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**MANAGING THROUGH A CRISIS: STRATEGIES USED BY KENYAN
EXECUTIVES TO LEAD THEIR ORGANISATIONS THROUGH THE COVID-
19 PANDEMIC**

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MBA/138811**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE STRATHMORE UNIVERSITY
BUSINESS SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AT STRATHMORE BUSINESS
SCHOOL, STRATHMORE UNIVERSITY**



MAY 2024

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been previously submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the research thesis itself.

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Evalyne Chege MBA/138811/2021.

Name of Candidate



29th May 2024

Signature
Date

Approval

The thesis of Evalyne Chege was reviewed and approved for examination by the following:

Prof. Joseph Odhiambo Onyango,
Associate Professor, Strathmore University Business School.



Signed:

Date: 29th May, 2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late mother Mrs. Anastasia Njoki Chege who passed on shortly before I joined this program. She encouraged me to do my best and supported me throughout my academic journey. May all the dreams you had for me come true. I hope I am making you proud.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my profound thanksgiving to God for the gift of life and His Grace that enabled me to go through this program, despite the many challenges and hurdles.

To my dad – Mr. Moses Thuku, thank you for your love, prayers and support. Thank you for encouraging me when things got tough and when I was about to give up.

I also wish to recognize my supervisor Professor Joseph Onyango for his patience, guidance and support.

To my friends, I am grateful for your encouragement and support.



ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for businesses and organisations around the world. In Kenya, executives were faced with the task of leading their organisations through a crisis of unknown duration and impact. This study aimed to investigate how Kenyan executives managed the Covid-19 pandemic starting with the pre-crisis period, the crisis period and the post crisis period. The study was anchored on the Stakeholder theory of crisis management which proposes that in the context of crises, managers behaving more in accordance with the stakeholder model will exhibit greater frequencies of proactive and accommodative crises management behaviour, even if these crisis management behaviours are not perceived to increase shareholder value. This study is undergirded on the interpretivist paradigm which posits that meaning is created from the personal interpretation of events and experiences of the participants. The research design that was used in this study was qualitative research design. This research design was deemed to be the most suitable for this study as it allows “patterns and meanings to emerge from the study that have not been strictly specified in advance” (Yardley, 2008, p. 246). The target population for this study was executives who work in the 13 industry sectors. The study applied purposive sampling where the participants were chosen because of their experiences. Primary data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants. This research used thematic analysis approach to the data, which entailed the researcher systematically assigning codes to qualitative data in order to uncover and explore emerging themes for subsequent analysis. During the data presentation phase, the study employed "thick descriptions" to offer a comprehensive and intricate exposition of the findings. The findings of this identified ten strategies that were employed by the Kenyan executives. They include; 1) Business Continuity Plans 2) Crisis Management Teams 3) Prioritising Employee Safety 4) Risk Assessment and Business Continuity 5) Stakeholder Engagement 6) Crisis Communication 7) Enhancement of Business Continuity Plans 8) Heightened Vigilance 9) Flexibility and Adaptability and 10) Stakeholder Engagement. The researcher ensured that the participants' data was treated with privacy and confidentiality. The analysis conclusions were that Kenyan executives employed several strategies in the pre-covid, covid and post-covid stages. The Kenyan executives, although they did not anticipate the Covid-19 pandemic and its accompanying magnitude, did have several pre-crisis preparedness plans and also shaped and implemented crisis management strategies during the pandemic and in retrospect, have instituted various post-crisis measures that have potential to stand them in good stead in the face of future crises. This study recommends executives to prioritise stakeholder engagement in the designing and implementation of crisis response strategies to ensure the concerns of every stakeholder group are catered for in the organisations' response strategies. This study also recommends executives to have more robust business continuity plans that prioritise the health, wellness and safety of their employees.

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Covid-19: Illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China (CDC, 2019)

Crisis: A specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organisation's high priority goals. (Seeger 1998).

Post crisis: A phase involves root cause analysis, management assessment, process review and implementation of change (Jacques, 2007).

Organisational crisis: A low probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organisation and is characterised by ambiguity of cause, effect and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly (Hermann, (1963)

Crisis Management: A systemic attempt by organisational members with external stakeholders to crises or to effectively manage those that occur" (Pearson & Clair, 1998)

Crisis preparedness: The designing and implementation of major plans, practices, procedures and mechanisms to prepare for the crises when they arise and later guide the organisation to full recovery and provide lessons for it to learn in the future (Mitroff, 1993).

Stakeholders: Persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present or future (Clarkson ,1995)

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AFTCOR	Africa Taskforce on Coronavirus Preparedness and Response
Africa CDC	Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease (2019)
DACH	Germany, Austria and Switzerland
ICT	Information, Communication and Technology
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation
NSE	Nairobi Securities Exchange
SACIDS	Southern Africa Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillances
WHO	World Health Organisation





CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines a pandemic as "an outbreak of a new pathogen that spreads easily from person to person across the globe" (World Health Organisation, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic refers to the worldwide occurrence of the coronavirus disease, a severe acute respiratory syndrome caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The virus was initially identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China (CDC, 2021; WHO, 2022). On January 23, 2020, Wuhan, which was the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic, was placed under lockdown, along with 16 other cities in the Hubei province, which were subsequently included in the cordon sanitaire (Leung, Wu, Liu, & Leung, 2020)

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global public health emergency. It escalated to a pandemic on March 11, 2020, as the disease had spread to 114 countries, with 118,000 confirmed cases and 4,291 deaths (Balkhair, 2020; WHO, 2021). As of mid-December 2022, WHO recorded over 649 million confirmed cases and 6.7 million deaths, with more than 13 million vaccine doses administered globally (WHO, 2022).

The economic repercussions of COVID-19 have been multifaceted, including economic slowdowns, disruptions in transportation, consumer panic, and altered consumption patterns leading to market irregularities (McKibbin & Fernando, 2020). Many businesses worldwide reported declines in sales, with the lowest point observed in the second quarter of 2020 (Bloom, Fletcher, & Yeh, 2021). Lockdown measures imposed by governments globally have resulted in

widespread economic downturns, with significant impacts on employment and production. This has prompted companies worldwide to adopt management strategies to navigate the pandemic (Carracedo, Puertas, & Marti, 2021).

Kenya's first confirmed COVID-19 case was reported on March 12, 2020, in a Kenyan citizen who had travelled to Nairobi from the United States via London on March 5, 2020 (MOH Kenya, 2020). The case was confirmed by the National Influenza Centre Laboratory at the Ministry of Health's National Public Health Laboratories. The pandemic disrupted corporate organisations in Kenya, most of which lacked robust business continuity management structures and had to resort to reactive responses for survival (Schmid, Raju, & Jensen, 2021). Specifically, economic activities were hampered by restrictions, including containment measures, population segment closures, a nationwide curfew, and reduced international travel. According to the Kenya Economic Survey (2021) published by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of over 700,000 jobs, reducing the employment figure to 17.4 million in 2020, down from 18.1 million in 2019 (KNBS, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on both individuals and economic systems worldwide. Notably, global economic growth in 2020 contracted by approximately -3.2%, and global trade experienced a decline of 5.3% during that year (Jackson, Weiss, Schwarzenberg, Nelson, Sutter, Sutherland, 2021). While the economic downturn was less severe than initially projected, thanks to fiscal interventions implemented by governments in 2020, the extended duration of the pandemic has presented unique challenges. Experts anticipate that its consequences will be "long-lasting and far-reaching" (Jackson, et al., 2021, p. 2).

The pandemic's effects extended across various industries in unprecedented ways. In the travel industry, complete travel bans were imposed, leading to the closure of airports. The hospitality sector witnessed a significant number of booking cancellations, resulting in substantial financial losses for hotels worldwide. Additionally, many restaurants had to lay off a large portion of their staff. In the sports industry, European football leagues were suspended for several months (Ozili & Arun, 2023). The financial sector experienced a surge in nonperforming loans, particularly in loans issued to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), due to the global economic slowdown. Ozili and Arun (2023) highlight that global stock markets collectively lost over six trillion dollars in value within a six-day period from February 23 to February 28.

Governments responded to the onset of the pandemic by implementing a wide range of measures. These included travel restrictions, school closures, bans on public gatherings, emergency investments in healthcare systems, contact tracing efforts, social welfare provisions, and fiscal measures aimed at mitigating the pandemic's economic impacts (Hale, et al., 2021).

Africa was the last continent to experience the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the first case being reported in Egypt on February 14, 2020, followed by Nigeria on February 27. Subsequently, countries including Algeria, Morocco, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, Cameroon, and South Africa reported their initial cases in early March 2020. Kenya confirmed its first COVID-19 case on March 12 of the same year. The pandemic imposed significant stress on healthcare systems worldwide, but its impact was particularly pronounced in Africa due to a range of factors such as limited COVID testing capacity, a shortage of trained medical personnel, insufficient ventilators and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) facilities, and a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) (Lone & Ahmad, 2020).

One of the most profound consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa was the loss of human capital, with the continent accounting for approximately 4% of total COVID-19 deaths (Anyanwu & Salami, 2021). According to Maliszewska and Van Der Mensbrugge (2020), countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were among the least affected economically, experiencing an estimated GDP loss of around 3%.

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), governments collaborated to establish a presidential task force for public health and pledged substantial financial resources toward pandemic response efforts. Consequently, on February 22, 2022, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) joined forces with the Southern Africa Centre for Infectious Disease Surveillances (SACIDS) to establish the Africa Taskforce on Coronavirus Preparedness and Response (AFTCOR) (Osseni, 2020). African governments took various measures to address the pandemic, including providing budgetary support for the health sector, implementing macro-financial policies, and making investments in healthcare systems. Financial institutions like the African Development Bank played a role in mobilising a pandemic global response package totalling 2 Billion Kenya shillings, spanning the years 2020 and 2021, to support the global fight against the pandemic.

Following the confirmation of the first COVID-19 case in Kenya, the Kenyan government implemented a series of measures in response to the pandemic's outbreak aimed at curbing the virus's spread. These measures encompassed compulsory COVID-19 screening at all entry points, mandatory isolation and quarantine protocols for incoming travellers, physical distancing regulations, movement restrictions, sanitation mandates, including the obligatory use of face masks in public spaces, the closure of educational institutions, nationwide curfews, additional

financial support for healthcare workers, and governmental initiatives to mitigate the economic repercussions of the pandemic (Oyando, et al., 2021).

The impact of the pandemic was pervasive, affecting nearly every sector, with no industry or business operating at full capacity. The hospitality sector in Kenya bore the brunt of the pandemic's impact, with some establishments either shutting down entirely or operating at less than 25% of their usual capacity. Other industries such as manufacturing, construction, real estate, and information and communication technology (ICT) experienced varied reductions in their operations, often falling within the range of 25% to 50%, whereas many healthcare facilities and a few manufacturing enterprises continued to operate at or above 75% capacity (Lagat, Nassiuma, Chepkwony, and Bitok, 2022).

Unemployment rates in Kenya nearly quadrupled compared to the pre-COVID era, with the adverse effects of the pandemic on the private sector having a direct impact on the well-being of Kenyan households (World Bank Group, 2021). According to the World Bank (2021), the unemployment rate escalated from 5% in the final quarter of 2019 to nearly 17% in May-June 2020. Furthermore, the pandemic prompted a considerable number of adult Kenyans to exit the labour force, resulting in a reduction from 75% in the last quarter of 2019 to 61% from mid-May to early July 2020. This reduction is likely attributable to some individuals who became discouraged by the lack of employment opportunities or were unable to actively seek employment due to the socioeconomic conditions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pearson and Clair (1998) provide a definition of organisational crises as "low-probability, high-impact events that pose a threat to the organisation's survival. These events are marked by ambiguity regarding their causes, effects, and resolution methods, and they necessitate swift decision-making" (p. 60). Hermann (1963) offers a complementary perspective, characterising

organisational crises as events that "threaten the organisation's high-priority values, impose time constraints for response, and catch the organisation off guard or unprepared" (p. 61).

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a global public health crisis but also presented significant organisational and managerial challenges. While there was no predefined playbook for managing a pandemic of this magnitude, Nembhard, Burns, and Shortell (2020) identified five critical actions for organisational leaders: prioritising the well-being of individuals, creative management of operations, fostering effective teamwork and communication, establishing external partnerships, and embracing clear and humble leadership. The pandemic's reality forced organisational leaders to think on their feet, adapt rapidly, and address problems promptly.

Organisations worldwide were compelled to adapt their business models, reassess strategies, and realign their organisational objectives. Longenecker and Wittmer (2022) conducted interviews with 30 CEOs from Fortune 500 companies, Fortune 1000 companies, and large privately-owned enterprises, identifying ten leadership drivers that facilitated their navigation through the pandemic. These drivers encompassed collaborative efforts with crisis teams, transparent dialogues with customers and suppliers, active listening and inquiry, reliance on senior leadership teams, and increased personal reflection and introspection.

The New Zealand government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has been commended. Bush (2021) conducted interviews with 18 secondary school principals in New Zealand to investigate how they managed the pandemic and subsequent national lockdowns from the perspective of crisis leadership. The research revealed that the pandemic and lockdowns encouraged these principles to adopt more collaborative forms of leadership, emphasising well-being, effective communication, and seizing opportunities through cross-functional teamwork.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique opportunity for researchers to explore how a leader's style influences or is influenced by a crisis of this magnitude. Sensemaking, defined as the process by which individuals interpret a changing and uncertain environment to motivate action, is a crucial concept in this context (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In organisational contexts, leaders play a pivotal role in sensemaking during crises, as they are uniquely positioned to interpret the crisis and facilitate responses. Leadership scholars have identified sensemaking as a fundamental leadership competency (Shamir, 2007), with some defining leadership as the ability to successfully engage in sensemaking (Pye, 2005). A study conducted by Medeiros, Crayne, Griffith, Hardy, & Damadzic (2022) found that world leaders tended to adopt more pragmatic sensemaking styles as COVID-19 infection rates surged, indicating a shift towards practical and adaptable approaches in response to the pandemic.

In a multi-country qualitative study, Hahang, Bayraktar, and Jimenez (2022) investigated the critical leadership skills that hospitality industry leaders employed to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic successfully. Their research identified flexibility, effective decision-making, positive thinking, trust-building, communication skills, and divergent thinking as key drivers of leadership effectiveness within the hospitality sector during the pandemic.

Similarly, a qualitative study conducted by Oruh, Mordi, Dibia, and Ajonbadi (2021) examined how leaders in the banking, manufacturing, and healthcare sectors in Nigeria navigated the pandemic. Their research found that compassionate managerial leadership significantly mitigated some of the most pressing COVID-19-related challenges faced by employees, including job insecurity, health risks, concerns about heavy workloads, delayed payments, and underpayment.

Plessis and Keyter (2020) proposed an adaptive leadership approach as the most suitable for leaders dealing with crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach draws from the strengths of leadership styles derived from transformational, transactional, democratic, autocratic, and servant leadership models. Plessis and Keyter (2020) also introduced six guiding principles derived from adaptive leadership: gaining a comprehensive perspective of the crisis, identifying adaptive challenges, managing distress without overwhelming individuals, maintaining disciplined attention, promoting shared responsibility for addressing the crisis's impact, and actively listening to and safeguarding the voices of those within the organization.

Stefan and Nazarov (2020) emphasize that leaders navigating a crisis must adapt their leadership style to suit the specific situation. They argue that leaders must be inspirational during a crisis, setting an example for their subordinates by demonstrating confidence, setting ambitious goals, and emphasizing excellence in performance.

1.1.1 Crisis Management: Pre-crisis, crisis, post crisis

Scholarship understands crisis management in three phases; pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis (Coombs, 2007); Coombs & Hollady, 2012, Coombs 2014; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Bundy, Pfarrer, & Coombs, 2016; Coombs & Laufer, 2018).

The pre-crisis stage is the planning that occurs prior to a crisis and focuses mainly on the proactive and pre-emptive measures geared towards mitigating a crisis or minimizing the impact of a crisis (Coombs, 2016). According to Jacques, Gatot, & Wallemacq (2007), crisis preparedness involves putting planning in place, assigning different roles and responsibilities as well as establishing process ownership for the crisis preparedness. Crisis preparedness, according to Jacques et al., (2007), encompasses putting in place systems and manuals including infrastructure, equipment, ‘war rooms’ and resources in preparation for a crisis. The crisis preparedness level

also includes conducting trainings, familiarization programs and live simulations with organisational staff. Pearson & Mitroff (1993) posit that crisis preparedness requires the meticulous designing and implementation of major plans, practices, procedures and mechanisms to prepare for the crises when they arise and later guide the organisation to full recovery and provide lessons for it to learn in the future. Coombs (2007) equally argues that this phase involves the acquisition and deployment of resources in preparedness and readiness to a crisis. Another important aspect that is stressed at the pre-crisis stage is the meaningful and effective engagement of stakeholders to foster a culture of trust and encourage free flow of information.

Trachsler and Wouter, (2020) warn that crisis teams tend to over-rely on procedures and responsibilities while largely underestimating the importance of a prepared mindset of the individual participants. Other scholars such as Gilpin and Murphy (2008) have also warned against “overly rigid crisis planning procedures”, as these inaccurately raises the expectations of what crisis management teams are capable of delivering. The scholars recommend a more flexible approach to crisis preparedness to not only be appropriate for the crisis at hand, but also to understand what is are realistic expectations of crisis management teams.

Pearson and Mitroff (1993) argue that an organisation can either be ‘crisis prepared’ or ‘crisis prone’. While crisis- prone organisations tend to act only when they are in a crisis, crisis prepared organisations are more proactive and spend time and resources in planning and preparing for eventual crises. With regards to leadership at the pre-crisis stage, research has shown that leadership competences such as emergency preparedness, emotional intelligence, problem-solving and crisis communication proved critical at this stage. Specifically, emergency preparedness emerged as the most important leadership skill in crisis management (Wisittigars & Siengthai, 2019).

The next stage- the crisis stage- involves the execution of laid out crisis management plans including the crisis response strategies and working with relevant stakeholders to stem the impact of the crisis. Organisational crisis management is “a systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that occur” (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 61). This process involves strategy selection and implementation, damage mitigation, media response and stakeholder management. Further, Pearson and Clair (1998) argue that organisational crisis management effectiveness is evidence when future crises are averted or when major stakeholders believe that the success outcomes of impacts of crises outweigh the outcomes. According to Boin, Kuipers and Overdijk (2013), crisis management is the “sum of activities aimed at minimizing the impact of a crisis”. The impact of a crisis could be measured in terms of the damage to people, infrastructure, organisations, property and public institutions. Boin et al., (2013) argue that the essence of effective crisis management lies in the lives saved, infrastructure protected and trust restored in public institutions.

One of the most well-managed crises in recent history, according to crisis management scholars is the Johnson & Johnson handling of the Tylenol crisis. In 1982, seven consumers of Tylenol died after using the company’s medical product, Tylenol, which was contaminated by cyanide. The Johnson & Johnson management were consumed with the safety of the consumers first, and recalled the product immediately, causing a sharp drop in the share price (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001). Due to the executive’s recognition and appreciation of the intrinsic value of stakeholders and their stakeholder approach towards the crisis, the company regained its market share and stock price and earned the public’s trust, and became a beaming example of how to handle a crisis.

For effective and efficient crisis management, Boin et al., (2013) posited ten executive crisis tasks collected from extensive crisis management studies across various contexts. The ten tasks include; early recognition, sensemaking, making critical decision, orchestrating vertical and horizontal coordination, coupling and decoupling, meaning making, communication, rendering accountability, learning and enhancing resilience. Lawton-Misra and Pretorius (2021) who explored leadership in a crisis, specifically leadership during the Covid-19 crisis, argue that leaders play a significant role in managing crises as they are tasked with taking charge of their organisations in the face of a crisis. They further note that while crisis preparedness policies are critical, they also argue that empathy, vulnerability, self-awareness and agility are some of the important qualities needed in individual leaders who are steering organisations through crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The two authors posit that leaders are “...expected to not only fully understand the meaning of empathy and compassion, but to know how to sincerely demonstrate these qualities to staff...” (p.1).

The last stage is the stock-taking and recovery stage after every crisis (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). This is the post-crisis management phase where evaluation and modification take centre stage. According to Jacques (2007), this phase involves root cause analysis, management assessment, process review and implementation of change. Penrose (2000) posits that companies that survive crises are often more prepared for future challenges. In case of Swedish media leaders, Appelgren (2021) found that follow-up meetings helped executives to establish and reinforce standard and key processes, which was instrumental in the effective navigating of the pandemic. In a study conducted by Glenn, Chaumont, and Dintrans, (2020) on the role of public leadership during the pandemic, the authors found that a better understanding of leadership is critical for better crisis management and found the need to renegotiate the scope of public health leadership.

Dirani, et al., (2020) also found that of the many leadership lessons that emerged during the current Covid-19 crisis, communication was key. They found that it is important for leaders to maintain constant communication with all stakeholders to address their concerns and ease their stress. The scholars concluded that it was imperative that the communicated messages be “aligned, realistic, positive, balanced and sent out via appropriate channels” (p. 393).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Covid-19 pandemic had profound and far-reaching impacts on organisations globally, disrupting traditional business operations and accelerating the need for digital transformation. Many companies faced immediate operational challenges due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, necessitating a rapid shift to remote work. This sudden transition exposed significant gaps in digital infrastructure and cybersecurity, compelling organisations to invest heavily in technology and remote working tools. Supply chain disruptions were another critical issue, as restrictions on movement and factory shutdowns led to delays and shortages, forcing businesses to rethink their supply chain strategies and diversify their suppliers Glenn, Chaumont, and Dintrans, (2020). Financially, the pandemic induced economic uncertainty, leading to reduced consumer spending and revenue losses for many industries, particularly those in the hospitality, travel, and retail sectors. Organisations had to adopt cost-cutting measures, including layoffs, furloughs, and salary reductions, to manage cash flow and ensure survival.

While existing research has extensively explored organizational responses to crises, there remains a significant gap in understanding how crisis management theories and models are perceived and applied by individual leaders within the African context, particularly in navigating major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Longenecker & Wittmer, 2022). Previous studies have predominantly focused on institutional behaviours related to crisis preparedness, prevention,

management, and post-crisis recovery, often overlooking the nuanced role of individual leaders in crisis response. While some studies have examined leadership in the healthcare sector in Western countries during the pandemic (Hartnery et al., 2021; Donelli, Fanelli & Zangradi, 2022), there is a scarcity of research taking a multi-sectoral approach to leadership during such crises.

Moreover, the crisis highlighted the importance of agile and resilient business models. Companies that were able to pivot quickly, such as by shifting to online sales or repurposing production lines, fared better. The pandemic also underscored the critical role of effective leadership and communication. Executives needed to maintain transparency, provide frequent updates, and support employee well-being amidst the unprecedented uncertainty. Mental health emerged as a significant concern, prompting organisations to enhance their support systems and offer more flexible working conditions.

This study sought to address these gaps by investigating how leaders from diverse industries in Kenya navigated their organisations through the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had far-reaching economic ramifications for countries, companies, and employees alike. By understanding the strategies employed by Kenyan executives before, during, and after the crisis, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of effective crisis management strategies. Additionally, the crisis prompted a re-evaluation of business priorities and a greater emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility. Consumers and employees increasingly demanded that organisations contribute positively to society, leading to more corporate social responsibility initiatives.

By bringing to light key insights gleaned from the pandemic experience and offering practical recommendations for future executives, grounded in the first-hand experiences and lessons learned from the interviewed leaders, this research aims to empower future leaders with

the knowledge and foresight needed to effectively steer their organisations through similar crises in the future. In summary, the Covid-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for change, driving organisations to innovate, adapt, and adopt more resilient and socially responsible practices to navigate through and emerge stronger from the crisis.

1.3 General Objective

This qualitative inquiry explores how Kenyan executives led their organisations through the Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on effective crisis management strategies before, during, and after the crisis to enhance understanding of organisational crisis management.

1.4 Specific Research Objectives

Informed by literature review on crisis leadership, this study sought to examine how Kenyan executives navigated through the three main phases of the Covid-19 pandemic- namely, pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. The specific research objectives are outlined as follows:

1. To examine the approaches taken by executives in addressing crisis preparedness and prevention before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (pre-crisis).
2. To explore the executives' crisis management strategies enacted at the outset of the crisis (during the crisis).
3. To investigate the crisis management strategies employed by executives in navigating the post-crisis phase, specifically ensuring sustained business continuity and organizational resilience (post-crisis).

1.5 Research Questions

1. What approaches did executives adopt to address crisis preparedness and prevention before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (Pre-crisis)?

2. What crisis management strategies were implemented at the outset of the crisis (during the crisis)?
3. What crisis management strategies did executives employ to navigate the post-crisis phase, specifically ensuring sustained business continuity and organisational resilience (post-crisis)?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The research scope for this research was limited to the thirteen sectors outlined by the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE). These thirteen sectors include; agricultural, automobile and accessories, banking, commercial and services, construction and allied, energy and petroleum, insurance, investment, investment services, manufacturing and allied, telecommunication and technology, real estate investment trust and exchange traded fund. The geographical scope of this study was restricted to Nairobi. From a theoretical perspective, this study was restricted to the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management. The methodological scope of the study was limited to qualitative research which will be conducted through in-depth interviews with participants holding management positions, specifically those reporting directly to the CEOs of their respective companies.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted various sectors in the country. Organisations across all sectors are adopting new management strategies to cope with the unprecedented disruption resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Management teams were thrust into an extraordinary situation that required them to handle the crisis with clarity while also managing the expectations of various stakeholder groups. The research findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating how executives in various sectors have successfully managed the initial stages

of the crisis. Additionally, the study gathers valuable evidence regarding the dynamics within different sectors during the early phases of the crisis. The unprecedented scale and impact of the pandemic offer unique opportunities for leadership learning. This study offers profound insights into the experiences of executives during the pandemic, showcasing the perspectives of leaders from different regions around the world.

The research sought to gain insights into the strategies, decision-making processes and leadership approaches employed by these executives to navigate through the crisis. By examining their actions and responses, the study sought to identify best practices, challenges faced, and lessons learned in managing organizations during a global health emergency. The findings of this research will contribute to a better understanding of effective crisis management in the Kenyan context and can serve as a basis for enhancing organizational resilience and preparedness for future crises. Ultimately, the study aims to provide valuable knowledge that can inform business leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in their efforts to lead organizations through challenging and unprecedented times.

Stakeholders in the various industries will find the findings of this study useful in understanding crisis management in the wake of Covid-19. Policy makers will also benefit from the results of this study as they think of interventions and playbooks for managers in handling crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the background of the study, the statement of problem, research objectives, research questions, scope of the study and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant theoretical and empirical literature. This chapter reviews the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis management and provides a review of empirical literature based on the three main objectives of the study. The chapter concludes by identifying the research gaps and outlines the conceptual framework.

2.2 Theoretical Literature Review

In general, crisis management theories provide a framework and considerations on how crises should be managed, with a special emphasis on the preparation and response strategies that will avert further damage on the organisation. While there are several theories of crisis management, this study was anchored on the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management that advocates a greater emphasis on the stakeholder model of corporate governance to help organisations successfully prepare for and navigate crises.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management

Management scholars have identified two general models of corporate governance. They are: the shareholder model, which is focuses on shareholder value maximization within the legal limits (Friedman, 1970), and the stakeholder model, which is focuses on the legitimate interests of ‘any group or individual who can effect or is affected by’ the organisation (Freeman, 1984).

In the shareholder model, organisations have one main objective which is to ‘make all decisions so as to increase the total long-run market value of the firm (Jensen, 2002, p. 236). Simply, according to the shareholder model, a firm is required to maximize shareholder value

within the legal constraints. The shareholder model recognises ‘strategic stakeholder management’ in which the firm’s stakeholders are involved in the organisation’s decision-making processes only if paying attention to stakeholders maximizes shareholder value. In the context of crisis management, the shareholder approach to crisis management posits that a stakeholder should only be considered in the crisis preparation and response phases if that action is seen to be of significant influence on maximizing shareholder value. This then means that in the context of a crisis, the interests of potential victims or low-impact stakeholders might sometimes dominate the shareholders’ interests. Therefore, managers must try to foster trusting relationships with the different stakeholders to understand their potential to be affected in the event of a crisis.

Clarkson (1995) defines stakeholders as “persons or groups that have, or claim, ownership, rights, or interests in a corporation and its activities, past, present or future” (p. 106). In the stakeholder model, all stakeholders within an organisation have intrinsic value and therefore managers take their objectives into account when making decisions. According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), the stakeholder theory resonates with the ‘principle of fairness’ where less powerful stakeholders are included in corporate governance as well as ‘intrinsic stakeholder commitment’ in which organisations include stakeholders in the decision-making processes because the organisation has a moral commitment to its stakeholders. In the context of crisis management, the stakeholder approach to crisis management postulates that an organisation’s decision to include a stakeholder in the crisis preparation and response phases should not be solely based on a stakeholder’s salience (importance) or influence on shareholder value (Berman 1999 et al.). This model requires managers to pay attention to a stakeholder to the extent the stakeholder is potentially affected by the organisation’s actions and decisions. More importantly, within the

stakeholder model, the interests of every stakeholder have intrinsic value and no interests are deemed more superior than others.

One of the key insights of crisis research is that an organisation's assumptions and understanding of its stakeholders and their behaviour play a significant role in an organisation's success in managing crises (Ulmer, 2001, Perrow, 1999, Mitroff & Kilmann, 1984). Generally, crisis management involves two broad phases: the preparation and response phase. In both phases, stakeholders play a key role and organisations aim to ensure that stakeholders interests and fears are managed appropriately. At the preparation phase, organisations identify key stakeholders to prevent the crises from happening and impacting the stakeholders. At the response phase, organisations minimize the stakeholder's losses resulting from the crises.

Alpaslan, Green, and Mitroff (2009), the main proponents of the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management, argue that in the context of crises (such as the Covid-19 pandemic), adopting the principles of a stakeholder model of corporate governance will lead organisations to engage more frequently in proactive and/or accommodating crisis management behaviour even if these crisis management behaviours are not perceived to maximize shareholder value.

Considering the shareholders versus the stakeholder models of corporate governance, Alpaslan, Green and Mitroff (2009) proposed the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management based on two main propositions:

1) Proposition 1:

- a. "In the context of crises, managers behaving more in accord with the stakeholder model will exhibit greater frequencies of proactive and accommodative crises management behaviour, even if these crisis management behaviours are not perceived to increase shareholder value." (Alpaslan et al., 2009, p. 44)

- b. “In the context of crises, managers behaving more in accord with the shareholder model will exhibit greater frequencies of proactive and accommodative crisis management behaviour, only if these crisis management behaviours are perceived to increase shareholder value (Alpaslan et al., 2009, p. 44)

2) Proposition 2:

“In the context of crisis, managers behaving more in accord with the stakeholder model will enjoy more successful crisis management outcomes (such as early detection of warning signals, fast recovery etc) than managers behaving more in accord with shareholder model” (Alpaslan et al., 2009, p. 46)

Alpaslan et al., (2009) postulate that managers who observe the stakeholder model appreciate and acknowledge the inherent value of all stakeholders within the organisation which promotes the establishment of strategic alliances and exchange of accurate information with an organisation’s stakeholders. Consequently, this principle enhances the coordination of crisis preparation and responses between an organisation and its stakeholders in a more effective and efficient manner, compared to relying solely on contracts or shareholder model’s fundamental principle of ‘shareholder value maximization’. In this case, managers know that ‘stakeholders are identified by their interests in the corporation, whether the corporation has any corresponding functional interest in them’ (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 67). In the same vein, Donaldson & Dunfee 1994 argue that managers who ascribe to the stakeholder theory acknowledge and recognise the less powerful stakeholders of an organisation and make deliberate effort to include them in the crisis management efforts. This holistic stakeholder mapping that includes even the stakeholders that are perceived to be less powerful, allows the managers to pick up the early

warning signals sent out by various stakeholders and crises in good time, thus allowing them to execute a wide range of damage control mechanisms in the event of a crises.

According to this theory, managers who adopt the stakeholder model acknowledge their reliance and ethical responsibility towards a diverse range of stakeholders. These managers engage in constructive dialogue and cultivate cooperative approaches in working together with their stakeholders to develop effective strategies (Nathan & Mitroff, 1991). These approaches encompass the establishment of cross-functional teams dedicated to crisis management, enabling representation of both internal and external stakeholders. Furthermore, stakeholders are integrated into the organizational crisis management systems and structures, while ensuring the provision of accurate information. In essence, the stakeholder model equips managers to effectively prepare for diverse crises, leverage the resources offered by a wide range of stakeholders, and facilitate the seamless flow of vital resources and information among them. (Mitroff et al., 1996; Pearson et al., 1997; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Ulmer & Sellnow, 1997, 2000).

In summary, adopting a stakeholder model for crisis management necessitates a greater investment of time and resources in crisis preparedness and building trust-based relationships with stakeholders. However, managers who adhere to this model are more likely to prevent crises and mitigate their costly outcomes, such as legal battles and financial ruin. By being perceived as fair, reliable, and collaborative by their stakeholders, these managers enjoy enhanced access to crucial information and stakeholder resources. As a result, both the managers and their stakeholders are better equipped to efficiently carry out the intricate and coordinated actions required during a crisis, enabling them to promptly and effectively address each other's diverse needs and interests.

One of the critiques of the stakeholder theory, advanced by Key (1997) posits that the stakeholder theory lacks a comprehensive understanding of the interconnections among actors, as well as the intricate relationships between internal and external stakeholders. Although the main proponent of the stakeholder theory Freeman (1984) acknowledges the existence of both internal and external stakeholder groups, Key (1997) points out that this theory falls short in fully illustrating the extensive network of connections between these groups and among individual actors.

For instance, individuals can hold membership in multiple groups as actors, exemplified by an employee who can simultaneously be part of internal stakeholder groups like shareholders and employees, while also participating in external stakeholder groups such as professional organizations, consumer associations, environmental activists, parent groups, or other community-based stakeholder groups. To remedy this, Key (1997) suggests that perhaps it is possible that stakeholder groups are not easily distinguishable, but rather the interests they represent (whether internal or external) can be identified. Consequently, the crucial factor may be the "interest" itself rather than the stakeholder. In fact, Donaldson and Preston (1995) have advocated for identifying stakeholders based on their interests.

Another critique of the stakeholder theory, as advanced by Marcoux (2000) is that the stakeholder theory suggests that all stakeholders should be treated impartially, regardless of the varying degrees to which they contribute to the organization. However, Phillips, Freeman and Wicks (2005) counter this criticism by arguing that Marcoux (2000) overlooks a prominent and compelling interpretation of achieving balance among organizational stakeholders: meritocracy. Phillips et al., (2005) note that according to a robust understanding of stakeholder theory, benefits are allocated in proportion to each stakeholder's relative contribution to the organization.

Phillips et al., (2005) also argues that the arrangement of stakeholders is not entirely determined by a meritocratic hierarchy. An alternative perspective proposed by Phillips (2003) suggests categorizing stakeholders into normative and derivative groups. Normative stakeholders are those to whom the organization has a direct moral responsibility to prioritize their well-being. They address the fundamental question in stakeholder theory: "For whose benefit should the firm be managed?" Examples of normative stakeholders often mentioned in stakeholder discussions include financiers, employees, customers, suppliers, and local communities.

On the other hand, derivative stakeholders are groups or individuals who can potentially impact the organization positively or negatively, but the organization does not have a direct moral obligation towards them as stakeholders. This category may encompass competitors, activists, interest groups, and the media. The organization's management is not primarily focused on the benefit of derivative stakeholders. However, managers are obliged to consider them in their decision-making to the extent that they may influence the organization or its normative stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholder theory provides several more compelling ways to differentiate and classify constituency groups, rather than strictly adhering to idea of equality.

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to investigate organisational preparedness and responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this section, some of those studies will be highlighted, with a focus on the purpose of the study, the design/methodology approach, findings and research implications. These studies were in different markets (Africa, Asia, Middle East, South America, North America, Europe and Australia) across various industries including healthcare, education, hospitality, banking, manufacturing among others.

Dada, Oladimeji, Gwacham-Anisiobi, Sekoni and Banke-Thomas (2022) investigated the leadership experiences of health facility leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This study employed an exploratory descriptive qualitative approach. To accomplish this, 33 health facility leaders from various roles within the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of the public health care system in Lagos, Nigeria, participated in remote interviews. The interviews with key informants were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis for data interpretation. This research was anchored on Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership theory. The study found that during the initial phase of the pandemic, health facility leaders encountered intensified levels of fear, anxiety, and various stressors. They faced genuine concerns about the potential exposure of their family members to the virus. Additionally, they had to address the apprehension and reluctance of certain healthcare workers who were afraid for their own lives. To cope with these challenges, health facility leaders implemented coping mechanisms such as seeking psychosocial support, implementing innovative hygiene measures both at the facility and in their personal lives, providing extensive training, and enhancing staff welfare beyond regular measures. Despite the difficulties, their dedication to their profession, their sense of calling, adherence to the Hippocratic oath, and support from the State government served as motivating factors for them to continue providing essential services during the crisis.

A study conducted by Terblanche (2021) investigated how the initial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on organizational managers in South Africa, as observed through the perspective of their executive coaches. The study addresses two key questions: (1) What were the challenges encountered by managers during the initial phases of the Covid-19 pandemic? and (2) How did coaching contribute to the development of crisis management skills during this period? Executive coaches hold a distinct position of confidentiality and professional intimacy, allowing them to

closely observe their clients' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Terblanche (2021) used an interpretivist (qualitative) approach and conducted interviews with 26 coaches from the UK, USA, South Africa and Australia. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. This research was anchored on crisis management theory and coaching efficacy theory. With regards to research findings, the coaches observed that the Covid-19 pandemic placed managers in a challenging position, where they had to navigate the dynamics between managing their staff, satisfying the expectations of their superiors, and attending to their own well-being. Managers encountered a range of difficulties, including logistical obstacles, personal fears, uncertainties, and a loss of identity. They sought solace in their coaches, relying on them for reflection, support, and constructive challenges that encouraged a forward-thinking approach.

Oruh, Mordi, Dibia and Ajonbadi (2021) explored the impact of a compassionate managerial leadership style in mitigating workplace stressors and reducing employee stress levels, particularly in the challenging circumstances of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on the banking, manufacturing, and healthcare sectors in Nigeria, which previously exhibited elevated levels of employee stress. The research employed qualitative, interpretive methodology and used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data. They conducted semi-structured phone interviews with leaders in the banking, manufacturing and healthcare industries. The study found that a compassionate managerial leadership approach plays a significant role in addressing employees' concerns related to job security, healthcare risks, and issues such as work overload, underpayment, and delayed payment. These factors were identified by the respondents as key contributors to heightened stress levels among employees during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In a study conducted by Shukla, Sufi, Joshi and Sujatha (2021), the authors investigated the challenges leaders in India's hospitality industry faced as they navigated the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, the research examines how leaders effectively handle the expectations of crucial stakeholders, effectively communicate challenging decisions to employees, pursue strategies for recovery, and assess the role of technology in navigating and overcoming the crisis. The study employed a qualitative approach that involved structured interviews with 16 senior hospitality leaders including CEOs, vice president, directors, entrepreneur, and general managers from a diverse selection of organisations such as restaurant chains, food services, hotels and facilities management services. The data was analysed using coding techniques. Shukla et al., (2021) found that the leadership faced a range of challenges, including prioritizing the safety of customers and employees, optimizing operational efficiency, cultivating leaders' agility and resilience, striking a balance between stakeholders, managing employee stress, and ensuring sufficient cash reserves. The study revealed that leaders effectively address the expectations of diverse stakeholders by maintaining equilibrium, demonstrating empathy, and adapting with agility. When communicating difficult decisions to employees, leaders promote employee engagement, exhibit empathy, and mitigate stress levels. This study contributes to scholarship by bringing out twelve themes based on the participants' responses under five major themes which include; managing stakeholder, the role of technology communicating with employees, leadership challenges and best practices of surviving the crisis.

Caringal-Go, Teng-Calleja, Franco, Manois, & Zantua R, (2021) investigated the traits and behaviours of organisations that were seen as helpful by employees during the Covid-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework used in this study was drawn from implicit leadership theory (ILT), which revolves around followers' preferences for specific leadership attributes. Specifically, they

concentrated on the traits and behaviours of organizational leaders that employees found beneficial during the initial weeks of the Covid-19 community quarantine. By doing so, this study made a theoretical contribution to the crisis literature by examining effective leadership from the followers' perspective. The study was conducted in the Philippines, and the researchers used an exploratory qualitative study design. Qualitative data was collected for this study using an online survey that incorporated open-ended questions. The primary focus of the study revolved around gathering responses to the specific question: "What traits or behaviours did your leaders exhibit during this crisis that were beneficial to both you and the organization?" Additionally, demographic information was gathered as part of the data collection process. To analyse the data, the researchers employed a conventional content analysis approach, which involves deriving themes from the collected data to obtain a deeper comprehension of the context and phenomenon. The research findings revealed a set of interconnected traits and behaviours associated with effective crisis leadership. These attributes were categorized into three overarching themes: prioritizing the well-being of individuals, assuming responsibility and providing guidance for the path ahead, and nurturing resilience and motivation. This study sought to address a gap in understanding the perspectives of followers regarding organizational leadership responses to crises. It emphasizes the significance of demonstrating care and compassion when guiding employees through challenging periods.

Arastaman and Çetinkaya (2021) conducted a study to understand how school principals in Turkey perceived and navigated the stress of the Covid-19 pandemic and the leadership practices that enables these leaders to cope with the uncertainty and stress of the pandemic. This study employed a qualitative case study approach in a bid to gain a deeper understanding of the stress factors, leadership experiences and coping strategies that the school principals faced during the

Covid-19 pandemic. This study was anchored on the crisis leadership theory. The two researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 Turkish school principals. The research found that the principals' leadership practices were influenced by the stressors they experienced during the pandemic. These practices were viewed as their responses to the perceived stressors. Furthermore, prioritizing the self-care and well-being of principals has been recognized as a crucial factor for effective crisis leadership. The study elaborates on the leadership practices that prove effective in achieving crisis leadership amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Hahang, Bayraktar and Jiménez (2022) conducted a multi-country study that sought to investigate the most critical leadership skills and strategies used by leaders in the hospitality industry to navigate the Covid-19 crisis. The study employed a qualitative research methodology and conducted semi-structured interviews with managers of local hotel chains and international hospitality groups in seven countries (France, Thailand, Dubai, USA, Macau, Austria and England). The findings of the study show that communication skills, trust building, divergent thinking, flexibility, decision-making and positive thinking had a positive impact of leadership effectiveness in the seven countries investigated. Crucial strategies that were teased from this study included; saving payroll costs, leveraging from partners' strengths and contingency plans.

A study conducted by Longenecker and Wittmer (2022) sought out to answer the question “What are the learning experiences and drivers that provide CEOs with the knowledge, skills and abilities that will allow them to lead their enterprises through crises?”. The two researchers employed qualitative research methodology and conducted in-depth, face to face and virtual interviews with thirty CEOs from ten Fortune 500 companies, ten Fortune 1000 and ten large multidivisional privately held companies in the United States. The interviews covered the experiences, challenges, adaptations, learning and lessons that CEOs gleaned from the Covid-19

pandemic. The data was then content analysed to tease out the main themes and sub-themes. Some of the findings include the following ‘Leadership learning drivers’; working closely with the crisis teams, listening and asking questions like never before, leaning in on the senior leadership team, increased personal thinking and reflection time, managing by walking around both physically and virtually, candid, transparent and authentic dialogues with customers and suppliers, focussed reading, webinars and podcasts around critical issues, drawing upon professional networks and boards, drawing upon your board and executive coaches.

Donelli, Fanelli & Zangradi (2022) sought to explore how health organisations in Italy coped with the impact and challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Anchored on crisis management and resiliency literature, the three researchers employed the case study methodology of Gemelli Polyclinic Foundation, the largest Italian hospital which was also at the forefront of the Italian response to the pandemic. The findings show that Gemelli used three types of responses; behavioural (effective leadership), contextual reinforcement (multiagency network response) and cognitive (rapid resource allocation).

Hartney, Melis, Taylor, Dickson, Grimes, Chan, Van Aerde and Horsely (2021) sought to define the leadership practices that are essential for reimagining and rebuilding the health and social care system during and after the pandemic. The study examined the effective leadership practices employed by Canadian health leaders during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzed the differences compared to pre-crisis practices, and to identify leadership practices that can be leveraged to shape the desired future health and care systems. The authors employed action research methodology and conducted one-on-one and virtual in-depth interviews with 18 health sector leaders in Canada. Data analysis was conducted using the grounded theory methodology. The findings of this study teased out five main leadership practices; agile and

adaptive leadership, disrupting entrenched structures, responding to emotion in self and others, integrating diverse perspectives to accelerate innovation and decisive communication linked to credibility.

Smithson (2021) set out to investigate the different leadership styles at play as a part of the response to Covid-19 in Australia. The study employed qualitative research methodology and conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 executives and senior leaders from the healthcare sector in Australia. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study used crisis management theory. The study found that health system leaders exhibited a combination of command and control, as well as relational leadership behaviours. This hybrid approach allowed for the necessary discipline and agility essential in responding to the crisis. Although some leaders faced personal unease in adopting these dual behaviours, it stemmed from a misalignment with their preferred leadership style rather than a conflict between the two approaches. Both command and control, and relational leadership were deemed indispensable for effectively managing the health system response.

Appelgren (2021) sought to investigate the perceived media leadership in the Covid-19 crisis. The research was premised on two research questions: “How did media managers perceive their leadership during the Covid-19 crisis?” and “What have the managers learned from the crisis that they will continue doing in their leadership?”. The study applied quantitative research methodology and conducted an online survey with a sample of 1,008 Swedish media managers. The study was anchored on crisis management theory. The findings of the study show that Swedish media managers demonstrated a sense of confidence in their ability to lead remotely and effectively executed crisis management tasks, aligning with established research on crisis management. While these managers recognized the advantages of remote work, they acknowledged the inherent

challenges of inspiring and motivating creativity, which is a crucial aspect of managing journalism and media work, in a remote setting.

Fombella, West, Muehlberger, Sautter, Zepf and Harrison (2021) conducted a study to first empirically describe crisis resilience through the actions of various firms in the DACH region of Europe (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and, as a result of the findings, extend existing crisis management models. The study employed a mixed method methodological approach which involved quantitative surveys with 57 managers and 13 qualitative interviews. The findings of the study show that highly resilient companies possessed clearly defined processes, adaptable employees who were effectively led, and readily deployable (digital) technologies.

In Glenn, Chaumont and Dintrans (2020), the objective of the study was to explore the significance of public leadership in navigating the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and to advocate for a greater involvement of public health professionals in effectively managing the crisis. The study used qualitative methodology (document review) and employed the Crisis Leadership framework developed by Boin et al., (2005). The authors of this study concentrate on three essential responsibilities: sense-making, decision-making, and meaning-making, which are pertinent to elucidating the role of public leaders in the current crisis. By drawing insights from the experiences of Chile, France, and the United States, the authors provide concrete examples that demonstrate how these tasks were carried out in practice. The study found that countries demonstrated different responses to the pandemic and the decisions made to prevent infections and alleviate consequences.

2.4 Summary of Research Gaps

Previous studies focus on the institutional management of crises with little focus on the experiences of individual leaders and managers in managing crises. Despite the widespread impact

of the COVID-19 pandemic, relatively little is known about how executives in different sectors led their organizations through this crisis. This lack of understanding limits our ability to develop effective strategies for managing future crises and to identify best practices for executive leadership during times of crisis. It is therefore critical to investigate leadership, and especially crisis management at individual levels to provide insights for the coming months and future crises.

Table 1: Summary of Knowledge Gaps

Author(s) and year	The study objective	Theory	Methodology	Findings and conclusions	Knowledge gap
Dada et al., (2022)	To explore the leadership experiences of health facility leaders during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.	Situational leadership theory	Exploratory descriptive qualitative study	The health facility leaders experienced high levels of fear and anxiety during the early phase of the pandemic. Some of the coping mechanisms included; psychosocial support, improved hygiene and training.	Sought to understand the experiences of health facility leaders specifically in sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria).
Terblanche, (2021)	To investigate how the covid crisis affected managers as seen from their executive coaches' perspective.	Crisis management theory and coaching theory	Interpretivist approach	Managers experienced fear, uncertainty and loss of identity. They relied on their coaches for support, counsel and reflection.	The research was important in proving that coaching could in fact foster effective crisis management.

Oruh, Mordi, Dibia, & Ajonbadi, (2021)	To investigate how compassionate managerial leadership can help mitigate work stress particularly in a crisis such as Covid-19.	Crisis management	Qualitative, interpretive methodology,	Findings show that compassionate managerial leadership can contribute to alleviating what employees consider work stress.	The study filled a research gap on how compassionate management leadership can help alleviate employee stress.
Shukla, Sufi, Joshi, & Sujatha, (2021)	To investigate the challenges hospitality leadership in India faces as they navigate the crisis.	Transformational leadership theory	Qualitative approach	The findings of the study show that the main leadership challenges included making customers and employees feel safe, optimising operations, agility and resilience of leaders, maintaining a balance between stakeholders, managing employee stress and ensuring cash reserves.	This study contributed to scholarship on the hospitality leadership challenges in managing crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
Caringal-Go, Teng-Calleja, Franco, Manois, & Zantua R, (2021)	To identify traits and behaviors of organization leaders that were deemed helpful by employees during the	Implicit Leadership Theory	Exploratory qualitative study	Several interrelated traits and behaviors of effective crisis leadership were identified.	This study helps address the research gap on follower-centered perspectives about organizational leadership responses to crises. This research also highlights the importance of care

	COVID-19 pandemic.				and compassion in leading employees during tough times like the Covid-19 pandemic.
Arastaman & Çetinkaya, (2022)	To understand how school principals in Turkey perceive and navigated the stress caused by the pandemic and the best leadership practices that enabled them to cope with the stress.	Crisis leadership theory	Qualitative approach	Some of the stressors include; anxiety about being ill, time management, working environment, professional relations and job diversity.	The research contributes to current knowledge on leadership in a time of crisis, especially how school leaders handled the complex and multidimensional nature of crisis leadership.
Hahang, Bayraktar, & Alfredo (2022)	A multi-country study that sought to investigate the most important skills and strategies needed by leaders in the hospitality industry to help them navigate the Covid-19 pandemic.	Crisis leadership	Qualitative study	The study found that positive thinking, decision-making, divergent thinking, communication skills, flexibility and trust building have a positive impact on effective leadership in the hospitality industry.	Given the fact that the hotel sector was one of the most affected by the pandemic and the fact that the hotel sector is under-researched, it is important to understand the leadership requirements needed for the hospitality sector.
Longenecker , C., & Wittmer, J. L. (2022)	To answer the question, “What are the learning experiences and drivers that provide	Crisis Leadership	Qualitative research	The study found ten main drivers of CEO learning during the pandemic.	The magnitude of the pandemic provides for lessons on leadership learning at an unprecedented scale. This study provides key insights from CEO

	CEOs with the knowledge, skills and abilities that will allow them to lead their enterprises through crises?”				experiences during the pandemic.
Donelli, Fanelli & Zangradi (2022)	To investigate how health organisations in Italy managed the pandemic.	Theory of Crisis Management and Resilience Theory.	Case Study – Qualitative	The authors found three types of responses; effective leadership, rapid resource allocation and multi-agency network response.	This study was a reaction to calls for more research on an integrative framework of crisis management in complex contexts such as healthcare.
Hartney et al., (2021)	To define the leadership practices that should be applied by Canadian health leaders during and after a crisis.		Qualitative (Grounded Theory)	Five main practices were discovered. They include, among others, agile and adaptive leadership, appreciating diverse views and creating psychologically supportive workplaces,	An interdisciplinary study bringing together a team of health researchers drawn from across Canada to understand best health leadership practices.
Smithson (2021)	To understand leadership styles in use as part of healthcare sector response to Covid-19.	Crisis management theory	Qualitative study	The study found that leaders applied both command and control and relational leadership styles.	Very few studies have focussed on relational aspects of crisis management or a combination of command and control and relational leadership.
Appelgren (2022)	To investigate media managers’	Crisis management	Quantitative survey	The results found that Swedish media	The study filled the research gap on Swedish media

	perceptions on leadership and lessons learned from the pandemic.			managers acted with confidence in their remote leadership and engaged in crisis management leader tasks in line with previous crisis management research.	managers perceptions and lessons in the crisis.
Fombella, et al., (2022)	To investigate the impact of Covid-19 on manufacturing firms in the DACH region (DACH meaning Germany, Austria and Switzerland) and the actions taken by firms taking into consideration the elements of resilience and compare to Northern Italy.	Crisis management model (with a focus on enterprise resilience)	Mixed method approach – quantitative research combined with qualitative research	The study found that the most resilient firms had well-defined plans and processes in place, including adaptable employees who have good leadership and had access to digital technologies that could be easily and quickly implemented.	Covid crisis occurred later in the DACH region thus firms were able to learn from Italy. The crisis management model based on the Italian research was redefined and the new model will be used by managers in future crisis.
Glenn, Chaumont, & Dintrans, (2021)	To explore the role of public leadership during the covid crisis across three countries; China, France and the United States.	Crisis Leadership	Document review using Crisis leadership framework	The study found that understanding public leadership is a key aspect for better crisis management.	The research on the three countries provided lessons for future public health emergencies.

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the study reviewed relevant theoretical and empirical research that provided an understanding of this research topic. This chapter focused on the stakeholder theory of crisis management. This chapter also reviewed various empirical studies conducted in other organisations and markets with key emphasis on the study objectives.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that was used to collect data for this study. The chapter describes the philosophical paradigm anchoring the study, the research design, population, and sampling as well as the data collection and data analysis plan. Finally, this chapter outlines certain aspects of research quality and highlights the ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is the “system of beliefs and assumptions” regarding the research process (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). A philosophical paradigm is important in a research study because it provides the basis for the formulation of the research problems, research objectives and questions and provides a framework upon which the researcher will use to answer the research questions (Huff, 2009). This study is undergirded on the interpretivist paradigm which posits that meaning is created from the personal interpretation of events and experiences of the participants

(Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The purpose of an interpretivist research is to understand and reconstruct the recollections and observations of the participants, with the aim of arriving at a consensus while also remaining open to fresh interpretations of the same concepts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The interpretivist underpinning of this study will allow the researcher to gather deep insights into the experiences and perceptions of the participants to get a first-hand experience of how executives in Kenya navigated the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.3 Research Design

A research design is the strategy or general plan that a researcher intends to apply to conduct the study (Saunders et al., 2019). It is the blueprint that researchers use to fulfil the research objectives and answer the research questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This research is exploratory by nature, as the study focuses on a research area where little scholarship exists.

This study used a qualitative research design. This research design was deemed to be the most suitable for this study as it allows “patterns and meanings to emerge from the study that have not been strictly specified in advance” (Yardley, 2008, p. 246). Qualitative research is based on inductive reasoning which moves from data to theory, that is from specific instances to general theoretical frameworks (Ulin, Robinson, & Tolley, 2004; Tuli, 2010, Creswell, 2013, Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017). Moreover, inductive reasoning identifies similarities and differences across various data sets and arranges them according to specific themes and categories (Graneheim, Lindgren & Lundman, 2017). As this was a qualitative inquiry, the aim was not to demonstrate validity and reliability (Tuli, 2010). Qualitative research is rather concerned with research values such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Healy and Perry, 2000) which will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.4 Population

A population of a study is the total collection of participants or elements in a research study (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The population for this study was the 13 industry sectors in Kenya as outlined by the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE). The 13 industry sectors include agricultural, automobile and accessories, banking, commercial and services, construction and allied, energy and petroleum, insurance, investment, investment services, manufacturing and allied, telecommunication and technology, real estate investment trust and exchange traded fund. In total, 61 companies have been listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange as at January 2023 and are divided as follows; agricultural (7 companies), automobiles and accessories (1 company), banking (12 companies), commercial and services (8 companies), construction and allied (5 companies), energy and petroleum (4 companies), insurance (6 companies), investment (5 companies), investment services (1 company), manufacturing and allied (9 companies), telecommunication and technology (1 company), real estate investment trust (1 company) and exchange traded fund (1 company). For this study, the target population was executives who work in these 13 industry sectors and are either CEOs or Managing Directors or senior-level executives who report directly to the CEO.

3.5 Sampling design

According to (Cooper and Schindler, 2014), sampling is important because it not only lowers the cost of research, but also provides for a greater accuracy of the results. This study used nonprobability sampling technique, which is commonly associated with qualitative research, where the researcher makes little attempt to generate a representative sample (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Saunders et al., 2019 posits that non-probability sampling includes elements of “subjective judgement” (p. 315).

Specifically, this study used purposive sampling where participants were chosen because of their experiences and willingness to share information (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Purposive sampling is also known as ‘judgemental sampling’ (Saunders et al., 2019), as the researcher is required to use their judgement to determine the participants that will best enable the researcher to fulfil the research objectives and answer the research questions.

The purposive sampling strategy that was used is the heterogenous or maximum variation sampling which, according to Saunders et al., (2019) requires the researcher to apply judgement in selecting participants with “sufficiently diverse characteristics” (p. 315) in order bring out the maximum variation of perceptions, experiences and attitudes in the data collected.

To arrive at the sample size, the following criteria was used to arrive at the number of participants to be selected for this study. The first criterion was that the participants had to be high-level management directly involved in the key decision-making process of the organisation. Possible participants within this criterion include CEOs and Managing Directors. The second criterion was that the participants must be top-level executives that manage respective business units that were affected during the first wave of Covid-19. The third criterion was that the participants must have been working at the organisation during the onset of the first wave of the pandemic. This is in acknowledgement that there are some top-level executives who joined their respective organisations after the pandemic started, for example, those who joined in October 2020. Using this criterion, the study arrived at 26 participants, having selected at least two top-level executives from each of the 13 NSE-listed industries. However, after the 20th interview, the research found no new insights, thematic redundancy was observed thereby indicating a data saturation. Therefore, the sample size for this study was 20 participants.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants. Interviews are the primary data collection techniques for qualitative researchers (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The study used semi-structured interviews due to their flexible and dialogue nature and because how they start with a few specific questions and then follows the individual participants' tangent of thought.

The participants were asked about their knowledge and experience of Covid-19 crisis preparedness, crisis management and post-crisis management strategies. Thirteen interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the rest (7) were conducted virtually due the fact that some of the participants were working out of Nairobi or were travelling during the course of the interviews. The interviews averaged one hour. The interviews were recorded upon receiving oral consent from the participants. The main data collection tool was the interview guide, which contained key talking points based on the research objectives. The interview guide is provided in Appendix 1.

3.7 Data Analysis and Presentation

This study employed thematic analysis of the data. Thematic analysis is a common and foundational method for analysis qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Saunders et al., (2019), thematic analysis involves the researcher coding the qualitative data with the aim of identifying emerging themes for further analysis. The thematic analysis procedure proposed will involve three critical stages namely, familiarising with the data, coding the data, identifying themes, and recognising relationships and refining themes as suggested by Saunders et al (2019).

Following the data collection, the audio files were transcribed by a professional transcription service. To guarantee accuracy, the researcher reviewed all the transcripts and compared them to audio files and made the necessary adjustments. The thematic analysis process

then began. The first step in the thematic analysis was an in-depth familiarization with the data which involved a process of deep interaction with and immersion in the data.

The second step was to code the data. Coding was done using the NVIVO software. It involved labelling every unit of data within the transcripts with a code that summarises the meaning of that piece of data. The codes were single words or phrases and came from various sources such as the actual terms used by the participants or the 'in vivo' codes and were also derived from theory and literature reviewed, also known as 'a priori'.

The third step in thematic data analysis was searching themes and recognizing relationships. According to Saunders et al., (2019), a theme is a broad category that includes several codes that seem to be related to each other. This step involved grouping the coded data into analysed or thematic categories to come up with the themes. Themes were identified by looking at what is recurring in the codes, looking at the patterns or trends and identifying the codes that seem to be related. At this point, the themes were also identified according to the main themes and sub-themes and their relationships identified.

The last step was refining the themes. This involved combining the initial themes to make new themes while separating others into different themes. This was achieved by re-visiting the coded data that was organised under each relevant theme.

At the data presentation stage, thick descriptions was used to provide a detailed explanation of the findings along the main themes and subthemes. The narrative will provide abundant and interconnecting details to provide the audience with accurate descriptions of the findings. The thick descriptions will be accompanied by direct quotes from the participants in a bid to capture the voices and opinions of the participants in their own words. Quotations will be used variedly, to include short quotations, embedded quotations, and long quotations where necessary.

3.8 Research Quality

In place of reliability, internal and external validity, and objectivity, qualitative researchers apply an alternative quality criterion namely, credibility, transferability, and dependability. The criterion is discussed in detail below.

3.8.1 Credibility

This is an alternative research quality criterion to internal validity. To ensure credibility, this study ensured a lengthy involvement with the participants to build rapport and trust as well as to collect sufficient data. The study also checked the data, analysis and interpretation with the participants in what is known as member checks. In this study, the preliminary data was shared with all the participants with the aim of allowing them review the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation.

3.8.2 Transferability

This is parallel criterion to external validity or generalisability. To provide the audience with an opportunity for determine the transferability of this study to another setting, this research has provided the details of the research questions, a detailed description of the research design and the context of the research. The study has also provided detailed description of the findings and interpretations to guarantee transferability.

3.8.3 Dependability

In place of reliability, qualitative researchers observe dependability. To ensure dependability, this research recorded all changes that occur to deliver a dependable account of the research focus to provide a clear understanding for the audience.

3.8.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study or a pre-test is critical to a research inquiry because it allows the researcher to refine the research design and the data collection tools prior to embarking on the study (Wimmer &

Dominick, 2013). This study conducted a pre-test with five participants that were not drawn from the selected organisations in the target population. The results of the pilot study were be used in the main research, rather the purpose of the pilot study was to review, revise and polish the research design and data collection tool.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study observed all research ethical considerations. Prior to data collection, the researcher sought and obtained research clearance and approval from the Strathmore University Ethics Review Board. The researcher secured a research license from the National Commission for Science and Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). During the data collection stage, the researcher sought and secured informed consent from the participants. The purpose of the study was also explained to the participants and the researcher ensured that that the participants voluntarily participated in the research process. Prior to the in-depth interviews, the researchers were asked to orally consent to the interview and it was made known to them that they could opt out of the research at their own will. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and their views was observed during the data collection process.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research methodology was outlined. The chapter covered the research philosophy, the research design, population and outline the pilot study. The chapter also introduced data collection, data analysis and presentation and explained how research quality was observed. Issues of ethical considered were also covered.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the qualitative data based on the research questions. The research questions are:

1. What approaches did executives adopt to address crisis preparedness and prevention before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (Pre-crisis)?
2. How did executives respond during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, and what crisis management strategies were implemented at the outset of the crisis (during the crisis)?
3. What crisis management strategies did executives employ to navigate the post-crisis phase, specifically ensuring sustained business continuity and organisational resilience (post-crisis)?

The findings are categorized into ten broad themes outlining the experiences of Kenyan executives as they navigated the Covid-19 pandemic. The ten themes have been identified across the three research questions. These themes include: 1) Business Continuity Plans 2) Crisis Management Teams 3) Prioritizing Employee Safety 4) Risk Assessment and Business Continuity 5) Stakeholder Engagement 6) Crisis Communication 7) Enhancement of Business Continuity Plans 8) Heightened Vigilance 9) Flexibility and Adaptability and 10) Stakeholder Engagement

4.2 Crisis Preparedness and Prevention (Pre-Crisis Period)

4.2.1 Business Continuity Plan

The executives interviewed underscored the presence of a formalized Business Continuity Plan (BCP) within their respective organizations, accessible to all staff members. This plan encompassed critical aspects such as risk assessment and analysis, contingency plans for different types of disruptions, provisions such as the establishment of offsite servers to safeguard data, back-up and recovery strategies, and clear communication protocols. However, some executives confessed to a lack of preparedness, as no scenario envisioned a world disruption to such a scale.

“In my organisation, we had a BCP – a Business Continuity Plan, and that involved having like an offsite server to take care of any eventualities if we want our data and a remote office that could take up about 10 to 15 employees out of the forty-something employees at that point in time.”

Key Informant 4

Furthermore, a number of the participants had prepared pre-existing strategies specifically tailored for health and safety crises and communication threats. Notably, these organisations being engineering firms, health and safety considerations were paramount. Existing frameworks for health and safety communication, including platforms for disseminating tips and conducting wellness checks, were repurposed to address pandemic-related risks and preparedness.

Additionally, partnerships with medical service providers facilitated the integration of COVID-19 testing into routine medical check-ups for staff.

“We had a BCP strategy in place. This strategy, like, from a health and safety perspective, we are an engineering company, which means health and safety is a priority. A lot of those things that were put in place to monitor and respond to health and safety crises are the ones that were repurposed to the pandemic.”

Key Informant 19

Some executives led their organisations through maintaining a robust Health and Safety Department, overseeing regular medical evaluations for employees. Existing crisis management policies, primarily centered on maintaining contact lists for communication and escalation processes, were activated during the pandemic. This pragmatic approach aimed to minimize disruptions to business operations caused by unforeseen events. In essence, some executives highlighted the importance of proactive crisis management, emphasizing anticipatory measures and procedural frameworks to mitigate the impact of unanticipated events on organizational continuity.

“We were basically anticipating problems and having procedures on how to minimize the impact on the business in an event that something unexpected happens that is likely to impact the business.”

Key Informant 7

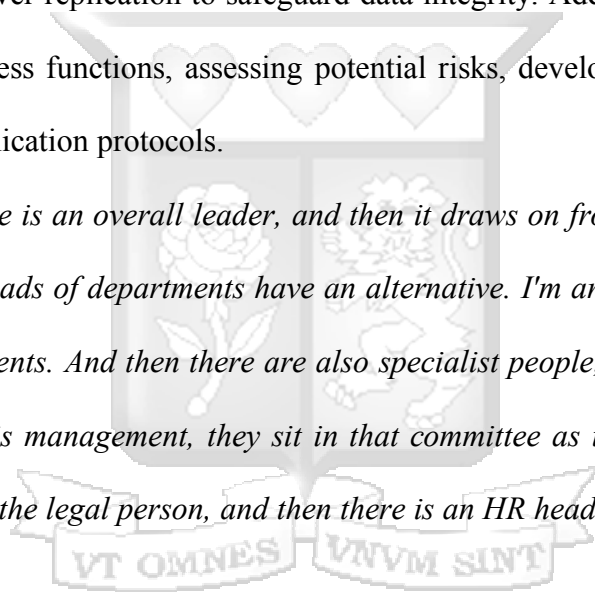
4.2.2 Crisis Management Teams

In organizational structures, a dedicated crisis management committee typically comprises top executives from various departments, including department heads and their deputies, alongside

specialists in crisis management, legal affairs, and human resources. This committee is entrusted with formulating and enforcing crisis management policies, ensuring adherence to established protocols, and orchestrating internal and external communication efforts.

According to the executives interviewed, crafting and maintaining the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) primarily falls under the docket of senior management, particularly the Chief Operating Officer (COO), in collaboration with the CEO and the Risk Management Office. This involves drafting detailed plans outlining procedures for maintaining operations during crises, including provisions for offsite server replication to safeguard data integrity. Additionally, it encompasses identifying critical business functions, assessing potential risks, developing response strategies, and establishing communication protocols.

“It draws on there is an overall leader, and then it draws on from heads of departments, and then those heads of departments have an alternative. I’m an alternative to one of the heads of departments. And then there are also specialist people, so there are people who specialise in crisis management, they sit in that committee as the technical people, and then there is also the legal person, and then there is an HR head.”



Key Informant 6

Preceding the pandemic, the executives interviewed played significant roles in proactive risk identification and mitigation. This involved conducting thorough environmental scans to anticipate potential threats and vulnerabilities. Certification standards often guided this process, prompting the executives interviewed to devise contingency plans, conduct risk assessments, and coordinate stakeholder engagement. Consequently, a systematic approach to crisis preparedness was cultivated, characterized by thorough scenario mapping, risk prioritization, and stakeholder communication strategies.

“Our role is to ensure that there is a policy. The policy essentially states what happens in case there’s a crisis. What’s a crisis? What happens? It’s quite a detailed document. Some of the things that we need to do are account for our people.”

Key Informant 2

Financial preparedness is another critical aspect of crisis management, wherein finance executives play a pivotal role. They are responsible for ensuring adequate funding for crisis mitigation efforts and establishing contingency measures. This may involve allocating resources for establishing backup facilities or maintaining liquidity reserves to sustain operations during crises. Consequently, finance executives were tasked with safeguarding organizational financial stability and facilitating swift crisis response through prudent financial planning and resource allocation.

“We had to ensure that we had finances on standby just in case we had a crisis, just to ensure that the company was able to continue through the crisis, or if not able to continue, then we would be able to move our operations to a backup location within a relatively short time. So my role as a finance person was to ensure that the finances for whatever was required in terms of financing was made available to avert or to ride through the crisis.”

Key Informant 5

Moreover, according to some of the executives interviewed, crisis management involved a dynamic continuous improvement and adaptation process. Prior to the pandemic, the executives routinely reviewed and updated their crisis management plans, incorporating lessons learned from past incidents and emerging best practices. This iterative approach enabled the executives to remain resilient facing the unpredictable pandemic.

4.3 Crisis Management Strategies (Crisis Period)

4.3.1 Prioritizing Employee Safety

In managing the COVID-19 crisis, the executives prioritized employee safety as a paramount concern. Recognizing the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, executives acknowledged the rarity of prior preparation for such a scenario, with only a few specialized sectors, like military and healthcare, possibly having contingency plans in place. Understanding that employees were the most valuable resource, the executives swiftly pivoted to developing and implementing strategies to safeguard their well-being.

“The main thing or resource in the business that would be affected would have been the people. Our business is generally a people person. Our first instinct was “How do we protect all employees? We did not want to have covid cases in our midst, and if a case is reported, the question was how do we protect the people? Once we ensured that this is the main thing that we need to protect, we started developing a plan on how to protect our people.”

Key Informant 1

As the crisis unfolded, the executives swiftly mobilized resources to develop comprehensive plans to protect employees from potential risks associated with the virus. This involved meticulous planning and coordination efforts, with crisis management committees playing a central role in formulating and implementing strategies to mitigate the spread of Covid 19 in their workplace and ensure employee safety.

“Our initial response was to establish a framework of operation during the crisis. Our highest priority was our staff wellbeing and health and safety. What we did was to intensively prepare a COVID-19 committee. We called it a COVID-19 committee that had

myself as a Country Managing Director, the Health and Safety Manager, the HR Manager, and also our Head of Operations. The committee was mandated to prepare and come up with operational strategies that would allow us to continue our operations despite the challenges.”

Key Informant 20

One of the primary objectives of these initiatives was to repatriate staff stranded abroad and facilitate their return to their respective work locations and home. This involved navigating serious logistical challenges, including the government-imposed bans to air travel and government directives regarding quarantine protocols. Additionally, some executives implemented stringent transport measures to minimize public contact and reduce the risk of virus transmission among employees while commuting to and from work. Moreover, some executives prioritized the establishment of robust health and safety protocols within the workplace to minimize the risk of virus transmission among employees. This included the installation of hand sanitizers at key entry points, regular sanitization of workspaces and communal areas, and the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff members. Additionally, the executives implemented regular COVID-19 testing protocols for employees to monitor their health status and detect potential cases early on.

“One thing that we did was we incorporated sanitisers in the office. We actually installed them on some of the key walls so any one point that you enter in, we actually had a sanitiser station then. But that's not the only thing that we put in place. Those were the initial strategies that we had when we started getting cases in Kenya, actually.”

Key Informant 16

In addressing operational challenges posed by the pandemic, the executives adopted innovative approaches to ensure business continuity while safeguarding employee health. This included scaling up logistics and procurement processes to mitigate disruptions, such as increasing vehicle fleets to maintain social distancing during transportation and providing essential safety gear, such as masks and sanitizers, to frontline staff.

4.3.2 Risk Assessment and Business Continuity

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya necessitated rigorous risk assessment and strategic planning to mitigate potential disruptions to business operations. Executives focused on quantifying the risks posed by the pandemic, particularly in terms of the projected reduction in revenue, and conducted scenario assessments to anticipate outcomes across various financial and operational scenarios, ranging from worst to best-case scenarios.

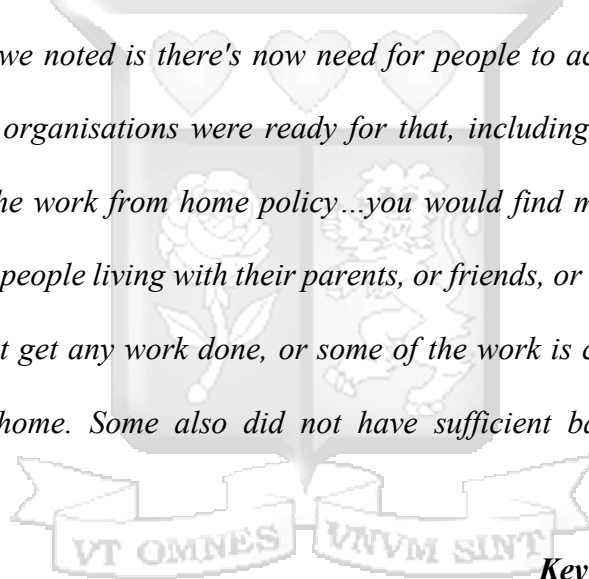
“Since the outcome is unknown, we run different scenarios in both financial and operational deliverables and anticipate results ranging from worst to best case scenarios.”

Key Informant 9

Implementing a work-from-home policy emerged as a critical strategy to ensure employee safety and maintain operational continuity amidst the pandemic. However, this transition presented numerous challenges, including assessing the practicability of remote work arrangements for employees and addressing logistical constraints such as access to appropriate workspace and reliable internet connectivity. The executives undertook comprehensive evaluations of the facilities and resources required for remote work, considering factors such as the suitability of home environments for work, the availability of necessary equipment and bandwidth, and the confidentiality of work tasks.

In response to the unprecedented shift towards remote work, the executives interviewed swiftly adopted measures to equip employees with the necessary tools and infrastructure to facilitate seamless remote operations. This included providing laptops to the employees, installing virtual private network (VPN) security links to enable remote access to company servers, and procuring additional equipment such as modems and data bundles to support internet connectivity for staff members working from home. Furthermore, organizations implemented initiatives to address connectivity challenges in areas without access to fiber optic internet, including providing mobile data bundles and exploring alternative internet connectivity options.

“First thing that we noted is there's now need for people to actually work from home. I don't think many organisations were ready for that, including ourselves. We had many challenges with the work from home policy...you would find most of our employees are either very young people living with their parents, or friends, or they are in noisy locations where they cannot get any work done, or some of the work is confidential that you can't implement from home. Some also did not have sufficient bandwidth for them to do meetings.”



Key Informant 14

Ensuring business continuity amidst the pandemic was a key priority for the executives, necessitating robust operational strategies to safeguard against disruptions. This involved relocating staff to their designated homes and establishing protocols to limit physical contact in the workplace. Additionally, the executives leveraged technology platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meets to facilitate virtual meetings and collaboration, enabling teams to maintain productivity while adhering to social distancing guidelines. The successful implementation of these measures underscored the importance of proactive planning and

investment in technology infrastructure to support remote work arrangements during times of crisis.

“The second strategy was to defend...protect the business from impact due to the reduced volume of work on some of our projects especially those outside the city. We actually ensured that we located all our staff to their designated homes. For those who preferred to work from their home village, for those who preferred to work in Nairobi. We had a logistical plan on transporting everyone back to their specific residential places.”

Key Informant 13

4.3.3 Stakeholder Engagement

While managing the COVID-19 pandemic, Kenyan executives faced the imperative of maintaining operational continuity and communication channels across diverse stakeholder groups. While certain staff members, particularly those engaged in factory operations, were required to be physically present on-site, others, including those from finance, human resources, and procurement departments, transitioned to remote work arrangements. Ensuring seamless communication with remote workers became paramount to foster a sense of inclusion and organizational cohesion.

“We had many stakeholders; the Board, the staff, the union, our customers and our suppliers. There was a section of the business each and every department handling different stakeholders, but it was all aligned, the message was the same across borders, depending on the needs of each stakeholder group. So, the message was fine-tuned but the context was the same.”

Key Informant 16

Addressing the concerns of various stakeholders emerged as a critical aspect of crisis management during the pandemic. Employees sought assurances regarding job security, working conditions, and potential changes in compensation, while customers expressed concerns about order fulfilment and service quality. Similarly, suppliers were eager to understand the organization's commitment to honouring payments and maintaining supply chain operations. Through proactive engagement and dialogue, organizations conducted role-playing exercises to anticipate and address the needs of each stakeholder group, thereby fostering transparency and trust amidst uncertainty.

For the staff, they were more concerned with, “are our jobs secure”? “Will we be reporting to work the same time?” “Will the pay be reduced?” Regarding customers, “will you fulfil our orders in time?” “Do we expect any delays?” “Will the quality be compromised?” Same thing with the suppliers, “Will you still buy from us?” “Do we ship now?” “Do we ship later?” We did that role-play to understand the needs of each and every stakeholder. And also maybe from the Board, the questions were “You had a budget, do you think you will achieve it?” “Will you have financial needs to cover working capital if we want to hold more stocks?” The key issue was temporary disruption of the business due to COVID-19 and how would affect every stakeholder”

Key Informant 8

Effective crisis management entailed establishing robust dialogues with stakeholders to facilitate timely decision-making. The executives coordinated with internal and external stakeholders, including executive leadership, the board of directors, employees, trade unions, customers, suppliers, industry associations, the media, and the public, to disseminate relevant information and align strategies. Memos and communications were tailored to the specific needs and priorities of

each stakeholder group, ensuring a consistent message while acknowledging unique concerns and perspectives.

“We engaged all our staff. We told them: “This is it, it's happening, and this is how we would like to pursue the restructuring of operations.” We engaged them frankly, we talked to the union, and then we came to a sweet balance. We said to them, “Now the production shift changed. We now have three shifts, we normally had two shifts and we told them about the reduction of the number of people working per given shift due to the spacing requirements.”

Key Informant 12

According to the executives, engagement with trade unions was pivotal in negotiating and implementing changes to work schedules and operational practices to accommodate social distancing requirements and ensure employee safety. In the manufacturing sector, collaborative efforts between management and union representatives resulted in the realignment of production shifts and the implementation of enhanced safety measures within the workplace. Moreover, organizations proactively engaged with landlords to devise flexible rent payment plans amidst revenue challenges, demonstrating a commitment to sustaining positive relationships with key stakeholders.

Assurances and commitments were provided to stakeholders to mitigate concerns and instil confidence in the organization's and executives' ability to weather the crisis. These included commitments to honour supplier payments, implement measures to safeguard employee jobs, maintain service standards for customers, and adopt innovative solutions to adapt to changing market dynamics. By proactively addressing stakeholder concerns and maintaining open lines of

communication, organizations sought to navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic while safeguarding the interests of all parties involved.

4.3.4 Crisis Communication

Communication emerged as a cornerstone of the executives' response efforts, with stakeholders being kept informed and reassured through regular updates and transparent communication channels. The executives established dedicated communication channels to disseminate critical information to both shareholders and staff members, including updates on COVID-19 developments, government regulations, and organizational response measures. Additionally, visual materials and guidelines on hygiene practices were shared with staff to promote awareness and adherence to safety protocols.

From the interviews, it was clear that in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, a primary strategic focus for the executives was maintaining robust communication channels. Recognizing the significance of providing timely updates and reassurances, some executives implemented a strategy of over-communication, conducting daily updates at specific intervals throughout the day. This approach aimed to address the uncertainty and apprehension prevalent among employees and stakeholders, particularly in light of the novel and rapidly evolving nature of the pandemic.

“The key thing about any crisis, communication becomes priority number one. The role here was, one, to communicate to the staff internally, to our customers how the pandemic could affect us, what measures we were putting in place.”

Key Informant 19

“The biggest strategy for us throughout the pandemic was constant communication. We over-communicated. We had daily updates. We actually had updates at 8:00 am, updates at 12:00 pm, updates at 6:00 pm.”

Key Informant 5

Central to effective crisis communication was the need to address various stakeholder concerns comprehensively. From ensuring employee safety to mitigating fears about job security, the executives aimed to provide transparent and consistent messaging. This involved centralized communication channels, with designated personnel tasked with disseminating information, providing status reports, and offering direction as needed. Contact tracing through communication emerged as a critical aspect of crisis management, enabling organizations and executives to isolate potentially affected individuals and implement appropriate measures to prevent further spread.

“The communication had to be centralised. We communicated to reassure people, and then to give direction as and when necessary. Like, contact tracing was quite key, that if people had come into contact with people who are infected or affected, then they had to communicate, then we do the contact tracing and make sure they’re isolated. And I remember, some people coming out of the country, and then you had to come in and be isolated initially. I don't remember the days, but there's a requirement that you go into an installation facility. Then making sure those people they are aware where they go, the facility, how do you facilitate communication with the families and all that. We had actually people full-time looking at all that, whether it's contact tracing, the communication, the updates, the projects going on, what was affected, what's not affected.

Key Informant 1

Additionally, proactive communication with stakeholders such as shareholders, suppliers, and customers were paramount to maintain business continuity and sustain vital relationships. Organizations communicated their strategic responses to the pandemic, including plans to support remote work arrangements, ensure operational resilience, and uphold financial commitments. By soliciting input from various stakeholders and demonstrating preparedness to adapt to evolving circumstances, the executives were able to foster confidence and trust amidst the uncertainty of the crisis.

“And the best thing that we did was we communicated and demonstrated that there is a plan around how teams were going to continue with work. And we had our shareholders approve the costs, in terms of just getting better equipment, in terms of setting people up at home, and in terms of having key persons within the office. Clear communication with the board and other stakeholders was key in getting those budgets approved”

Key Informant 4

Transitioning to remote work necessitated a shift in communication paradigms, with executives leveraging digital platforms to facilitate virtual collaboration and information sharing. While face-to-face interactions were no longer viable, the adoption of video conferencing tools such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, Google Meets and Zoom enabled teams to maintain connectivity and productivity. Notably, information and technology (IT) infrastructure and support played a pivotal role in enabling remote work capabilities, ensuring seamless communication and access to essential resources.

Recognizing the psychological toll of the pandemic, the executives prioritized the provision of psycho-social support to employees. This encompassed initiatives such as online counselling services and access to mental health professionals, aimed at addressing the heightened

stress and anxiety experienced by individuals during this challenging period. Additionally, frequent meetings were convened to provide assurances, offer moral support, and foster a sense of camaraderie among team members.

“I mean, it's no secret, there was a spike in domestic unrest for most families. And having young families as our staff, we realised there was a need to provide, again, therapy for teams, and we added these to our health system so teams could tap into the resources of a health psychologist or a psychiatrist if need be.”

Key Informant 9

In a nutshell, effective crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a multi-faceted approach encompassing transparency, responsiveness, and empathy. By prioritizing communication, the executives sought to navigate the uncertainties of the crisis while safeguarding the well-being of their employees and sustaining critical business operations.

4.4 Post-Crisis Management Strategies (Post-Crisis Period)

4.4.1 Enhancement of Business Continuity Plans (BCPs)

In reflection upon the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, executives emphasized the importance of enhancing Business Continuity Planning (BCP) efforts, particularly in terms of personnel resilience. A re-evaluation of the existing BCP plan revealed a gap in addressing risks about workforce availability, prompting the establishment of a dedicated Business Analysis Teams tasked with identifying future threats and implementing proactive measures.

“So, post-crisis... one thing we identified is that we need to beef up our BCP plan. It was more focused on something happening to the office, something happening to our servers, but we did not really factor in what if something happened to the main team, the people that we have. That was something that was not in it. We had to, first, install a process in

terms of our BCP plan. And this is still work in progress, it's something that we continue working on.”

Key Informant 5

The enhancement of BCP also included the bolstering of infrastructure to support remote work capabilities. This entailed a significant shift towards cloud-based servers and electronic signatures, departing from traditional reliance on physical documentation. To facilitate this transition, emphasis was placed on technological upskilling and awareness among employees.

“I think one of the learnings we have had is the enhancement of infrastructure to then allow people be able to work from elsewhere. Pre-pandemic, we used to basically have small things like physical signatures. Now those were all changed to electronic signatures, to do like that. And I think we then had people to train more on the tech, what, if any, awareness of it to use some technologies.”

Key Informant 20

Moreover, executives acknowledged the importance of diversifying supply chain dependencies to mitigate vulnerabilities exposed during the pandemic. This involved identifying alternative manufacturing sources in regions such as India and Turkey, enhancing business continuity and resilience.

Automation emerged as a central tenet of organizational transformation, with a concerted effort directed towards streamlining processes and reducing reliance on manual intervention. This initiative encompassed the development of bespoke software solutions by a dedicated team of software engineers, aimed at optimizing operational efficiency and agility.

“We looked into how can we automate some processes rather than relying solely on people. So, we hired software engineers... who are looking at automating all our systems to ensure

basically we are now working in the 21st century. We are reducing overreliance on human intervention. That's what we are reducing.”

Key Informant 6

The pandemic also prompted a reassessment of leadership structures, leading to a realignment of roles and responsibilities within the organization. Recognizing the need for greater specialization and delegation, executives embarked on a hiring spree to strengthen existing managerial capacities. Additionally, the crisis prompted a paradigm shift in the management of health and safety protocols, necessitating the establishment of a standalone department reporting directly to senior management.

“The pandemic actually exposed that some of the managers were actually taking up quite a lot in terms of their roles. We had a split in roles. And I would say we went on a hiring spree. They should have increased our salaries way more than they did, but those are the struggles of working for corporate world. But yes, we actually hired more people after covid”

Key Informant 10

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for organizational transformation, prompting executives to adopt a proactive stance towards enhancing resilience, agility, and efficiency. From infrastructure modernization to supply chain diversification and leadership restructuring, organizations sought to fortify their operational foundations in preparation for future disruptions.

4.2.2 Heightened Vigilance

As a result of the pandemic, the executives recognized the necessity of integrating risk management as a pivotal cog within the organizational framework. This entailed conducting

regular risk audits to assess the business environment and identify potential areas of exposure. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of global risk awareness, and emphasized the need for comprehensive preparedness strategies. Key considerations included the procurement of essential resources especially for those in manufacturing, to sustain operations amidst unforeseen disruptions.

“For senior management, I think the other thing also is to include risk management as a key metrics to look at. So, to regularly scan the business environment, do a risk audit, see what areas of the organisation are exposed and what risk, and what is the organisation's preparedness to specific risks. What COVID was able to bring out, was that, traditionally people always thought the risk could be localised so that you would only have a risk in Kenya, so you could get resources from Tanzania, Uganda. But in this case, the risk was not localised. It was across. So, being aware that there could be situations whereby something affects globally, then the question is, how do you prepare for that? What are your essential things that you must have?”

Key Informant 17

Another critical lesson gleaned by the executives from the COVID-19 crisis was the acknowledgment of unpredictable events that go beyond what can be anticipated. To navigate such uncertainties, the executives found it prudent to establish robust communication strategies and crisis management committees to prepare for any eventualities. These frameworks facilitate effective communication and escalation protocols, ensuring timely responses to emerging challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

“I think the most critical lesson coming from COVID pandemic crisis is to appreciate that a business can only anticipate as much. There will be something that will happen that is

totally unpredictable. For me, my advice to any organisation would be to ensure things like communication strategy is in place, to ensure that things like a crisis management committee exists, and the framework exists, to ensure there is a communication matrix, there is an escalation matrix within the organisation”

Key Informant 13

Additionally, the executives noted that adopting disaster management protocols, encompassing business continuity planning (BCP), was a key success factor to organizational resilience. This entailed mapping potential risks, delineating mitigation strategies, and identifying key stakeholders to execute contingency plans. Executives learnt, that by institutionalizing these protocols, organizations fostered agility, rapid adaptation, and streamlined decision-making processes during times of crisis.

4.4.3 Flexibility and Adaptability

The pandemic resulted to a re-evaluation of workforce strategies, necessitating a shift towards rethinking of personnel structures and skill sets. The executives recognized the potential for remote work and virtual collaborations, leading to the adoption of virtual secondments in some cases and flexible work arrangements. This transformation led to role redefinitions, with a sharper focus on critical business aspects such as technology management. Centralization of certain administrative functions and the emphasis on leveraging technology were some of the key factors in the evolution in organizational roles and structures.

“I think we have had to look at the workforce strategy. You actually realise that you probably don't have to be physically in a place to do certain things. We have had to do things like we do virtual secondments- that is- you can actually virtually work in other

countries when you are here [Kenya]. And that, obviously, has happened, how do we manage these people? They're saying even why should I work here virtually and be here?"

Key Informant 2

While organizations had crisis management plans in place, the unprecedented nature of the pandemic highlighted the need for agility and adaptability. The crisis necessitated a paradigm shift in crisis response frameworks, emphasizing the importance of agile planning and responsiveness. Consequently, employment contracts and requirements were significantly revised, emphasizing multi-skilled teams, computer literacy, and remote working capabilities. Long-term organizational changes included re-evaluating employee remuneration to support remote work arrangements and prioritize employee well-being beyond the traditional office setting.

"I think instead of giving permanent long-term contracts, I think mostly now it's two-year contracts. We went from it impacted the form of employment, the employment contracts as defined."

Key Informant 8

"I think on a HR perspective, organisations must think of the employee past the office, because during the pandemic, we relied on employees to work from home. So, the question is, are we remunerating our employees well enough to be in spaces they can work from home? Because how is their wellbeing?"

Key Informant 10

The pandemic also prompted a reassessment of time horizons in strategic planning, challenging conventional ideas of short, medium, and long-term planning horizons. The executives confessed

that they now recognized the need for flexibility in time horizons, acknowledging the potential for rapid shifts in market dynamics and operational requirements.

“Most of the time, when you're doing planning, you talk of one to five years as short term, five to ten as medium term, that way. All that changed with this COVID-19 pandemic. To mean even a month is a time horizon to be concerned about, everything can collapse or increase exponentially in a month or in a year. That is one of the things that we understood, that time horizons need to be very flexible, and we don't need to hold onto what we have always known, that anything 5 to 10 years is medium term, that way.”

Key Informant 1

This newfound agility facilitated streamlined planning processes and enhanced responsiveness to evolving customer demands. As a result, executives say that their organizations have become more adept at swiftly adapting to changing market conditions and customer preferences, underscoring the importance of flexibility and agility in strategic planning and organizational processes. During the pandemic, executives observed that granting employees greater autonomy and flexibility increased productivity and effectiveness. This departure from traditional micromanagement practices proved to be refreshing and conducive to enhanced performance.

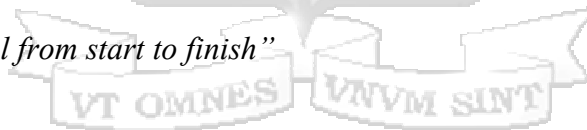
“When you extend the leash on your employees, they actually tend to do way more than you may think. This whole thing of constant oversight, constantly looking over their shoulders, that really does not work. I don't know if it's only on our side but it just became something that was more refreshing.”

Key Informant 3

4.4.4 Stakeholder Engagement

In the post-crisis phase, stakeholders were informed of the steps that the organisations and the executives were taking to transition from the crisis to the post crisis phase. The aforementioned strategies such as enhancement of business continuity plans were implemented with the support of significant stakeholder engagement. According to the executives interviewed, the strategies of flexibility and adaptability also required significant stakeholder engagement, particularly with the board members who come from diverse backgrounds and age groups, who required to be convinced of the organisations’ need to pivot and adapt in readiness against future crises. The bottom line is that engaging with stakeholders such as the Board, union representatives, and suppliers was crucial in garnering support for organisational changes in the post-crisis phase.

“Post-crisis phase, same thing happened, engagement with stakeholders, that during this crisis period, business has grown exponential and we have been able to hit some interesting levels. We went back to the stakeholders and told them, in line with this exponential growth, we would like to change our normal operations from this to that. Stakeholder engagement for me was critical from start to finish”



Key Informant 12

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings of this research. The findings are categorized into ten broad themes outlining the experiences of Kenyan executives as they navigated the Covid-19 pandemic. The ten themes have been identified across the three research questions. These themes include: 1) Business Continuity Plans 2) Crisis Management Teams 3) Prioritizing Employee Safety 4) Risk Assessment and Business Continuity 5) Stakeholder Engagement 6) Crisis Communication 7)

Enhancement of Business Continuity Plans 8) Heightened Vigilance 9) Flexibility and Adaptability and 10) Stakeholder Engagement

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This last chapter of the study provides an overview of the findings of the study in relation to the research objectives presented in chapter. Additionally, this chapter presents recommendations based on the research findings as well as conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

5.2 Discussion

The study sought to understand how Kenyan executives led their companies through the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study examined the strategies and experiences of Kenyan executives in the pre-crisis period, the crisis and post-crisis period. Accordingly, the study was anchored on the Stakeholder theory of crisis management which propositions that in the context of crises, managers behaving more in accordance with the stakeholder model will exhibit greater frequencies of pro-active and accommodative crises management behaviour, even if these crisis management behaviours are not perceived to increase shareholder value.

The research employed thematic analysis to cull out the main themes and finally the ten main strategies that Kenyan executives employed in the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis periods. These strategies include: business continuity plans, crisis management teams, prioritizing employee safety, risk assessment and business continuity, stakeholder engagement, crisis communication, enhancement of business continuity plans, heightened vigilance, flexibility and adaptability and stakeholder engagement.

These findings are in tandem with the assertions of stakeholder theory of crisis management which asserts that in the context of crises, managers behaving more in accord with the shareholder model will exhibit greater frequencies of proactive and accommodative crisis management behaviour, only if these crisis management behaviours are perceived to increase shareholder value. The findings revealed that stakeholder engagement was a central aspect of crises management. The Kenyan executives interviewed for this study employed this throughout the three stages specifically in the pre-crisis period and the crisis period and revealed that addressing the concerns of various stakeholders emerged as a critical aspect of crisis management.

5.2.1 Crisis Preparedness and Prevention (Pre-Crisis Period)

The study's first objective was to examine the approaches taken by executives in addressing crisis preparedness and prevention before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (the pre-crisis period). This study applied thematic analysis, which found that Kenyan executives employed crisis preparedness and prevention strategies such as business continuity plans and crisis management teams. This implied the use of proactive and accommodative crises management behaviours of managers in the context of crises, even if these behaviours were not perceived to increase shareholder value. According to the study, a number of executives led their companies in

formulating business continuity plans (BCPs) that prioritised their employees, even though these BCPs turned out to be inadequate in the wake of a crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic. While these BCPs were focussed on ensuring continuity in the event of a crisis, this study found that executives included health and safety components within the BCPs, revealing the use of proactive and accommodative crises management behaviours, even if these behaviours were not perceived to increase shareholder value. It is also important to note that the study found that the executives that struggled the most with stemming the impact of the pandemic on their companies exhibited crisis management strategies that increased shareholder value. This was evident from the executives whose BCPs had little to do with the human, health and safety aspects and more to do with protecting the business in the event of a crisis.

The aspect of stakeholder theory of crisis management came out very clearly at the pre-crisis period when the executives were putting together the crisis preparedness teams. The findings show that the executives that prioritised stakeholders were more accommodative and inclusive in the selection of their crisis management teams, cognizant of the ‘principle of fairness’ and the recognition of the value of every stakeholder.

The findings are corroborated in the DACH region (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) in the study by Fombella, et al., (2022) whose study found that the most resilient executives and companies had well-defined plans and processes in place that were easily accessible and quickly implemented when the pandemic hit. Donelli, Fanelli and Zangradi (2022) who investigated how health organisations in Italy managed the pandemic found that executives who allocated resources allocation on pre-crisis business continuity plans navigated the pandemic with more ease compared to those who invested fewer resources in crisis preparedness and prevention plans. Dada et al., (2022) who explored the experiences of executives in Nigeria found that leaders who were more

accommodative and inclusive in the setting up of the crisis management teams experienced less stress due to the proactive nature of these teams and the ability of these teams to set up systems that supported the employees and the companies during the pandemic.

5.2.2 Crisis Management Strategies (Crisis Period)

The second objective of this study was to investigate how the executives responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, this study sought to understand the crisis management strategies that were implemented at the outset of the crisis. Thematic analysis was applied on the data collected and it revealed four main strategies. These strategies include; prioritizing employee safety, risk assessment and business continuity, stakeholder engagement and crisis communication. The analysis also showed the importance of compassionate and empathetic leadership where the executives prioritised the needs of the stakeholders above those of the shareholders. The study showed that at the onset of the pandemic, executives swiftly mobilised resources to develop and implement comprehensive plans that were aimed at protecting employees from the risks of the pandemic. There was also significant risk assessment conducted in tandem with implementing the business continuity plans, and this is where the leaders made decisions such as the work from home policy and supported employees with the tools and technology, they needed to implement the work from home policies. The data shows that stakeholder engagement played a prominent role in the management of the crisis. The executives engaged various stakeholders including employees, customers, suppliers, the boards, governments, unions and the general public, while addressing the concerns of each stakeholder groups. The thematic analysis revealed crisis communication to have played a significant role, with a number of executives noting that they had to ‘overcommunicate’ to their stakeholders during the pandemic.

Empirical literature supports the findings of this objectives. Shukla, Sufi, Joshi and Sujatha (2021) whose study sought to identify the challenges hospitality leadership in India faced as they navigated the pandemic, found that leaders who maintained a good balance with the stakeholder groups were more resilient in their handling of the pandemic. Hahang, Bayraktar and Alfredo emerged with similar findings when their study revealed that communication and stakeholder engagement had a positive impact on effective leadership in the Indian hospitality industry. Hartney et al., (2021) whose study sought to define leadership practices that were applied by Canadian health leaders during and after the crisis found five main practices, including appreciating diverse views from stakeholders and fostering psychologically supportive workplaces during the pandemic. In a study Longenecker and Wittmer (2022), findings revealed the ‘leadership learning drivers’ which included working closely with teams, listening and asking questions, as well as ‘candid, transparent and authentic dialogues’ with stakeholders including customers, suppliers, employees and boards. The findings of this study corroborate with a study conducted by Caringal-Go, Teng-Calleja, Franco, Manois, & Zantua R, (2021) that investigated the behaviours of executive leadership that were found useful by employees found that traits such as prioritising employee well-being, assuming responsibility and motivating employees as critical and important characteristics. In Nigeria, a study by Oruh, Mordi, Dibia and Ajonbadi (2021) explored the impact of compassionate leadership in mitigating workplace stressors in the context of the pandemic. The study found that compassionate leadership played a key role in addressing the concerns of stakeholders such as employees’ concerns during the pandemic.

From a theoretical point of view, the findings within this objective conform to the assertion by Alpaslan et al., (2009) which proposition that leaders who observe the stakeholder model in dealing with crisis appreciate and acknowledge the value of every stakeholder which in turn

enhances the effectiveness of the organisation's crisis preparation and responses. The findings of this study reveal that the executives found that maintaining open lines of dialogue and communication with the diverse stakeholder groups made their responses to the pandemic more effective and efficient.

5.2.3 Post-Crisis Management Strategies (Post-Crisis Period)

The third objective of the study was to investigate the crisis management strategies executives employ in navigating the post-crisis phase, focusing on ensuring sustained business continuity and organisational resilience. Thematic analysis was employed and revealed that executives emphasized the enhancement of Business Continuity Plans (BCPs), especially in terms of personnel resilience. This also included the bolstering of infrastructure to support remote work capabilities and the increased use of technology. The data also revealed heightened vigilance and the integration of risk management as a priority cog within the organisational framework. The executives interviewed noted that they are now leading their organisations in conducting regular risk audits to scan and assess the business environment in a bid to identify potential areas of exposure.

The study also found that executives heightened the need for flexibility and adaptability. There were paradigm shifts in crisis response frameworks, and significant changes in employment contracts and working arrangements were made to be more flexible. The study also showed long-term organisational changes such as the re-evaluation of organisational structures, employee remuneration, the support for remote work engagements as well as the prioritization of employee well-being beyond the normal office settings. Stakeholder engagement also took a central theme as executives needed all the stakeholders' buy-in in re-engineering their organisations against future crises.

Empirical evidence shows that the pandemic caused managers to be more proactive in their crisis management planning. In a study by Shukla et al., (2021) which sought to investigate the challenges Indian hospitality leadership faced as they navigated the crisis found that optimising personal and organisational resilience was a key strategy in the post-crisis management phase. Similarly, a multi-country study conducted by Hahang et al., (2022) which sought to investigate the most critical skills and strategies required by leaders in the hospitality industry to prepare them for a crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic magnitude, found that flexibility and trust building had a positive impact on effective leadership. Hartney et al., (2021) whose study sought to define leadership practices that should be applied by health care leaders in Canada during and after a crisis, found agile and adaptive leadership as one of the critical strategies for successful leadership during and after a crisis.

5.3 Conclusions

The analysis conclusions were that Kenyan executives employed several strategies in the pre-covid, covid and post-covid stages. The Kenyan executives, although they did not anticipate the Covid-19 pandemic and its accompanying magnitude, did have several pre-crisis preparedness plans and also shaped and implemented crisis management strategies during the pandemic and in retrospect, have instituted various post-crisis measures that have potential to stand them in good stead in the face of future crises.

Additionally, the analysis conclusions are that managers who behaved more in accord with the stakeholder model- those who prioritized the concerns of various stakeholder groups- exhibited greater frequencies of proactive and accommodative crisis management behaviour, even if these strategies were not perceived to increase shareholder value. This conclusion corroborates with Alpaslan et al., (2009) proposition of the Stakeholder Theory of Crisis Management which posits

that in the context of crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, adopting the principles of the stakeholder model of corporate governance will lead executives and organisations to engage more frequently in pro-active and accommodating crisis management behaviour and strategies even if these strategies were not perceived to maximise shareholder value.

The first objective of this study was to explore the crisis preparedness and prevention strategies adopted by executives before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (the pre-crisis period). The findings suggest that executives had implemented Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) and formed Crisis Management Teams. This study concludes that while Kenyan executives had some crisis preparedness measures in place, including BCPs and Crisis Management Teams, these plans were inadequate to effectively manage the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second objective of the study was to examine how executives responded during the initial phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the crisis management tactics employed to mitigate its impact on their employees and organizations. The research identified four primary strategies: prioritizing employee safety, conducting risk assessments for business continuity, engaging stakeholders, and implementing crisis communication. These findings were validated through empirical studies conducted across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States. This study concludes that many Kenyan executives emphasized stakeholder engagement and crisis communication in their COVID-19 response efforts. This prioritization contributed to the effectiveness and efficiency of their overall strategies, as addressing stakeholder concerns facilitated a more cohesive response to the pandemic.

The third objective of the study was to analyse the crisis management approaches employed by executives to navigate the post-crisis phase, with a specific focus on ensuring sustained business continuity and organizational resilience. The research identified four primary strategies: enhancing

business continuity plans, maintaining heightened vigilance, fostering flexibility and adaptability, and engaging stakeholders. The study concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted Kenyan executives to reassess and redesign their businesses. Stakeholder engagement emerged as a critical factor in determining these enhanced post-crisis strategies. Furthermore, the study finds that the Kenyan executives interviewed are now considerably more prepared for future crises than before the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.4 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations that can be drawn from this study's findings. With regards to the first objective, which is concerned with the crisis preparedness phase (the pre-crisis period), recommendations are for executives to have more robust Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) that prioritise the health, safety and wellness of their employees. This study recommends that executives develop comprehensive Business Continuity Plans that outline strategies and procedures for responding to various crises, and consider that future crises might even be of higher magnitude than Covid-19. These Business Continuity plans should include contingency plans for different types of disruptions, such as alternative communication channels, health and safety guidelines, backup power sources, remote work protocols. This study also recommends that executives consider stakeholder engagement in the setting up of crisis management teams to ensure that the concerns of every stakeholder group are catered for in the organisation's crisis preparedness strategies. This study also recommends that executives ensure sufficient resource allocation and mobilization including but not limited to technology, personnel and adequate finances to bolster the organisation's crisis preparedness.

The second recommendation was on the crisis response strategies. This study found that executives prioritised the health and safety of their employees, ensuring that everyone was safe

from the virus. This study therefore recommends that in the face of a crisis in the future, executives consider implementing proactive measures to safeguard the health and safety of their employees. This might include providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and promoting healthy and hygienic practices in the event of another health-related crisis. The findings of this study revealed that stakeholder engagement played a key role in the executives' decisions and responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. This study recommends that executives consider stakeholder engagement and establish continuous dialogue with all stakeholder groups including the employees, customers, suppliers, investors, government agencies and the public. From the findings of this study, crisis communication played a significant role in the management of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study recommends that executives establish dedicated crisis communication teams responsible for the coordination and dissemination of information during crises. This study recommends that executives develop clear and precise crisis communication plans that outline the roles, responsibilities and communication protocols for all stakeholders. This study also recommends that executives and their organisations communicate as promptly, clearly and with empathy as is possible with every stakeholder, and prioritise providing of regular updates and support.

The third objective focussed on the post-crisis period. The study found that the executives emboldened their business continuity plans, heightened vigilance, observed organisational with existing Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) prior to the Covid-19 pandemic conduct a thorough review of the effectiveness of existing plans in order to mitigate the impact of future crisis. This review process will be useful in identifying the gaps and shortcomings of the existing BCPs and take necessary measures to enhance the robustness of these BCPS. This study also recommends executives to heighten their vigilance and remain pro-active in monitoring their environment for emerging threats and vulnerabilities that could expose their organisations. This study also

recommends that executives embrace organisational flexibility and agility and invest in innovative, agile processes, technologies and personnel to ensure a more effective and efficient crisis response in the future. Lastly, this study recommends executives to foster and strengthen relationships with stakeholders and seek feedback from the different stakeholder groups as they design responses for future crises.

5.5 Limitations of the Study Suggestion for Areas for Further Research

This study sought out to evaluate how Kenyan executives managed the Covid-19 pandemic through the pre-crisis, crisis and post crisis period, thus limiting itself to investigating the Covid-19 pandemic only. The study also limited itself by collecting data from senior managers who might desire to present themselves in the best light and as successful in managing the pandemic. The study also limited itself to the thirteen industry sectors are listed by the Nairobi Securities Exchange, not all industries were covered in this study. The study also limited itself to the Stakeholder theory of crisis management which explains crisis management from a specific perspective. Other factors that are not stipulated in the stakeholder theory of crisis management can have an impact on how executives responded to the pandemic.

Several pre-crisis, crisis and post-crises strategies and insights have been highlighted in this study. This study recommends a comparative analysis to investigate how executives in different industries and sectors responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. The study could compare strategies, challenges and outcomes across the industries. This study further recommends a further investigation into the role of digital transformation and innovation technology in the pandemic response strategies. The study could explore how Kenyan executives leveraged digital technologies to inform their pandemic response strategies. Another area for further research could be an investigation into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employee well-being and

workforce resilience within Kenyan industries. Further another possible area for further research could be an exploration into the communication strategies employed by Kenyan executives to engage stakeholders during the pandemic. Lastly, a study synthesizing all key lessons and best practices from the Covid-19 pandemic response efforts of Kenyan executives could be an insightful study.

5.6 Suggestion for Areas for Further Research

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5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the discussion, conclusion and recommendations of the study. The chapter also highlighted suggestions for areas for further research as well as the limitations of the study.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I: Interview Guide

I am an MBA student from Strathmore Business School, and I am conducting research study how executives are navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. I would greatly appreciate your input. The interview should take about 45 minutes. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential. Your name will not be connected to your answers in any way. If you have any questions regarding this research, you may contact the researcher listed below. Thank you very much for your time.

Evalyne Chege: evalyne.chege@strathmore.edu

Name of respondent: .

Department: .

Title: .

Interview Questions:

Research Question 1: What approaches did executives adopt to address crisis preparedness and prevention before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (Pre-crisis)?

1. Can you describe the crisis preparedness and prevention strategies that were in place within your organization before the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How did your role as an executive involve addressing potential crises prior to the pandemic?

3. Were there specific challenges or successes in crisis management that stood out before the Covid-19 pandemic?

Research Question 2: How did executives respond during the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, and what crisis management strategies were implemented at the outset of the crisis (during the crisis)?

4. When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, how did your organization initially respond, and what were the immediate challenges faced?
5. Can you share specific crisis management strategies that were implemented during the initial phase of the pandemic?
6. How did you communicate with your team, shareholders and stakeholders during this crisis, and what role did effective communication play in managing the situation?
7. Were there unexpected challenges or learnings during the crisis management phase?

Research Question 3: What crisis management strategies did executives employ to navigate the post-crisis phase with a specific emphasis on ensuring sustained business continuity and organisational resilience (post crisis)?

8. After the initial crisis phase, how did your organization transition into the post-crisis phase?
9. What strategies were employed to ensure business continuity and enhance organisational resilience in the aftermath of the pandemic?
10. How did the experience of managing the Covid-19 crisis influence long-term decision-making within your organization?

11. Were there changes in leadership or organizational structure post-crisis, and if so, how did these changes contribute to future resilience?

General Questions:

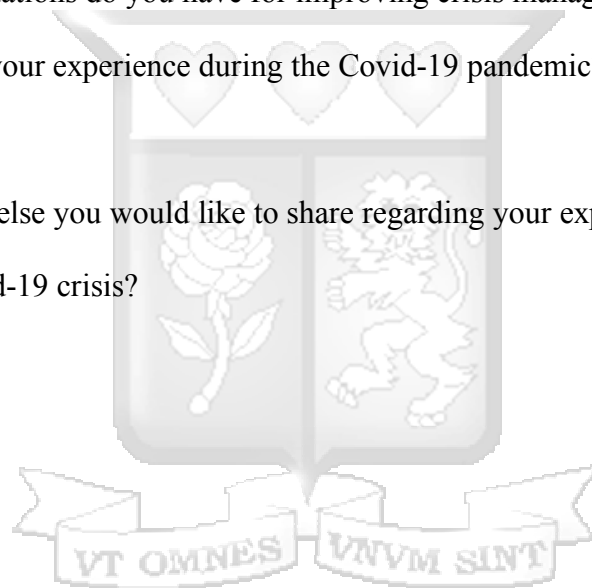
12. Reflecting on the entire crisis management process, what do you consider the most critical lessons learned?

13. In your opinion, how did the crisis management approach in Kenya differ from other regions or global practices?

14. What recommendations do you have for improving crisis management strategies in the future, based on your experience during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Conclusion:

- Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experiences in managing through the Covid-19 crisis?



APPENDIX II: Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Managing Through a Crisis: A Qualitative Analysis of how Kenyan Executives led their organizations through the Covid-19 Pandemic

SECTION 1: INFORMATION SHEET

Investigator: Evalyne Chege

Institutional affiliation: Strathmore Business School (SBS)

SECTION 2: INFORMATION SHEET – THE STUDY

2.1 Why is this study being carried out?

To analyze how Kenyan executives led their organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to identify effective strategies, decision-making processes, and leadership approaches for managing through a crisis.

2.2 Do I have to take part?

No. Taking part in this study is entirely optional and the decision rests only with you. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete a participate in an in-depth interview to get information on crisis management strategies. If you are not able to answer all the questions successfully the first time, you may be asked to sit through another informational session after which you may be asked to answer the questions a second time. You are free to decline to take part in the study from this study at any time without giving any reasons.

2.3 Who is eligible to take part in this study?

- Participants who are high-level management directly involved in the key decision-making process of the organisation.
- Participants who are top-level executives that manage respective business units that were affected during the first wave of Covid-19.

- Participants who were working at the organisation during the onset of the first wave of the pandemic.

2.4 Who is not eligible to take part in this study?

- Those who do not meet the above criteria in section 2.3

2.5 What will taking part in this study involve?

You will be approached by the researcher Evalyne Chege and requested to take part in the study. If you are satisfied that you fully understand the goals behind this study, you will be asked to sign the informed consent form (this form) and then taken through a questionnaire to complete.

2.6 Are there any risks or dangers in taking part in this study?

There are no risks in taking part in this study. All the information you provide will be treated as confidential and will not be used in any way without your express permission.

2.7 Are there any benefits of taking part in this study?

The information will be used to better understand effective crisis management in the Kenyan context and can serve as a basis for enhancing organizational resilience and preparedness for future crises.

2.8: What will happen to me if I refuse to take part in this study?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Even if you decide to take part at first but later change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time without explanation.

2.9: Who will have access to my information during this research?

All research records will be stored in securely locked cabinets. That information may be transcribed into our database but this will be sufficiently encrypted and password protected. Only the people who are closely concerned with this study will have access to your information. All your information will be kept confidential.

2.10: Who can I contact in case I have further questions?

You can contact me, Evalyne Chege at SBS, or by e-mail evalyne.chege@strathmore.edu. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof. Joseph Onyango, at the Strathmore Business School, Nairobi, or by e-mail jonyango@strathmore.edu.

If you want to ask someone independent anything about this research please contact:

The Secretary–Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Board, P. O. BOX 59857, 00200, Nairobi, email ethicsreview@strathmore.edu Tel number: +254 703 034 375

I, _____, have had the study explained to me. I have understood all that I have read and have had explained to me and had my questions answered satisfactorily. I understand that I can change my mind at any stage.

Please tick the boxes that apply to you;

Participation in the research study

- I AGREE to take part in this research
- I DO NOT AGREE to take part in this research

Storage of information on the completed questionnaire

- I AGREE to have my completed questionnaire stored for future data analysis
- I DO NOT AGREE to have my completed questionnaire stored for future data analysis

Participant’s Signature: _____ Date: _____ / _____ / _____

DD/ MM/ YEAR

Participant’s Name: _____ Time: _____ / _____

HR / MN

(Please print name)

I, _____ (Name of person taking consent) certify that I have followed the SOP for this study and have explained the study information to the study participant named above, and that s/he has understood the nature and the purpose of the study and consents to the participation in the study. S/he has been given opportunity to ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.

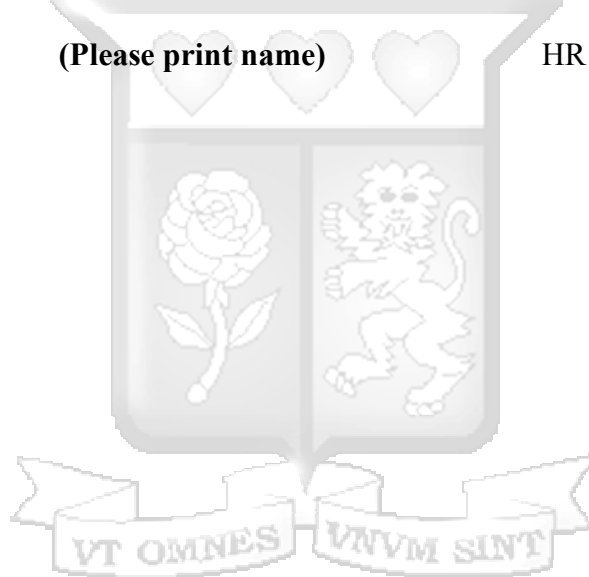
Investigator's Signature: _____ Date: _____ / _____ / _____

DD/ MM/ YEAR

Investigator's Name: _____ Time: _____ / _____

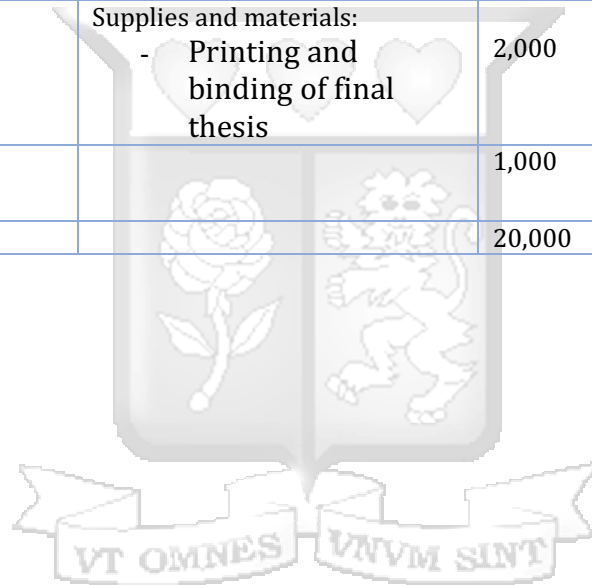
(Please print name)

HR / MN



APPENDIX III: Research Budget

Item	Details	Cost (Kes)
1. Proposal Research	Internet Research Printing, and photocopies	7,000 2,000
2. Ethical Review and Compliance	- NACOSTI application fees	1,000
3. Project	Data collection: - Travel expenses for conducting interviews Data Analysis: - Qualitative Data Analysis tools	5,000 2,000
4. Final Thesis	Supplies and materials: - Printing and binding of final thesis	2,000
5. Miscellaneous expenses		1,000
TOTAL		20,000



APPENDIX IV: Strathmore University Institution Review Board Licence



21st November 2023

Ms Chege Evalyne,
evalyne.chege@strathmore.edu

Dear Ms Chege,

RE: Managing through a Crisis: A Retrospective Multi-Sectoral Qualitative Analysis of how Kenyan Executives Led their Organisations during the Covid-19 Pandemic

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU-masters** research proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-ISERC1872/23**. The approval period is from **21st November 2023 to 20th November 2024**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for the export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days of completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Before commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) [<https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/>] and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Ambrose Rachier,
Chairperson; SU-ISERC

Ole Sangale Rd, Madaraka Estate, P.O. Box 59857-00200, Nairobi, Kenya. Tel +254 (0)703 034000
Email [admissions@strathmore.edu] [www.strathmore.edu]

Appendix VI: Strathmore Introductory Letter

C/o Sangalo Rd, Mbaraka Estate,
P.O. Box 59857 00200, Nairobi, Kenya.
Cell: +254 703 414/6/7, Twitter: @S55Kenya
Email: info@sbs.ac.ke or visit www.sbs.strathmore.edu



21st November 2023

To Whom It May Concern.

Dear Sir/ Madam.

RE: FACILITATION OF RESEARCH – EVALYNE NJOKI CHEGE

This is to introduce Evalyne Njoki Chege who is a Master of Business Administration student at Strathmore University Business School, admission number MBA/138811/21. As part of our MBA Program, Evalyne is expected to do applied research and undertake a project. This is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the MBA course. To this effect, she would like to request for appropriate data from your organization.

Evalyne is undertaking a research paper on "Managing Through a Crisis: A Qualitative Analysis of how Kenyan Executives Led Their Organizations Through the Covid-19 Pandemic". The information obtained from your organization shall be treated confidentially and shall be used for academic purposes only.

Our MBA seeks to establish links with industry, and one of these ways is by directing our research to areas that would be of direct use to industry. We would be glad to share our findings with you after the research, and we trust that you will find them of great interest and of practical value to your organization.

We appreciate your support and shall be willing to provide any further information if required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alois Njenga".

Alois Njenga.
Manager – MBA Programs.
Strathmore University Business School

