

Qualitative approach: Managers responses to a crisis in South African construction industry

Student Number: 14456266

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Abstract

In today's evolving business environment, crises are becoming more common and severe. The importance of leadership in handling such difficulties is paramount. The study sought to investigate how leaders in the South African construction industry respond to crisis, mainly focusing on their decision-making methods, communication approaches and risk management techniques. This investigation is significant as leadership is essential in steering through crises and lessening their effects on companies.

The study used a qualitative approach with purposive sampling to select managers for interviews, and thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

By situating its findings within existing literature, the study aimed to enhance the theoretical understanding of crisis management and crisis leadership. It offers a framework that explains how leader characteristics and crisis context influence behaviour that drives outcomes. The study concludes that crisis leadership is a multidisciplinary approach to crisis management.

The findings provide actionable insights into effective crisis management strategies that can be adopted by construction firms. They improve the understanding of crisis management literature by providing empirical evidence on the specific leadership behaviours and strategies that contribute to effective crisis response. The study also suggests avenues for future research and practice.

Keywords: Crisis leadership, Crisis management, Thematic analysis

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 in 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.

Name & Surname

Signature

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Chapter 1: Problem Statement

1.1 Introduction

In tough times, crisis leadership becomes crucial for organisations, as leaders have a big role in guiding teams through challenges and ensuring survival (Collins et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). A leader might exhibit a specific behaviour in various ways or, to different extents (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). For example, in a natural disaster scenario the leader might swiftly evacuate the staff to keep them safe demonstrating a high level of decisiveness that may not be as evident, in less critical circumstances. Hence, context matters. This study explored how leaders respond to crises. The belief that certain leadership traits are transferable universally across types of crises is flawed. Understanding how leaders react to a crisis can be better grasped by examining the interplay of their traits with the surrounding situation (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020).

1.2 Background

Since the 1970s, organisational settings have witnessed a surge in crises, spreading uncertainty among managers regarding appropriate business actions (Wenzel et al., 2020). During periods of hardship, crisis leadership emerges as indispensable for organisations, with leaders bearing significant responsibility for driving teams toward survival (Collins et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). Leaders heightened responsibility forces the need to investigate how managers navigate crises effectively (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Previous reviews on crisis management have not provided sufficient insight into crisis leadership itself (Wu et al., 2021). Given the dynamic nature of crises, understanding the effectiveness of different leading approaches in crisis leadership is pivotal. At the same time, there is recognition that no single best-practice formula exists (Wilson & Newstead, 2022). Exploring diverse perspectives on this phenomenon is crucial for theoretical advancement. There is a call for further exploration of factors influencing managers' responses to crisis situations (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Suppose leaders of organisations are unable to identify and promptly address the major dangers associated with crises. In that case, these crises may rapidly escalate and put the survival of the organisation at risk, while also causing a lasting effect on stakeholders (Wu et al., 2021). Understanding factors influencing managers choices during a crisis is essential for developing strategies that facilitate effective crisis management. (Wu et al., 2021).

1.3 Research problem

Crisis leadership literature has been found to be inadequate in reporting how leaders respond to a crisis (Wu et al., 2021). Scholars have used a single crisis event as the basis for the research or report based on a snapshot of the crisis life cycle. Their findings seem to superficial to address context issues (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). Context is the internal and external dynamics that mold the decision managers make. Internal factors may relate to the structure and size of the organisation, the culture, the diversity and the power dynamics. External factors could be associated with regulation competitions, geopolitics, and affected stakeholders (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). Crisis leadership need to address context issues as they impact the decision-making of leaders.

The crisis has a lifecycle where there is a phase for preparation, a phase for implementation, and a phase for reflection (Wu et al., 2021). The crisis elements are time sensitive. They are not static; their severity or impact is largely related to time and context (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). The effectiveness of the crisis leadership approach is linked to crisis phases and is time and context dependent. Crisis leadership literature needs to classify in what context the suggested approach is practical as the current environment has an increase frequency of crises happening simultaneously (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). There is a need for crisis approaches to be updated or improved to be effective in today's environment (Gottfredson & Reina, 2020). Studying how leaders respond to crisis in different contexts assists to provide solutions this problem. Leaders have an essential role in managing the situation and guiding the rest of the team (Samimi et al., 2022; Schaedler et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). To effectively navigate a crisis and achieve positive outcomes, it is crucial to have capable leaders in place. Hence the urgency to address this problem.

1.4 Research purpose

Leaders must address challenges distinct from regular business issues during a crisis (Collins et al., 2023). While facing significant time constraints, risks, and uncertainty (Wu et al., 2021). Managers are unsure of their decision making due to crises' perceived gravity and urgency (Wu et al., 2021). The manner in which managers react is shaped by their observable characteristics, which can greatly affect how well an organisation performs (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The impact of their decisions warrants that approaches to crisis management be investigated to modify or add to existing approaches. By highlighting which approaches have the most impact during a crisis life cycle and pointing out factors that must be considered to adjust the approach. Wenzel et al. (2020) emphasised that grasping how managers skilfully

handle a crisis is crucial for understanding effective leadership behaviours that lead to positive organisational outcomes. This research aimed to explore how managers respond to an external crisis.

1.5 Research objectives

- I. Discover approaches leaders use to manage crises.
- II. Identify and analyse the behaviours of leaders that contribute to positive outcomes during a crisis.
- III. Uncover sources leaders use to maintain morale during a crisis.
- IV. Discover how the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered within a crisis are handled.

1.6 Research questions

The overarching question for this study is: How do managers respond to a crisis?

To uncover the dynamics of how managers effectively respond to a crisis the following sub-questions will be explored:

- I. What approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?
- II. Which specific behaviours of leaders significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis?
- III. How do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?
- IV. How were the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis handled?

1.7 Research scope

The scope of this research involved conducting interviews with managers in the construction industry, particularly from organisations that have been operational before 2017. The study concentrates on investigating responses employed to manage crises. The intent is to explore elements that affect these managers responses to the challenges brought about by crises. This choice is influenced by the recommendation of Wenzel et al. (2020).

1.8 Theoretic contribution

This study uses Upper Echelon theory to explain the relationship between leadership characteristics, and leadership behaviour. To get a better understanding of leadership behaviour, the study explored the responses of various members of the management team, not just the chief executive officer (Hambrick, 2007). Characteristics were assessed based on factors such as the age and background of the managers. The Upper Echelon theory emphasises that the unique characteristics of managers play an essential role in determining leaders' decisions and performance (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Leadership behaviour is important in influencing companies' outcomes. Scholars need to focus on the ways in which different characteristics interact and the specific contexts in which they operate to understand better the causal link between them (Neely et al., 2020).

The study's theoretical contribution is in revealing the mechanisms that support crisis management strategies by addressing identified gaps in the research field. It also deepened the understanding of the direct impact; characteristics of senior managers have on leadership actions during critical situations. Next the study provides practical strategies to improve the current crisis leadership literature. It further underscores emotional intelligence as a critical leadership quality during crises. Then it highlights the importance of context in understanding leadership responses to crises. The research adds depth to understanding how teamwork can lead to better decision-making.

By exploring the practical application of Upper Echelon theory, the study created a bridge between theory and practice. It highlighted the interpersonal skills required for effective crisis leadership. Which ultimately leads to positive organisational outcomes.

1.9 Practical relevance

In today's world, which is becoming more unpredictable, having the ability to anticipate risks is essential for business leaders to pave the way toward a safer tomorrow (World Economic Forum, 2024). Crises impose exceptional pressures on leaders across various sectors, presenting formidable challenges to executives due to their inherent unpredictability (McKinsey & Company, 2020). For example, the construction industry sector in South Africa was under pressure pre-COVID-19 and lost 163,000 jobs in three years as compared to during the lockdown period when it lost up to 277,000 jobs in three months (Veitch, 2022).

Many leaders encounter several pitfalls in their leadership approach during a crisis, including adopting a narrow perspective, becoming overly engrossed in management tasks, and losing sight of long-term objectives (McNulty & Marcus, 2020). Effective leadership is arguably the most critical factor in successfully weathering a significant crisis. Being a resilient leader amidst disruption hinges on readiness and preparation (PWC, n.d.). Prompt and wise action is essential to repair the current disruption. Then rethink how to deal with the present while keeping sight of the future (PWC, n.d.).

Effective crisis leadership is essential as it enables organisations to steer through difficult periods, mitigate harm, and recuperate efficiently (The Economic Times, 2023). To act appropriately leaders must adopt mental attitudes that prevent them from reacting excessively to past events rather than relying solely on predetermined response plans. Choose actions that enable them to focus on forward-thinking strategies (McKinsey & Company, 2020). The necessity for know-how and proficiency in crisis leadership arises from the impracticality of devising strategies and procedures for each conceivable crisis (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). Moreover, crises attract public attention, which results in a thorough examination of leaders' actions (Riggio & Newstead, 2023).

1.10 Research setting

The construction industry has been crucial in economic development since ancient times. Its' impact goes beyond just constructing structures; it plays an essential part in stimulating economic growth. The industry's contributions are significant and include the creation of jobs that benefit both skilled and unskilled workers in society (Kaur et al., 2023).

The construction industry in South Africa has seen negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As an external health crisis, it has caused a decline, in jobs and revenue earnings. However, this unprecedented situation has also opened doors for innovation as new technologies have surfaced to sustain productivity while minimising the transmission of the virus. The lessons learned during the pandemic can also improve project planning and drive economic recovery (Sesele, 2022). Exploring the relationship between leadership and crisis management in this context is significant because of the sector's impact on job and economic activity. Stats SA released data in June 2022 that showed the construction industry earned a total income of R436.7 billion in 2020. Even though big construction companies were responsible for almost half of the industry's revenue, small and medium enterprises created over three-quarters of the employment opportunities in the sector (Maluleke, 2022)

The construction industry was already facing challenges before the COVID-19 pandemic upsurge. However, the pandemic introduced a unique opportunity to identify companies that demonstrated resilience during these difficult times. Leaders from companies that managed to stay operational during the pandemic are ideal subjects for studying decision-making (Veitch, 2022).

1.11 Definition of key constructs

Crises are occurrences that leaders of organisations perceive as unforeseen, demanding immediate actions due to their impact; they are possibly disruptive as they often threaten viability firms (Collins et al., 2023; Wenzel et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). They can be categorised based on intent and whether the originating cause is external (Collins et al., 2023). For a crisis to be termed external its origins must be exogenous in nature.

Leaders/managers are individuals who hold positions such as CEOs, supervisors, members of the top management team, and board members (Wu et al., 2021). In this study, the terms "leaders" and "managers" are used interchangeably, despite subtle differences between leadership and management found in the literature.

Crisis management centres on the strategies used in resolving and learning from a crisis. It encompasses what actions are taken to handle a threat. (Schaedler et al., 2022)

Crisis leadership refers to the impact that leaders have on stakeholders throughout the crisis lifecycle. It centres on how the leader applies crisis management strategies. It is about how the leader behaves. (Ali et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2023).

1.11.1 Definition of subconstructs

Leader characteristics encompass personal qualities that influence how a leader manage crises.

Crisis context refers to the crisis attributes and the environment. Attributes encompasses specific characteristics that define a crisis, affecting how it is perceived. The environment is the internal and external elements that moderate how the crisis is managed (Schaedler et al., 2022).

1.12 Outline of the document

This document is structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and its relevance, outlining its aims and contributions. The following chapter reviews the extant literature to give the reader an explanation of the nuances of constructs around crisis leadership. Then Chapter 3 presents the research questions grounded in the recent scholarship discussed in Chapter 2. Next, Chapter 4 addresses the research methodology, explaining the rationale behind the selected study design. Chapter 4 details the data collection process and the typical stages involved in data analysis. Chapter 5 details the study's findings, organised according to each research question. These findings are derived by applying Chapter 4 methods.

Chapter 6 discusses key outcomes from the comparison of findings to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the document, summarising the research outcomes, providing recommendations, acknowledging limitations, and proposing potential avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Leadership cuts across all industries, making it a common thread that affects all businesses. This literature review shines the light on crisis leadership and related constructs relevant to understanding how managers respond to a crisis. Leadership is multifaced as it deals with the how question. Figure 1 below illustrate the literature review road map. This review focuses on what and how strategies for managing a crisis. The Upper Echelons theory serves as the theoretical lens through which the phenomenon is studied.

Chapter 2: Literature Review Road Map	Main Section Headings	Subsection 1 Headings	Subsection 2 Headings	Subsection 3 Headings	Subsection 4 Headings	Subsection 5 Headings
	2.1 Introduction					
	2.2 Theorathical anchor: Upper Echelon theory	2.2.1 Analysis and conclusion on Upper Echelon Theory				
	2.3 Crisis	2.3.1 Crisis Type	2.3.2 Crisis Stage	2.3.3 Crisis severity	2.3.4 Crisis as an opportunity	2.3.5 Analysis and conclusion on crisis construct
	2.4 Leadership	2.4.1 Leadership characteristics	2.4.2 Analysis and conclusion on leadership			
	2.5 Crisis management	2.5.1 Risk assessment	2.5.2 Crisis decision making	2.5.3 Crisis communication	2.5.4 Lessons Learned	2.5.5 Analysis and conclusion on crisis management
	2.6 Effectiveness of crisis management strategies	2.6.1 Analysis and conclusion on effectiveness of crisis management strategies				
	2.7 Crisis context	2.7.1 Analysis and conclusion on crisis context				
	2.8 Crisis leadership	2.8.1 Clear communication	2.8.2 Self regulation	2.8.3 Respect and trust	2.8.4 Working with others	2.8.5 Analysis and conclusion on crisis leadership
	2.9 Organisational crisis related outcomes	2.9.1 Analysis and conclusion on organisation related outcomes				
2.10 Conclusions						
2.11 Conceptual Framework						

Figure 1: Literature Review Road Map

Source: Authour's own

The researcher examined and reported regarding the theoretical lacunae under the Upper Echelons theory. Then, the researcher defines a crisis, how it can be categorised into different phases and highlight its impact on organisations. The essential characteristics of successful leadership are highlighted. Next, the researcher spotlights various common approaches used

in crisis management. Then, the researcher discusses how leaders use strategies to manage crises. Where risk assessment, decision-making, using lessons learned and communication is explained. Furthermore, how the leaders must behave and the moderating effect of context is discussed before the conclusions are made. This literature review highlights the theory that will assist in understanding the research objectives.

2.2 Theoretical anchor: Upper Echelon theory (UET)

The Upper Echelon theory position is senior managers' decisions are greatly influenced by their characteristics and experiences. These characteristics affect their perception and reactions to the situations they encounter (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The Upper Echelon theory is especially relevant to complex scenarios with numerous conflicting objectives, excess choices, and varying degrees of aspirations where decision-makers may struggle to grasp all the factors at play (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). When the manager's discretion in the organisation is limited, their characteristics have a minor impact. The discretion of managers and the demands of the job serve as moderating factors in the causal link between characteristics and decisions. Managers with high job demands often turn to their experiences to guide their decision-making processes (Hambrick 2007).

Other elements that may impact the accuracy of predictions using managers' characteristics mentioned in Hambrick's (2007) update on Upper Echelons theory are endogeneity and incorrect causality attribution. For example, the board mandate might be the reason managers act a certain way, and the compensation plan does influence how managers respond when faced with a complex situation.

What scholars need to also pay particular attention to when predicting management decisions based on characteristics of top management team members is how they relate, the impact of power distribution and behavioural integration (Hambrick, 2007). Additionally, context must be accounted for. Most of the literature studied executives in the United States, where managers have more discretion and diverse backgrounds (Hambrick, 2007). Recently there has been an increase in studies based in Ghana and India and further context variation is called for (White & Borgholthaus, 2022).

There is a need to set guidelines, for Upper Echelon theory research about theory and methods to better respond to critiques (Neely et al., 2020). It's important to address relational elements theoretically and systematically assess different factors. Methodologically, attention should be paid to the congruence of constructs and measures, and increased consideration of endogeneity issues (Neely et al., 2020).

Cognition, relationships, and context are central to these critiques and require careful attention for future impacts. This includes broadening the influence of Upper Echelon theory beyond business domains, addressing the proximity of relationships, and fostering greater confidence and impact for business leaders through rigorous research practices (Neely et al., 2020).

Measuring cognition is quite challenging (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Neely et al., 2020; White & Borgholthaus, 2022). Cho and Hambrick (2006) found that the connection between managers' traits and strategic decisions is facilitated by managerial attention, suggesting managers vary in their awareness, which influences their actions. Therefore, organisational decisions may reflect the psychological processes of leaders. Separating cognitive and relational aspects improves the accuracy and clarity of the research process (Hesselbarth et al., 2023). Even though both assist in the understanding of decision making during a crisis (Wu et al., 2021). Scholars must shift the focus from judging if empirical findings based on the Upper Echelon theory remain the same in all situations to where and how do contextual factors such as country-specific environments, organisational policies and procedures, managers' backgrounds, culture, international experience, cross-cultural immersion, gender, economic standing, decision-making discretion etc. moderate the causal link (Neely et al., 2020).

The organisation's decision is at a firm level, and the management decision is at an individual level concerning the individual's role and responsibility (Wenzel et al., 2020). Managers are guided by their intuition and values when dealing with an event of extreme threat to the organisation's survival (Schaedler et al., 2022). When managers are exposed to a perceived or real threat, the unconscious human decisions of freeze, fright, fight, or flight play out (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). Their actions significantly impact their ability to anticipate, decide, interpret, and restore operations throughout the crisis phases (König et al., 2020). Freeze is the period when the threat is being assessed and recognised. Fright is a decision taken to limit or stop some activities. The fight is to continue with the business and confront the threat head-on. Flight decides to remove the subject from the threat (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020).

The four prevalent ways an organisation responds to a crisis are retrenchment (cost reduction efforts), persevering (maintaining current operation by using firm reserves), innovation (modifying current operation by adding or deleting services), and exit (closing the operations) (Wenzel et al., 2020). A parallel comparison exists between human and organisational choices in a crisis (persevering/fight, exit/flight, retrenchment/fright, innovation/freeze). Managers often rely on innate characteristics to simplify the complexities of crisis management even though the organisation's choices set the direction (Wenzel et al., 2020).

While most research has emphasised the negative aspects of intuition, it can be beneficial, especially when combined with experience and matched to the appropriate context (Hodgkinson et al., 2023). The domain of uncertainty and sudden changes within which leaders operate is likely to remain the same. Therefore, the relevance of the Upper Echelon theory perspective will continue to be valid (Neely et al., 2020) and to greatly impact the world (White & Borgholthaus, 2022).

In a nutshell, the Upper Echelon theory implies that the choices made by top-level managers are significantly shaped by their characteristics and past encounters in their careers. Factors such as job requirements, past experiences, board guidelines and commands, managerial attention and reward structures all impact decision-making. Establishing a standardised criteria for assessing constructs and addressing contextual elements, like cultural backgrounds and organisational policies is important to predict effective responses.

2.2.1 Analysis and conclusion on Upper Echelon Theory

The Upper Echelon theory introduced by Hambrick and Mason (1984), provides a robust framework for understanding how senior managers' characteristics influence their decision-making processes. Their suggestions underline the significance of the personal attributes and experiences of leaders, particularly in high-stakes environments where decisions are complex and multifaceted. Recognizing the importance of considering factors, like contextual variables, cultural differences and organizational policies is key when applying Upper Echelon theory.

Cho and Hambrick (2006) show that the connection between managers' traits and strategic decisions is mediated by managerial attention, which suggests that varied awareness levels among leaders can significantly alter organizational responses. This cognitive lens is crucial, especially in contexts of crisis management, where managerial intuition and instinct play pivotal roles (Schaedler et al., 2022). The interplay of human instincts—freeze, fright, fight, or flight—during crisis scenarios further complicates decision-making processes (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020).

Although the Upper Echelon theory provides perspectives on how managerial traits affect decision making processes; however, researchers should embrace a holistic approach that considers cognitive functions, environmental factors and interpersonal interactions to enrich the theory's relevance and applicability across various organizational landscapes.

2.3 Crisis

Crises are characterised by their infrequency, importance, and effects on stakeholders (Wu et al., 2021). Management and leadership perceive these events as unforeseen, enormously significant, and possibly disruptive (Collins et al., 2023; Wenzel et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2021). Crises threaten businesses' survival (Wenzel et al., 2020), generating elevated levels of attention and concern (Wilson & Newstead, 2022). They are unexpected, disruptive, and require immediate response (Wu et al., 2021).

2.3.1 Crisis Type

Crisis can be classified in a multitude of ways. However, all categorisations can be differentiated according to origin and how leaders actions are perceived. Classifying whether the nature of a crisis is external or internal and deliberate or non-deliberate (Collins et al., 2023). For example (1) Externally originated and non-deliberate crises arise from outside the organization and are not caused by the leadership themselves. In these situations, leaders are seen as guardians protecting the organization (2) External deliberate crises are intentionally caused by external factors. In these situations, leaders are viewed as exemplars to address the situation (3) Internal and non-deliberate crises happen within the organization and are not a result of deliberate actions by the leadership. In these scenarios leaders act as spokespeople communicating with stakeholders to explain the crisis and the organization's response (4) Internal deliberate crises are caused by actions taken within the organization, often by the leadership. Leaders are often seen as transgressors in these situations (Collins et al., 2023). It is these differences that makes it difficult to offer one size fit all solution (Collins et al., 2023).

2.3.2 Crisis Stage

Current literature views a crisis as once off occurrence and a process that can be separated into "pre-crisis prevention, crisis management, and post-crisis management"(Wu et al., 2021, p. 2). The crisis prevention stage involves preparation and planning before a crisis occurs. During this stage of the process evaluating risks and preparing for crises, through devising communication plans and training sessions for leaders and employees is performed (Collins et al., 2023). When the end date of the crisis cannot be predicated scenario planning is performed during this stage (Opatska et al., 2024). The crisis management phase deals with the period when the crisis occurs and its immediate impact (Klößner et al., 2023). Where it is important for leaders promptly to handle the situation and engage with those involved. The focus is on immediate damage control (Collins et al., 2023). Post-crisis management stage

involves recovery and learning (Opatska et al., 2024). Organizations assess the impact of the crisis, evaluate their response, and identify lessons learned to improve future crisis management (Collins et al., 2023). Distinct crisis stages require different types of leadership responses as crises are not static events.

2.3.3 Crisis severity

Crisis severity refers to the level of impact and urgency associated with a crisis event (Collins et al., 2023). The impact of a crisis is situational. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism industry was affected by decreased demand, while the technology industry profited from growing demand (Klößner et al., 2023). Crisis impact changes from the initial incidence throughout its management (Wu et al., 2021).

The severity of the crisis is largely moderated by firm's context, stakeholder impact, duration and public perceptions. High-severity crises may exhaust resources, damage reputation, or lead to significant financial losses, while lower-severity crises might be more manageable and less damaging (Collins et al., 2023).

2.3.4 Crisis as an opportunity

Crises reveal previously unnoticed issues, actions, as well as the vulnerabilities in systems and infrastructures (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). These issues threaten business survival. However, they also present opportunities to accelerate organisational behaviour changes (Seidl & Whittington, 2021). In times of crisis, when the usual ways of doing things are disrupted. This opens up chances for new organisational patterns, fostering liberation from predetermined constraints (Seidl & Whittington, 2021). During the initial COVID-19 crisis, tools like Zoom Video, Microsoft Teams, and Shopify played pivotal roles in swiftly shifting educational institutions and offline businesses to the online format.

Sometimes, crises act as catalysts for the innovation of new businesses by creating an environment that allows collaboration and experimentation that leads to the development of new practices (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). For example, the development of COVID-19 pandemic vaccinations (Klößner et al., 2023). Crises often spur innovation as organizations seek to overcome challenges (Seidl & Whittington, 2021). Organisations can build resilience while managing these challenges. This study explores these crisis opportunities and challenges to provide insights into how upper-echelon dynamics impact responses to crisis opportunities, challenges, and their consequent performance results. Hambrick and Mason (1984) indicates decisions of management, influenced by their characteristics play a crucial role in navigating unexpected events.

2.3.5 Analysis and conclusion on the crisis construct

Crises are challenging situations that're rare and hold great importance due to their potential to cause significant disruptions to an organisation (Wu et al., 2021). The crisis construct is multidimensional. It involves various types, stages, severities, and opportunities for growth. Leaders must understand the distinct traits of each crisis in order to effectively handle them.

Crisis events can be categorized based on their origin internal or external—and whether they are deliberate or non-deliberate. Stakeholders' views on how leaders handle crises are significantly shaped by the classification used – with internal deliberate crises casting leaders in a negative light and external crises portraying them more positively (Collins et al., 2023).

According to the literature analysis by Wu et al. (2021) crises are typically broken down into stages such as before the crisis, during the crisis and post crisis. Each stage places duties on leaders; the pre-crisis phase is, about assessing risks and getting ready by creating communication plans and strategies to minimize any possible problems. During the crisis, the focus changes to reactions and minimizing damage. The aftermath of a crisis involves recovery and gaining insights for the future (Opatska et al., 2024). This changing scenario requires leadership approaches that can adapt to the different phases of a crisis effectively. It emphasizes the need, for assessment and improvement to be better prepared for future challenges (Collins et al., 2023).

Moreover, the seriousness of a crisis depends on how it affects sectors amid specific circumstances; for instance, during the COVID pandemic tourism suffered declines but the technology sector thrived (Klößner et al., 2023). The varying effects of impact highlight the importance for companies to evaluate their situations and adjust their actions accordingly.

It's interesting how crises sometimes act as triggers for innovation and growth by bringing hidden problems and weaknesses within companies (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). These discoveries lead to reassessments of how things are done operationally and open up chances for changes, in organizational practices. Throughout the period of the COVID 19 numerous businesses adopted fresh technologies and embraced collaborative approaches shifting to online platforms to adjust and prosper in the changing environment. The transformative nature of crises is evident in their ability to foster resilience and inspire creative solutions. This process can ultimately drive lasting change, for the better (Seidl & Whittington 2021). Adapting leadership approaches that can be adjusted to the particular phase and intensity of each crisis can bolster resilience and foster creative solutions.

2.4 Leadership

There is an increasing trend in the occurrence of crises (Wenzel et al., 2020). Leaders are expected to guide their organisations through crises, by steering the organisation to achieve its objectives (Samimi et al., 2022; Schaedler et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). They are likely to provide direction, reassurance, and hope to stakeholders affected by the crisis (Collins et al., 2023). Leaderships' inadequate or late response may result in negative outcomes for the firm.

Leadership is a title given to individuals such as managers, CEOs, supervisors, individuals belonging to the top management team, and board members (Wu et al., 2021). However, leaders may also emerge in crisis as they are typical individuals who guide and influence others (Collins et al., 2023).

2.4.1 Leadership characteristics

There is consensus among scholars that leadership characteristics are linked to crisis and firm performance outcomes (Neely et al., 2020; Samimi et al., 2022; Schaedler et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). The way leaders act and their qualities influence how a crisis unfolds. For example, if leaders see a crisis, as dangerous, they may cut back spending and growth (Schaedler et al., 2022). No particular traits lead to a positive outcome, but any trait of leadership may result in either favourable or unfavourable result for the organization during a crisis, as influenced by the context and crisis type (Schaedler et al., 2022). Initial action taken by decision-makers is shaped by their experience of similar situations (Hodgkinson & Sadler-Smith, 2018).

Various characteristics are better suited for distinct types of crises; for instance, masculine traits, as opposed to feminine traits, might be linked to more proficient crisis leadership when dealing with a deliberate external crisis such as a terrorist attack (Collins et al., 2023). Behaviour is driven mainly by the leader's characteristics (Schaedler et al., 2022). The following are general leaders characteristics as identified by scholars. Leaders must make quick and informed decisions, use verbal and non-verbal tactics to convey confidence and positivity and have the ability to assess the situation and modify strategies accordingly. They must possess emotional intelligence (Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022). The effectiveness these characteristics may depend on the specific challenges posed by the context, such as innovation demands or cultural expectations (Johns, 2024).

2.4.2 Analysis and conclusion on leadership

The significance of leadership during times of crisis underscores the crucial role of leader in moulding organisational responses and outcomes (Neely et al., 2020; Samimi et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2021). The interplay between a leader's traits, their experience, and the context of the crisis is vital for effective crisis management (Schaedler et al., 2022). While certain leadership characteristics are consistently recommended, their applicability and effectiveness can vary widely depending on the type of crisis and external factors (Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022)

In today's changing landscape of challenges for organizations, around the globe it is crucial to cultivate adaptive leadership traits that can be customized to suit varying circumstances in order to enhance resilience and drive favourable results.

2.5 Crisis management

Crisis management is about what approaches are there to manage or resolve a crisis. It involves activities that manage a threat (Schaedler et al., 2022). There are a variety of approaches to managing crises. The most common, as discussed in the literature, are decision-making, risk assessment, using lessons learned and communication (Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022). These approaches may be applied in parallel rather than in a specific order (Opatska et al., 2024). Applying approaches in parallel aligns with the suggested solution to the crisis management theory dilemma of lack of organisation and coherence, as it brings cohesion of different approaches (Cronin et al., 2021).

2.5.1 Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a live process that consists of steps that, if done in sequence, increase the likelihood of choosing the correct risk to deal with first. When faced with a crisis, the likelihood of having multiple risks is guaranteed. Risk assessment is the means to risk management. This live process involves gathering relevant stakeholders, establishing context, identifying risk, and analysing risk (Hamir & Sum, 2021).

When establishing context, the correct attribution of whether the crisis is a once-off incident or a persisting incident like a pandemic during the initial assessment cannot be overstated, as incorrect assessment leads to ineffective decisions (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020; Wu et al., 2021). The persistence of the threat affects the sustainability and appropriateness of the choice made. When identifying risk, the important element is to choose criteria to evaluate it and a

timeline for monitoring it weekly, daily, or hourly. During evaluation, the important element is to consider each risk in relation to the overall impact of all risks identified (Hamir & Sum, 2021).

2.5.2 Crisis decision making

Decision-making during a crisis is often not rational as there is not sufficient time to assess all possible solutions, and the crisis impacts several factors at varying levels making the situation complex. The dominant factors affecting decision-making are organisational and economic, compared to personal and social (Kozioł-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021)

Decision-making is about selecting the correct solution to deal with the crisis, but one must consider the long-term effects of whatever choice is made. Uncertainty also has a moderating effect on decision-making (Shepherd et al., 2023). The structure and size of the organisation impacts the effectiveness of the decision (Kozioł-Nadolna & Beyer, 2021). Team integration impacts both quality and speed. Quality is the extent the decision taken addresses the risk to be managed. The difficult task is choosing the appropriate solution to deal with the risk. For example, if the organisation continues with its strategy and deliverables to maintain the status core, the reserves used may be depleted, leading to its failure (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). The benefits are also considered before making the decision (Hamir & Sum, 2021).

2.5.3 Crisis communication

Leaders effectively manage information by collecting, synthesising, and distributing critical data internally and externally to facilitate informed decision-making (Samimi et al., 2022). How leaders frame the information affects how it will be received. Successfully communicating the crisis to stakeholders in a positive perspective helps boost morale (Opatska et al., 2024). Leader behaviours identified by Tasselli and Sancino (2023) that are prevalent in managing a crisis in relation to interactions are (1) building network contacts, (2) terminating network contacts, (3) engaging in healthy network disagreements, (4) deepening relationships, (5) focusing on the purpose of relationship and (6) reconstructing ties according to needs. Communication responsibility during a crisis is twofold. The leader must show understanding and empathy towards employees, and employees have a responsibility to share concerns and assist with solutions, as they often have the expert skills to resolve the crisis (Opatska et al., 2024). Communication is important and it should be done often (Shepherd et al., 2023), as the situation and impact change daily.

2.5.4 Lessons Learned

It is essential for crisis leadership to embrace a process view perspective to gain insights into the strategies required for learning from past crises and effectively managing ongoing ones (Wu et al., 2021). Organizations should invest in proactive crisis management strategies, including training leaders in crisis preparedness and conducting simulations to learn from past crisis and be better prepared for the future (Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022).

Organizations should establish mechanisms for capturing and analysing lessons learned from past crises. This includes conducting post-crisis evaluations to identify what worked and what failed, allowing organisations to improve their crisis management strategies over time (Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022). Leaders should use lessons learned to develop contingency plans (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). This reflective practice of learning from setbacks or failures and applying lessons can strengthen organisational resilience in the future to deal with challenges better. (Gkeredakis et al., 2021).

2.5.5 Analysis and conclusion on crisis management construct

Crisis management is a critical field aimed at mitigating threats by encompasses various strategies and activities to ensure organisational resilience. The concept of crisis management involves aspects such as risks assessment and making decisions while effectively communicating information (Opatska et al., 2024) and learning from experiences (Wu et al., 2021). Crisis management involves understanding and evaluating risk (Hamir & Sum, 2021). Making decisions with the pressure of time and the multitude of factors to consider (Shepherd et al., 2023) and reflecting on crises for the development of organizations (Wu et al., 2021). By incorporating these aspects companies can develop strong crisis management plans that not only deal with current threats but also set the stage, for continual development and recovery.

2.6 Effectiveness of crisis management strategies

Success in managing a crisis can be measured by how managers handle immediate challenges, maintain stakeholder trust, communicate transparently throughout the crisis, and implement necessary changes to prevent future crises (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Wenzel et al. (2020) encouraged researchers to pursue new strategic responses. The following approaches found effective for crisis management by Klöckner et al. (2023) were linked to the following activities (1) finance to boost the reserves through loans, (2) changing operations, for example supplying products that are in demand during the crisis, (3) digitalise to improve communication and visibility and flexibility, (4) organisational introspection of capabilities that

can be used to mitigate the risks and (5) supportive way like providing relief such as extended payment terms to customers. These approaches highlight usable actions that can be taken (Cronin et al., 2021). Effective crisis management may be achieved by providing clear and accurate information to reassure stakeholders about the organization's reliability and competence to address rational concerns (Iqbal et al., 2024). For crisis approaches to be effective leaders need the ability to evaluate the situation, recognise the needs of their stakeholders and adjust the chosen approach accordingly (Collins et al., 2023).

2.6.1 Analysis and conclusion on effectiveness of crisis management strategies

Effective handling of crises depends upon a multifaceted approach that incorporates strategic financial decisions, operational flexibility, effective communication, and stakeholder support (Klöckner et al. 2023). Managers who can adeptly manoeuvre through these components with thinking and foresight are more capable of steering their organizations through challenges and fostering resilience (Collins et al., 2023).

2.7 Crisis context

Context is the bridge from theory to practicals (Johns, 2024). Understanding context is important because it allows the leader to adjust the suggested approach as needed. Context is not static; it changes over time and can be influenced by specific environmental events or shifts. Geopolitical events, regulation and competition are related to the external environment. While organisational culture, resources are related to the firm internal environment (Ali et al., 2024; Banks, 2023; Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). The firm environment may be homogeneous or diverse in gender, race, and other demographic factors (Banks, 2023).

Contextual factors affect firm outcomes and impact crises responses used by managers (Ali et al., 2024). The underlying factor that influences a crisis response choice is resources such as organisational reserves (human or capital) and routines (Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). Firm characteristics such as structure and size of full-time employees, distribution of power, high level of reserves or slack resources have strong impact on outcomes (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). While external environment factors such as a rapid change in regulation and increased competition were shown to have a limited impact during crisis decision-making (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). Crises responses are also influenced by two aspects. Accountability the extent the firm take responsibility for their involvement, in the crisis and attention which involves how well they communicate about the crisis and its resolutions (Iqbal et al., 2024). Leaders must adapt their strategies based on the context Leaders need to modify their approaches

according to context and stakeholder dynamics associated with the crisis they are facing (Collins et al., 2023).

2.7.1 Analysis and conclusion on crisis context

Understanding of both internal and external contextual factors is fundamental for leaders to make informed decisions and effectively manage crises. Context is not fixed and evolves over time, influenced by various external factors (geopolitical events, regulations, and competition) and internal factors (organizational culture and resources) (Ali et al., 2024; Banks, 2023; Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). Leaders must continuously assess context conditions to remain responsive. Contextual factors significantly affect organizational outcomes and crisis responses. Necessitating leaders to adjust their strategies (Collins et al., 2023).

2.8 Crisis leadership

Crisis leadership may start with an event, but it is a process that includes preparation, adjustment, and feedback (Wu et al., 2021). Crisis leadership is the influence leaders exert on stakeholders during the crisis lifecycle (Ali et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2023). Leadership during crises is multifaceted, requiring a blend approaches the ability to inspire and guide others through challenging times. Crisis leadership involves managing. Hence, it cannot be discussed without mentioning crisis management activities (Collins et al., 2023).

Prior literature reviews have often overlooked crisis leadership as a focal point (Wu et al., 2021). As a result, a significant gap exists in our understanding of crisis leadership dynamics. Digging deeper into this area to provide organisational leaders with empirically tested strategies for navigating crises practically is necessary. This study focuses on leader responses to crises. Multiple crises can happen simultaneously; therefore, studying how managers respond to crises is important as it offers perspectives on the underlying mechanisms driving leadership behaviour (Neely et al., 2020). This aligns with the core principles of Upper Echelon theory. By gaining insights into these mechanisms, researchers can contribute to the creation of more effective crisis management strategies.

Crisis leadership is about how the leaders executes the crisis management strategies (Collins et al., 2023). The main behaviours identified by review of scholarship are clear communication, self-regulation, respect and trust, working with others (Ali et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2023; Opatska et al., 2024; Schaedler et al., 2022). Effective crisis leadership needs adaptability and understanding of the particular circumstances surrounding the crisis (Johns, 2024).

2.8.1 Clear communication

Leader communication refers to the verbal, written, and nonverbal messages that leaders convey to others, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Liu et al., 2023). The way a leader communicates can influence the morale of the team and ultimately affect their performance (Ali et al., 2024; Banks, 2023).

Clear, simple communication is key to effective crisis leadership (Collins et al., 2023; Wilson & Newstead, 2022). As it is important to have strong communication skills to ensure information is conveyed clearly and effectively. This involves not just giving direction but also actively listening to stakeholders concerns and encouraging open conversations (Collins et al., 2023). Use of rhetoric language such as inclusive language, emotional appeals is encouraged (Liu et al., 2023). Leaders must communicate hope and frame the crisis in a positive tone for stakeholders. They should emphasize ways to learn from the experience and move forward rather than getting caught up in who is to blame (Opatska et al., 2024). Leaders should communicate a positive outlook on the future (Opatska et al., 2024). The focus on redirecting negative feelings and enhancing positive perceptions is a strategy to mitigate emotional concerns . It can also involve communication that emphasizes the commitment to resolving the issue (Iqbal et al., 2024). This communication approach not only helps the organization recover but also boosts employee morale and builds trust.

2.8.2 Self-regulation

Strong emotional intelligence enables leaders to comprehend and regulate both their own feelings and the emotions of their team members. Thereby providing support and reassurance during challenging times (Collins et al., 2023). Surprisingly Liu et al. (2023) found that displaying negative emotions can also have beneficial effects, for example, when leaders express sadness, it can lead to improved performance because it invokes deeper levels of engagement. Similarly, displays of anger, such as using stern looks, can motivate followers, particularly those who may be less agreeable.

Self-awareness assists leaders in maintaining composure during a crisis and managing their reactions, which is essential for effective decision-making (Schaedler et al., 2022). There is a need to investigate additional courses used to influence management of emotions (Collins et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). Studying the effect of managers' characteristics, including people skills, on organisational outcomes aligns with the Upper Echelon theory (Hambrick, 2007; Liu et al., 2023).

2.8.3 Respect and trust

Throughout times of turmoil, leadership plays a pivotal role by motivating and influencing employees to navigate challenges and pursue organisational goals amidst uncertainties (Ali et al., 2024; Samimi et al., 2022). Being honest about challenges and acknowledging mistakes

is likely to earn the leader the respect and trust of their stakeholders, as is sharing the rationale behind the decisions (Liu et al., 2023). Acknowledging mistakes address moral concerns and improves positive perception of stakeholders (Iqbal et al., 2024). Managers must avoid micromanaging and directing employees unnecessarily as it has proven ineffective during disruption (Ali et al., 2024). Leaders must show empathy to gain an understanding into the needs and worries of their team members and stakeholders (Opatska et al., 2024). Empathy may be achieved through listening attentively, which includes concentrating on what followers say, acknowledging their emotions, and responding thoughtfully. Leaders should also express genuine concern for their followers through verbal affirmations and by providing resources to help them cope with challenges (Liu et al., 2023). This ability to understand emotions helps build trust and commitment, for teamwork especially in challenging situations (Gkeredakis et al., 2021). Leadership is not only affected by individual attributes but also by an individual's relationship with others (Ma et al., 2022; Tasselli & Sancino, 2023).

2.8.4 Working with others

The importance of teamwork and collaboration becomes evident during crises. Leaders should encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing, as these practices can lead to creative solutions (Schaedler et al., 2022). For example, the COVID-19 crisis has dismantled numerous organisational obstacles to experimentation and expedited innovation within the health-tech sector (Schaedler et al., 2022). Leadership is a dynamic process that involves feedback loops (Banks, 2023). Leaders encourage dialogue and feedback from their followers (Liu et al., 2023). Crisis situations often require input from various stakeholders with different expertise and perspectives (Collins et al., 2023). Diverse opinions from various stakeholders leads to comprehensive problem-solving and innovative solutions.

2.8.5 Analysis and conclusion on crisis leadership

Crisis leadership is a process involving ongoing preparation, adjustment, and feedback throughout the crisis lifecycle. It as a multifaceted endeavour that influences stakeholders via various activities, which are closely linked to crisis management practices (Ali et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2023).

Recent research has highlighted four behaviours that are crucial for effective crisis leadership; clear communication skills; emotional intelligence; trust building abilities; and respect for others (Ali et al., 2024; Collins et al., 2023; Opatska et al., 2024; Schaedler et al., 2022). These behaviours do not only help leaders respond promptly to crises but also play an essential part, in enhancing long term organizational resilience.

Gaining a comprehension of crisis leadership can greatly influence how organizations operate merging these perspectives with well-known theories like the Upper Echelon theory could also advance further exploration and growth, in this field.

2.9 Organisational crisis related outcomes

Outcomes are subject to the influence of the contextual variables (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). For example, choices allied to survival, like cost-cutting and digitalisation, were preferred by investors over the choices associated with support, like providing customer and employee relief or exploiting the crisis for gains (Klößner et al., 2023). Even though the choice associated with support has more long-term benefits, such as customer satisfaction (Bahmani et al., 2023). Furthermore, managing conflicting concerns impacts outcomes. Prioritising conflicting concerns during a crisis involves addressing rational concerns like factual information over emotional ones, allocating resources effectively, and balancing the effectiveness of one strategy for an issue with broad applicability, for instance, using a targeted communication approach that may not resonate universally (Iqbal et al., 2024).

Success can also be measured using the organisation's financial performance (Bahmani et al., 2023). Organisations can create effective leadership development programs that enhance individual competencies and organisational outcomes (Banks, 2023). Positive organizational outcomes during and after a crisis are shaped by effective crisis leadership and management that promotes resilience, trust, engagement, learning, team cohesion and innovation (Collins et al., 2023).

2.9.1 Analysis and conclusion on organisation related outcomes

While survival instincts may drive immediate decisions, organizations that prioritize supportive measures and invest in leadership development are likely to achieve better long-term outcomes (Banks, 2023). Acting with innovation and foresight in decision-making is crucial (Collins et al., 2023) Effective leadership requires a careful balance in managing both urgent issues and long-term objectives to achieve positive outcomes.

2.10 Conclusions

Success in leadership is associated with the ability to keep an emphasis on both short-term and long-term recovery. There is no one leadership style or strategy that works in all crises; several commendable approaches are grounded in virtuous principles (Wilson & Newstead, 2022). However, a manager with a balanced approach and humility is most likely to effectively lead the organisation through the crisis process (Wu et al., 2021). Despite the discussed approaches, there is still a need to investigate more practical approaches that managers may use to manage a crisis. A leader's communication style affects team morale, consequently impacting performance (Banks, 2023).

Crisis management is a comprehensive interdisciplinary framework that considers crisis leadership within it (Wu et al., 2021). Crisis management is executed by organisation leaders; therefore, how leaders behave is an essential aspect that impacts the successful resolution of a crisis. The role managers play in crisis management is essential. As the frequency of crisis events increases, the need for research that investigates leader behaviour and decision-making during such events increases (Schaedler et al., 2022). A crisis begins as an event but ends up being a process encompassing distinct phases: before, during, and after the crisis. Its complexity is exacerbated by its situational nature (Wu et al., 2021).

Succeeding in crisis management can be measured by how a leader seizes opportunities and adapts for a better future (Ali et al., 2024). Henceforth, managers require experience and the skill to communicate openly in order to guide the organisation through crises. Analysing manager's behaviour through the lens of Upper Echelon theory offers perspectives on how their relationships and context impact decision-making. The information gained will then be used to improve crisis management strategies.

Literature reviewed is further summarised in a conceptual framework below where scholars such as Collins et al. (2023); Liu et al. (2023) and Schaedler et al. (2022) contributed to leader characteristics elements and scholars such as Neely et al. (2020); Samimi et al. (2022); Schaedler et al. (2022) and Wu et al. (2021) contributed to organisational outcomes.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

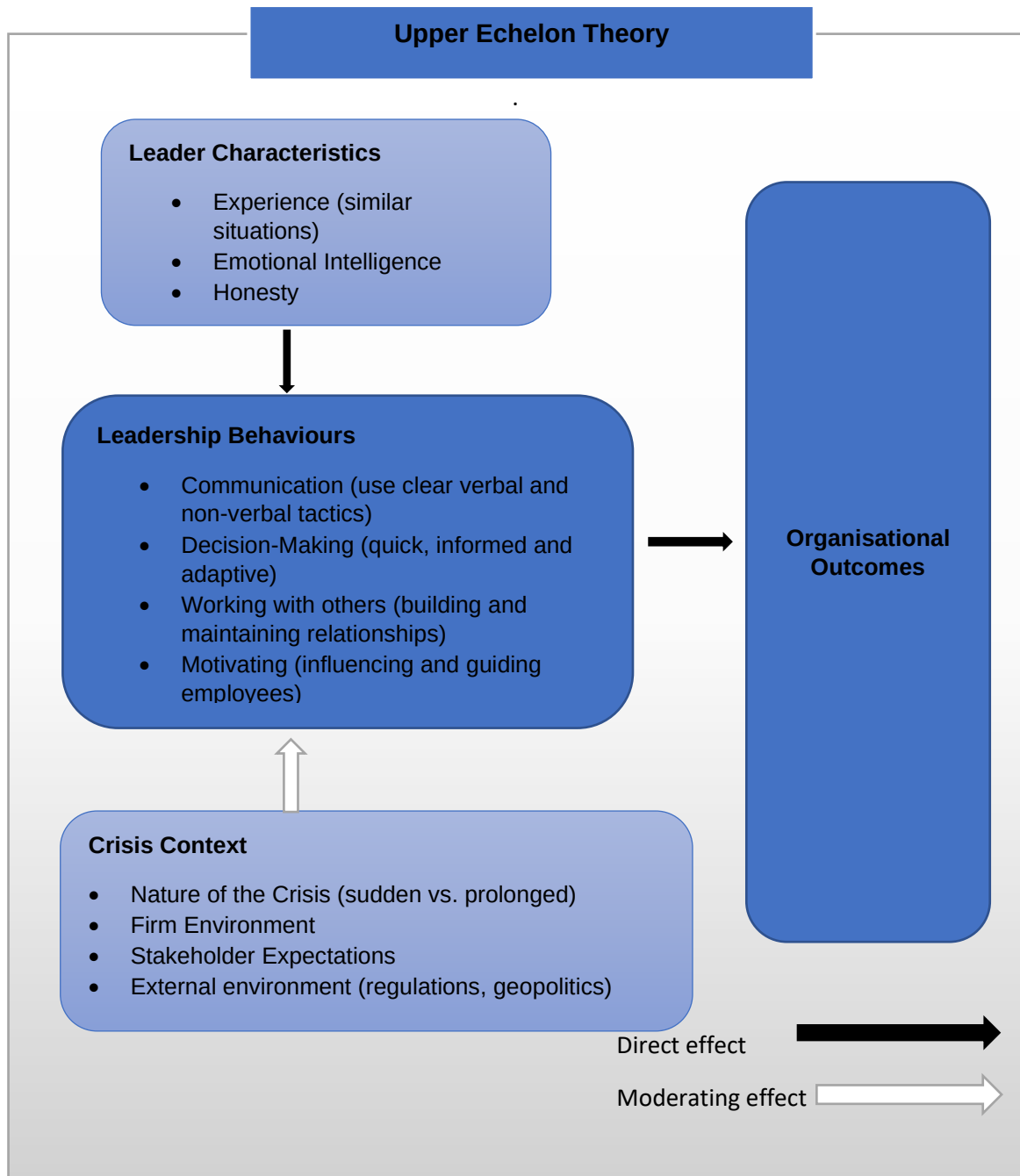


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework for Crisis Leadership

Source: Authour's own

Figure 2 highlights elements of crisis leadership by demonstrating how a leaders characteristics impact their behavior and influence organisational outcomes. The crisis context plays a role, in shaping leadership behavior. This interaction creates a cycle where the outcomes, shape the leaders experience.

Chapter 3: Research questions

We live in times where the occurrence of a crisis is common and frequent; therefore, managers must be equipped to deal with uncertainty while driving the organisation to positive outcomes. Literature has provided approaches that lead to effective crisis management. However, the caveat to these approaches is the crisis attributes (Wenzel et al., 2020). A crisis is dynamic as it evolves over time. This movement in the elements affecting a crisis impacts the effectiveness of reported approaches (Wu et al., 2021).

Wenzel et al. (2020) suggest that to improve the tool kit that managers have, researchers must elaborate on the context and the crisis stage where recommended approaches are most effective. Researchers are encouraged to explore new approaches to increase the crisis management tool kit available to managers. This study sought to improve the understanding of effective crisis management approaches.

3.1 Main research question

How do managers respond to a crisis?

Observable Upper Echelon characteristics shape how managers respond to a crisis. These characteristics substantially affect organisational performance (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Context shapes the crisis leadership responses (Ali et al., 2024). Therefore, discovering how managers respond to a crisis aids understanding the dynamics of leaders' behaviours.

3.2 Research sub-questions

Question 1: What approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?

This question is motivated by the following gap identified in the literature. Research has provided limited practical leadership responses therefore researchers must explore new ways of responding to a crisis to broaden the range of options available to managers (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Question 2: Which specific behaviours of leaders significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis?

This question is motivated by the following gap identified in the literature. Research has provided limited direction of specific leaders' characters and behaviour that contribute to positive outcomes during a crisis (Wu et al., 2021). Due to the limited scope of existing research to align existing crisis responses with a time horizon and context, there is a need to explore of internal and external factors influencing a crisis response (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Question 3: How do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?

This question is motivated by the following gap identified in the literature. Leadership holds a crucial position in motivating and steering employees through challenges (Samimi et al., 2022). Further examination of approaches that leaders employ to uphold stakeholder morale while addressing negative emotions is necessary (Wu et al., 2021).

Question 4: How were the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis handled?

This question is motivated by gap identified in the literature that crises are becoming increasingly complex and multifaceted, where traditional approaches may not be sufficient to deal with the challenges. For example, occurrences like the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, it is essential to provide additional insights on how managers can effectively respond to crises (Wenzel et al., 2020).

Chapter 4: Proposed research methodology and design

4.1 Introduction

The research problem is to explore how do managers respond to an external crisis? The purpose of this study is to identify the strategies, behaviour manifestations and sources used by effective leaders to manage crises successfully. Furthermore, the study aimed to provide insights into the methods that leaders use to handle unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis while maintaining morale. This chapter discusses the methodical approach to resolve the problem, ways data was collected and the method to analyse data. It explains the rationale behind the choices made for, the research setting, the level of analysis unit of analysis, the sampling technique and sample size, as well as the research instrument used. Additionally, it outlines how the data was collected, the approach taken for data analysis, ethical considerations, and the strategies implemented to maintain research quality and rigor. Lastly, it addresses the limitations associated with the research design and methods.

4.2 Research philosophy.

Interpretivism is a research philosophy founded on the belief that human knowledge is shaped by context and individual perspectives. Interpretive researchers collaborate with participants to construct knowledge, using language to capture distinctions accurately (Bell et al., 2019). The study used interpretivism to explore how managers respond to crises, focusing on the context of their experiences and accurately representing their responses while taking into account my own interpretations.

4.3 Research design

How managers respond to a crisis problem has received little attention (Wenzel et al., 2020) prompting the need for an in-depth investigation. Exploratory research design is chosen to advance knowledge and resolve the problem. The exploratory research design is used to examine problems that do not have a clear definition. Its objective is to increase understanding of the current issue, and the results of this research strive to answer questions about what, how, and why (Olawale et al., 2023).

4.4 Choice of methodology

Just by focusing on identifying themes and patterns in data, thematic analysis is a valuable tool for theory development in research, providing a simpler yet effective alternative to the

extensive procedures of grounded theory (Bell et al., 2019). This study intent is to build on existing theory by discovering new insights. Qualitative research findings offer an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation to present a more detailed picture (Berebekova et al., 2021).

The study's research context and theoretical framework considerations led me to opt for reflexive thematic analysis, as the most particularly suitable approach. The reflexive thematic analysis method allowed me to collect and analyse data in a manner that respected and mirrored participants subjective viewpoints while also acknowledging and embracing how my interpretations as the researcher could influence the process (Byrne, 2022). This qualitative approach is appropriate to explore how do managers respond to a crisis. Given that the question how, often yields multiple answers.

4.5 Research population

The population for this research study was managers from registered construction companies in South Africa, with a majority from firms with a Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) grading of nine, indicating their ability to manage projects exceeding 90 million rand. In 2021, there were 258 such high-caliber contractors who contributed significantly to the industry's revenue (Maluleke, 2022). To enhance the study's comprehensiveness and ensure that the responses obtained were relatable to all industry players, at least 25% of the participants were sourced from companies with CIDB gradings lower than nine. The goal was to gather a balanced representation of insights from both high-ranking and lower-graded construction firms.

The inclusion criteria were to target managers occupying their positions before the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic offered a chance to pinpoint businesses that exhibited strength in navigating crises, making managers who were successful in directing the firm to positive outcomes ideal candidates to form part of the population (Veitch, 2022).

4.6 Level of analysis and unit of analysis

The level of analysis for this study is at the individual level as interview responses of individual managers on each transcript were analysed (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). During a crisis, leaderships' role in managing a crisis becomes especially critical and essential (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). How managers respond to a crisis is studied. The unit of analysis was the individual since it's the managers behaviours and responses that were explored. Thus, the unit of analysis and level of analysis was the same.

4.7 Sampling method, sampling criteria, sample size

Purposive sampling entails choosing participants based on characteristics relevant to the study's objectives, its purpose is to offer credible explanations of a phenomenon. When employing purposive sampling, researchers need to consider research objectives and geographic diversity to thoroughly represent the phenomenon being investigated (Campbell et al., 2020). A purposive sampling approach was employed, targeting management personnel within the construction industry. This selection is crucial for transferring findings within the construction sector. Furthermore, managers are particularly suitable for addressing the research question, given their central role in providing direction and leadership during crisis management situations. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that enhances the probability of selecting predetermined participants (Bell et al., 2019). It is also beneficial when there is time constraints and difficulty in mapping the total of individuals involved (Bell et al., 2019).

The inclusion criteria focused on individuals who led teams and held decision-making responsibilities in their companies by March 2020 when the COVID-19 lockdown began in South Africa. Only individuals from construction firms operating in different provinces were intentionally selected and recruited as participants.

When determining the sample size for qualitative research, it's crucial to consider the concept of saturation, which indicates that enough data has been collected to thoroughly understand a phenomenon. Bell et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of reaching saturation in qualitative research to justify sample size. According to Boddy (2016), saturation can be achieved with as few as 12 participants in in-depth interviews when the population under study is homogenous. Moreover, Belina (2023) and Harrell & Bradley (2009) suggested 15 participants can offer valuable insights into less obvious aspects of a phenomenon, facilitating a thorough analysis, even though transferring the findings may be limited. Saunders and Townsend (2016) also emphasized that a sample range of 15 to 60 participants is generally considered sufficient for qualitative research.

It's important to note that the minimum and maximum number of participants is not the sole criteria for justifying sample size (Bell et al., 2019). Instead, the nature of the study, research questions and specific settings including saturation should also be taken into account (Bell et al., 2019). The planned sample size was 15 because it exceeded the minimum recommended by Boddy (2016) and it's aligned with the range recommended by Saunders and Townsend (2016), Belina (2023) and Harrell & Bradley (2009). Thirteen interviews were conducted. The thirteen interviews were sufficient as saturation was reached at interview eleven (see Figure

3). The first six interviews, which account for less than half of the participants, generated 92% of the codes. All transcripts were coded to ensure consistency.

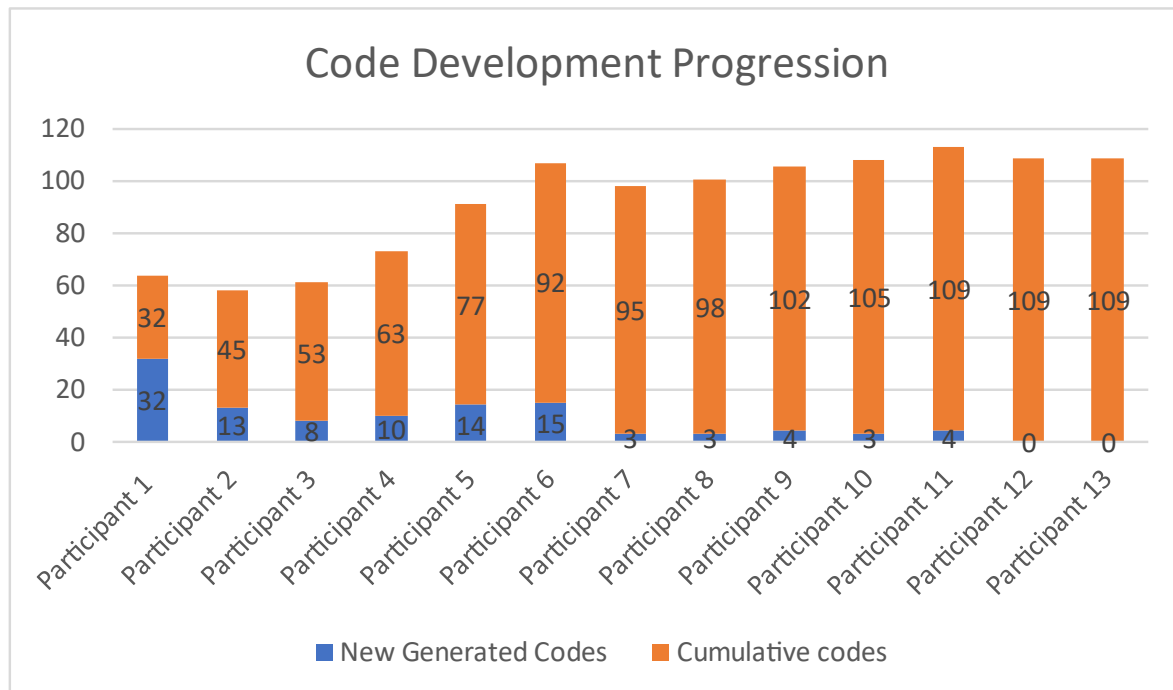


Figure 3: Code development and progression

Source: Authors' own

4.8 Research instrument

Semi-structured interviews are a valuable source of insight into the impacts of events. They also offer an understanding of the motivations and underlying attitudes of those who participate (Adams, 2015). Moreover, this instrument can lead to data saturation and ensure diverse perspectives are adequately represented, making it a valuable tool for exploring themes and gaining a broad understanding of the subject matter (Belina, 2023; Harrell & Bradley, 2009). A semi-structured interview approach was employed by one interviewer, The same open-ended questions to ensure uniformity were posed to each participant while allowing flexibility to explore unanticipated viewpoints (Gioia et al., 2013).

An interview protocol found in annexure A based on the research questions was developed (Gioia et al., 2013) to guide the interviewer. A pilot interview to obtain feedback on question clarity and was conducted. The pilot interview responses collected were not used as part of the main study data set.

To ensure voluntary participation and no coercion was applied to recruit participant the researcher made it clear before the data collection that participants can refuse to participate without any adverse effects. The semi-structured interviews lasted between 20 to 45minutes

and primarily focused on gathering insights about the managers' experiences to fulfil the research objectives. The interviews were conducted in the following manner: the researcher facilitated introductions. Then explained the purposes of study, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the process. Each interview commenced with an overview of the participant's position in management and their background experience. Demographic information was also gathered. The interviewer explained the format the answers to main question should be. The use of open-ended questions was implemented, and additional inquiries were made to explore further when needed. Probes considered the factors that might shape people's thoughts, feelings, or experiences regarding the issues the researcher wished to discuss (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). On closing the participant was acknowledged for their time and given an opportunity to add or share information they deemed relevant.

4.9 Data gathering process

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams to facilitate easy and cost-effective access to managers, offering a convenient online platform. The transcription feature was activated on the online platform and the voice recorder was employed to record the interview. The transcripts and recordings are stored in a password protected computer folder to protect against unauthorised access. Data collection commenced only after obtaining ethical clearance from GIBS.

Several project managers associated with a client involved in capital expansion programme were contacted and informed about the research, and they were asked to see if they could provide the contact information of their contractors' management staff for study purposes. After obtaining the contact information, the researcher drafted an email to invite potential participants to take part in the study, with an informed consent letter attached. Participants were asked to provide their available time slots for interviews. The researcher sent the appointment for interviews.

During interviews, active listening was employed without note-taking to maintain participant engagement. The researcher-maintained impartiality to prevent influencing participants' answers by refraining from suggesting a response. The researcher refrained from expressing personal opinions. Additionally, the researcher avoided showing agreement or disagreement with comments and abstained from making gestures that indicate approval or disapproval, as there is neither correct or incorrect answers (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Questions that might interrupt the participant, such as clarifications, were avoided.

Video was utilised to observe at least half of the participants' bodies to gauge body language and expressions, fostering a space where participants feel comfortable sharing their

experiences (Josselson, 2013). Expect where technology failed the process such as the participants laptop camera not functioning. Filed notes were taken immediately after the interview to capture impressions. The notes used the user code identifier instead of participants' names. Nonverbal cues during the interview, like extended pauses or laughter, and instances where the speaker appears uncomfortable answering a question, were documented (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Each interview audio was transcribed to ensure anonymity while preserving original content. The notes taken at the end of each interview were added to the transcripts. The researcher kept recordings and transcripts in a password-protected folder to adhere to the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA). The folder is equipped with access controls, ensuring that only authorised personnel could access the data.

4.10 Data analysis approach

Qualitative data analysis was approached systematically using thematic analysis, which provides a flexible and adaptable framework that allows for changes in codes and themes during the process due to its recursive nature (Berbekova et al., 2021). Thematic analysis is a technique used to recognise, examine, and report patterns known as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an inductive approach to discover themes based on primary data. It allowed the researcher to gather insights of responses to crises from managers' perspectives and experiences. It's important to emphasise that it is acceptable and often necessary to have just one coder when conducting qualitative thematic analysis (Kogen, 2024).

Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step process for data analysis was employed; (1) getting to know the data, (2) creating initial codes, (3) seeking out themes, (4) evaluating themes, (5) explaining and naming themes and (6) generating the report. Final notes were transcripts that clearly indicate the speaker.

4.10.1.1 Phase one: getting to know the data

The familiarisation phase in qualitative analysis, involves thoroughly reading and analysing the dataset to gain an in-depth understanding. This process is essential for identifying relevant information applicable to research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Manually editing the Microsoft team's transcription was employed while playing back the audio recording to aid the researcher in understanding the data set and ensuring the participants' responses are captured accurately in the transcripts. The process took a lot of time, but it was entirely necessary for understanding the context. The researcher carefully reviewed the transcript data by reading and reflecting on it repeatedly. Once the transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and

the researcher was familiar with the data, the transcripts were analysed independently, line by line. Coding process was assisted by Atlas TI software to researcher mitigate bias.

4.10.1.2 Phase two: creating initial codes

Coding is a step in the early stages of thematic analysis where the researcher creates succinct labels for data to pinpoint possible themes relevant to the research question. During this phase the entire dataset is systematically analysed to guarantee a consideration of all data points (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Creating initial codes included identifying a meaningful piece of data that pertains to the research question and assigning it a code. Ultimately, every idea was assigned a code, which is a phrase closely related to the data but not strictly exclusive to that data. The researcher examined the codes used to confirm they were applied consistently. The researcher only used an inductive coding process to analyse the data. All the codes that emerged from the data are descriptive analyses of the information shared by participants.

The first step generated 326 quotes known as 1st order codes, which were reduced to 109 second order concepts. The second order codes were categorised to form 26 groups of meaning. The researcher compared the relationships between the code groups to produce the 11 themes. The final 2nd order code list is attached as appendix C in this report.

4.10.1.3 Phase three: seeking out themes

This point is about generating code groups to categories overall meaning across the dataset. Code groups are not simply discovered within the data but must be deliberately constructed by the researcher, who investigates the connections between the codes to articulate a theme's narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The significance of a theme is not determined by the number of supporting codes it has, but by its meaningfulness. Meaningfulness can be understood, first from the perspective of the researcher, in relation to the need to identify data pertinent to the research questions, and second from the standpoint of the participant, with regards to varying levels of significance regarding the issues being discussed (Byrne, 2022).

The researcher assessed the coded data to reveal shared meanings that assisted in establishing categories by combining similar codes. The researcher recognised the value of recurrence while also considering meaningfulness importance in the coding process. The code groups and themes found in Table 1 represent the cohesive view of the data.

Table 1

Second order codes and themes

Categories/Code Groups (n=26)	Themes (n=11)
● Collaborate	RQ1: COLLABORATION SUPPORTS STEPS TO ACHIEVE PROGRESS
● Steps to Achieve Progress	
● Advantageous Attributes	
● Quick Results	RQ1: ADVANTAGEOUS ATTRIBUTES THAT ASSISTS WITH ACHIEVING RESULTS QUICKLY
● Prevention	RQ1: RESPONSE TOOLS ARE INFLUENCED BY PREVENTION ACTIVITIES
● Response Tools	
● Positive outcome enablers	RQ2: RESPECT IS THE FOUNDATION FOR POSITIVE OUTCOME ENABLES
● Respect	
● Execute Decision	RQ2: YOU NEED INFLUENCE TO EXECUTE DECISIONS WELL
● Influence	
● Calmness	RQ2: YOU NEED TO BE CALM TO THINK
● Think	
● Give Confidence	RQ3: GIVING REWARDS BOOSTS CONFIDENCE
● Rewards	
● Give direction	RQ3: UNDERSTANDING A SITUATION IS KEY IN GIVING DIRECTION
● Seek to understand	
● Build relationships	RQ3: USE COMMUNICATION APPROACHES FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT WHILE BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
● Ways to manage change	
● How to assess situation	RQ4: ASSESSING THE SITUATION IS A PREREQUISITE TO TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES SUCCESSFULLY
● Ways to handle opportunities	
● Improve Business	RQ4: MANAGING OR RESOLVING CHALLENGES IMPROVES BUSINESS
● Manage Crisis	
● Resolve challenges	
● Act	STAND ALONE 2nd ORDER CODES
● Evaluate Risk	
● Solution orientated	

Source: Authors own

4.10.1.4 Phase four: evaluating themes

In this stage of the research process the researcher carefully examined the code categories in connection to the coded information and the complete dataset. This step uncovered instances where certain code category labels did not accurately represent the data or respond to the research question. As a result, the researcher had to adjust code group labels including making changes such as adding codes and revising existing ones in order to guarantee a meaningful analysis and understanding of the data (Byrne, 2022). A second reading of the

transcripts was conducted to ensure consolidation and accuracy of themes (Kogen, 2024), with refinement where necessary. Code that did not fit a group were grouped together.

4.10.1.5 Phase five: explaining and naming themes.

Establishing themes necessitates a thorough examination of the underlying data items. At this stage, the researcher also determines which data items to select as examples when presenting the findings (Byrne, 2022). The code groups were then be organised according to each interview question. Subsequently, the data is categorised into themes.

4.10.1.6 Phase six: generating the report.

Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, and the researcher's reflections and interpretations was be added during the analysis process. Findings regarding the frequency of each theme and its explanation, supported by many examples from the data, were documented. Disclosing the quantity of people referencing a theme promotes transparency regarding the grounding of that theme (Kogen, 2024). The researcher summarised the main take aways form the data and proposed under what circumstances based on the themes and patterns observed the findings hold true. A summary is the final step which includes pattern recognition, classification, and the construction of theories (Wicks, 2017). Reflexive thematic analysis is an irritative process therefore phase six can be viewed as the finalization and thorough review of the report.

Conclusions

Adopting Braun and Clarke (2006) method for analysis aimed to ensure moderate dependability (Bell et al., 2019). The researcher collected and analysed data professionally and without manipulation to provide genuine results. Contradictory data was acknowledged and included in the analysis to enhance the understanding and interpretation of themes.

4.11 Research quality and rigour

Research adhered to established principles of good practice to ensure credibility, conformability, transferability, and dependability (Bell et al., 2019). These principles are be explained below.

4.11.1 Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the trustworthiness of the findings (Bell et al., 2019). Ensuring trustworthiness of research is crucial. This necessitated transparency regarding the research methodology, careful consideration, accurate documentation, rigorous data analysis, soliciting input from others, and maintaining comprehensive records. These measures were essential in establishing the credibility of research outcomes (Closa, 2021).

The set of questions included in the interview protocol was tested beforehand to ensure that there are no difficulties in obtaining the data. To ensure credibility the researcher used the English language, which participants were familiar with, to avoid translating the interview data. All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed word for word. Any identifying details were removed from the transcripts, which are stored securely. The research employed thick descriptions, often including direct quotes from participants to convey actual situation and context in the findings. Thick description is a solid foundation for making informed judgments or interpretations based on the depth of understanding gained from the detailed portrayal of phenomena (Bell et al., 2019).

4.11.2 Confirmability

The concept of confirmability pertains to the objectivity and neutrality of the research methodology employed, and the degree to which the results are based on the data rather than the researcher's preconceptions (Bell et al., 2019). After piloting the interview, a feedback session was held with my supervisor to ensure that my conduct is neutral, and the interview guide is obtaining the required information to answer the research question. I ensured that I know the study's objectives by heart to guide against bias when prompting for answers or following up on replies. I followed the interview guide to ensure all main questions were asked. Transcribed text was written word for word, without paraphrasing. When a part of the initial recording is unclear, the researcher did not assume it, to make a complete sentence (Bell et al., 2019). When writing findings ellipsis were used to indicate a break in between sentences or words. When providing quotes that are not grammatically clear, context information was provided. The findings were based on the responses of the participants. To maintain a record of the entire research process, each step was documented to create an audit trail.

4.11.3 Transferability

The concept of transferability pertains to the possibility of extending the results of a study conducted in one setting to another setting. It concerns the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied across settings (Bell et al., 2019). After the interview, the researcher uploaded the audio recordings and downloaded the Teams transcription scripts into a password-protected folder. The researcher then listened to the recording and edited the Microsoft team's transcription to reflect the recording. The study has thick descriptions and a comprehensive collection of information to ensure comparability and transferability. The participants' characteristics were made clear. A systematic approach was followed in the study.

4.11.4 Dependability

Robust techniques in qualitative research are essential to guarantee dependable and consistent results. Transparency in the three crucial steps of the research process - planning, implementing, and reporting - is crucial to enhance the dependability of the techniques used

in research despite ethical or other constraints (Bell et al., 2019; Closa, 2021). Upon receiving ethical clearance, the researcher approached the senior manager in the project delivery space to introduce the researcher to top managers in the contractor space who are willing to assist the researcher in piloting the study instrument. The researcher shared the study objectives with them.

In parallel, the researcher approached client project managers to solicit contractors open to participating in the study contact details. The researcher collected the contact details, including cell phone numbers and emails, of individuals that indicated openness to participation. The researcher contacted the individuals by email with the attachment of the informed consent letter that they must fill and sign, then return the form with information indicating the time slot they are offering for the interview to be conducted. The researcher made it clear that the researcher is also available after working hours and weekends to make it convenient for them to accommodate the researcher. Upon conclusion of the interviews, the researcher requested the participant to introduce the researcher to other managers to conduct further interviews, increasing the chances of reaching a sufficient sample size.

Before the interviews, the researcher ensured the phone is charged and has the capacity to record. The researcher activated the transcription service on Microsoft Teams, ensured that there is reliable internet service and backup for both fibre and 3G. Then the researcher ensured the laptop battery is charged in case of power outages to ensure uninterrupted communication. Additionally, the room where the interview was conducted was free of noise and private.

The research study explains what was planned and executed. It describes in detail the data collected to ensure findings are dependable. To achieve dependability, one must take a similar role to the research process (Bell et al., 2019).

4.12 Research ethics

Ethical considerations in research aim to prevent harm and privacy violations, guarantee informed consent, and eliminate deception or coercion in participant involvement (Bell et al., 2019). To safeguard the rights of the university and its researchers, no data, even if it is publicly available, was collected until the GIBS master's research ethics committee approved the ethical clearance application (Gordon Institute of Business Sciences University of Pretoria, 2024). To protect the participants rights, they were informed via a consent letter as to the nature of the research project and its objectives, the time commitment required and how the present study will be conducted (Bell et al., 2019).

An informed consent letter served as a legal instrument to shield the university and its researchers from potential legal repercussions when sharing research findings. It is central in

safeguarding the rights of participants involved in the study (Gordon Institute of Business Sciences University of Pretoria, 2024). The letter highlighted that taking part is optional and that the participant can leave at any point without facing any consequences. It also explained that all information would be kept and shared without including any personal details. The researcher ensured that a signed consent letter was acquired from participants. Participation was not induced or forced through any means of incentive or coercion (Gordon Institute of Business Sciences University of Pretoria, 2024). Participants could converse in English. They did not have dependency relationships with the researcher.

The researcher kept all personal details confidential by using pseudonyms and storing the signed consent form away from interview guide and in a folder that requires a password to open. The researcher explained the research clearly to leaders in the construction industry and respected the rights of participants and allowed them to participate or withdraw voluntarily. The study will be shared with participants that indicated interest. The research and any information shared is to be published without identifiers such as real names and statements that their company can be identified with so that other people may learn from the research.

4.13 Study methodological limitations

It's not feasible to carry out an exclusively inductive analysis because the researcher needs a criterion to determine if a piece of information is relevant to answering the research question, but the decision-making process mainly relied on input from the study participants, giving importance to their perspectives. Making the process inductive (Byrne, 2022). Interpretivism philosophy is subject to researcher bias because the researcher ascribes the significance of the data. However, the researcher acknowledges that different researchers might analyse the data in diverse ways, and this range of interpretations is anticipated and accepted.

Self-reported data bias of behaviours and responses that happened in the past but is recalled later without any verification means. This limitation was mitigated by asking same questions to a variety of participants to validate commonality. Exploratory research answers the research questions even though answers are typically inconclusive (Olawale et al., 2023)

Using a small sample size allowed for in-depth exploration (Bell et al., 2019), but it limited the transferability of findings. Additionally, there was the possibility that different subjects might bring additional views.

The researcher is a novice; therefore, there might be limitations in data gathering and analysis. To address this issue, the researcher adhered to procedures outlined in the literature on research methodology. For example, during interviews, the researcher avoided leading questions, and during analysis, Braun and Clarke, (2006) thematic analysis steps were followed.

The next chapter presents the findings.

Chapter 5: Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings. There were four research questions and each question findings are colour coded differently question 1 yellow, question 2 blue, question 3 pink and question 4 green to assist with navigation. The layout is by research question and associated themes. Each theme is explained followed by the presentation of evidence. Next the evidence is analysed and each theme ends with a concluding remark. The chapter ends with a concluding summary to highlight important findings.

The research problem explores how managers handle crises effectively. The goal is to discover the leadership behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes and the approaches leaders use to manage crises. Including sources used to maintain morale during a crisis. The goal is also to discover how a crisis's unforeseen opportunities and challenges are handled. Interviews with managers in the construction industry whose organisations have survived the COVID-19 crisis were conducted to gather data. Four research sub-questions were asked to address this study's overarching question: How do managers respond to a crisis?

Thirteen participants were interviewed. Their experience in a management role ranged from six years to thirty-two years. A purposive sampling giving priority to individuals who lead teams and carry decision-making responsibilities within construction firms was selected. Managers were particularly suitable for addressing the research question, given their central role in providing direction and leadership during crisis management. Four participants held supervisory roles while, nine were part of top management team. Many participants were in the age category 41 to 50. Comprehensive age characteristics of participants is shown on Table 2.

Table 2

Age Characteristics of Participants

	Top Management Team	Supervisory
Age Group (Years)		
30-40	3	1
41-50	3	2
51-60	2	0
Over 60	1	1

Source: Authors own

5.1 RQ1: What approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?

The design of this research question was to explore practical responses on how to manage a crisis to expand the range of options available to managers. Three main themes were identified. Figure 4 shows a schematic representation of the themes that emerged.

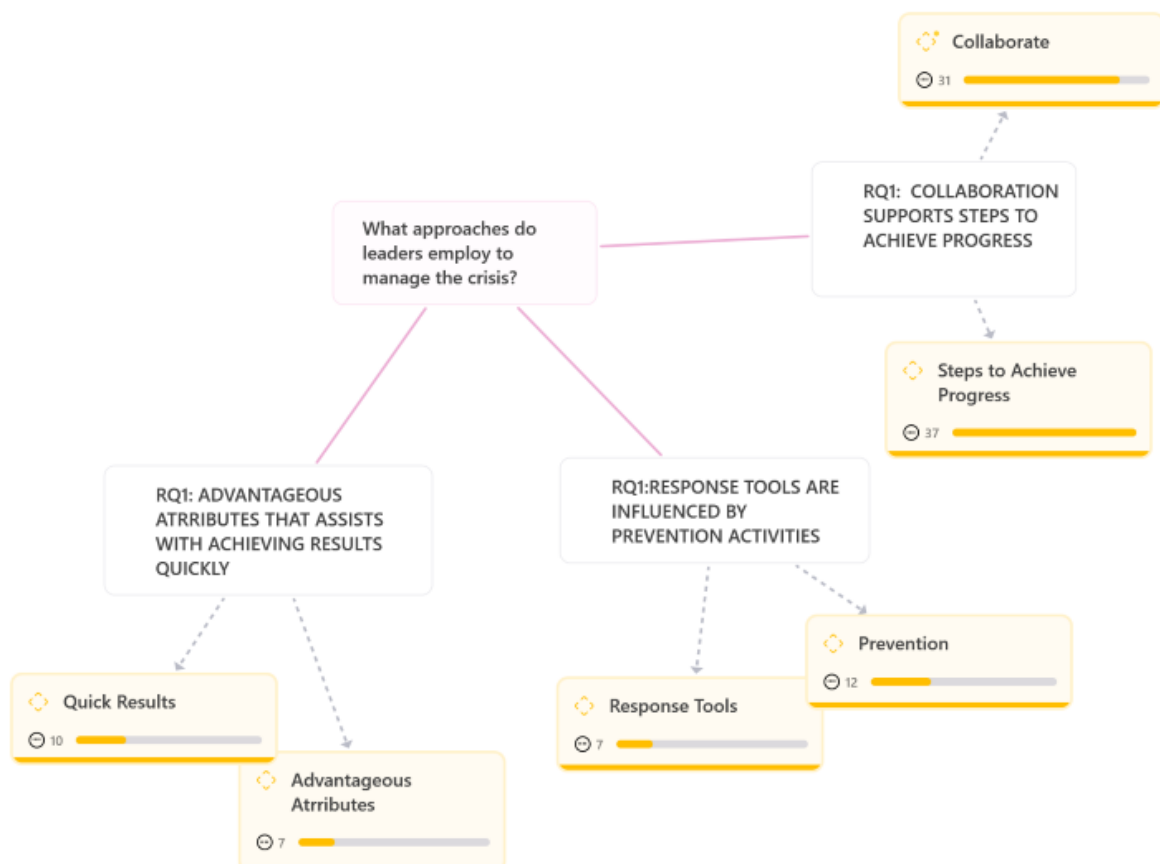


Figure 4: Research Questions 1 Themes

5.1.1 RQ1 Theme 1: Collaboration supports steps to achieve progress.

This theme is about how working with others expedites decision making and achieving results. Steps to achieve progress are related to decision making steps but only the information shared by participants is presented. Figure 5 shows a graphical representation of these steps.



Figure 5: Steps to achieve progress category

5.1.1.1 Collaboration supports steps to achieve progress.

RQ1 Theme 1 Steps to achieve progress require collaboration
<i>“everyone brings the results of the table. Other than having one man responsible to resolving the crisis. Because when you are minding something on your left, something might be happening on your right. Then you go to fix the right, then the left. It's possible something is going bad. So if we can work as a team, delegate and see. Okay, this one we know, we know our staff, we know our personnel that this one, Mister X, is good in like negotiating” 2:14 ¶ 122 in Participant 10</i>

“Communication being probably the biggest thing. So when we start off a project, we try communicate with. All the role players, all the key stakeholders that are involved in the project, the municipalities, the counsellors of those different areas and basically before we start, we engage with these communities and with the SMMES and companies that want to be involved in the project and we do it through a channel that. Is open, so it's transparent.” [13:1 ¶ 31 in Participant 9](#)

“call all the stakeholders around the table. Say guys tell me. What happened so that when you are pointing at someone else, they are in the room, they are able to give a different perspective of how, what the problem, that what happened”. [9:16 ¶ 46 in Participant 5](#)

“what helped us a lot in some of those crisis as well is that as an electrical construction company, we are affiliated with the body like National Bargaining Council and Electrical Contracting association, you know, consulting those people and get some advices of how to confront and face such crisis” [15:17 ¶ 117 in Participant 13](#)

“It was about taking interaction with all the staff on a continuous basis every day, so we put plans in place. Where we would meet at least once a day” [3:1 ¶ 23 in Participant 11](#)

“use a consultative approach in terms of engaging them in terms of making them to form part of the solution to the crisis” [8:17 ¶ 43 in Participant 4](#)

“There's strength in numbers, you know, you. So if you're dealing with a community and you're already using 10 companies out of the community. And there's one company that wants to exploit the situation. Usually those ten companies would stand up” [13:10 ¶ 33 in Participant 9](#)

“how do we make sure in future this doesn't recur then I'm in this specific example, I now have a team that goes and audits steel at in Imap before it gets loaded on a truck”, [9:12 ¶ 40 in Participant 5](#)

“You don't have production in a linear sequence where you would start at 12345. Now you're starting out of sequence, so you know it's a bit of. Bit of a touch and go sort of scenario where the challenges that you are paying your resources the same, rate but you're actually getting lower production but the production you're getting is production, you wouldn't have got?” [13:26 ¶ 41 in Participant 9](#)

5.1.1.2 Analysis

Many participant's responses highlighted the importance of working together as a team. Participant 13 further explained that when you don't have expertise within your company, you should hire an expert or seek help from institutions like associations. Whatever you do, don't isolate yourself. Work with others, as emphasised by Participant 4. RQ1 theme one finding indicates that when in a crisis, you need a team to achieve positive results, determine solutions, and assist with quick implementation. Participant 9 quote indicates how a team of stakeholders can assist to prevent community from disrupting construction activities. Steps to achieve progress highlight that it's essential to choose a solution that reduces the impact of the consequences of the crisis first. Each solution must be considered in the context that there might be no ideal solution available; therefore, the better of the worst solutions is the perfect

solution. It is the best available outcome. Steps to progress further highlight many problems arising during decision-making; however, the team must establish which problem to deal with. Safety must come first. The essence of Participant 9 points on communication is transparent communication is needed if results and controlled tension are to be achieved. Participant 11 indicates that communication must be frequent.

The leader should be logical when approaching a crisis. The initial action is to understand the crisis situation and quickly implement a solution to minimise impact and ensure safety. Next, a detailed exploration of challenges and possible solutions should be conducted to be able to determine the best available solution. Throughout the process, there must be clear communication to all stakeholders, including communication about what is required to achieve progress quickly. This process is rooted in collaboration, as seen in the above participant's quotations.

5.1.1.3 Conclusion on collaboration supports steps to achieve progress.

When facing a crisis, it's crucial to involve experts or outside help if necessary, rather than working in isolation. Achieving positive outcomes in a crisis often relies on a team effort to find solutions and implement them effectively. Even though there might not be a perfect solution available since the available options typically come with shortcomings. Clear and frequent communication among stakeholders is vital for effective collaboration. Using logic to achieve a solution is seen as a central step that ensures the best available decision is taken. Additionally, leaders must listen to understand the core issues to be able to address what is required. A team assists to establish context as the leader takes longer if he does everything himself.

5.1.2 RQ1 Theme 2: Advantageous attributes assist with quick results.

This theme highlights which leader characteristics are attributable to getting results fast.

Advantageous attributes as shared by participants are presented graphically in Figure 6. These attributes are not a benefit. They have been reported as crucial to responding effectively to a crisis.

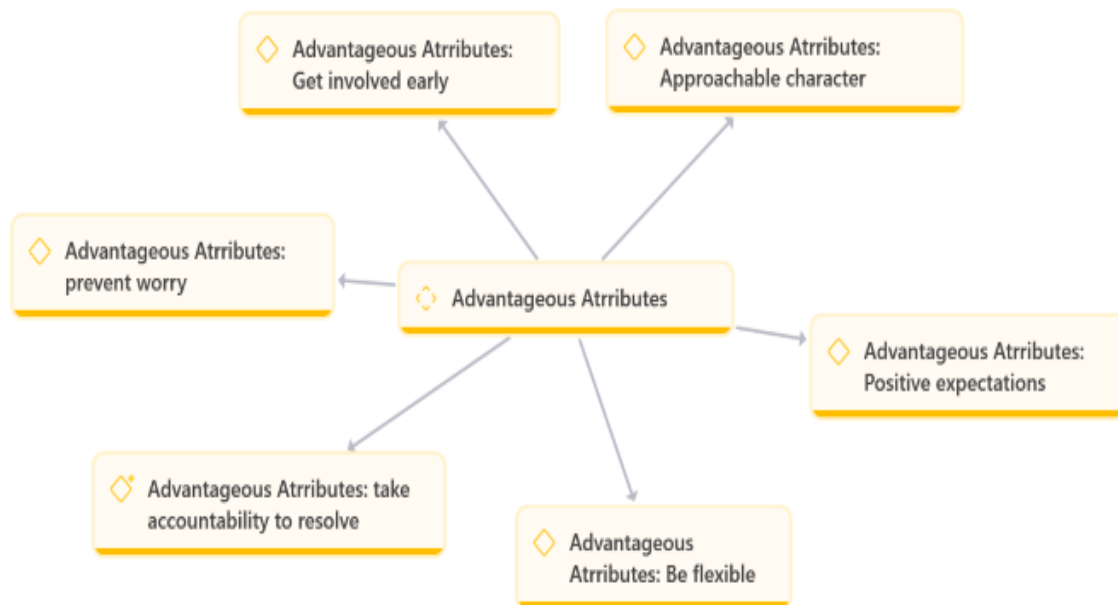


Figure 6: Advantageous attributes category

5.1.2.1 Evidence that attributes assist with quick results.

RQ1 Theme 2 Advantageous attributes assist with quick results
<i>"do your risk assessment. You identify means of attending to the situation as quick as possible". 1:28 ¶ 35 in Participant 1</i>
<i>"The team on site accidentally hit a pipe. While the working, so that would therefore mean that there is a stoppage, which is a crisis on my end. Then I will need to then urgently inform the people that are responsible for maybe stopping the water" 4:2 ¶ 31 in Participant 12 s</i>
<i>"If it's a mistake, say I've made a mistake. I'm moving out of this mistake". 12:22 ¶ 58 in Participant 8</i>
<i>"once we determine that what should happen within, you know the first half an hour of us actually hearing about it, then we can address that that situation. So if there's a threat. Or a threat of violence or anything like that. Then we immediately demobilise the people we tell them to, to remove themselves from site and get themselves to a safe place." 13:5 ¶ 31 in Participant 9</i>
<i>"try to resolve the crisis there and then" 15:2 ¶ 71 in Participant 13</i>
<i>"basically got a letter from the Department of Agriculture saying that we can't continue to work in this area. We need to have certain protocols in place and from there we, you know, that's an external crisis is where we had to sort of restructure "what we were doing without making all the employees get worried" 13:7 ¶ 31 in Participant 9</i>
<i>"People run up to you and say. You know, there's a big problem." 1:9 ¶ 26 in Participant 1</i>

5.1.2.2 Analysis

Risk assessment is a process that assist a leader to choose a solution to resolve the crisis quickly as alluded to by participant 1. Participant 12s quotation highlights that getting involved early is the key to controlling the direction and influencing the outcome. The characteristic of taking accountability to resolve pushes the leader to achieve results as they often must put their ego behind them and advance behaviour that puts the company first. A leader must have an approachable character alluded Participant 1. It must be easy for the team to share the sequence of events with him openly. Participant 8 shares how he deals with and contextualises mistakes. Acknowledging when you make a mistake and finding a way to get out of the mistake is crucial in preventing worry. Participant 9 asserts that a leader must do what they need to do without getting the other employees worried. How the leader communicates, his language choice and intention are paramount in managing a crisis successfully. These attributes assist the leader in finding solutions quickly since the team is free of worry but focuses on the solution of the challenge.

5.1.2.3 Conclusion on advantageous attributes assist with quick results.

An effective leader should be easy to talk to so that team members share information openly with him. The leader should admit to mistakes speedily and nip the unsuccessful path in the bud. It is important to prevent worry among employees while implementing crisis management strategies. Evaluating risks is a strategy for leaders to navigating crises situations quickly and effectively. Getting involved early is essential as it ensures that the crisis is resolved early before the impact and severity increases. Having positive expectation opens the mind to findings amicable solutions.

5.1.3 RQ1 Theme 3: Response tools are influenced by prevention activities.

This theme discussed how, where, and why response tools are suggested, updated, approved. Figure 7 shows a graphical representation of response tools as shared by participants. Response tools are practical actions managers take to respond to a crisis effectively.

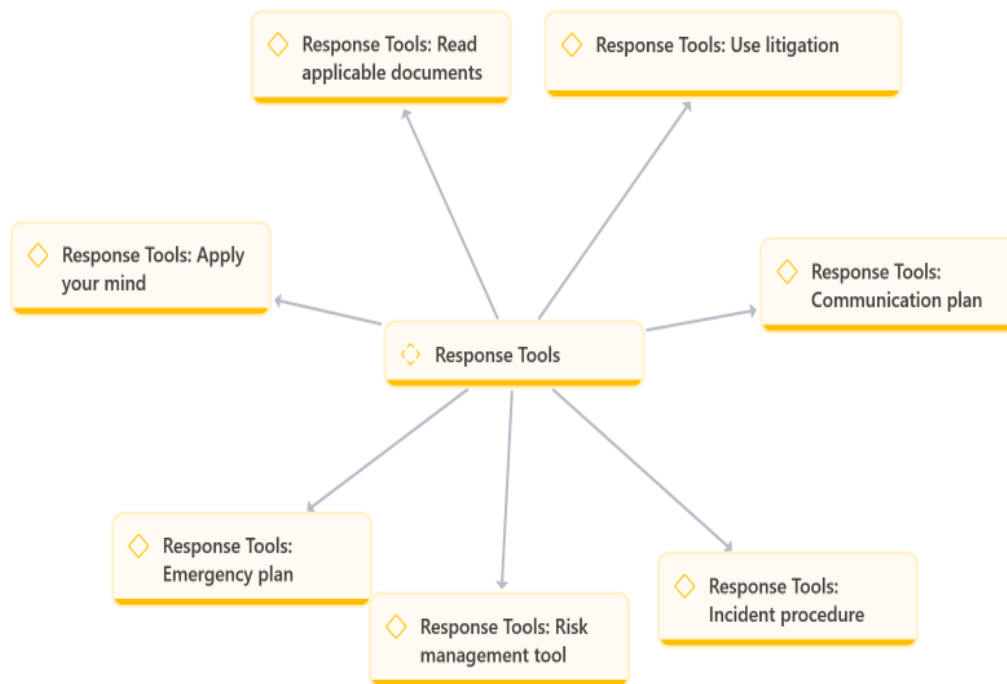


Figure 7: Response tools category

5.1.3.1 Evidence that response tools are recommended during prevention activities.

RQ1 Theme 3 Response tools are influenced by prevention activities
<i>"Write down that report, send it back to our client to say, this is what had happened, this is how we resolve the matter, this is how we are going to do to prevent this from happening again". 2:5 ¶ 80 in Participant 10</i>
<i>"Crisis will happen and you can't. You can't manage it on the fly like you just wait for the crisis and say well that when you make decisions, one of the things we're trying to do now is we document what we term a business continuity plan" 3:19 ¶ 46 in Participant 11</i>
<i>"proactive management of the crisis. So you do, once you manage the crisis immediately, you then go back and you try to see what puts you into that cross in the 1st place and try to proactively arrange it in the future. You don't have this type" 10:11 ¶ 42 in Participant 6</i>
<i>"all issues that are arising during the projects will be reported to the steering committee. It makes it easier for us to control". 11:23 ¶ 53 in Participant 7 s</i>
<i>"Immediately when there's an onsite crisis like that, our supervisors are instructed to phone our site managers. Our site managers then contact the project manager and the CLOS or the Community liaison offices" 13:3 ¶ 31 in Participant 9</i>

5.1.3.2 Analysis

The leader takes time to reflect when the crisis is under control to establish how the leader ended up in the situation, to begin with, as illustrated by Participant 6. The leader looks for ways to improve his systems, processes, and procedures. He uses the crises as an enabler to enhance and update risk response plans. He uses the crisis to share lessons learned, as demonstrated in the Participant 10 quotation. Many participants indicated two solution phases for a crisis: an immediate solution to reduce impact and the other to learn and prevent future occurrences. It is through the second phase of the solution that response plans are updated and influenced. The second phase is critical because it gives the business a plan to manage crises and ensure continuity.

Applying your mind, opting for litigation, and using documented plans and procedures were some of the response ways shared by participants. It was also shared how a committees assist to control the crisis by building on experience and strengths of different parties. Having a committee is a prevention activity that ensures the responses suggested are informed by lessons learned previously. Communication plans assist to share information with speed among stakeholders as indicated by participant 9. Risk management is an assessment tool that is utilised during the first and second phase of solving the crisis.

5.1.3.3 Conclusion on response tools that are influenced by prevention activities.

After resolving a crisis, leaders need to pause and reflect on the events that led to it happening in the first place. Leaders strive to enhance their risk response tools to prevent similar problems in the future. Tools such as communication plans were found to be essential by many participants. Risk management tool was emphasised to be foundational when decisions must be made. What is critical is the leader must apply their mind during a crisis as to be able to adjust response tools to a situation at hand. Reading applicable documents informs how the leaders must respond and applicable documents are revised based recommendations from lessons learned.

5.2 RQ2: Which specific behaviours of leaders significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis?

The design of this research question was to discover specific leader behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes during a crisis. Three themes were identified. Figure 8 shows a schematic representation of the themes that emerged.

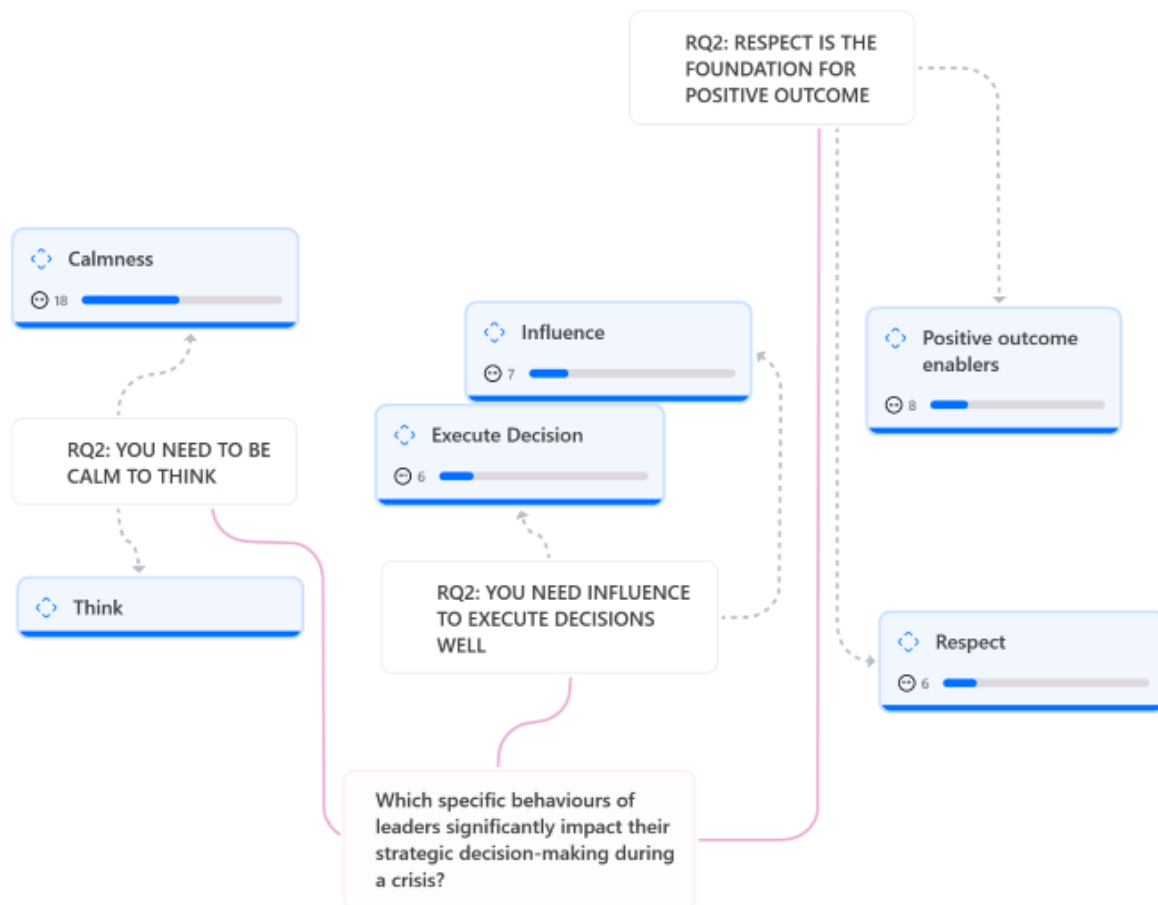


Figure 8: Research question 2: themes

5.2.1 RQ2 Theme 1: You need to be calm to think.

This theme explains the state that the leaders must embody to allow leaders to think and bring positive outcomes

Figure 9 shows ways of thinking that support positive outcomes.

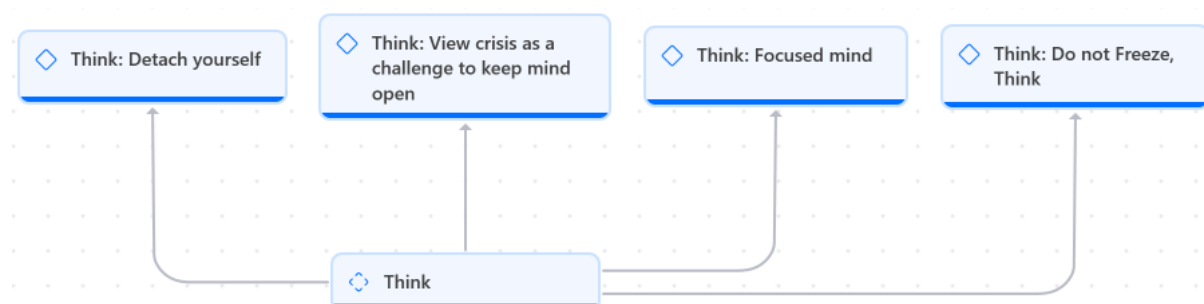


Figure 9: Think category

5.2.1.1 Evidence of the need to be calm

RQ2 Theme 1 You need to be calm to think
<i>"You need to be you need to be calm yourself so that you are able to think you know".</i> 1:25 ¶ 35 in Participant 1
<i>"it's critical to control your emotions, because you know, when, when you're panicking or when you are angry, you might end up taking reckless decisions".</i> 2:8 ¶ 92 in Participant 10
<i>"I detach myself, I mean we are a speck of dust in the universe. I mean come on what I do, what I don't do, I'll try my best. That's all I can do. But it's not that I will stop the world from collapsing. Or do you understand? I'm trying to you give less importance to ... all the things that are around ",</i> 10:42 ¶ 56 in Participant 6
<i>"But after I've prepared myself then it gets to a point that you're saying when you are in it and now the things that you did not expect or you did not or you're not able to mitigate it or it happened when you didn't expect it or if you it happened at the worst case than what you expected. Then you go back into the balance ...and you're saying, OK. All right, let's start looking at finding my inner peace, I do it by example walking in and I don't know in the animals"</i> 10:39 ¶ 56 in Participant 6
<i>"You have to have a calm demeanour. There shouldn't be any raised voices. There shouldn't be any sort of threat or anger, definitely not anger that, that doesn't help anyone"</i> 13:14 ¶ 35 in Participant 9

5.2.1.2 Analysis

Participant 9 explains that leaders' emotions should be in check. The tone of voice should be projected low. Participant 10 explains that you should never be angry when in a crisis as it leads to reckless decisions, how you react matters. Your state must be at peace to be able to see solutions creatively. Participant 6 reflects that leaders must detach themselves and look at the problem from a bird eye view to be able to give direction. The leader must at all times think logically, not emotionally; they should never freeze or be overwhelmed that they can't act. Participants 6 further alludes that perspective assists in framing the crisis no matter how big. Viewing a crisis as a challenge or a problem assists with keeping the mind in search of a solution. Leaders must be in balance with their emotions. This can be achieved by walking in nature or spending time with animals.

5.2.1.3 Conclusion on you need to be calm to think.

Leaders should keep their emotions in check, maintaining a calm demeanour and a low tone of voice. Leaders should adopt a bird's-eye view of problems by detaching themselves to

provide effective direction. Engaging in activities like walking in nature or spending time with animals can help leaders manage their emotional state better.

5.2.2 RQ2 Theme 2: Respect is the foundation for positive outcome enablers.

This theme explains the manner in which the leaders must interact with others that supports positive outcomes Figure 10 depicts other predecessors to positive outcomes as shared by participants.

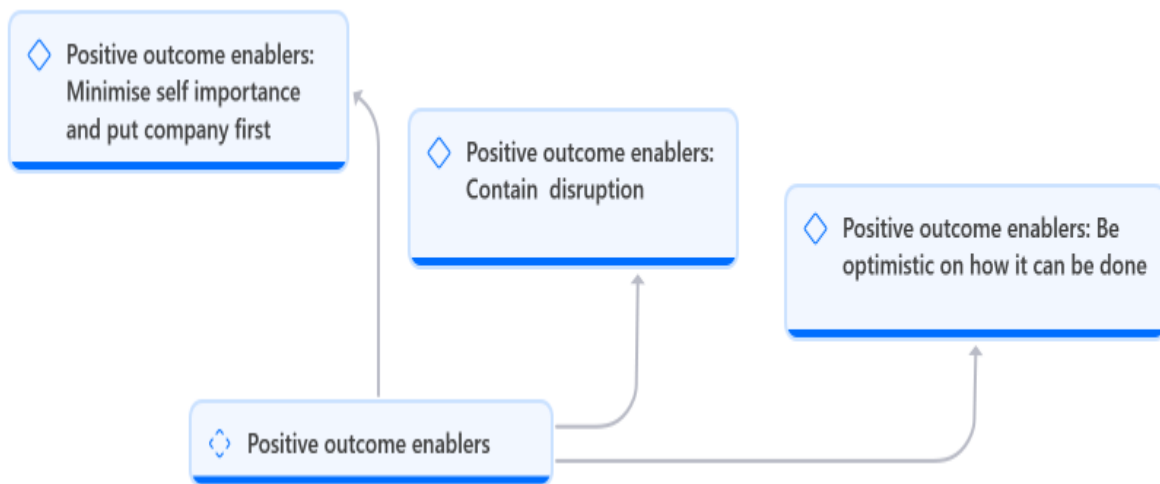


Figure 10: Positive outcome enablers category

5.2.2.1 Evidence of respect associated behaviours

RQ2 Theme 2 Respect is the foundation for positive outcome enables
<i>"You have to understand people where they're coming from. What their passion is, how they interact, and if you don't have. I was gonna say if you don't have a rapport with the people. and know what their strong points is and the weak points is. How they actually get into integrate as a team because if you don't have that, then you gonna struggle"</i> 7:9 ¶ 44 in Participant 3 s
<i>"people are also not conducting themselves like people that care and so on and so forth. But it's critical not to disrespect a person"</i> 9:25 ¶ 50 in Participant 5
<i>"slowly moving constructively towards a solution than trying to break each other down kind of thing".</i> 9:48 ¶ 50 in Participant 5
<i>"Some Members within the teams that are running the projects, you'll find it that they're not disciplined, they'll divulge information about the strategies that we're discussing"</i> 11:8 ¶ 55 in Participant 7 s

5.2.2.2 Analysis

Maintaining respect by addressing the problem and not attacking people was emphasised by Participant 5. How you protect information given to you and not sharing it without approval or with parties that are not connected to a solution is a valued characteristic says Participant 7s that contributes to positive outcomes. Participant 3 indicates that the leader must understand people and their values to correct behaviour without offending them. Even if the person is responsible for the crisis it is important to have empathy and respect when enquiring into the root cause explains Participant 5.

With respect, it is easier to contain the disruption effectively and get to a solution as people tend to be free and share facts. When there is respect, people don't avoid speaking up and speaking out, knowing the environment is conducive to seeking the solution that assists the organisation. Participant 3 indicates leader behaviour of communicating with empathy and maintaining confidentiality enhances the achievement of intended outcomes.

5.2.2.3 Conclusion on respect is the foundation for positive outcome enablers.

Respect is fundamental for achieving positive outcomes. A respectful atmosphere encourages team members to speak up share their thoughts, which helps in solving problems and achieving success as a team. Attacking individuals rather than addressing issues at hand can hinder progress. Sharing sensitive information without permission prevents a constructive movement towards a solutions as trust and respect is undermined.

5.2.3 RQ2 Theme 3: You need influence to execute decisions well.

This theme explains the impact which the leaders must exert when dealing with others that supports positive outcomes Figure 11 depicts that the leader must ensure that decisions taken are executed with discipline as shared by participants.

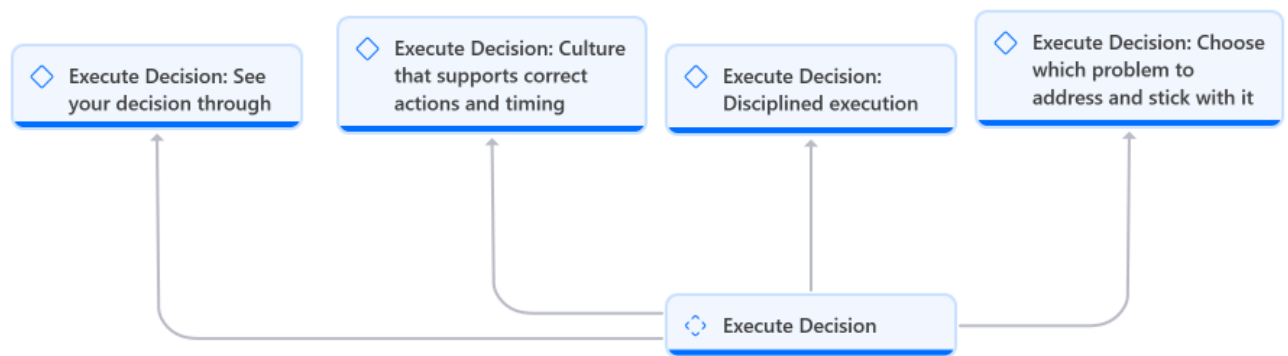


Figure 11: Executive decision category

5.2.3.1 Evidence of why influence is needed

RQ2 Theme 3 You need influence to execute decisions well
<i>"when you deal with the crisis, you would need a buy in of the of the stakeholders"</i> 1:30 ¶ 37 in Participant 1
<i>"everybody needs to be in the same boat as you in terms of like your goals that you want to achieve"</i> 5:9 ¶ 42 in Participant 2 s
<i>"Your control is with regard to the team, the people, because of that is the biggest asset that you work with. Always".</i> 7:10 ¶ 44 in Participant 3 s
<i>"you need to look on the tools that you have. In house, in a company, in order to manage the crisis, if you don't have that. You need to go outside of the company. And and show that you engage whoever or whichever. Whichever company that you require partnership with in order for you to solve the crisis,"</i> 8:26 ¶ 41 in Participant 4
<i>"You need to keep people focused and say guys keep the emotions aside for now. Let's solve the problem"</i> 9:34 ¶ 61 in Participant 5

5.2.3.2 Analysis

The leader needs help to implement decisions. Leaders must be able to persuade even people outside their companies to share in the company goals to resolve a crisis, says Participant 4. As a leader, you must be able to influence people to achieve the intended outcome with the least amount of resistance, as highlighted in Participant 3s and Participant 1 quotations.

Motivation and influence are ongoing activities to ensure your decisions are implemented and given a chance. The decision must not be changed at the first resistance point. You cultivate a culture that supports achieving the vision by motivating the team to stick it out, therefore assisting in executing decisions well, as shared by Participant 5.

5.2.3.3 Conclusion why influence is needed.

Leaders need to influence their teams and stakeholders by ongoing efforts to motivate and encourage free communication thereby making them part of decision making. Leaders should remain steadfast in their decisions and not waver at the first sign of resistance but use influence to inspire stakeholders to execute the decision taken effectively. Leaders must use influence to facilitate the implementation of decisions by ensuring the culture that prevails supports taking action in a timely manner. Influence is essential at the leader does not implement decisions on his own.

5.3 RQ3: How do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?

This question was designed to explore strategies that leaders employ to uphold stakeholder morale while addressing negative emotions. Three main themes were identified. Figure 12 shows a schematic representation of the themes that emerged.

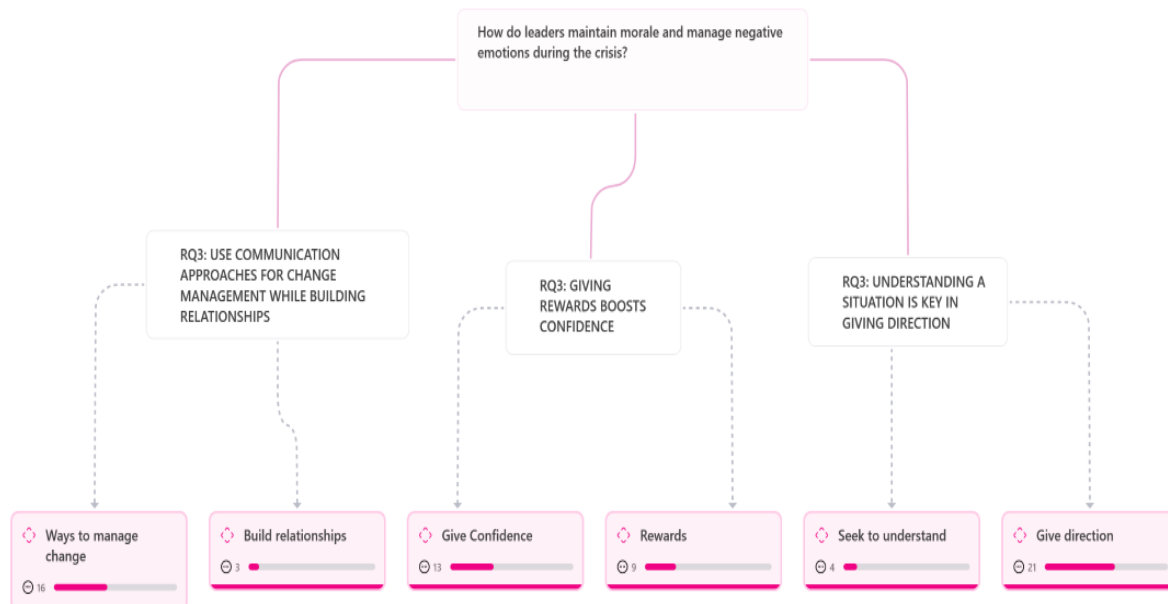


Figure 12: Research question 3 themes

5.3.1 RQ3 Theme 1 Understanding a situation is key in giving direction.

This theme is highlighting the importance of understanding the situation but soliciting opinions to give direction.

Figure 13 depicts ways the leader may give direction, which include providing leadership.



Figure 13: Give direction category

5.3.1.1 Evidence of approaches to understand the situation

RQ3 Theme 1 Understanding a situation is key in giving direction.
<i>"involve them. You, ask them their views, how can they participate? What do they think? and if they're not coming up with really good suggestions. You know, you then suggest to say, how's about doing it this way, you know. You try and led them and you get buy in."</i> 1:42 ¶ 43 in Participant 1
<i>"my door is always open and I always have. I always interact with people and because of my background. I can immediately see if there was an issue or there was a stress or whatever, and then I'll sit with the person and I'll give that time. Even though I have to most probably work late or whatever since I've been out, it doesn't matter because I know that if that person I can pull it in .and be compassionate and have empathy".</i> 7:12 ¶ 46 in Participant 3 s
<i>"I actually formed myself a lot. That's what I tend to do in general. I'm that's why I spend a lot of time. I really like to understand something so I can actually be able to talk to it".</i> 10:27 ¶ 50 in Participant 6
<i>"you must be a good listener. Try to listen carefully and always write down each and every detail that they specify, that they say. And then try to make sense out of it. And then, in your mind, try to make sure that if you have an opportunity, try to turn that conflict or that crisis into a positive. Into a positive energy"</i> 15:8 ¶ 95 in Participant 13

5.3.1.2 Analysis

When it comes to dealing with emotions and morale. Participant 1 highlighted that the leader must take the time to understand what is causing the low morale and negative emotions. The leader must engage people and listen to understand. He must ask clarifying questions to real not misdiagnose the issue, only once he is clear on what the issue is, he can then suggest a way forward. The leader suggests a solution but does not impose it. While Participant 3 stressed that maintaining an open-door policy is important to showing people that they are valued. Interacting with people gives leader an opportunity to understand context. The leader may provide direction that manages the emotion and morale once he is in a position to understand the context. It's key that leader addresses the correct issue. Participant 13 stressed the significance of active listening, advising that one should even document details in the process to understand a situation.

5.3.1.3 Conclusion on understanding a situation is key in giving direction.

Leader should actively involve their team members by asking for their opinions and suggestions. It's essential to listen carefully to understand the root causes of low morale or negative emotions before proposing solutions. Leader should seek consensus rather than imposing their ideas to deal with low morale. Understanding what the issue is a predecessor to proving a solution. Leaders cannot address what they don't understanding. To understand context the leaders should interact with stakeholders in a none threatening way. Leaders must be able to solicit buy in and support on the way forward by explaining the leader's rationale and constraints.

5.3.2 RQ3 Theme 2: Use communication approaches for change management while building relationships.

This Theme deal with how leaders use communication to maintain morale and enhance relationships. Figure 14 depicts the building relationships category that shares practical ways that builds relationships.

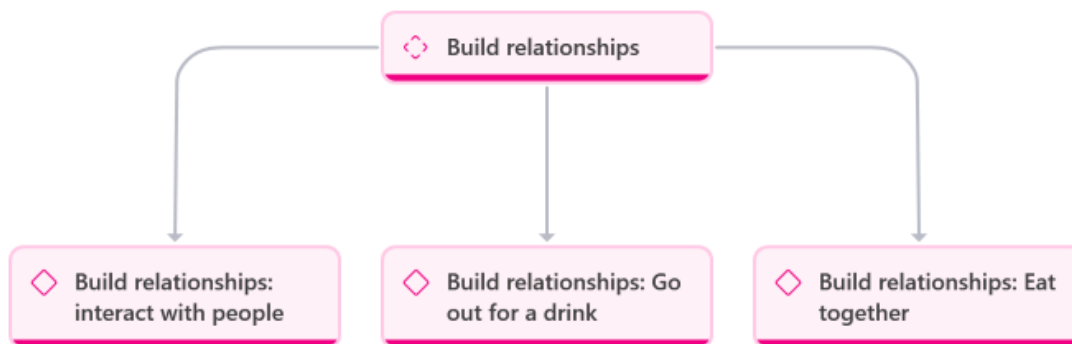


Figure 14: Build relationship category

5.3.2.1 Evidence of Communication approaches to manage change

RQ3 Theme 2 Use communication approaches for change management while building relationships
<i>"people are looking for something specific, you know. And if you can identify that it needs to be clear whether you can provide it or not, or it needs to be clear. If you can't provide it, it needs to be clear as to why you can't provide it"</i> 1:46 ¶ 45 in Participant 1
<i>"what I would do is to actually motivate the team that, OK mistakes do happen as much as somebody needs to take accountability...this is a mistake"</i> 4:9 ¶ 41 in Participant 12 s
<i>"we're getting negative feedback that people are feeling like, no, this is the end of the company. What is going on and now you have to start lifting. It becomes heavy on you. But we have to then maintain, carry them on your shoulders until it stabilises and then work starts coming and they realise, oh, OK, so yes, the company's going forward"</i> 9:30 ¶ 50 in Participant 5
<i>"first of all you need to make people understand that the crisis is not permanent"</i> 8:14 ¶ 43 in Participant 4
<i>"Not give an indication that, that's a crisis, more something that needs to be re managed, reworked re planned... that allows for the people to carry on"</i> 10:23 ¶ 46 in Participant 6
<i>"So in order for you to boost the morale of that, you need to break down whatever it is there. How big it is. And then you say guys this, the this what we're going to do"</i> 12:12 ¶ 43 in Participant 8

5.3.2.2 Analysis

Participant 1 emphasises that communicating well, what can and cannot be provided to stakeholders when addressing their specific needs is essential. Participant 12s highlights another important approach: leaders must motivate team members to recover and learn from mistakes by clarifying that mistakes happen but emphasising accountability. Leaders need to

support their teams and instil a sense of stability and hope when employees feel that the company is failing, shares Participant 5.

Participant 4 indicates that leaders must clarify that crises are temporary and influence perception. Participant 6 supports that perception must be influenced because his quotation indicates that instead of framing an issue as a crisis, it should be treated as a situation that requires re-evaluation and planning. Leaders should break down significant issues into manageable parts to enhance team morale. This action communicates a clear action plan for moving forward. Building relationship during a crisis helps to communicate. Relationships can be built by eating together, going out for drinks to pass the message that we are together, we shall overcome, we refuse to let this crisis cause us depression. It also provides a platform to have one on one discussions.

5.3.2.3 Conclusion on communication approaches for change management while building relationships.

Communicating well by sharing limitations of the firms' resources is essential, as well as offering emotional support and motivation when employees are going through negative changes by echoing that the situation is not permanent and the crisis can be managed. Encouraging employees to take accountability for their mistakes swiftly by explaining that mistakes are part of life which assists in achieving progress. Taking the action of breaking work into manageable parts assists in alleviating employees from being overwhelmed and offers direction. Relationships are built to allow for open communication and support. Leaders build relationships during crises to manage morale and encourage employees to act despite the challenges they have experienced. Relationships are built and maintained by sharing meals and drinks and having regular interactions.

5.3.3 RQ3 Theme 3: Giving rewards boosts confidence.

This Theme deals with how the leaders should act to boost confidence. Figure 15 shows circumstance where people receive confidence from as shared by participants.

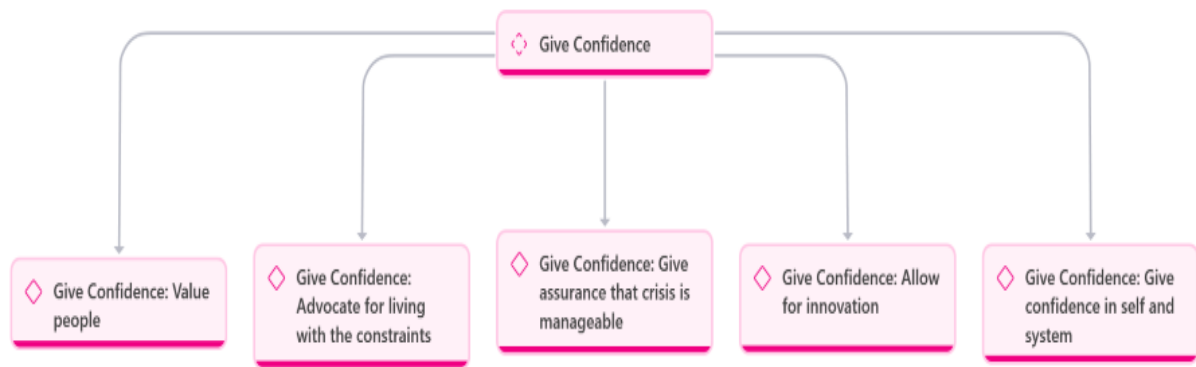


Figure 15: Give confidence category

5.3.3.1 Evidence that giving rewards boosts confidence.

RQ3 Theme 3 Giving rewards boosts confidence
<i>"Another strategy I use, if I see one of my members, maybe that they are pretty much stressed. I encourage them to take leave that this go distress. We will stay behind. We'll try to resolve the matter because if we keep you here, you might, you might be. You are a danger to yourself and to others"</i> 2:10 ¶ 104 in Participant 10
<i>"incentives it also drives the morale of the people. So to give incentives, there are ways, I think it's the same like eeeh, giving the credit when it's due",</i> 5:16 ¶ 50 in Participant 2 s
<i>"being paid some monies that also kept people going and the way it was applied as well. It was applied equally if I'm not mistaken amongst all and then also there were people. I think that they were getting even though they were not directly involved in the in the in the sorting out of the crisis but mainly it was to give confidence".</i> 11:15 ¶ 62 in Participant 7 s
<i>"You can't. It's not the same as when you're trying to motivate people to execute work where you can have bonuses and incentives and a crisis that just doesn't exist in a crisis".</i> 13:19 ¶ 37 in Participant 9

5.3.3.2 Analysis

Incentives are about giving praise and highlighting things being done correctly. It is important to acknowledge people, especially during the crisis, to give them confidence that they are recognised and their efforts are seen. Encouraging people to build their resistance levels gives them the strength to forge ahead. Participant 2s supports that credit must be given when due. Participant 7s shared that people go the extra mile when there is a monetary reward for solving issues; they work in synergy to overcome their differences and external pressures because

they have a common goal to qualify for the reward. Rewards increase confidence, thereby maintaining morale and managing negative emotions during the crisis. However, Participant 9 believes there is no room for incentives and or rewards during the crisis as it's a strategy to motivate people to work. He further shares that giving confidence is especially important during crisis management as sometimes there is no room to give money incentives. Talk people through their fears. Be practical and research effective ways to assist them.

Encouraging time off if the person is overwhelmed communicates that the leader values the person. It also assists in bringing the morale up as the person feels valued to change their state and come back prepared to overcome challenges, explains Participant 10.

5.3.3.3 Conclusion on rewards boosts people's confidence.

Acknowledging effort is essential for maintaining motivation. Reminding people of their victories motivates and encourages them to soldier on. Giving time off helps people feel valued and increases their strength to face challenges. Financial rewards can encourage employees to go the extra mile. Participants noted that equitable distribution of rewards enhances group dynamics. Some participants argued that alternative strategies, such as building confidence through practical support and open communication, work better to manage morale, as incentives and rewards are more suitable for motivating performance.

Rewards through encouragement allow people to live with the constraints while pursuing positive performance. When people have confidence and a positive outlook, they are prone to being innovative in the solutions they provide. Giving people confidence is acting in ways that demonstrate people are valued.

5.4 RQ4: How were the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis handled?

This question was designed to discover how crises opportunities and challenges were managed. Two main themes were identified. Figure 16 shows a schematic representation of the themes that emerged.

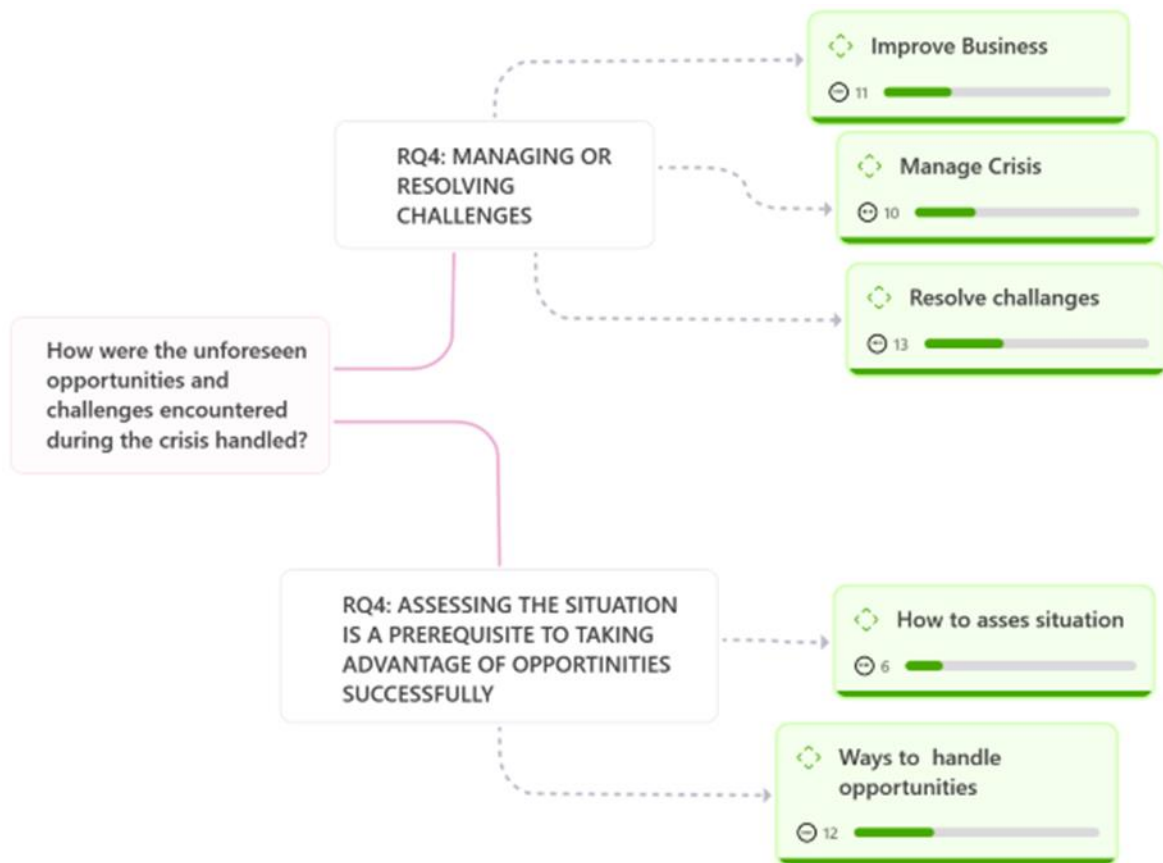


Figure 16: Research question 4 themes

5.4.1 RQ4 Theme 1: Managing or resolving challenges improves business.

This theme deals with managing challenges if they cannot be resolved. It includes practical ways of resolving and managing challenges. Figure 17 shows a graphical representation of approaches that improve business.

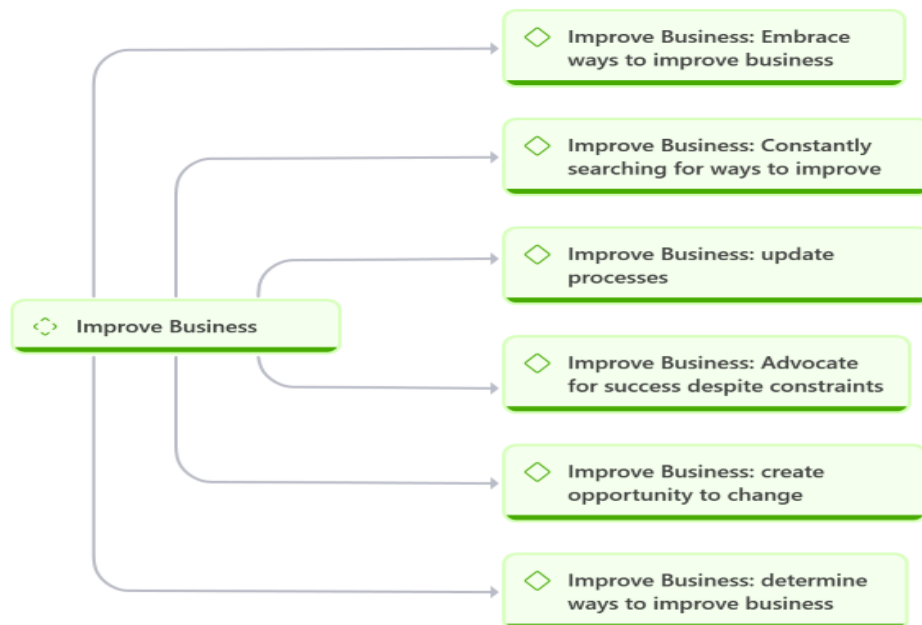


Figure 17: Improves business category

5.4.1.1 Evidence of how challenges are resolved or managed.

RQ4 Theme 1 Resolving challenges improves business
<i>"So in instance, like those, we, we sometimes stop, stop the process, go back and look if we should just start over or we can just carry on. But now look, look wide, like broaden the process because now there are other parties involved. So that's how we normally do it. Just take a break, check if you need to exhaust other measures or you can just continue how we had intended to solve the problem."</i> 2:11 ¶ 110 in Participant 10
<i>"I would come with a solution which we see that it OK, maybe my solution is not working, so we ask the next person who maybe is more experienced in this field".</i> 4:17 ¶ 51 in Participant 12 s
<i>"write down what you agree on and then what you don't agree on So what you agree on you put it aside what you don't agree on you try to see. How close can you come to each other? And then with all the closeness, you can make a decision there"</i> 12:7 ¶ 27 in Participant 8
<i>"our project manager and our client project manager might be having a feud, which is they're both trying to protect their contract on each side of their business, right, so. My portion is to come in and manage that relationship to say guys, you know just you know from the outside, I can see we're not getting anywhere. We need to come to a solution and we need to sort this out".</i> 13:13 ¶ 35 in Participant 9
<i>"change is right. Although it's very strenuous. I'm going to say it's very. Demanding from a from a system, the reality is you need it to keep mobile, to keep the system adaptable, so one of the main thing is adaptability"</i> 10:35 ¶ 54 in Participant 6

5.4.1.2 Analysis (resolve)

Challenges must be resolved by compromising and thinking outside the norm to find amicable solutions, as Participant 8 alluded to. If the premise is a solution is possible, then a solution emerges; the mindset needs to be solution-orientated. The manager's behaviour needs to be adaptable and, in their stance, to allow for flexibility, as shown by Participant 9. Managers must avoid hitting a deadlock in negotiations they must find amicable solutions. Deadlock is not conducive to the project environment as it results in loose-loose situations, as seen in the Participant 9 quotation. Therefore, when encountering a challenge or unpredicted behaviour, it's important to re-evaluate whether your chosen solution needs to be modified, aborted, or left as is. It is in the process of revaluation, where processes are updated. Resolving challenges brings opportunities for change that improves business.

5.4.1.3 Analysis (manage)

When challenges emerge that cannot be resolved, the consequences must be managed like a sickness. The leader must find ways to live with the constraints and achieve the end goal. Business adapts as mentioned by Participant 6. Sometimes, the challenge requires the leader to seek expert advice, as in Participant 12s situation. Therefore, engaging experts assists in managing unforeseen difficulties. The crisis must be managed for what it is. Being able to manage challenges while achieving business objectives improves business.

5.4.1.4 Conclusion on managing or resolving challenges improves business.

The theme stresses the importance of having a problem-solving attitude when dealing with business challenges. Participants suggests that conflicts should be resolved through compromise and creativity to prevent impasse that can result in undesirable consequences. Managers must be flexible about the way they resolve challenges, not the outcome. Managers are advised to asses solutions for their appropriateness when challenges arise. Resolution is the preferred way when dealing with crisis; however, when a resolution is not possible, the leader may adapt systems to achieve business goals despite constraints. Using experts to manage a crisis or complicated execution is strongly advised. Managing or resolving challenges leads to positive outcomes.

5.4.2 RQ4 theme 2: Assessing the situation is a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

This theme discusses how to assess an opportunity and highlights how opportunities are handled. Figure 18 shows a graphical representation of how opportunities are handled.

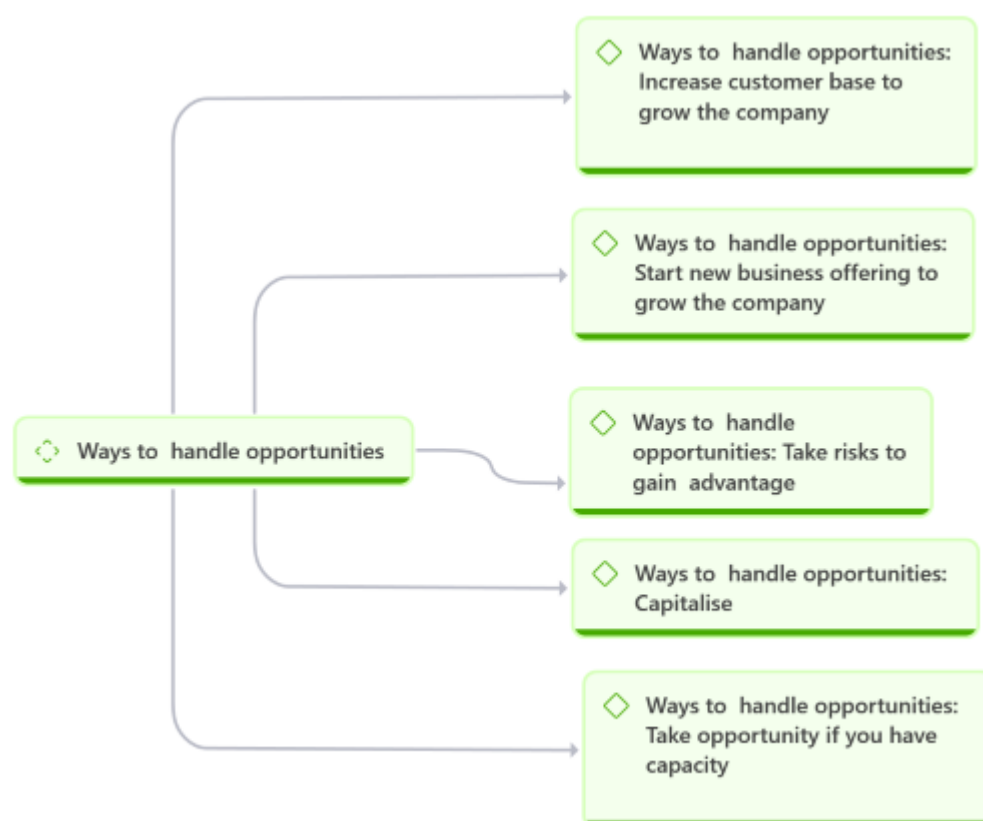


Figure 18: How to handle opportunities

5.4.2.1 Evidence of how to assess an opportunity situation

RQ4 Theme 2 Assessing the situation is a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

"However, they forget about the operating and the maintenance and for that construction to work, you need to know, what the maintenance guy's gonna do and how it's gonna maintain the plant, whether it's safety, whether it's access, whether it's a spares, where he gonna get it and things like that, that all needs to be integrated" [7:13 ¶ 48 in Participant 3s](#)

"So some of these tenders, you know, things go wrong without even knowing what happened. So. But at the end, just try to be yourself. Just try to be yourself and don't bow down. Try to enforce your principles. Some of these opportunities, they want to take you out of your principles" [15:10 ¶ 101 in Participant 13](#)

"unexpected opportunity. I think that one, it depends on the operations that you have and the capacity that you have. So because the opportunities when it comes and then if you if you're ready and then you need to take that opportunity, if you're not ready, I won't advise anybody. I've seen a lot of companies actually going down because of taking every opportunity that comes across them. So it's been it's actually a suicide any way. You've got a lot of companies that went down because of that. "5:21 ¶ 58 in Participant 2 s

"Half of the democratic dispensation Years, I have been in management. So these things. You know what? You know what we need as ...people. And what you can afford so, so. So I look at that, I don't have. I don't have methodology, but the only simple basis is that if I do this, I will. I gain more. If it said yeah I will gain more I'll go and do that. But I don't have like a process" 12:23 ¶ 51 in Participant 8

5.4.2.2 Analysis

When unforeseen opportunities present themselves in a crisis, the leader must assess the opportunity and its pros and cons in relation to the business capacity and strengths, as mentioned by Participant 2s. This includes understanding how the opportunity impact the running of existing business systems, says Participant 3s. An assessment is needed to guard against taking what seems like an opportunity for new business but can introduce threats to your system resources. Participant 8 highlights evaluating potential gains is an important step in deciding whether to take the opportunity or not. The opportunity must be sized if the company has the capacity and when the opportunity will not affect the stakeholders negatively. Participants 10 warns if that to guard against opportunities that take you out of principles.

5.4.2.3 Conclusion on assessing the situation as a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

It's imperative to assess opportunities in relation to the company's capacity. Evaluating opportunities in that manner helps guard against jeopardising the company's future success. Companies have failed by taking too much without being prepared; therefore, managers are warned to check if the company has the capacity before seizing the opportunity. Opportunities can also be assessed against potential gains, that is, checking if the business will gain by seizing the opportunity. However, leaders must steer away from opportunities that takes them out of principle, opportunities that do not align with the company's vision and values.

5.5 Concluding summary

Interviews were conducted with managers in the construction industry to explore how managers handle crises effectively. A conceptual framework of the key study findings is shared in Figure 19. Key insights for each research question are highlighted. Lastly, a short description of what to expect in the next chapter.



Figure 19: Conceptual framework of the key findings of the study

Note: Figure 19 depicts a summarised version of key findings from participants. Handling opportunities and challenges block represents crisis management strategies.

The approaches leaders use to manage crises.

To manage crises effectively the study participants shared the following approaches: to involve experts rather than tackling the crisis alone. Encouraging teamwork through collaborative brainstorming to find viable solutions, acknowledging that no solution is perfect, and that collaboration can lead to better outcomes. Maintaining open and frequent communication among all stakeholders to keep everyone informed and aligned while actively listening to grasp the core issues involved. Leaders should be approachable thereby allowing team members to share insights freely.

Leaders should acknowledge their mistakes promptly and address them to prevent further complications. Early involvement in crises helps in addressing issues before they escalate. Maintaining a positive outlook opens the door to finding amicable solutions. Reflecting on past

crises allows leaders to derive valuable lessons, leading to continuous improvement in their risk response strategies for future challenges.

Leadership behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes

Study participants indicated the following as leadership behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes. Leaders should maintain emotional regulation, creating a calm atmosphere during challenging situations. Adopting a bird's-eye view of problems allows leaders to detach from emotional responses and evaluate issues more objectively.

Fostering a respectful atmosphere encourages open dialogue among team members to share ideas freely. Addressing issues rather than attacking individuals. Then leaders should respect confidentiality and avoid sharing sensitive information without permission to protect the trust within the team. Engaging teams in decision-making to ensure their commitment and ownership of outcomes. Leaders must remain resolute in their decisions while being open to feedback. Participants also mentioned promoting a culture that encourages timely action. By embodying these behaviours, leaders can significantly enhance team dynamics and achieve successful outcomes.

Sources used to maintain morale during a crisis.

To manage crises effectively the study participants shared the following approaches: to involve experts rather than tackling the crisis alone. Encouraging teamwork through collaborative brainstorming to find viable solutions, acknowledging that no solution is perfect, and that collaboration can lead to better outcomes. Maintaining open and frequent communication among all stakeholders to keep everyone informed and aligned while actively listening to grasp the core issues involved. Leader should be approachable thereby allowing team members to share insights freely.

Leaders should acknowledge their mistakes promptly and address them to prevent further complications. Early involvement in crises helps in addressing issues before they escalate. Maintaining a positive outlook opens the door to finding amicable solutions. Reflecting on past crises allows leaders to derive valuable lessons, leading to continuous improvement in their risk response strategies for future challenges.

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How are a crisis's unforeseen challenges handled?

Participants recommend that unexpected challenges within a crisis such as conflicts be addressed through compromise and innovative thinking to avoid deadlocks that could lead to negative outcomes. Participants indicated managers should focus on the achieving results rather than advocating for just preferred methods to get there. The approach must be flexible. It is essential for managers to re-evaluate the suitability of chosen solutions when challenges arise. While finding a resolution is preferable during crises, when that isn't achievable, leaders may need to adjust systems to meet business objectives despite constraints. For challenges such as having trouble in execution, engaging experts is highly encouraged. Effectively managing or resolving challenges can lead to favourable results.

How are a crisis's unforeseen opportunities handled?

Leaders should evaluate their organisation's resources and readiness before taking on additional opportunities to ensure that the organisation is not overextending itself. Opportunities should be evaluated against the company's vision and values to avoid pursuing opportunities that may divert the company from its essential principles. Leaders should look at the potential benefits of the opportunity to determine whether they contribute positively to the business. Handling unforeseen opportunities during a crisis requires a thoughtful approach.

How managers respond to a crisis? They use predetermined response tools such as risk assessments, evacuation plans, and communication plans. They also apply their mind. Managers work with others, including experts and various stakeholders such as associations steering committees, to assess and implement solutions quickly. Their role in these processes is significant as it impacts the outcomes. Not a single action resolves the crisis on its own, but a combination of actions puts the manager in a better position to resolve the situation.

Advantageous attributes such as getting involved early, having an approachable character, and taking accountability to resolve the crisis result in resolving the crisis quickly. Assessing

context before implementing any shared successful approaches to resolving a situation is essential. Context matters as it moderates the effectiveness of the solution.

Managers must actively manage the transition process when change occurs by communicating to uplift morale and ensuring that chosen solutions are implemented effectively. How managers behave drives outcomes. When an opportunity arises careful assessment is necessary to avoid mistaking a potential opportunity for new business as something that could threaten existing resources. additionally weighing the potential benefits is a key part of determining whether to pursue the opportunity.

The next chapter presents the discussions where findings are compared to the literature.

Chapter 6: Discussions

This chapter provides an analysis of the study findings against the theory. This is done per the research question and its identified themes. The key findings are reiterated, followed by interpretations of what findings mean, and then an explanation of why the findings matter or the findings alignment with literature. Each question has a conclusion on the outcomes.

To compare the findings with existing scholarship, a three-step approach was employed to identify relevant sources. First, a keyword search was carried out on the literature referenced in Chapter 2. Then another keyword search was conducted on the articles selected to address each research question. Lastly, a broad search on Google Scholar was carried out to find additional literature using constructs in top management journals.

Subsequent steps were carried out if there was a lack of sufficient literature found in the preceding steps. Additionally, when new literature is discovered in the second and third steps, the literature review was not updated; instead, new literature was treated as part of the analytical process. This study seeks to broaden practical crisis management strategies available to managers.

The research problem revolves around a need for insight into how managers successfully handle crises since previous assessments have yet to sufficiently cover crisis leadership (Wu et al., 2021). As crises differ in nature and context, it is essential to explore different approaches, as no single approach works for every situation (Wenzel et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study wanted to better understand the factors that influence leadership reactions during crises as failure to acknowledge and address these can threaten an organisation's survival (Wu et al., 2021).

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews based on the four research questions to discover how managers respond to crises. The study findings revealed that leaders play a significant role in managing crises. As they use various approaches that include risk management tools, teamwork, and collaboration in decision-making to drive implementation.

Leadership behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes include emotional regulation, staying neutral, building trust, and showing respect. Maintaining morale during a crisis relies on clear and open communication, a leader's commitment to supporting employee well-being, acknowledging hard work, offering rewards when possible and motivating it can be done. Unforeseen challenges can be addressed through innovative thinking and adaptable

approaches, while unexpected opportunities should be evaluated in relation to firms' capacity, long-term benefits, and alignment with the organisation's values.

6.1 RQ1 What approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?

The design of this research question was to explore practical responses of strategies used to manage a crisis to expand the range of options available to managers. This enhances crisis management response strategies. Three themes identified for this question are collaboration supports steps to achieve progress; advantageous attributes assist with quick results and response tools are influenced by prevention activities.

6.1.1 RQ1 Theme 1: Collaboration supports steps to achieve progress.

The study findings identified the significance of teamwork and collaboration throughout a crisis life cycle. This discovery indicates that when managing the situation, it is advantageous to seek help, from professionals or external sources. Thereby leveraging team strengths by deploying more experienced members to solve challenges. Each person brings their own ideas and experiences, which can lead to better decisions even though those decisions may be flawed. The leader engages team members in decision-making through consultation. This finding seems consistent with Schaedler et al. (2022) contributions that leaders should encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing, as these practices can lead to creative solutions.

Furthermore, clear and frequent communication among stakeholders is essential for successful collaboration. This implies that the leader should often communicate with all stakeholders without ambiguity to lay the foundation for successful cooperation. This finding aligns with Klöckner et al. (2023) and Schaedler et al. (2022) findings that clear and transparent communication during a crisis helps to manage expectations, reduce uncertainty, and maintain morale among employees and customers.

The findings state leaders must listen to understand the core issues to be able to address what is required using logic. This finding means the leader must actively listen to team members to grasp the underlying issues that need to be addressed, additionally they must follow rational methods in decision making. Interestingly Collins et al. (2023) highlights that leadership does not involve giving direction only but it's about actively listening to stakeholders concerns and encouraging open conversations to ensure decisions address stakeholder challenges.

Leaders who exhibit effective decision-making behaviours, such as gathering and synthesizing information, are expected to make more informed choices that positively impact organizational performance during crises (Samimi et al., 2022).

6.1.1.1 Conclusion on RQ1 Theme 1: Collaboration supports steps to achieve progress

The study has displayed similar findings in comparison with the literatures emphasising that teamwork, collaboration, open and clear communication and understanding core issues is vital to achieve progress. The findings of this study seem to indicate that working with others assists to effectively minimise impact. The study points out aspects of strong leadership in difficult situations by stressing the significance of working together and communicating effectively during a crisis period. Involving team members in decision making can improve solving problems by incorporating viewpoints even if not all decisions are flawless. Listening attentively is crucial, for comprehending team obstacles. It allows leaders to tackle actual issues efficiently. The finding indicates that combining data and encouraging collaboration, in an environment can help reduce the adverse effects of a crisis and result in more positive results. In practise it might be challenging to involve all stakeholders as a crisis is time bound.

6.1.2 RQ1 Theme 2: Advantageous attributes assist with quick results.

The findings indicate in times of uncertainty and challenges, like a crisis situation it is vital for leaders to put in place plans that inhibit worries, among employees. This finding means it's important to ease and prevent any worries among employees during tough times. An example of implementing this finding is providing relief to customers and employees which not only inhibits worry but foster loyalty and long-term commitment (Klößner et al., 2023). When employees are not worried, they are focused on crisis management actions.

The study findings recognise that leaders should quickly acknowledge mistakes and address issues to prevent them escalating. This means that leaders should promptly admit when they realise, they've made a wrong decision. They should also take swift action to rectify the situation to avoid the negative consequences that could arise from allowing the mistake to continue. Previous work by Wu et al. (2021) also identified promptness to addressing issues as critical because if leaders of organisations are unable to identify and promptly address issues associated with crises these issues may rapidly escalate and put the survival of the organisation at risk.

The study findings revealed that leaders should evaluate risks which is a step-in crisis management. This means that leaders need to assess potential risks as part of their crisis management steps and this step is crucial for making informed decisions and minimising negative impacts. This finding is aligned with Mithani and Kocoglu (2020) finding who stated that by identifying the associated risks, leaders are able to make better-informed choices which results in timely crisis response strategies that help lessen the impact of the crisis. During crisis management, it's crucial to evaluate risks and engage early to mitigate impacts. Taking action at the onset of a crisis enables resolution and helps in reducing any potential adverse outcomes. Getting involved early helps resolve issues before they get worse.

The leader must the steer the discovery of practical solutions to overcome obstacles quickly. This means the leader must keep a positive outlook and help find friendly and workable solutions. This finding is similar to Klöckner et al. (2023) who argued that managers who embrace strategies like adjusting operations to align with evolving needs are likely to handle crises more efficiently.

6.1.2.1 Conclusion on RQ1 Theme 2: Advantageous attributes assist with quick results

These findings mean assessing risks is crucial, for making decisions and minimizing adverse outcomes. Leaders should also take a stance by emphasizing constructive problem solving and flexibility to tackle challenges successfully. This theme highlights the importance of clear communication and effective response during periods of unpredictability. These findings are similar with literature.

6.1.3 RQ1 Theme 3: Response tools are influenced by prevention activities.

The study findings indicate that there is a need for reflection after a crisis. Thereafter, the leader should revise crisis response documents based on lessons learned. This finding means that leaders should take a step back and analyse what led to the crisis in the first place. The leaders must also reflect on what went right or wrong during the crisis management phase. The reflection helps them improve their risk management strategies. This finding aligns with Collins et al. (2023) and Schaedler et al. (2022) who state that organisations should have systems in place to capture and analyse what happened in past crises. It further aligns with Gkeredakis et al. (2021) who said leaders should use the insights gained from past crises to develop contingency plans, which are proactive strategies that prepare the organization for potential future emergencies. Organizations that emphasize learning from crises and integrating those lessons into future strategies are expected to improve their crisis

management capabilities over time (Wu et al., 2021). This continuous improvement approach can lead to more effective responses in subsequent crises.

The study findings identified the importance of having effective communication plans in place when navigating crises. This finding means communication must be dispersed to and from relevant stakeholders in a short space of time. The communication plan must be such that leaders can get feedback and give direction quickly. This finding is consistent with Samimi et al. (2022) who attest that it is the leader's responsibility to communicate effectively, and the leaders do this by collecting, synthesising, and distributing critical data internally and externally to facilitate informed decision-making. Collins et al. (2023) highlights that communication plan are devised before the crisis occurs.

The study findings deem proper risk management as foundational for making decisions in high-pressure situations. This finding implies risk management tools are used as a base to guide choices that must be made in crisis situations. Risk management involves a series of steps where identification and evaluation of risk is involved. Hamir and Sum, (2021) in their study found risk management critical in decision making they further highlighted that each risk impact must be considered in relation to other risks.

The study findings indicate that leaders must use their minds critically during a crisis to adjust their responses according to the unique circumstances of each situation. This finding means leaders must adapt predetermined responses to suit the situations they encounter because similar crises are different due to specific attributes such as firm resources. This finding is in line with Johns, (2024) and Koziol-Nadolna and Beyer, (2021) who attest that economic and organisational factors affect decision making.

6.1.3.1 Conclusion on RQ1 Theme 3: Response tools are influenced by prevention activities

The study emphasizes how essential it is for leaders to reflect and learn during crisis management situations. It recommends that leaders carefully examine the causes of a crisis, evaluate how well their responses worked and update their crisis response strategies based on the insights gained. Having communication strategies in place is key to ensuring that information is shared promptly, and feedback is received from all involved parties. Moreover, established risk management protocols play a role, in guiding decision making under intense pressure necessitating a thorough assessment of potential risks. Leaders need to adjust their approaches based on the aspects of each crisis since similar crises can differ due to various factors unique to each situation. Organizations are anticipated to improve their crisis management skills by integrating these perspectives over time.

6.1.4 Conclusions on RQ1 what approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?

The themes findings highlight key strategies and attributes that contribute to effective leadership during a crisis. The findings are aligned with the overarching aim of expanding the range of options available to managers.

Collaboration supports steps to achieve progress theme emphasizes the importance of working together, clear and frequent communication, and building relationships among team members and stakeholders. Seeking help from experts enhances decision-making in conjunction with actively listening to understand underlying issues. Fostering communication promotes transparency and reduces uncertainty, which assists in navigating crises effectively. Collaboration and clear communication are vital crisis response approaches.

The second theme points to specific attributes that leaders must exhibit in crisis situations, such as addressing employee concerns, ongoing evaluation of risks and responding promptly to changing circumstances. By tackling employee concerns, leaders foster trust and confidence. Frequent evaluation of risk enables leaders to make and adjust decisions and minimize negative impacts. Acknowledging and swiftly addressing mistakes reduces negative consequences. These attributes support leaders to achieve quick and effective results.

The third theme emphasis on the need for reflection, learning, effective communication plans, risk management and adjusting responses. The need for reflection after a crisis is to understand its causes and evaluate if the response strategy was effective. This approach allows for learning and improving crisis management strategies. Effective communication strategies achieve timely information dissemination and feedback gathering, which helps leaders to give direction speedily. The risk management process guides decision-making during high-pressure situations. Ensuring that responses to crises are not only addressing the immediate threat but are addressing the threat with the most impact first. Not all crises are the same; therefore, leaders should tailor their strategies, drawing on both prior experiences and the current context. This theme illustrates what successful crisis management involves.

Overall, these themes demonstrate multifaceted approaches leaders use to manage crises effectively, showcasing the interplay between collaboration, communication, personal attributes, decision making and crisis management. Practical strategies shared enhance the understanding of how leaders can navigate complex challenges during a crisis. Together, the themes have addressed research question 1.

6.2 RQ2 Which specific behaviours of leaders significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis?

The design of this research question was to discover specific leader behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes during a crisis. Three themes were identified for this question are you need to be calm to think, respect is the foundation for positive outcome enablers, and you need influence to execute decisions well.

6.2.1 RQ2 Theme 1: You need to be calm to think.

The study findings seem to emphasise the importance of emotional regulation for leaders, further highlighting they should step back from emotions to assess the problems rationally. This finding implies that leaders should maintain a calm demeanour, speak in a lower tone when engaging stakeholders and maintain a clear mind when evaluating risk. Engaging in activities like walking in nature or spending time with animals, which can be beneficial for managing emotion as mentioned by participants. This finding aligns with implications of Collins et al. (2023) where it is advocated that leaders should be adept at handling both their own feelings and the emotions of their team members to create a more stable work environment. This emotional intelligence can help mitigate negative feelings in challenging times.

Effective strategies for managing stakeholder emotions can lead to improved organizational reputation. Organizations that are perceived as caring and responsive during crises are more likely to maintain customer loyalty and attract new business (Bahmani et al., 2023; Klöckner et al., 2023; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). The implication here is that emotional intelligence is critical for leaders to navigate crises effectively.

6.2.1.1 Conclusion on RQ2 Theme 1: You need to be calm to think

The findings emphasize the importance of leaders managing their emotions to accurately evaluate challenges in a leadership position. Leaders must maintain composure. Take a measured approach when engaging with stakeholders to foster strong relationships. Participating in activities such, as walking in nature can aid in emotional regulation. Moreover, businesses perceived as compassionate and flexible typically enhance their reputation and customer loyalty.

6.2.2 RQ2 Theme 2: Respect is the foundation for positive outcome enablers.

The study findings emphasise respect as essential in a team environment. Promoting respect allows team members to openly express their thoughts and ideas. Combining these ideas leads to positive outcomes. This finding means that a respectful team environment free from personal attacks and sharing sensitive information without consent allows for better problem-solving and collaboration. This finding supports that of Samimi et al. (2022) study that indicated leadership behaviours that emphasize transparency and integrity are expected to foster trust and credibility with stakeholders. The study finding is also in line with Opatska et al. (2024) study who state that leaders need to understand the concerns and needs of their team members and stakeholders through active listening and respond in a considerate manner. When leaders communicate honestly and act consistently, they can strengthen relationships with stakeholders which is vital during a crisis.

6.2.2.1 Conclusion on RQ2 Theme 2: Respect is the foundation for positive outcome enablers.

The findings indicate that promoting a culture of respect and open dialogue within teams, coupled with leadership strategies can boost teamwork effectiveness increase problem solving skills and establish trust among team members and stakeholders. Developing a respectful team environment is crucial, for managing challenges and reaching shared objectives.

6.2.3 RQ2 Theme 3: You need influence to execute decisions well.

The study findings indicate that leaders should seek to inspire and guide stakeholders in executing the decisions. This finding implies that the leader must allow stakeholders to raise their concerns; however, the leader must encourage and ensure stakeholders execute the decision. Demonstrating leadership behaviours that promote resilience and adaptability enhances the organization's ability to navigate crises (Klößner et al., 2023)

The study findings reveal that leaders must continuously motivate their teams and stakeholders and foster open communication. This finding means the stakeholders must raise their concerns openly without fear of being victimised or having their trust being broken. The leader must also be able to voice his disagreement and motivation freely. Leaders involve team members and stakeholders in decision making processes through transparent and consistent communication to facilitate information flow, within the team. Open communication

ensures that decisions making is informed and considerate of stakeholders' view. This finding is aligned with the work of Opatska et al. (2024), who emphasise that communication becomes a shared responsibility, where leaders demonstrate understanding and empathy toward employees, encouraging them to voice concerns and contribute to solutions and Shepherd et al. (2023) who indicates the importance of frequent communication as both the crisis and its impacts can change daily. The leader should regularly discuss and give updates to navigate the crisis effectively. Furthermore, Tasselli and Sancino (2023) highlight that during a crisis, leaders must exhibit behaviours that foster strong relationships, such as engaging in healthy disagreements and deepening relationships based on evolving needs. Deepening relationships can be achieved through communication, encouraging teams to embrace change to foster a culture that is better equipped to respond to unexpected challenges (Klöckner et al., 2023). The study finding is aligned with literature.

Leaders who prioritize relationship-building and collaboration are expected to enhance team cohesion (Ma et al., 2022; Tasselli & Sancino, 2023). By promoting a sense of unity in purpose, leaders can encourage teamwork and collective problem-solving. Leadership behaviours that focus on motivating and supporting employees are anticipated to lead to higher morale and engagement (Samimi et al., 2022).

6.2.3.1 Conclusion on RQ2 Theme 3: You need influence to execute decisions well.

The research findings highlight the importance of leadership during tough times to motivate guide stakeholders and encourage open transparent communication and collaboration. Leaders need to establish an environment for team members to share their thoughts without worry of negative consequences, to promote transparency in decision making. Showing empathy and support can improve relationships among team members. Consistent motivation and flexibility are key, as leaders must keep their teams motivated and adaptable, in the face of evolving situations. In a nutshell these actions aid in fostering resilience within companies which sets them up to better tackle obstacles and uphold positive spirits among team members.

6.2.4 Conclusion on RQ2 which specific behaviours of leaders significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis?

The themes identified highlight specific behaviours that contribute to positive outcomes. The findings explain how leaders must behave when executing crisis management strategies. Behaving in this manner enhances the effectiveness of the crisis responses.

You need to be calm to think. The theme emphasises the importance of maintaining composure during a crisis. Leaders who control their emotions effectively are more capable of analysing situations critically before reaching conclusions. The capability of leaders to handle stress and maintain focus assists, in their decision making, fosters confidence in their team and influences the team to be calm. These qualities lead to positive outcomes.

The second theme emphasizes the importance of encouraging respect, within teams to promote teamwork and communication dynamics among members. When leaders cultivate an atmosphere of respect, in the team environment, it encourages open sharing of ideas and concerns amongst members. Demonstrating integrity as a leader nurtures trust and strengthens relationships which in turn improves problem solving and enhances decision-making processes during a crisis.

Theme three highlights the importance of a leader's influence in ensuring that decisions are effectively implemented. It highlights that open communication assists in ensuring decisions consider diverse perspectives, as contention does not mean that decisions must be changed. Having constructive discussions fosters connections. Enables leaders to use their influence to motivate stakeholders to support and implement decisions. Building relationships cultivates teamwork. Influences the crisis response execution, which is crucial during a crisis.

Overall, the theme findings directly addressed research question two by pinpointing leaders' specific behaviours, such as the ability to be calm, foster respect and influence stakeholders, to significantly impact their strategic decision-making during a crisis. Each theme provided insight into how leaders can cultivate a conducive environment for positive outcomes, aligning closely with the research question.

6.3 RQ3 How do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?

This question was designed to explore strategies that leaders employ to uphold stakeholder morale while addressing negative emotions. To increase team resilience. Three themes identified for this question are understanding a situation is key in giving direction, use communication approaches for change management while building relationships and Giving rewards boosts confidence.

6.3.1 RQ3 Theme 1 Understanding a situation is key in giving direction.

The study findings indicate aspects of understanding context are (1) Employing active listening is an essential aspect of understanding context. Leaders should not only listen to the concerns of their team but also document what is shared to ensure they fully comprehend the situation; (2) Maintaining an open-door policy to allow for open communication where the leader can judge the emotional climate; (3) A clear understanding of the root causes of issues is essential before proposing solutions, and (4) Leaders should exhibit compassion and empathy by taking the time to address team members' concerns. Once leaders have a comprehensive understanding of the situation, they can give informed guidance that aligns with the team's needs. These findings imply that the leader should engage in a manner that displays respect to lay the foundation for stakeholders to open up. It is through open dialogue that leaders can better understand contextual factors that may be affecting morale.

The study findings align with Collins et al. (2023) study that states effective leadership requires not only providing clear guidance but also actively listening to the concerns of stakeholders and fostering open dialogue. Furthermore, Opatska et al. (2024) states to connect with their team and stakeholders, leaders must demonstrate empathy, which involves gaining a insight to the needs and anxieties of their members. This can be cultivated through active listening, which entails being fully present in conversations, recognizing the emotions of others, and responding thoughtfully Opatska et al. (2024) findings are similar to this study findings. Strategies that focus on recognising and validating employee feelings can lead to higher levels of engagement (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Leaders who prioritize transparent and open communication are expected to alleviate uncertainty and anxiety among stakeholders (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017). Clear messaging about the organization's situation, plans, and support measures can help stakeholders feel informed and valued, thereby boosting morale.

6.3.1.1 Conclusion on RQ3 Theme 1 Understanding a situation is key in giving direction.

When leaders focus on communication and acknowledge the emotions of their team they can uplift spirits resulting in a pleasant and cooperative workplace environment. Where leaders not only listen but also take note of concerns to fully understand the challenges at hand. Implementing an open-door policy promotes communication and enables leaders to gauge the team's emotional atmosphere. Showing empathy and understanding can help build relationships with stakeholders leading to a more trusting and supportive atmosphere.

6.3.2 RQ3 Theme 2: Use communication approaches for change management while building relationships.

Leaders should build relationships by communicating the limitations of a firm's resources, providing emotional support during challenging times, encouraging employees to take responsibility for their mistakes, breaking work into smaller, manageable tasks to prevent employees from feeling overwhelmed and engaging in regular interactions. This finding implies that leaders must be transparent about what can be done considering resources; and reassure employees that negative situations are temporary and manageable. Leaders must have regular interactions, including sharing meals and drinks, help to build and maintain relationships. Open communication plays a role in ensuring team cohesion. It is essential to encourage team members to express their thoughts. Such actions facilitate progress, maintains morale and provides direction.

The findings of the study align with Opatska et al. (2024) who states leaders should express hope and discuss tough situations in a positive way to inspire and guide employees to overcome difficulties and Ali et al. (2024) who state leaders should focus on what can be learned from challenges and how to move forward instead of blaming others. Participants highlighted that It's crucial to show support by comforting team members and acknowledging the obstacles they're going through. In hard times, good leadership is important for motivating and supporting employees to work through problems and reach company goals, even when things are uncertain.

Being open about challenges can help leaders earn the trust and respect of their team, just like explaining why they make certain decisions (Liu et al., 2023). Furthermore, by actively addressing negative emotions and demonstrating empathy, leaders can foster a sense of trust among stakeholders (Wu et al., 2021). This trust is crucial for maintaining strong relationships and ensuring continued support from employees and stakeholders during challenging times.

6.3.2.1 Conclusion on RQ3 Theme 2: Use communication approaches for change management while building relationships.

Leaders are advised to be transparent by sharing resource constraints and reasons behind decisions to build trust among team members. Offering support and recognizing the challenges encountered by colleagues can uphold morale. Promoting accountability for mistakes fosters an environment centred on improvement rather, than fault finding. Furthermore, dividing work into tasks can help avoid feeling overwhelmed. Regular interactions like having meals together can strengthen the relationships. Leaders can encourage resilience and support employees by discussing challenges in a positive light and focusing on the lessons learned. These practices are crucial for maintaining team unity.

6.3.3 RQ3 Theme 3: Giving rewards boosts confidence.

The research indicated that it is important for leaders to appreciate and recognize the efforts made to boost morale within a team. By reflecting on past successes, with team members leaders can offer the motivation necessary to overcome obstacles successfully. Motivating the team by highlighting achievements and assisting them to break down challenges into manageable action plans has a significant impact in building confidence. It is crucial to show care and consideration for the wellbeing of employees. When team members are struggling emotionally it's important for leaders to offer support options like flexible work schedules and time off to reduce stress levels. This not only demonstrates leadership's concern, for their team but also enhances the team morale and confidence. It's also important to boost morale by offering rewards and incentives, as a way of appreciating their efforts.

Financial rewards can serve as a motivator for employees to excel despite obstacles they may face at work; however, there are some participants who argue that building confidence through practical support and open communication could be a more impactful approach, in boosting morale compared to traditional incentives. When stakeholders feel valued and receive the support, they tend to be more receptive to change resulting in smoother transitions and adjustments (Collins et al., 2023). They are more inclined to think creatively and offer innovative solutions.

This theme points to the psychological benefits of acknowledgment and appreciation among team members. In the long run these successful leadership actions of recognizing and valuing

team members contributions, are expected to help achieve lasting success, for the organization as a whole.

6.3.3.1 Conclusion on RQ3 Theme 3: Giving rewards boosts confidence.

The research suggests that having leadership is crucial for improving team spirit and the general welfare of employees as a whole. Offerings like flexible work hours shows concern for the wellbeing of employees and contribute to a more positive morale. Although financial rewards can boost performance levels to some extent the provision of assistance and transparent communication typically have a greater impact, in creating a supportive work atmosphere. When workers sense that their contributions are valued and they receive support in their workplace, they tend to adapt to changes and are more inclined to bring forth innovative ideas. In the end a culture that values acknowledgment and gratitude results in lasting achievements, for both the individuals and the entire organization.

6.3.4 Conclusions RQ3 how do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?

The themes identified provide actionable tips that leaders can implement to uphold morale therefore the findings address the research question regarding how leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during a crisis.

The first theme's primary focus is on the importance of leaders comprehensively understanding the context before providing guidance. By listening attentively and maintaining open communication, leaders can better grasp the emotional climate and underlying issues affecting their team. This understanding allows them to customise their responses and assistance based on the shared requirements. When individuals have guidance and support, it enhances confidence enabling them to navigate the crisis more effectively.

The second theme highlights that in times of crisis it is essential to use communication tactics to handle change and build relationships among team members. Leaders can ease anxieties by addressing challenges and resource limitations openly. Breaking down tasks, into portions can bolster team members confidence leading to morale and reduced negative emotions, within the team. Leaders can establish an atmosphere that shows their concern, for the wellbeing of their employees by offering them time off during periods of stress.

The third theme emphasises recognising and rewarding efforts. When leaders recognise and applaud accomplishments, it can inspire a sense of achievement—encouraging people to

maintain their performance levels during challenging times. Thus helping to counteract feelings of despair. Incentivising minor wins can have a notable effect on the overall morale of a team.

Together, these themes provide practical strategies for mitigating negative emotions and sustaining morale during crises. Leaders must focus on understanding context, communicating, and recognition, to support their teams' emotional well-being. These practical strategies contribute to addressing the overarching research question of how leaders respond to a crisis.

6.4 RQ4 How were the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis handled?

This question was designed to discover how crises opportunities and challenges were managed. Two themes identified for this question are managing or resolving challenges improves business and assessing the situation is a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

6.4.1 RQ4 Theme 1: Managing or resolving challenges improves business.

The research findings indicate that flexibility and innovation are essential in conflict resolution to prevent deadlocks that may result in unfavourable consequences. This finding implies that managers need to be open to different approaches, in addressing issues and must be willing to adjust their methods to arrive at an acceptable outcome. Managers who embrace strategies like adjusting operations to suit evolving needs or digitising processes for improved transparency are likely to handle crises more efficiently (Klößner et al., 2023). This ability to adapt swiftly could result in quicker crisis recovery and the ability to seize opportunities that arise during turbulent times.

The research findings indicate that managers need to reconsider if the existing solutions are still suitable when dealing with unforeseen challenges. This finding means managers should re-evaluate whether to stick with the current solution, amidst unforeseen challenges during a crisis or switch to a new approach. The findings of the study suggest that it is advisable to involve specialists in handling crises or complicated scenarios emphasizing the importance of seeking assistance, in addressing challenges. This finding supports Klößner et al. (2023) assertion that optimizing the use of resources by reallocating them and leveraging existing capabilities can help organizations effectively navigate crises and reduce risks. Moreover, breaking down challenges into action plans makes them more manageable to address. It's

important for the organisation to stay flexible so that response strategies can adjust as circumstances evolve. Collaboration within a team is important for addressing challenges.

While resolution is preferred during crises, leaders should be prepared to adapt systems when resolution isn't impossible. Leaders embracing challenges and tweaking approaches helps organizations become more resilient. This resilience allows them to handle crises better by drawing lessons from the past and creating stronger backup plans (Seidl & Whittington 2021).

6.4.1.1 Conclusion on RQ4 Theme 1: Managing or resolving challenges improves business.

Continuously performing risk assessment is crucial in dealing with challenges. It's vital for managers to be willing to adjust their tactics when faced with unexpected obstacles. Seeking input from experts can improve problem solving endeavours. Breaking problems into smaller steps and promoting teamwork are key, in tackling issues successfully.

6.4.2 RQ4 theme 2: Assessing the situation is a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

The study finding indicate that it is crucial to evaluate opportunities based on the company's capacity to avoid jeopardising companies' future success. Indicating that companies have faltered by chasing too many opportunities, without sufficient resources or capabilities. When dealing with opportunities and it's important to assess the benefits and risks involved through a thorough risk assessment. Taking into consideration how these opportunities might affect existing operations is key. Evaluating the positives and negatives with insights, from team members to gain a comprehensive view. The research findings suggest that it is important to assess opportunities by considering the advantages they may bring to the business before acting on them in order to ensure that there is a benefit involved beforehand. This discovery implies that leaders must determine whether the company stands to gain in the future by implementing the assessed opportunity.

Crises often spur innovation as organizations seek to overcome challenges. It is important for leaders to foster an environment that values creativity among their team members in order to tap into the perspectives and expertise available to develop novel solutions that address both immediate and long-term needs (Seidl & Whittington, 2021). The study findings indicate that it is advisable for leaders to steer clear of opportunities that clash with the company's vision, as pursuing such opportunities could undermine the principles of the organisation. The literature suggests that organisations that implement effective crisis response strategies are likely to experience long-term performance gains (Bahmani et al., 2023). This includes not

only financial performance but also improvements in brand reputation and stakeholder relationships.

6.4.2.1 Conclusion on RQ4 theme 2: Assessing the situation is a prerequisite to taking advantage of opportunities successfully.

The study findings emphasize the importance of assessing business opportunities and ensuring they align with the company's values to prevent over-committing resources and future setbacks. Furthermore, the study shows how crises spark creativity in organizations. Handling crises well doesn't just help in the team but also brings about lasting benefits in terms of financial success, brand image and connections with stakeholders.

6.4.3 Conclusion on how the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis were handled.

The central idea that is conveyed is companies that confront challenges not only survive but also tend to emerge stronger. The first theme promotes flexibility in approaches, striving for expert support and innovativeness in managing crises. Managing or resolving challenges improves business theme highlights the importance of effective crisis management strategies in addressing difficult situations This principle highlights the importance of being flexible and resourceful in handling conflicts by adjusting strategies and seeking advice from professionals as necessary to help leaders navigate obstacles or to seize new opportunities for growth.

The research findings presented in the study reveal that it is essential to assess opportunities critically. The second theme highlights the significance of understanding the context as leaders must consider their company's capacity and weigh the long-term advantages of pursuing new opportunities. Verifying that the opportunities they seek align with their organisation's principles minimises the dangers linked with overcommitting resources and helps maintain a strategic focus during uncertain times.

The identified themes explored various aspects of how businesses dealt with unexpected opportunities and challenges amid the crisis. Overall, the themes illustrate the importance of assessing situations effectively to resolve challenges and seek opportunities.

6.4 Summary comparison of outcomes with literature.

The outcomes and existing literature are thematically aligned. Both the findings and the literature emphasize that leader characteristics significantly influence decision-making. There is an emphasis placed on how leaders build trust and confidence by addressing employee issues; this resonates with the Upper Echelon theory (Hambrick & Mason 1984). Additionally, writings from crisis management studies underscore the connection between leaders' characteristics and their responses, during crises (Wu et al., 2021).

Interpersonal interactions during decision-making is a shared theme. Interacting with others plays a role, in making decisions together and dealing with challenging situations effectively as highlighted in various studies (referencing Mithani & Kocoglu from 2020 and Schaedler et al., 2022).

Crises have the ability to spark innovation within organizations. This concept is in line with literature on crisis management that points to the idea that being able to recognize and adapt to circumstances can improve decision making and drive flexible (Gkeredakis et al., 2021; Seidl & Whittington, 2021). Furthermore, it is emphasized in both research findings and literature that leaders should have an understanding of situational contexts before providing guidance since the context significantly influences how stakeholders perceive situations and how leaders respond (Collins et al. 2023).

The difference between the research findings and literature is lack of detailed advice on how to stay calm and maintain equilibrium during turbulent times of chaos. This subtle element of crisis leadership that is vital, for managing stressful circumstances has not been thoroughly examined in current literature.

An extension to the Upper Echelon Theory could involve giving importance to emotional intelligence, in crisis leadership situations instead of just leader traits alone as suggested by recent research findings. This highlights the significance of leaders staying composed and balanced while fulfilling stakeholder requirements in times.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This section concludes the study by summarizing the findings outcomes obtained in Chapter 6 and linking them to the research goals and question while emphasizing their importance and contributions on the field of study. Furthermore, it addresses the study' limitations. Proposes potential avenues, for future research.

Crisis events are becoming common and complex, as organisations can face several crises simultaneously (Wu et al., 2021). The research problem addressed the crucial role of leaders in managing crises and guiding their teams (Samimi et al., 2022). It pointed out a significant gap in crisis leadership literature regarding leaders' responses to crises (Wu et al., 2021). The researcher has studied different aspects of how leaders respond to a crisis. The effectiveness of crisis leadership approaches was found to be closely linked to specific leader characteristics (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). and was influenced by contextual factors (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014).

7.2 Principal theoretical conclusions

The research centred on leaders within South Africa's construction industry due to its important role in the economy and it being one of the biggest employers (Maluleke, 2022). Conducting a study in this environment allowed the researcher to add to crisis leadership theory by providing practical strategies that support and enhance literature while also providing strategies that assists industry leaders in dealing with crisis events. Ultimately, dealing with crisis effectively leads to fewer job losses in the industry and increased economic contributions.

The researcher accepts there is limited literature on how leaders respond to a crisis (Wu et al., 2021). The available literature may not be transferable to a different type of crises. Because the crisis is impacted by its attributes such as is it short-lived or prolonged; the internal environment of the firm regarding resources and culture; the external environment involving geopolitics and government resources (Ali et al., 2024; Banks, 2023; Mithani & Kocoglu, 2020). These crisis variables warrant that leadership responses be investigated in a variety of contexts (Wenzel et al., 2020). and it's important that the context be reported in the findings to increase the available strategies that managers can use.

The study addressed the following questions: the strategies leaders use to regulate their own emotions and those of their teams, methods for maintaining and managing morale during a crisis, the handling of unforeseen challenges and opportunities that arise, and the crisis management techniques employed to respond effectively. The overall focus was establishing how leaders respond to a crisis.

To answer these questions, purposive sampling was used to interview managers from construction companies that successfully navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was considered suitable because these companies exemplified effective leadership that guided employees and organizations toward positive outcomes. A qualitative approach was appropriate as the research study addressed the how question.

The research outcomes were viewed using the Upper Echelon theory principles which suggests that the characteristics of leaders within a company play a crucial role, in shaping the strategic choices they make and ultimately impacting the organizations overall success. Several significant outcomes, from the research highlight important aspects. In times of crisis, a leader's ability to remain calm during a crisis greatly impacts the emotions of their team members, as emphasized by many participants. Another point is effective communication by being honest and transparent is important. Communicating in this manner is key to overcoming challenges together. It builds trust and respect within the team. Additionally, outcomes reveal that openly discussing problems is more impactful in boosting morale than providing incentives.

Next in times of crisis when time is scarce for a detailed risk assessment process to be carried out thoroughly. Collaborating and working together proves crucial for efficient outcomes to be reached swiftly. Splitting the responsibilities pertaining to risk assessment allows teams to achieve results more efficiently as risk assessment is an essential process for handling unexpected challenges and opportunities.

The responses to a crisis must be carefully evaluated within the context of the situation. Context matters; the firm's resources significantly impact decision-making alongside the external environment. For example, if there is a shortage of skills in the industry, the leader will not consider reducing certain team members as surviving the crisis will be in vain if that skill is also lost; the firm context determines how long the crisis response can be contained, therefore responding to a crisis is a balancing act where a most suitable way forward must be chosen. The idea that losses can be avoided must be dispelled, reducing losses is possible, completely avoiding loss is unrealistic.

7.3 Research contribution

How The themes for leadership approaches to crisis enforce existing literature that emphasises collaboration, communication, adaptability, and learning as key components of effective crisis management (Opatska et al., 2024; Samimi et al., 2022; Schaedler et al., 2022). These themes expand the list of crisis response options available to leaders, offering a more nuanced understanding of how to integrate risk management and relationship-building effectively.

Leadership actions that were found to influence decision-making included promoting respect and showing integrity, as supported by the research of Liu et al. (2023), that suggested that these behaviours enhance team unity and enhance group decision-making abilities. Also, influence and transparent communication, which mirrors the actions involved in engaging stakeholders to improve results were highlighted as important (Ali et al., 2024; Banks, 2023). Furthermore, the study's emphasis on maintaining composure supports the Schaedler et al. (2022) point that emotional intelligence, particularly self-regulation, is crucial for effective decision-making under pressure. This is in line with research suggesting that calm leaders foster stability and trust (Banks, 2023; Liu et al., 2023).

When it comes to maintaining morale and managing emotions, leaders should first focus on listening and providing guidance, which aligns with Collins et al. (2023) findings that leaders should encourage open conversations in order to guide their teams. Next, they must recognise and reward efforts to boost motivation. The Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, that suggests that acknowledgement of achievements is a critical motivator during challenging times supports the findings. Lastly, task segmentation was highlighted to alleviate stress and enhance morale. These ideas give leaders useful ways to create a positive environment and keep everyone engaged and performing well during a crisis.

When handling unforeseen opportunities, it is essential to align opportunities with organisational principles, highlighting the relevance of balancing short-term goals with the firm's vision. This principle is supported by Ali et al. (2024) who identified that success in crisis management can be measured by how a leader seizes opportunities and adapts for a better future. Discussing seizing opportunities aligns with crisis innovation literature, highlighting how constraints can spark innovative problem-solving and innovation (Gkeredakis et al., 2021; Seidl & Whittington, 2021).

7.4 Implications

The findings outcomes have useful implications for leaders and organisations involved in crisis management efforts. The practical strategies outlined validate theoretical constructs bridging academic frameworks with real-world applications.

Leaders now understand how to handle crises effectively by emphasising teamwork and collaboration while maintaining a sense of calmness and respect (Banks, 2023; Collins et al., 2023; Schaedler et al., 2022). The study findings highlight actionable tactics such as consulting with experts which resonate with a need for a quick and efficient decision making (Collins et al., 2023). These methods enable them to take charge with certainty and reach conclusions when faced with challenging situations. It is the responsibility of leaders to manage their own panic as well as of the workers during an extreme event. Next leaders recognise the importance of addressing staff concerns and acknowledging achievements while promoting transparency. Addressing concerns foster positivity. Minimises adverse emotions, during difficult times. Recognising that each crisis is unique underscores the need for leaders to tailor their approaches based on circumstances (Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). Leaders must understand that they need to be quick in decision-making.

Organisations can use these insights to enhance their ability to bounce back, from crises by fostering communication channels, building trust among members and establishing flexible systems that promote learning from previous incidents. Practical implications for organisations of emphasising teamwork and collaboration during a crisis means shortened time frames to achieve progress, strong relationships among team members and ownership of the solution, which reduces resistance during implementation. These actions lead to promptly addressing the issues that contribute to organisational resilience.

In times of crisis, it is important to reflect and be adaptable, as this opens up possibilities for growth and innovation (Gkeredakis et al., 2021), allowing organisations not only to survive but also to prosper. These insights give leaders and organisations the ability to handle crises with greater efficiency turning obstacles into opportunities, for progress and advancement.

7.5 Limitations of the research

The overall study's limitations are detailed below. These limitations must be read together with the methodology limitations found in Chapter 4.

The study is limited in the scope of the setting that is findings were collected on managers from the South African construction industry. The study outcomes are limited to the sector and geographic location. These research outcomes are valuable for the sector although they might not be directly relevant to different industries, the strategies identified can still serve as a useful framework for similar situations in other sectors.

The study was conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it did not delve into the degree of effectiveness of crisis responses employed during the pandemic or other crisis examples given by participants. We know the outcomes reported are effective, but we are unable to gauge how effective. The approaches identified can be applied regardless of the specific crisis being addressed.

The study identified the importance of managing one's own emotions during a crisis but, it did not explore this discovery in nuanced detail. Subsequent studies can build on this outcome, even though it remains relevant.

7.6 Recommendations for management and/or other stakeholders

The study highlights the benefits of collaboration; therefore, it is recommended that firms develop separate policies for guiding collaboration and decision-making during crises. Creating procedures, for working together and making decisions in times of crisis can help organizations set straightforward rules that lead to quicker, well-coordinated reactions which in turn can lessen the severity of the crisis.

Firms should make sure that their leaders receive training, in handling crises and engaging with employees effectively. Training leaders, in crisis risk management and employee engagement helps them make decisions while also supporting their teams. Trained leaders are more prepared to manage stress, maintain morale and lead employees through tough times all of which can improve overall resilience.

It is recommended that firms treat crisis management in phases: phase one deals with the challenge, and phase two reflects on, learns from, and adjusts response strategies for the future. Treating crisis management in phases allows firms to systematically deal with immediate challenges while also targeting long-term improvement.

7.7 Recommendations for future research

The researcher has identified areas that can help with understanding and gaining deeper insights into crisis leadership literature. The knowledge acquired will contribute to the current conversation about successful management approaches, in times of crisis.

Firstly, the study explored how leaders handle crises. It would be beneficial to focus on employees' encounters amid crises to grasp how leadership actions directly influenced their morale, engagement, and performance.

Secondly the study accepts that leadership is a crucial ingredient in assisting organisations to achieve positive outcomes. A potential area for investigation could be exploring the impact of different training initiatives aimed at equipping leaders to handle crisis situations and identify areas for improvement. The findings from that investigation can provide insights, for business leaders seeking to enhance their skills and better equip themselves to manage crises proficiently.

Thirdly, it is recommended that scholars dive deeper into how specific emotional intelligence components such as empathy and self-regulation affect leaders' effectiveness in navigating crises. The scholars can further explore various approaches to achieving empathy and self-regulation during a crisis. Lastly, the study can also explore the effect of leaders responses on workers.

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Annexure A: Interview Protocol

Introduction 5 minutes	Thank you for volunteering to share your knowledge and experience and for showing up. My name is interviewer I am conducting research on Managers Responses to a Crisis in South African Construction Industry Our interview is expected to last less than an hour and will help us understand How do managers respond to an external crisis? Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. I will treat your answers as confidential. Your answers will be combined with answers from others and presented in aggregate form. I will not include your name or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. The notes and transcript will be stored in a password protected folder. The notes will be destroyed after 10 years from the date I complete the study and publish the results. Do you have any questions? Please keep your camera on throughout so that we may interact better. <i>I will be using an interview guide to direct our interaction. It will assist to ensure I don't forget information I need to ask. Do not be alarmed if you see mee looking at a piece of paper occasionally.</i> You are welcome to ask the me any questions that occur to you during the interview at the end. Before I get to the main questions to build context, please share the following:
Preliminary Questions 8 minutes	1. What is your position in the company? 2. How many years of experience do you have in your current position? 3. What does your company do? 4. How many employees in your company? 5. Is there a period where you took a break from management duties in the last five years?

	6. How many years of experience do you have overall in a managerial position? 7. What is your age category? (Under 30, between 30 to 40, between 41 to 50, between 51 to 60, over 60). 8. In the last five years what is approximate highest contract value your company secured?
Main Questions To answer the following main questions please share at least two examples. Explaining the task, what you did and the results. (I will only ask probe questions if answer did not address)	
Question One 8 minutes	What strategies and methods (approach) do you use to manage a crisis? PROBE 1: Can you provide specific examples of how you have employed these strategies and methods to manage a crisis in the past? PROBE 2: What were the results?
Question Two 8 minutes	Which behaviours do you think are most important for guiding strategic decision-making during a crisis? PROBE 1: In what ways do these behaviours impact your decision-making? PROBE 2: How do these behaviours align with the overall mission and vision of the company?
Question Four 8 minutes	How did you manage unexpected opportunities and challenges that arose during the crisis? PROBE 1: Could you elaborate on an unexpected opportunity or challenge that emerged during a crisis and how you navigated through it? PROBE 2: Would you say the solution was successful?
Closing 5 minutes	Those were all the questions that I wanted to ask. Is there any final thoughts you would like to share? Your participation is appreciated. Thank you so much.

Annexure B: Consistency Matrix

Title: Qualitative Approach: Managers Responses to a Crisis in South African Construction Industry

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	DATA ANALYSIS
I. What approaches do leaders employ to manage the crisis?	Wenzel et al. (2020, p. 9)	Question one in the interview protocol	Inductive thematic analysis to expose approaches
II. Which behaviours do you think are most important for guiding strategic decision-making during a crisis?	Wu et al. (2021, p. 18); Wenzel et al. (2020, p. 8)	Question two in the interview protocol	Inductive thematic analysis to expose behaviour shaped by context
III. How do leaders maintain morale and manage negative emotions during the crisis?	Wu et al. (2021, p. 16)	Question three in the interview protocol	Inductive thematic analysis to expose tactics employed by leaders to maintain morale
IV. How were the unforeseen opportunities and challenges encountered during the crisis handled?	Wenzel et al. (2020, p. 9)	Question four in the interview protocol	Inductive thematic analysis to expose how are unexpected situations handled

Annexure C: Second order concept codes list

2nd Order Concept Codes	
1	Act: Adapt systems to accommodate new solution Gr=1
2	Act: Commit resources in stages to accommodate new developments Gr=1
3	Act: Create processes to ensure execution Gr=6
4	Act: Have a specialised team to deal with problematic execution Gr=4
5	Act: inform affected stakeholders Gr=2
6	Act: Respond Gr=2
7	Advantageous Attributes: Approachable character Gr=1
8	Advantageous Attributes: Be flexible Gr=1
9	Advantageous Attributes: Get involved early Gr=1
10	Advantageous Attributes: Positive expectations Gr=2
11	Advantageous Attributes: prevent worry Gr=1
12	Advantageous Attributes: take accountability to resolve Gr=1
13	Build relationships: Eat together Gr=1
14	Build relationships: Go out for a drink Gr=1
15	Build relationships: interact with people Gr=1
16	Calmness: Be calm Gr=15
17	Calmness: Your state must be at peace Gr=3
18	Collaborate: Be inclusive in Approach Gr=1
19	Collaborate: Collaborative Approach Gr=9
20	Collaborate: Collaborative Risk accountability Gr=3
21	Collaborate: Network Gr=2
22	Collaborate: Seek Help Gr=1
23	Collaborate: Team problem solving Gr=15
24	Evaluate Risk: Do full risk assessment Gr=2
25	Evaluate Risk: Establish Facts from stories Gr=4
26	Evaluate Risk: Understand Crisis Gr=11
27	Evaluate Risk: understand the depth of crisis Gr=6

2nd Order Concept Codes	
28	● Evaluate Risk: Understand your position Gr=3
29	● Execute Decision: Choose which problem to address and stick with it Gr=1
30	● Execute Decision: Culture that supports correct actions and timing Gr=2
31	● Execute Decision: Disciplined execution Gr=1
32	● Execute Decision: See your decision through Gr=2
33	● Give Confidence: Advocate for living with the constraints Gr=3
34	● Give Confidence: Allow for innovation Gr=1
35	● Give Confidence: Give assurance that crisis is manageable Gr=2
36	● Give Confidence: Give confidence in self and system Gr=5
37	● Give Confidence: Value people Gr=2
38	● Give direction: Provide leadership Gr=16
39	● Give direction: Solicit buy in on way forward Gr=4
40	● Give direction: Suggest way forward Gr=1
41	● How to asses situation: Appreciate you capacity Gr=1
42	● How to asses situation: Have a bigger picture Gr=2
43	● How to asses situation: Remember Integration Gr=1
44	● How to asses situation: Study and understand impact on stakeholders Gr=2
45	● Improve Business: Advocate for success despite constraints Gr=2
46	● Improve Business: Constantly searching for ways to improve Gr=1
47	● Improve Business: create opportunity to change Gr=3
48	● Improve Business: determine ways to improve business Gr=1
49	● Improve Business: Embrace ways to improve business Gr=2
50	● Improve Business: update processes Gr=2
51	● Influence: Influence people Gr=7
52	● Manage Crisis: Delegate Expects Gr=4
53	● Manage Crisis: Manage consequences Gr=3
54	○ Manage Crisis: manage the crisis for what it is Gr=3
55	● Positive outcome enablers: Be optimistic on how it can be done Gr=5
56	● Positive outcome enablers: Contain disruption Gr=2

2nd Order Concept Codes	
57	• Positive outcome enablers: Minimise self importance and put company first Gr=1
58	• Prevention: Asses the crisis second time to determine why you were affected Gr=3
59	• Prevention: communicate lessons learned Gr=2
60	• Prevention: Think solution for now and solution for future Gr=7
61	• Quick Results: Achieve progress quickly Gr=2
62	• Quick Results: Provide solution quickly Gr=8
63	• Resolve challenges: Be adaptable Gr=4
64	• Resolve challenges: be clam and reevaluate your path Gr=2
65	• Resolve challenges: Find a win- win way Gr=7
66	• Respect: Have empathy while communicating Gr=1
67	• Respect: Maintain confidentiality Gr=2
68	• Respect: Maintain Respect Gr=2
69	• Respect: Understand people Gr=1
70	• Response Tools: Apply your mind Gr=1
71	• Response Tools: Communication plan Gr=1
72	• Response Tools: Emergency plan Gr=1
73	• Response Tools: Incident procedure Gr=1
74	• Response Tools: Read applicable documents Gr=1
75	• Response Tools: Risk management tool Gr=1
76	• Response Tools: Use litigation Gr=1
77	• Rewards: Encourage time off Gr=3
78	• Rewards: Incentives Gr=3
79	• Rewards: Money Gr=3
80	• Solution orientated Gr=6
81	• Seek to understand: Solicit views and opinions Gr=2
82	• Seek to understand: Understand what is the cause Gr=2
83	• Steps to Achieve Progress: Be logical in approach Gr=4
84	• Steps to Achieve Progress: choose best available outcome Gr=4
85	• Steps to Achieve Progress: Choose solution to minimise impact first Gr=3

2nd Order Concept Codes	
86	Steps to Achieve Progress: Decide on which problem to prioritise Gr=1
87	Steps to Achieve Progress: Evaluate possible solutions Gr=6
88	Steps to Achieve Progress: First establish context Gr=1
89	Steps to Achieve Progress: First establish the cause Gr=1
90	Steps to Achieve Progress: Listen to understand Gr=3
91	Steps to Achieve Progress: Prioritise safety Gr=2
92	Steps to Achieve Progress: Transparent communication to all stakeholders Gr=4
93	Steps to Achieve Progress: understand what is required Gr=6
94	Steps to Achieve Progress: use lessons learned from previous challenges Gr=2
95	Think: Detach yourself Gr=5
96	Think: Do not Freeze, Think Gr=3
97	Think: Focused mind Gr=1
98	Think: View crisis as a challenge to keep mind open Gr=1
99	Ways to handle opportunities: Capitalise Gr=3
100	Ways to handle opportunities: Increase customer base to grow the company Gr=1
101	Ways to handle opportunities: Start new business offering to grow the company Gr=2
102	Ways to handle opportunities: Take opportunity if you have capacity Gr=3
103	Ways to handle opportunities: Take risks to gain advantage Gr=3
104	Ways to manage change: Communicate it can be managed Gr=5
105	Ways to manage change: Communicate its not permanent Gr=4
106	Ways to manage change: Communicate the why behind your position Gr=1
107	Ways to manage change: Communicate with each individual Gr=1
108	Ways to manage change: Explain your position Gr=1
109	Ways to manage change: Motivate Gr=4

Annexure D: Ethical clearance

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear [REDACTED]

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

Informed consent for interviews

I am conducting research on **Managers Responses to a Crisis in South African Construction Industry** Our interview is expected to last an hour and will help us understand *How do managers respond to an external crisis?* **Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.** By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:

- The interview to be recorded;
- The recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers.

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: XXXXXXXX XXXX

Email: 14456266@mygibs.co.za

Phone: +27 xx xxx xxxx

Research Supervisor name:

XXXXX XXXXXX

Email: xxxxxxxxx@gibs.co.za

Phone: +27 xx xxx xxxx

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

If you are interested in information about the study results as a whole, please provide contact information below:

Email: _____