders to be calm, they first need to lead themselves (Crossan et al., 2008) and as one participant states, for CEOs to be effective and positively shape employee perceptions, they are required to "be that anchor or that rock that brings calmness and composure during a crisis." (13:41 p 6 in Participant 9).

6.6.2.7 Vulnerability

An interesting concept found crucial as an enabler for positive influence of employee perception during crisis is CEO vulnerability. Participants seek CEOs who will not be conceited or unrealistic but will promote show of emotions to say that 'I do not have all the answers. Employees claim that admittance of bare honesty shows understanding and connects CEOs with employees. One participant says "I don't think from leadership you have to show that you have all the answers all the time, I think it's OK to show vulnerability from time to time... it just comes to honesty ... around you know, where the business is at, what are the things being worked on and where people see things going?" (18:38 p 6 in Participant 16). Scholars who argue that transformational leadership results in CEO conceit, agree with the assertion of

vulnerability during crises and argue that vulnerability in charismatic leadership may be crucial to strengthen relationships with employees and increase the provenance of charisma. These scholars state that leaders who show feelings of vulnerability create opportunities for followers to connect as they perceive safety and develop a willingness to trust (Al & Bligh, 2017).

6.6.2.8 Honesty

Honesty in leadership, referred authentic leadership was mainly in response to a bothered society and a loss of confidence in businesses and in leaders borne of the many disruptions and business scandals increasingly becoming part of today's world (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019). According to Littman, honesty is crucial to any deed and decision for without genuine decisions and choices, nothing else counts (Littman & Littman, 2019). The cornerstone of follower perceptions of an authentic leader is that the leader engages in honest activities, which include factual and timely communication (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Honesty inspires leaders to have morals which guide how information is processed, decisions are made, and how a leader interacts with others. The capacity to interact with honesty promotes confidence between leader and follower, hope and a positive outlook. "Importantly, authentic leadership is not merely an activity performed by leaders. Rather, authentic leadership requires authentic followership, meaning followers recognize, embrace, and emulate the leader's authentic behaviours" (Peck & Hogue, 2018, p. 128). Findings suggested that employees require honest leadership from CEOs. And as outlined, authentic leadership is crucial to shaping employee perceptions of leaders (Iszatt-White & Kempster, 2019; Peck & Hogue, 2018).

6.6.2.9 Incentives

Asked what employees require during crisis to shape perceptions, one participant stated: "Well, the money. Think about it, everyone wants money." (16:47 p 7 in Participant 14). Positive orientation between firm success, leaders and employees is a logical idea in any organization (Rubin & Abramson, 2018). Incentives have been commonly used by leaders to harness the energy, drive and commitment from employees which promote company performance (Altarawneh et al., 2020; Schaedler et al., 2021). Transactional leaders therefore use incentives to drive performance. A transitional leader details the function that followers must do to be rewarded for the effort and through vigorous management, the leader will track the performance, guide and where required take corrective action to shape the outcome (Jansen et al., 2009). During crisis, employees feel discouraged, fearful, and anxious. The right type of incentive which suits the situation, which include monetary reward, could be used

by CEOs to drive certain behaviour, and positively influence employees and participants suggest that incentives do inspire positive change.

6.6.2.10 Listening

Another interesting need from employees in Eswatini are CEOs who listen during crisis. While there is admittance of the fluid and erratic nature of crisis, employees suggest that listening to the ideas of others strengthen the team's ability to work together to drive positive resolution. In the framework of leadership around four contexts, Snowden & Boon suggest that different views, healthy debates and ideas are crucial to encourage the free flow of information among clear guidelines which support and help employees feel listened (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Resistance from employees is most likely reduced by using influence to treat stakeholders fairly, by genuinely listening to apprehensions and being compassionate to pursuits and needs (Floris & Cuganesan, 2019). One participant, stating the need for a leader who listens states, *"I think it is possible to make people feel supported, and the key there is just to let everybody share their opinion ... make sure everyone feels they can use their voice and that their voice is heard. ... I've learned that people want to feel like they spoke, and you heard them. And you are considering their point of views."* (16:61 p 9 in Participant 13).

6.6.2.11 Framework

Literature stresses the crucial standing of a firm ability to plan and be ready to manage crisis and argues that a well-organized and effected plan, helps companies and leaders to manage crisis successfully (Leta & Chan, 2021). Planning is claimed to be one of the most crucial strategic leadership practises for firms and CEOs to best manage crisis (John-Eke & Eke, 2020; Karam, 2018; Schaedler et al., 2021). CEOs who craft, communicate and apply strategic approaches to manage crisis are better prepared to cope early (John-Eke & Eke, 2020) and to shape employee perceptions positively (Panimalar & Kannan, 2013). Eke et al. (2020) further details that, for firms to recover through crises with minimal loss, they need a strong strategic leaders' planning focus to crisis management and employees who are well trained in crisis management. Employees assert that during crises they need CEOs to have a plan and that such plan helps them understand crisis risks and expectations. Scholars who have studied crisis support employees expand claim that, best practise approaches during crisis include activating a firms emergency response plan and informing stakeholders on what is expected of them (Chandler, 2015; Leta & Chan, 2021; Tagarev & Ratchev, 2020).

Articulating employee requirements in what should be included in the framework, participants outlined imperatives such as (i) clarity on roles, direction on who is qualified to make decisions and communicate them, (iii) timelines within which specified actions must be done (iv) how communication will flow, including tools (v) how staff risk will be mitigated and, should there be a need to exit staff from the building in an emergency, how that process would unfold. Chandler (2015) confirms the findings and refers to a crisis management plan which should include protocols, procedures, and tools to assist with emplacement notifying and connecting all decision makers efficiently timeously and reliably.

6.7 Summary of discussions

The idea that impressions can be formed implicitly can be improperly assumed to suggest that these same impressions can also be shaped implicitly. The review of literature, coupled with findings from the interviews carried out, which showed that participants were far less willing to change impressions of CEOs during crisis than they were to make implicit first impressions of the same CEOs, suggest that influencing impressions, whilst achievable, is complex and more testing than can be expected. Additional to this, and based on findings from the interviews, much more tact and contribution, as well as a level of emotional intelligence is required from CEOs who wish to influence employees to change perceptions during crisis positively than is required prior to crisis. Participants findings in the context of CEO strategic leadership during the crises experienced in Eswatini, having also explored how CEOs can shape employee perceptions positively were consistent with varying literature, and included, care and empathy, communication, agility, positive attitude, honesty, incentives and listening. Findings from the semi structured interviews interestingly added 'vulnerability' to the more commonly studied leadership traits from which CEOs and claim that vulnerability in CEOs can positively shape employee perceptions during crisis, thus contributing to the study of knowledge.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The study purposed to reconnoitre perceptions formed by employees about CEOs' strategic leadership role during two events of crises in Eswatini, and to investigate how CEOs can use the strategic leadership role to shape employee perception positively during crises to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution. The context of the crises was the (i) COVID-19 pandemic and the (ii) political unrest, both which were experienced by Eswatini from 2020 in the case of COVID, leading into 2021, when the political unrest emerged and added to challenges from the pandemic.

The research was set out to uncover the objectives through one primary research question and two secondary questions which mainly focused on the strategic leadership role of CEOs during crises, perceptions formed by employees prior and during crisis, how and if prior perception influence perceptions formed during crisis, and how CEOs leadership can adapt during crisis to positively influence employee perceptions and effectively manage and resolve crisis. The central research questions for this research were as follows:

The primary research question:

What role do CEOs play in shaping the perceptions of employees during a crisis (Schaedler et al., 2021) and what tools, characteristics or behaviours could CEOs use to foster coherence with employees that would induce effective outcomes during crises (Wu et al., 2021)?

Secondary research questions were:

1. What perceptions do employees have on CEOs during crises and do prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis (Grutterink & Meister, 2022; Mazzei et al., 2019; Tskhay et al., 2014)?
2. How should CEO's leadership roles during crises adapt to shape positive employees' perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018) to the resolution of crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs & Laufer, 2018)?

The chapter draws conclusions from chapter 6. The conclusion is based on the research problem and is organised to first draw deductions from themes and construct under principal

findings in section 7.2, deductions which are summarised in section 7.3. These are then followed by the contribution to the study and recommendations to management, specifically CEOs. The chapter further outlines limitations to the study in section 7.5 and concludes by making suggestions on areas other scholars can explore for future research in section 7.6.

7.2 Conclusion: secondary research 1

Based on qualitative analysis of the strategic leadership role of the CEO during crisis, impressions formed by employees during crisis, and whether impressions formed during the crises vary or are reflective of prior impressions, conclusions can be made that CEOs apply varying styles in how they lead employees. Leadership traits and styles of leadership can have opposing impact to how employees perform, and to company performance (Detjen & Webber, 2017; McLarty et al., 2021). Depending on style used, employees can either support and drive positive performance or can be demoralized and reluctant to participate in strategic decisions or deliverables employee (Daniels et al., 2022; Detjen & Webber, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Johnson, 2021; Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2015; Straatmann et al., 2016).

Styles of leadership applied by CEOs varied from authentic, autocratic, coaching, democratic, situational, and visionary leadership. Prominent in the strategic leadership role of CEOs were traits which included (i) nurturing and driving a clear vision, (ii) delegation of powers to drive team collaboration and collective ownership (a concept of shared leadership) (iii) caring and understanding, which referred to CEOs who are accommodative, accessible, and willing to listen (iv) support and encouragement of new and innovative ideas and (v) exerting influence and inspiring employees to function as a unit with a shared agenda.

Positive traits such as support, delegated powers and clear vision from CEOs suggested positive result of employees engaged and motivated to steer a company to success (Kriger & Zhovtobryukh, 2016; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Taylor et al., 2014) while caring, inspiring and collaborative traits, which were mostly evident in democratic and coach leaders, are claimed as enablers of employee loyalty, teamwork and confidence (Eden, 2021; O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020), all which support CEOs to execute their strategic intention, and to effectively carry out stakeholder management (Samimi et al., 2020). The role of a strategic CEO can be applied to influence and motivate employees and for a company to gain competitive advantage, particularly where CEOs lead with clarity of direction, apply good quality values, empower, and are visionaries who communicate clear ideas about company future (Georgakakis et al., 2019; Kotamena et al., 2020; Lovelace et al., 2019; Teece et al., 2016; You et al., 2020).

On the other hand, obstructive behaviours to strategic leadership which included CEO lack of confidence, micromanagement of employees, lack of conflict management capabilities, mostly common in the autocratic individualistic and rigid style of leadership from CEOs who are unwilling to listen, and who apply a 'top down' approach to leadership results in demotivated and uninspired employees who lose interest in leaders and/or business, thus ultimately affecting business performance (Fors Brandebo, 2020; Harms et al., 2018; König et al., 2021; Sarkar & Osiyevskyy, 2018).

CEOs adjust leadership styles as required to suit changing demands of the operational environment (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020; Hannah et al., 2009). Leadership adjustments are influenced by factors such as the business environment, support, or lack of support from employees, and own interpretations of the expectations and the dictates of the strategic leadership role (de Lange et al., 2018; Detjen & Webber, 2017; Krause & Miller, 2020; Snowden & Boone, 2007). The situatedness of the role of a strategic leader demands openness to learn and respond to new things, agility, and flexibility to adapt as required, and a level of foresight and confidence in own ability to be effective as a leader (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001). Most CEOs in Eswatini adapt styles through collaborative democratic traits, which positively impact employees.

While first impressions are commonly implicit between leader and follower, changes in impressions are incremental, and occur on influences which force a change in how one interprets and views the other (Cone et al., 2017; Ferguson et al., 2019). Leadership traits such as openness and approachability of a CEO, and care to listen and guide for example had influence in how employees perceived CEOs. Other influencers to employee perceptions of CEO included employee biases, what employees had heard from others about CEOs, knowledge of, and the nature of the relationship which employees shared with CEOs (Brannon & Gawronski, 2017; Cone et al., 2017; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Mende-Siedlecki, 2018).

How CEOs behave, how they lead, what they believe, and how they apply what they believe, expectations and interpretations of the strategic leadership role, of employees, themselves (Aru et al., 2018; Georgakakis et al., 2019; Samimi et al., 2020), as well as other inputs such as passage of time and the context (the business and overall environment) (Bundy et al., 2017; Cone et al., 2017; Luttrell et al., 2022; Russell et al., 2021), have influence on how employees perceive them. An environment such as the crisis which befell Eswatini therefore would have huge influence on CEOs and employees and the perceptions that were consequently formed.

The crises, which by its nature is disruptive, highly uncertain, and highly volatile, was impactful to business, leaders, society, and employees (Bundy et al., 2017; Schaedler et al., 2021). Classifies 'black swan' the crises were highly unlikely, risky with prospect of long-term impact and life altering impact on stakeholders, communities, businesses, leaders, and followers in all spheres (Grandori, 2020; Kanungo, 2020). While categorised differently, of common feature was mainly the potential impact to business, CEOs, and employees. Classified external organisational crises, the erratic, rare and unlikely nature, found companies in Eswatini, leaders and employees, ill prepared and ill equipped to know how to manage them. Emotions ran high as employees panicked, felt anxious, uncertain, and strained (König et al., 2020; Petriglieri, 2020), especially as front liners who had to continue working through the worst aspects of the crises. Demands were placed on CEOs to provide calm, and effective leadership and how CEOs responded dictated perceptions employees formed of them (Schaedler et al., 2021).

It can be argued that crises also have positive effects on business, and that surviving one crisis prepares and builds resilience in leaders, employees, and business. Lessons learned from prior crisis, effected in another assist with crisis management. Some businesses utilize crisis to improve efficiencies and seek innovative means to survive, to improve on business recovery and risk policies position, which position them well into the future (Donthu & Gustaffson, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2021). Leaders who also lead during one crisis are better prepared to manage another. Through learned survival leadership capabilities, improved relationships with employees as they show care, support and empathy toward employees, and agility and flexibility to adapt and change, they strengthen in capacity to lead effectively, and shape perceptions employees have on them.

Another influencer to employee perceptions of CEOs was communication. How a leader communicates if he communicates, influences the perceptions formed and held about them (Fusch et al., 2018; Mazzei et al., 2019). A tool of communication which was interestingly prominent in the study was the role of social media in a crisis. Employee's perspectives were that social media plays a critical role in a crisis, both as an enabler of immediate and far-reaching communication, and as a platform to avert risk by directing the narrative of the information shared (Eriksson, 2018; Saroj & Pal, 2020; Tsoy et al., 2021). CEOs in Eswatini however, struggled to adopt social media as a credible tool of communication during the crises. They failed to support its role and lacked understanding and appreciation of how employees are influenced by social media. Largely ignoring reports on social media which had potential to negatively impact businesses and staff, CEOs left employees to make own deductions about the information that was readily available and, in some instances,

inaccurate. The practise of ignoring social media was negatively viewed by employees who argue that the risks of social media outweigh the benefits (Tsoy et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2019). Ignoring social media as a credible source of information during crises is viewed as a detractor to shaping employee perceptions, and to effective and collaborative crisis management (Eriksson, 2018; Tsoy et al., 2021).

Leaders are encouraged to gain understanding of social media tools and adopt them as enablers to positive impressions which lead to effective crisis resolution. Additional to social media was the role of technology and its ability to automate and support the ease of doing business. Findings indicated that technology improved productivity and reduced employee fatigue and was claimed highly effective to crisis resolve (Baert et al., 2022).

7.3 Conclusion: secondary research 2

Secondary question 2 aimed to determine how CEOs can adapt leadership to influence employee perceptions positively during crisis. Based on qualitative analysis of crisis leadership and employee perceptions of CEO crisis leadership, it can be concluded that CEOs adapt style of leadership to respond to situational and consequent employee needs.

The results indicate that the impact of crisis results in stakeholders, both external and internal, setting very high expectations on CEOs, to not just manage the existing crisis, but to prepare future robust and clear responses that will lessen future risks and reduce the probability of future crisis (Leta & Chan, 2021). These expectations place huge demand on CEOs to (i) be agile and active in leadership, (ii) anticipate the challenges that emanate from crisis, and to (iii) respond with firm resolute actions that manage and resolve crisis (Bundy et al., 2017; Kanungo, 2020; Kotamena et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2017). One such way for CEOs to respond to the expected demands placed on them is through effective leadership of employees during crisis.

CEOs are tested beyond the norm during crisis. Challenges include ability to comprehend the operational landscape, stretch targets on their strategic and leadership capabilities, agility and flexibility, the effectiveness of firm risk and disaster management policies, and equally, their ability to balance stakeholders (external and internal) needs (Wu et al., 2021).

Employees are the greatest resource for business and can either support or disrupt processes that drive firm performance during crisis (Alknawy, 2019). Their capacity to remain committed and supportive of the strategic deliverables of the company is crucial to company performance

(Emmett et al., 2020, 2021) . CEOs who drive effective employee leadership during crisis are not just skilled at reducing impact, they identify and exploit opportunities to transform employees (Jansen et al., 2009; Peck & Hogue, 2018; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

Employees form perceptions about CEOs during crisis (Baert et al., 2022; Oc, 2018; Van Beurden et al., 2021). Perceptions formed can complicate and bring tumultuous and complex challenges and demands on the strategic role of CEOs during crises (Garretsen et al., 2022). Demands placed, and perceptions formed about CEOs require them to adjust leadership to include inventive and more responsive and flexible traits to style of leadership (Garretsen et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). The results indicated that CEOs expanded on styles of leadership during crisis when compared to those actively deployed prior to the crises. Recognizing that context demands certain leadership styles which can influence employee behaviours (Oc, 2018; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Ronay et al., 2019), CEOs in Eswatini primarily led with care and empathy, and authenticity through active application of collaborative and consultative practises which fostered great teamwork and connectedness among employees.

Leadership styles evident and perceived positively by employees during crisis, and claimed to have supported CEOs effectiveness, which were not prominently applied prior to the crises, included care and emotional connectedness (empathic leadership), gifts and incentives (transactional leadership), inspiring and motivational (transformational leadership), policy guided (bureaucratic leadership) and most interestingly to the researcher and novel to literature, admittance to not having the answers (vulnerable leadership).

Through transformational leadership, which is claimed to be the most effective style of leadership during crisis, CEOs inspired and motivated employees (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020; Peck & Hogue, 2018). Caring leadership was applied by CEOs who were able to sense how employees were feeling, and respond with empathy, active listening, frequent communication, patience, understanding, humility, supportive feedback, and updates which kept employees abreast with progress through the crisis (Steinbinder & Sisneros, 2020). Transactional leadership was used as an appreciative tool to solicit buy in to suggested crisis management activities, and in some cases as a tool of trade to enable employees to be motivated as they worked from home. While transactional leadership is identified as an enabler to effective crisis management, as well as a tool to harness CEO support during crisis, there is caution that CEOs need to ensure that where they apply transactional leadership, they fully understand employee values and needs and the impact that incentives may have, suggesting that not all incentives suit effective crisis resolution (Jansen et al., 2009; Tyssen et al., 2014; Vera & Crossan, 2004). The results provide insight that bureaucratic leadership is important to

establish order and clarity during crisis (Peck & Hogue, 2018) but cautions that there needs to be a structured and flexible leadership alongside, as bureaucratic leadership is rigid and can discourage employees from innovations which may resolve the crises (McLarty et al., 2021; Saqib Khan et al., 2015). The combination of bureaucratic and transformational leadership therefore is the best type of leadership, as the results also indicate that both are required to shape employee perceptions.

It can also be concluded from the results that vulnerable leadership supports, and fosters strengthened relationships between CEOs and employees. CEOs, in vulnerable state during crisis, engaged and sought ideas from employees. Their humility to accept and indicate what they did not know, compassion and authenticity, calmed and influenced employees positively (Al & Bligh, 2017). While the interpretation of vulnerability to be authenticity by many scholars may limit the generalizability of the results and the claim made by the researcher that vulnerable leadership is unique and a novel positive attribute to effective crisis leadership styles, the emphasis and definition of vulnerability provides new insights into the difference between authentic leadership and vulnerable leadership (Al & Bligh, 2017; Kiersch & Peters, 2017). An authentic leader acts with integrity and openness, strength of character and credibility (Dehghanan et al., 2021) and an ability to admit mistakes, while a vulnerable leader displays all the qualities of authentic leaders and extend authenticity by also admitting to being 'weak and inadequate' and being 'in need of help' and open to receiving that help, not just from equals, but also from followers (Al & Bligh, 2017).

Autocratic leadership, a style which was frowned upon prior to crisis gained major impetus as one of the favoured and more effective styles to influence employees positively during crisis. Of primary benefit is the ability of an authoritarian leader to make quick and clear decisions which are also implemented with urgency to influence perceptions of employees to believing that this type of leader has the capabilities required to successfully steer them through crises (Harms et al., 2018; Kakkar & Sivanathan, 2017). Resultant impact on employees of the noted positive traits of leadership during the crises includes evidence of shifts in perceptions to a state of calm, enhanced trust and emotional support, increased confidence, motivation, and shared purpose; all which drive effective crisis management and resolve.

Lack of communication, indecisions, lack of empathy and care, lack of creativity and blame by CEOs on the other hand, negatively influence employee during crisis (Daniels et al., 2022; Eriksson, 2018; Fusch et al., 2018; Gilbert, 2021). CEOs who get emotional and panic too much during crises tend to foster mistrust among employees, which together with the

employee low morale, fear and panic, hinder the company's ability to navigate its way out of crisis and growth (Beilstein et al., 2021; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021).

7.4 Summary of conclusion: primary research question

The primary research question sought to determine the role CEOs play in shaping perceptions of employees, and to understand the tools, characteristics, or behaviours which CEOs could use to foster coherence and induce effective outcomes during crises. Employees have varied perceptions of CEOs during the crises. Perceptions of CEOs by employees are formed implicitly and then incrementally through observed behavioural traits in leaders (Cone et al., 2017; Ferguson et al., 2019; Ronay et al., 2019). Influenced by many factors, perceptions range from positive good quality leadership to negative.

The strategic leadership role of CEOs is fluid and dynamic and can be applied with agility and flexibility to shift and adapt to changing environment (Kanungo, 2020; Oreg & Berson, 2019; Tamunomiebi & Akpan, 2021). With each change, and in some cases without the influence of change, perceptions are formed, adjusted, and updated. Prior relationships and biases held, quality of relationships between CEOs and employees have influence of how a leader is perceived. Context such as crisis also has huge influence on perceptions, and to a large degree on the expectation set by employees on CEO crisis leadership (Baert et al., 2022; Blomqvist et al., 2021; Gillespie et al., 2014; Hannah et al., 2009; Oc, 2018).

This research clearly illustrates that CEOs play a critical role in shaping employee perceptions during crises, and that expected behaviours, leadership traits and what is known about CEOs (prior experience and biases), the environment, and the style of leadership applied, shapes how employees perceive and act toward CEOs during a crisis (Oc, 2018). CEOs who apply leadership traits perceived positively by employees during crisis, who inspire employees to view leadership and the company as structures 'with a heart', drive effective crisis resolution.

The research clearly outlines leadership traits and behaviours which CEOs can use to foster coherence and drive effective outcomes of crisis to include CEOs who practise the following (1) care and empathy, (2) communication, (3) decisiveness, (4) agility, (5) 'positive' attitude (6) calm, (7) vulnerability, (8) honesty (9) incentives, (10) listening, and (11) a clear framework.

Other factors concluded to have potential to positively influence employee perceptions of CEOs during crisis include (i) 'routine' CEOs who maintain routinely working schedules for employees, (ii) 'job assurance' the message that jobs are secured, (iii) 'time' taking time to get

to know a CEO, (iv) 'teams' leveraging of teams to drive messages through the whole firm and (v) trust 'a CEO who displays a level of trust and confidence' in his employees.

7.4 Research contribution

7.4.1 Theoretical contribution

Our research provides a comprehensive review of the strategic leadership role of CEOs and how CEOs can shape employee perceptions positively in the context of crisis. Several contributions have been made. First by including and exploring employee sentiment and perceptions during crisis, this research bridges the gap identified to exist, which primarily lacked focus on the social evaluations of employees and instead prioritized external shareholders during crisis, at the detriment of business, as employees are a crucial stakeholder during crisis.

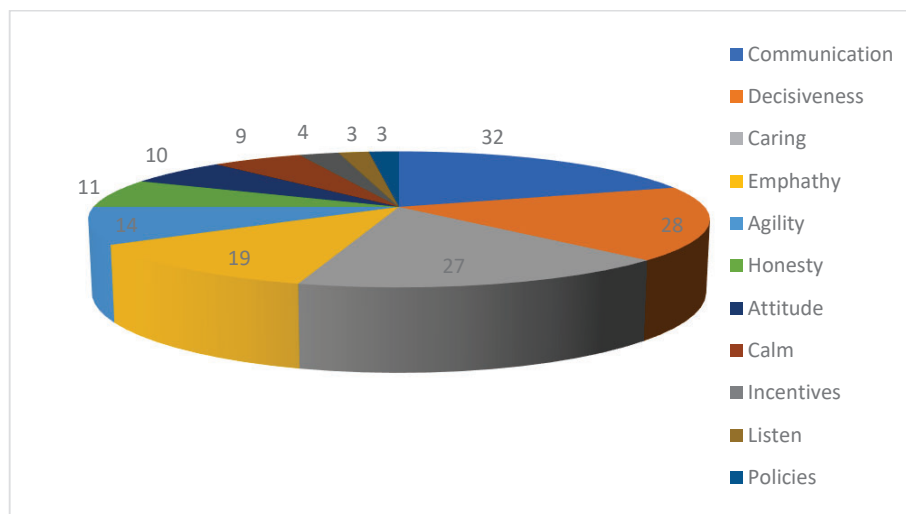


Figure 7.1: Frequency framework to foster positive CEO employee perceptions for effective crisis resolution

The researcher claims that employee lived experiences and the findings established from the study contribute to the subject of strategic leadership during crisis. Exploring accounts of employees, fosters connectedness and contributes to the study of shared leadership. Employees who feel 'cared for' and 'empowered' support crisis resolution.

Findings which include different ideas such as the positives which stem from 'vulnerable CEOs' and maintaining 'routine' for employees, expand knowledge and present opportunities for other scholars to conduct studies which explore these claims more pronouncedly. By

recommending that CEOs adopt the attributes outlined in Figure 7.1 during crisis, the researcher further provides a clear and concise path to shift employee perceptions during crisis. CEOs can apply suggested practises to strengthen relationships with employees.

7.4.2 Practitioner recommendations

By identifying shifts in styles of leadership required from CEOs during crisis, and clearly articulating each of these and the resultant impact, CEOs are presumably better enlightened to understand and respond appropriately to the needs of employees during crisis, responses which support effective crisis resolution. The prioritizing of employee expectations from CEOs during crisis, and the clear articulation of these, path a framework which CEOs can use in any future crisis to solicit employee support.

CEOs further need to create enabling environments by applying agile and flexible processes to accommodate the needs of employees, in particular the younger generation who depend on platforms such as social media for information. CEOs should understand the generational influences in employees and the executive leadership and use it as background to learn and leverage off positives which stem from the 'new idea'. Adaptation to use newer technologies considered social and to include them as tools of information, will serve CEOs to be better positioned to lead effectively. CEOs should also be flexible to adjust leadership style as required by the demands of the environment, understand, and anticipate that leadership is by nature fluid, and that to manage varying employees effectively, no one style suits all the time.

7.5 Limitations of the research

Methodology limitations were highlighted in chapter 4 of this research. Other research limitations related to this study should be considered when reviewing the findings of the research and these, as determined by the researcher include that:

- Based on the purposive sampling method used, which is relatively small and targeted at line manager of essential services, the results cannot be claimed to be representative of the population.
- The specific sample to line manager may have also resulted in bias and specific position grouping error as line managers may view their experience from the perspective of their leader role, which creates observation prejudices in the formation and shifting of perceptions.

- Due to time and resources limitations, CEOs were not included in the study when the researcher would have wanted to get their own perspective of the experience and compare it to that of employees.
- A substantial amount of time had passed since participants' lived experience of the crises, and that may have compromised account of the experiences, especially given that this study was to explore "perceptions" and perceptions, as established shift over time, sometimes by mere passage of time.

7.6 Suggestions for future research

The purpose of the study was to explore CEO strategic leadership during crisis: shaping employee perceptions. Based on conclusions which suggest that the sample of line managers used did not expect anything from CEOs during crisis, and the assertion that line managers do not focus on their own needs, but rather feel pressure to always be strong and respond as leaders instead of followers during crises, future scholars could consider that:

- While the study did focus on social evaluation of employees during crisis, it was limited to line manager employees. A diverse and more inclusive study of employees at all levels of employment is suggested.
- This study focused on a few sectors within essential services, a broader sector of essential service businesses is recommended. Other scholars could explore all business as impact was not limited to essential businesses.
- A more detailed study on differences between the crises and consequent perceptions and impression management of employees through each of the crises.
- Leader emotions were not considered. Future study should consider what CEOs feel, experience, and perceive as they go through crisis, and how their own perceptions of the crisis and followers, influence how they lead during crisis.

7.7 Conclusion

The study aimed to explore perceptions formed by employees about CEOs' strategic leadership role during two events of crises in Eswatini, and to investigate how CEOs can use the strategic leadership role to shape employee perception positively during crises, to foster

collaboration for effective crises resolution. The study has contributed in varying degrees to the overall understanding of strategic leadership, crisis, crisis leadership, perceptions, and impression management, primarily during crisis. This understanding will assist leaders to manage employees during any future crisis, with knowledge acquired through the study on what employees expect from CEOs during crisis.

Therefore, the study has succeeded in establishing perceptions employees form of CEOs and how perceptions can be shaped to positively influence effective crisis management and crisis resolve. The study further succeeded in identifying leadership traits in order of priority during crises and provided recommendations on how CEOs can lead employees during crisis.

The researcher concludes that this research adequately addresses the primary and secondary research questions, and that it sufficiently adds to current knowledge and therefore can be used as a reference for future studies.

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Appendix 1: Consistency matrix

TITLE: CEO strategic role during organizational crisis: Shaping employee perceptions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	DATA ANALYSIS
<p>Primary Question:</p> <p>How can CEOs use their strategic leadership roles to shape employees' perceptions during crises to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution?</p>	<p>Samimi et al. (2020) Schaedler et al. (2021) Wu et al. (2021)</p>	<p>Question 1 and 4</p>	
<p>Secondary question 1:</p> <p>What perceptions did employees have on their CEOs during crises? Do prior perceptions influence perceptions during a crisis?</p>	<p>Tskhay et al. (2014) Mazzei et al. (2019) Grutterink & Meister, (2022)</p>	<p>Question 2 and 4</p>	
<p>Secondary question 2:</p> <p>What is the strategic leadership role of a CEO during crises? How should the role adapt to shape and influence positive employees' perceptions (Detjen & Webber, 2017; Hu et al., 2014; Peck & Hogue,</p>	<p>Peck & Hogue, (2018) Johnson, (2021) Detjen & Webber, (2017) Hu et al. (2014) Schoemaker et al. (2018)</p>	<p>Literature review Question 3 and 4</p>	

2018; Schoemaker et al., 2018)?			
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Appendix 2: Interview guide

Dear Participant,

I am conducting research on ***CEO's strategic leadership role during crises: Shaping employee perceptions***. To that end, you are requested to participate in this interview which should take no more than an hour.

The interview will help the researcher to explore how employees perceived their CEO strategic leadership before and during the crises, and how CEO's can use their strategic leadership role to shape employee perception during crises to foster collaboration for effective crises resolution? The context of the crises is the (i) COVID-19 pandemic and (ii) follow-on riots experienced in 2021 Eswatini. Your lived experience of both crises will anchor the study.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. Your participation is anonymous and only aggregated data will be reported.

Preliminary Data:

Sector of your company:

Number of employees reporting to you:

Number of years in current firm:

CEO strategic leadership role

I would like to ask that you think about the relationship you have with your CEO as a leader

- How would you describe the relationship and quality of your engagement?
- What do you value most about the CEO as a leader, and what do you find to be the most challenging aspect of their leadership style?
- What impression did you have of your CEO the first time you met?
- How has your perception of the CEO changed over time? What influenced the change?

Crisis

Now I would like for you to think about the pandemic, and the riots and looting in June 2021

- How would you categorise the pandemic and the riots?
- How did they impact business operations from an internal perspective (employees)?

How the CEO lead during crises

Please consider your CEO leadership style during the pandemic and the riots that ensued

1. How did your CEO lead during the crises?
2. Do you feel the CEO took charge/ownership of their leadership role? How, if so?
3. What skill (approach/tools) did the CEO use to lead during the crises?
4. Please tell me about an experience that showed support and understanding to you, or other employees if any, during the crises. What did the CEO do or say?
5. How did your CEO help maintain calm if they did? How did you and other employees respond to the CEO's initiative(s)?

Employee perception of the CEO's leadership during crises

Now, please think about your perception of the CEO leadership role during crises

1. How did you feel during the crises? How could these feelings have been supported/shaped for the positive?
2. What perception did you form of the CEO's leadership during crisis? What informed this perception?
3. Was your perception of the CEO different during the crisis to what it was before, or did it remain the same? If it was different, what influenced the change?
4. Do you have a preferred leadership style during a crisis? If so, which and why?
5. Please list, in order of importance, everything you believe a CEO can do or say to shape/influence your perception and keep you motivated during a crisis.

Thank you for your time!

Appendix 3: Codes created after merging first order codes

CODES		
accommodative	emotions	perception shift
agile and flexible	employee impact (+ve)	personal disposition leader
assurances	employee impact (-ve)	policy guided
authentic	employees are a priority	post crisis reflections
autocratic	empowering	process driven
biases	execution challenges	professional approach
black swan	expectations ~ CEO	professional management (incl conflict)
business impact	expectations varied by age	proper governance
business is a priority	financial incentives	reactive
close relations	firm culture influence	relational shift
caring CEO	generational gap	risk management
CEO blamed employees	gives direction	robust data
CEO on the platform	good communicator	sets clear deliverables
CEO support	great attitude	shared experiences
CEO values	grounded approach	shareholder value
change leadership	grounded approach	show us compassion
cl empathy	happy employees	sl collective accountability
cl with incentives	hear say	social media narrative
clarity of direction	humanity	stakeholder influence
coaching	inclusive leadership	stakeholder management
cohesion and clarity	influencing and motivating	strategic intent
collaborative style	key internal stakeholder	strong networks
communicates a clear vision	leader support system	style influence
confidence	leadership is about foresight	sustainability
consistency	managing conflict	teams and clans new ce
counselling opportunities	map consultation with agility	technical bias
COVID employee support	micromangement	the perceivers bias
COVID learnings ~ Unrest	mirage	the softer side
crisis a distraction	mistrust and hesitation	tough decisions influence
crisis as an opportunity	motivational	tough decisions influence
crisis bring humility	no communication	transparent
crisis management - reactive	no creativity	trust and confidence foster creativity
crisis mismanagement	opportunistic	uncaring ceo
crisis strategy deliverables	opportunistic	uncertainty
culture of Ubuntu	organizational change	undecisive
digital focus	participative leader	unity
disconnectedness	past influence	visibility
disengaged ceo kills passion	perceiver's bias	visionary
		vulnerable

