Success Factors for Crisis Management of Major Municipalities

A Comparative Case Study of Nordic Municipalities During COVID-19

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Preface

We are pleased to present this thesis as our final work as part of the master's program in Economics and Administration at the University of Agder. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the content of this master thesis. A special thank you to our supervisor Andreas Erich Wald. His insights and feedback have been essential, and we are really grateful for his contributions. We also want to thank the interviewees for participating in the research and for the insight and experiences they shared with us. Furthermore, we would also like to express our gratitude to all of the professors we have had at the University of Agder. Their knowledge and expertise laid the groundwork for us to write this thesis. Lastly, we would also like to thank our friends, family, and fellow students for their support and encouragement throughout our studies.

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Abstract

The number of crises is increasing and being prepared for one is crucial. The aim of the study was to find critical success factors for municipalities in dealing with crises. The inspiration for writing this thesis is taken from one of the more recent global unpredictable events, COVID-19. Given its significant consequences, an interest arose in exploring ways to enhance crisis preparedness to limit potential damages. Due to the limited research on bigger organizations during times of crises, the choice became to focus on major municipalities. Coombs' three-stage model of crisis management is used as the theoretical foundation for the study. With a qualitative case study, the thesis attempts to fill the gap in the literature about municipalities in times of crises. The thesis examines various crisis-related elements to determine what is most important at the different stages in the three phases of a crisis. This study has found critical success factors in dealing with a crisis, as well as factors that are seen as important. The success factors are being adaptable, having a crisis management plan, effective communication, as well as documenting everything clearly. The critical success factors are influenced and enhanced by several other factors looked at throughout the thesis.

Key words: crisis, crisis management, success factors, three-stage model, municipalities

Sammendrag

Antallet kriser øker og det er avgjørende å være forberedt på en. Målet med studiet var å finne kritiske suksessfaktorer for kommuner i håndtering av kriser. Inspirasjonen til å skrive denne oppgaven er hentet fra en av de nyere globale uforutsigbare hendelsene, COVID-19. Gitt de betydelige konsekvensene, oppsto det en interesse for å utforske måter å styrke kriseberedskapen for å begrense potensielle skader. På grunn av begrenset forskning på større organisasjoner i krisetider, falt valget på å fokusere på større kommuner. Coombs sin tre-stegs modell for krisehåndtering er brukt som det teoretiske grunnlaget for studien. Med en kvalitativ casestudie forsøker oppgaven å fylle gapet i litteraturen om kommuner i krisetider. Oppgaven undersøker ulike kriserelaterte elementer for å finne ut hva som er viktigst på de ulike stadiene i de tre fasene av en krise. Denne studien har funnet kritiske suksessfaktorer i håndteringen av en krise, samt faktorer som blir sett på som viktige. Suksessfaktorene er å være tilpasningsdyktig, ha en krisehåndteringsplan, effektiv kommunikasjon, samt å dokumentere alt tydelig. De kritiske suksessfaktorene påvirkes og forsterkes av flere andre faktorer som er sett på gjennom oppgaven.

Nøkkelord: krise, krisehåndtering, suksessfaktorer, tre-stegs modell, kommuner

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1. Introduction

The world constantly faces challenges, and an increasing occurrence of crises is causing significant impacts on its surroundings (Leta & Chan, 2021, p. 1). During the past decades, the world has faced several different crises, such as floods, earthquakes, heatwaves, wars, and pandemics. These types of crises tend to escalate rapidly, and effortlessly exceed geographical, cultural, and legal boundaries. They are called transboundary crises and tend to challenge both the administrative and political systems (Boin, 2019, p. 94-95). One of the more recent global crises is COVID-19. COVID-19 erupted in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread across the world. To begin with, it was seen as a local disease, but quickly changed in March 2020 when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Johansson et al., 2023, p. 15-16).

The rapid spread of COVID-19 caused a wide range of responses from governments taking action to constrain the spread of the virus and protect their inhabitants. Common government measures included school closings, travel restrictions, and bans on public gatherings (Hale et al., 2020, p. 4-7). Cooperation and production of vaccines have been key factors in bringing the pandemic to an end (Eccleston-Turner & Upton, 2021, p. 427). Different government policies reflect differences in the crisis management organization (Hale et al., 2020, p. 7).

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Director General Daren Tang said: "There is no certainty when the next pandemic will strike us, but there is absolute certainty that it will happen again" (World Health Organization, 2022). The increasing occurrence of crises emphasizes the importance of preparing for one. As organizations cannot prepare for all types of crises, it is important that they understand how to build mechanisms that enable effective crisis management. Learning from previous experiences can benefit the organization in tackling a crisis and reduce the entailed consequences (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, p. 181-186). It is therefore important to investigate how organizations have handled crises and how they can better prepare for future ones. In doing so, this thesis will explore three different municipalities and how they have dealt with COVID-19 in order to find success factors for crisis management.

Previous research emphasizes the importance of leadership in crisis management as leaders have a direct influence on the actions taken (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 541; Kessel & Masella, 2016,

p. 134). A culture that emphasizes the importance of learning and improving from mistakes is also seen as an important aspect of effective crisis management (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, p. 188). Previous research has predominantly focused on countries and smaller organizations, with limited attention given to bigger organizations such as municipalities. This creates a gap in understanding how larger entities respond to crises.

The thesis focuses on three municipalities in the Nordic countries and investigates key success factors for crisis management. It is a comparative study of Oslo-, Stockholm- and Helsinki municipalities' crisis management strategies during COVID-19. It is found adequate to study crisis management in municipalities during COVID-19, because it is the most challenging crisis the world has faced since the Second World War (Guterres, 2020).

The thesis will enhance the knowledge of crisis management and success factors and aims to answer the following question:

"What are important success factors in managing a crisis for municipalities?"

The research question will be answered through a qualitative approach. A case study was found suitable in order to answer the research question of the study. Data is collected through three semi-structured interviews as well as documents from the chosen municipalities. The data is processed using a content and thematic approach.

The thesis onwards is structured as follows: The second chapter provides the theoretical background of the topic and explains the key concepts in crisis management that will be used throughout the thesis. Further, it describes different crisis management models and creates the foundation of the study. Chapter three covers the methodology and justifies the qualitative approach for this study. This chapter also elaborates on the tools used and the chosen analysis method. The fourth chapter introduces the three different cases. The fifth chapter presents the results gained from the interviews and documents. Chapter six discusses the findings of the study. The last chapter provides a conclusion for the thesis, as well as presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptual Foundations

In this chapter, the theoretical foundation of the thesis will be presented. It will elaborate on existing definitions of crisis, crisis management, and critical success factors. Furthermore, it will present different models for crisis management and address gaps in the existing literature.

2.1 Core Concepts

2.1.1 Crisis

Because there are many different perspectives on the nature of crises, there is no universally accepted definition of a crisis (Smith, 1990, p. 265). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines a crisis as a "situation with high level of uncertainty that disrupts the core activities and/or credibility of an organization and requires urgent action" (ISO 22300, 2012, 2.1.12). Similarly, Venette argues that crises are processes where the old system no longer can be maintained, resulting in a need for changes (Venette, 2003, p. 43). Organizations are forced to make sense of turbulent environments, as well as make changes to the normal routines and understandings (Roberts et al., 2007, p. 108). Fink defines a crisis as an unstable time that will lead to a turning point for the ones that are affected (Fink, 1986, p. 15). The aspect of change is central in the definitions presented.

2.1.2 Crisis Management

The goal of crisis management is to prevent or reduce the negative outcomes of a crisis which helps protect the organization and the stakeholders. The crisis management process consists of four interrelated factors: prevention, preparation, response, and revision. Prevention is the step taken to avoid a crisis, preparation includes the crisis management plan, the response is the application of the preparation components to a crisis, and lastly, the revision is the evaluation of the response (Coombs, 2015, p. 5-6). If a crisis occurs, a central principle of crisis management is regaining control of the situation (Heath, 1998, p. 140). Fink describes crisis management as planning for a crisis as well as removing risks and uncertainty in the situation (Fink, 1986, p. 15). Effective crisis management can reduce the damage caused by the crisis and is an essential approach for an organization's strategic planning but having good crisis management is not easy (Roberts et al., 2007, p. 120). Kessel and Masella argue that crisis management is about planning for a crisis that your organization is likely to be exposed to during its lifetime. As the environment is constantly changing the crisis management plan should be regularly updated. Furthermore, they argue that there are certain elements that

should be included in crisis management: a crisis management team with clear roles and tasks, understanding and prioritizing of potential crises, an action plan addressing the most significant crises, an effective communication strategy, and lastly, periodic update of the plan (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 133-134). Coombs agreeably states the importance of effective communication in crisis management (Coombs, 2015, p. 6).

2.1.3 Critical Success Factors

According to Bullen and Rockart, critical success factors are "the few key areas of activity in which favorable results are necessary for a particular manager to reach his goals" (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 3). It focuses on the individual manager and the current information needs, and it takes into consideration that the needs are different for different managers. The critical success factors are the characteristics and variables that must go right to have a positive impact on the success of the organization (Zhou et al., 2011, p. 244). There are usually three to six critical success factors determining success in most industries, which the organizations in the industries must pay attention to. On the other hand, the success factors can differ from organizations in the same industry based on different sizes, geographic locations, and strategies (Rockart, 1979, p. 9-13). The critical success factors arise from five different sources: the industry, competitive strategy, and industry position, environmental factors, temporal factors, and managerial position (Bullen & Rockart, 1981, p. 14-16).

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Empirical Research

Previous research states that having a crisis management plan will benefit the organization in dealing with a crisis. Creating a crisis management plan can help in resolving a crisis as quickly as possible (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 134). Coombs states that a crisis management plan should facilitate strategic thinking and make sure the right people are put on the right tasks. It should be used as a reference tool and provide advice and reminders to the crisis team. Additionally, it should hold information about how to reach different stakeholders and contain contact information for the different team members (Coombs, 2015, p. 90-92). The information in the emergency plan should be updated regularly for the organization to constantly be in a state of preparedness (Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41). Kessel and Masella also argue that the crisis plan should be adapted to each of the most likely crisis situations identified, as different crises will demand different actions (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 135).

According to Hutchins and Wang, there are five elements that are inherent in a crisis system. These elements are "technology, organizational structure, human factors, organizational culture, and top management", where culture and human factors such as leadership and effective teams are seen as the most important factors during a crisis (Hutchins & Wang, 2008, as cited in Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). "Culture provides better (or the best) ways of thinking, feeling and reacting that could help managers to make decisions and arrange activities of organization" (Sun, 2008, as cited in Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). Culture can therefore be assumed in shaping the reaction of an organization to a crisis, positively and negatively (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). According to Schein, organizational culture is "the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problem of external adaptation and internal integration" (Schein, 1984, as cited in Bhaduri, 2019, p. 537). Related, having an organizational structure that enables rapid implementation of preplanned organizational solutions in an evolving situation limits the probability of organizational dysfunction (Bigley & Roberts, 2001, as cited in Bundy et al., 2017, p. 1667).

Further, a study by Hazaa, Almaqtari, and Al-Swidi states that there are eight factors that influence crisis management: IT, strategic planning, communication, social media, knowledge management, the role of government, leadership, and lastly, professional entities (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 8-26). IT is found to be positively correlated to crisis management in order to improve decision-making, by obtaining timely, efficient and accurate information (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 8). Strategic planning is dependent on managers and the employees, as well as the culture of the organization in order to overcome crises. However, the variability of crises poses a challenge to strategic planning, unless the plan is being updated continuously (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 9). Having a crisis management team that understands their roles is important in enhancing the planning, and handling the crisis (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 134). Further, communication and social media pose both challenges and opportunities for crisis management. They can reduce uncertainty and threats but can also contribute to confusion and rumors. It is also stated that efficient communication is a challenge during crisis management (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 10-18). Building a good relationship with the media is important to make sure that the information regarding the situation is balanced. This is because of the importance of gaining the trust of the people and maintaining the reputation of the organization (Harwati, 2013, p. 175). Knowledge management can contribute to a better

crisis management by accomplishing goals (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 21). It also involves being trained and empowered to make creative decisions in times of crisis (Şuşnea, 2013, as cited in Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 19).

Moats, Chermack, and Dooley also emphasize that scenario-based training and scenario planning are two important aspects needed to avoid or deal with crises. With scenario planning the goal is to shift the thinking inside of the organization in order to help decision-makers and leaders of the organization. Training and planning are also required for the crisis managers to become efficient decision-makers in times of crises (Moats et al., 2008, p. 397-401). Furthermore, the role of governance plays an important role in crisis management as there is a need to apply governance and responsibility in times of a crisis (Al-Kholy, 2009, as cited in Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 21). Professional entities can also be beneficial in handling a crisis, as some provide guidance and regulations to improve businesses and manage crises (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 26).

Leaders play an important role in managing a crisis. Having a suitable leader for the crisis management team is critical (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 134). Leaders have a direct influence on the outcomes of crisis management as their values play a huge role in times of a crisis and can contribute to determining the outcome of the management (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 541). Harwati found that a transformational leadership style is most effective in times of a crisis (Harwati, 2013, p. 178-179). While according to Alkhawlani there are three leadership styles that have a positive impact on crisis management. These are transformational, transactional, and charismatic styles of leadership (Alkhawlani, 2016, as cited in Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 23). A transformational leader is detail-oriented, strategic, and adaptive. Even though they are detail-oriented, they are also able to see the big picture and use previous experiences for cause-and-effect logic. A transactional leader on the other hand focuses on details and gets the job done while bounded by rules and regulations and therefore not suited for managing emerging crises (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 554). Lastly, a charismatic leader sacrifices everything to show their commitment. They have an impact on their followers by using symbols and stories (Rjoub et al., 2017, p. 111).

Furthermore, according to Harwati, trust and two-way communication are important factors for leadership during crises. It is also crucial that the leaders are able to make changes to the existing strategy if needed (Harwati, 2013, p. 178-179). On the other hand, Bowers, Hall, and

Srinivasan found that the desired leadership style depends on the nature of the crisis and is also based on the organizational culture of the organization. The different cultures looked at are hierarchy-, clan/adhocracy-, and elitist culture. A hierarchy culture is generally risk-averse and is characterized by a tiered and rigid structure and strictly defined core principles that call for specific processes and systems to ensure compliance. On the other hand, a clan/adhocracy culture is not risk averse, has an entrepreneurial spirit, and has an empowered workforce. Lastly, elitist culture is likely to be dictatorial in nature with the authority concentrated in the hands of few. They believe they have special responsibilities and are exempt from rules that generally apply to organizations. For an internal crisis in an organization with hierarchal organizational culture, a directive or transformational leader is seen as more effective. On the other hand, for an internal crisis with an elitist organizational culture, cognitive-, directive- or transformational leaders are seen as efficient. Further, for an internal crisis with a clan/adhocracy organizational culture, a transformational style of leadership is seen as the most effective. Whereas for external crises, the type of organizational culture is not significant, as transformational leaders are seen as the most efficient in all organizational cultures (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 555).

Culture provides better ways of thinking, helping managers to make decisions and arrange activities (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). Mitroff states that organizational culture is one of the main determinants of how an organization will respond to a crisis (Mitroff, 1988, as cited in Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, p. 180). Creating a culture that enables them to catch and react to the unexpected can make the organization more resilient to crises (Harrald, 2006, p. 265). Creating an organization that is prepared for a crisis can be crucial when one occurs (Labaš, 2017, p. 75).

In a recent study by Mikušová and Horváthová of small organization managers and owners, some stated that they do not prepare for a crisis because they do not know how. Additionally, some stated it is too costly, while others meant preparing for a crisis does not make sense as it will develop differently than expected (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019, p. 1845-1846). Similarly, a study by Fasth, Elliot, and Styrhe found that most of the small and medium-sized enterprises studied did not have any form of crisis plan before the outbreak of COVID-19. Out of the companies that had a plan, half did not update it regularly. Of the companies that had a plan, 61% felt that it helped them tackle COVID-19 (Fasth et al., 2022, p. 165). Fowler, Kling, and Larson found that larger organizations had a higher preparedness for a crisis than

smaller organizations. There was no significant difference in the level of preparedness in the organization based on the size of the city it was located in (Fowler et al., 2007, p. 88-94). Agreeably, a study by Cloudman and Hallahan found that an organization's crisis preparedness activities are positively correlated to the size of the organization. This implies that the smaller organizations in the sample were less prepared for a crisis than the bigger ones (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006, p. 374-375).

Another study done on European countries by Coccia stated that the countries with a population of fewer than 14 million people and/or a higher index of public governance were better prepared for COVID-19 than the ones with a higher population and lower level of indicators of public governance (Coccia, 2022, p. 4-5). Singapore, which is a rich but small country with effective and dynamic communication strategies and community support was well prepared for COVID-19. This is because of the country's previous experiences with pandemics such as the SARS outbreak and H1N1 which made them have a proactive response to COVID-19 (Tan et al., 2021, p. 15-16). Turkey, on the other hand, is a country that experiences a variety of crises and has a crisis management system that is strictly hierarchical and highly centralized. The country has a lack of political support and local resources which influences crisis management. They do not have a very flexible approach to crisis management and failure in the recovery phase makes the country face the same problems at different times. Additionally, the government's response is usually more reactionary than pre-planned which is causing the country inefficiency in the country's crisis management (Unlu et al., 2010, p. 156-172).

An important aspect of crisis preparedness is being able to learn from previous failures and improve ways of dealing with a present, and a future crisis. Having a culture that emphasizes this will improve the organization's ability to detect warning signals of a crisis and how to deal with them (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, p. 184-189). Because it is not possible to anticipate all types of crises, and they usually have a dynamic nature, it is important to have an adaptive approach to crisis management (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019, p. 1845; Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41). Even though many see crises as unpredictable events, research indicates that many types of crises are predictable to a large extent. Being able to unlearn behavioral patterns is important in adapting the responses to a crisis and also in preventing future ones. Learning new behavioral patterns, unlearning habits, and values that are detrimental can be crucial in dealing with a crisis (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, 180-181).

Table 1: Summary of empirical research

No.	Studies	Results
1	Kessel & Masella (2016)	A clear and adaptable crisis management plan as well as having a suited leader can benefit in resolving a crisis.
2	Coombs (2015)	A crisis management plan should facilitate strategic thinking, including tasks, information about stakeholders and contact information of team members.
3	Steen & Morsut (2020)	The emergency plan should be updated regularly to constantly be prepared for crises, as crises vary in nature.
4	Hutchins & Wang (2008)	Five elements inherent in a crisis system "technology, organizational structure, human factors, organizational culture, and top management". Culture and human factors are seen as most important.
5	Bhaduri (2019)	Leaders have a direct influence on the outcomes of crisis management and culture can shape the reaction of an organization to a crisis, both positively and negatively, and help managers make decisions and arrange activities.
6	Bigley & Roberts (2001)	An organizational structure that enables rapid implementation of preplanned solutions can limit organizational dysfunction.
7	Hazaa et al. (2021)	There are eight factors that influence crisis management: IT, strategic planning, communication, social media, knowledge management, the role of

		government, leadership, and professional entities. Transformational, transactional and charismatic leadership styles have a positive impact on crisis management.
8	Harwati (2013)	Building a good relationship with the media can benefit the organization in maintaining a good reputation and gain trust of the people. The most effective leadership style during a crisis is a transformational leader. Additionally, a leader that emphasizes two-way communication, trust and being adaptable is seen as important.
9	Moats et al. (2008)	Scenario-based training and planning needs to be implemented to avoid/deal with crises.
10	Bowers et al. (2017)	The desired leadership style is dependent on the nature of the crisis and also based on the organizational structure of the organization.
11	Carmeli & Schaubroeck (2008)	Organizational culture is one of the main determinants of how an organization will respond to a crisis. Learning and unlearning behavioral patterns are important parts of crisis preparedness. Having a culture that emphasizes this will improve the organization's ability to detect and deal with a crisis.

12	Harrald (2006)	A culture that enables organizations to catch and react to unexpected events can make them more resilient to crises.
13	Labaš (2017)	An organization that is prepared for a crisis can be crucial.
14	Mikušová & Horváthová (2019)	Most of the small organizations studied do not prepare for crises because they do not know how to, it is too costly, or they do not see the point as the crisis tends to develop differently than expected.
15	Fasth et al. (2020)	Most of the small and medium-sized enterprises studied did not have a crisis plan before the outbreak of COVID-19. Half of the ones that had one did not update it regularly. 61% of the ones with a plan felt that it helped them tackling COVID-19.
16	Fowler et al., (2007)	Larger organizations had a higher preparedness for a crisis than smaller ones, however, the size of the city the organization is in was insignificant.
17	Cloudman & Hallahan (2006)	Crisis preparedness is positively correlated to the size of the organization.
18	Coccia (2022)	Countries in Europe with a higher index of public governance and population of fewer than 14 million were better prepared for COVID-19.
19	Tan et al. (2021)	Singapore, a small and rich country with effective communication strategies and community support was well prepared for COVID-19. Because of previous experiences with pandemic causing them

20	Unlu et al. (2010)	Turkey has an inefficient crisis management because the system is not flexible, and they have a lack of political support and local resources even though they have experiences with a variety of crises.

2.2.2 Prescriptive Models

Several crisis management models emphasize the importance of seeing the early warning signs of a crisis. Three models are found adequate to present for this thesis: Fink's four-stage model, Mitroff's five-stage model, and the three-stage model by Coombs.

Fink´s four-stage model

Fink's four-stage model consists of the prodromal -, acute-, chronic-, and crisis resolution stages. He compares a crisis to a disease, as crises are unstable and dynamic like an illness (Fink, 1986, p. 20).
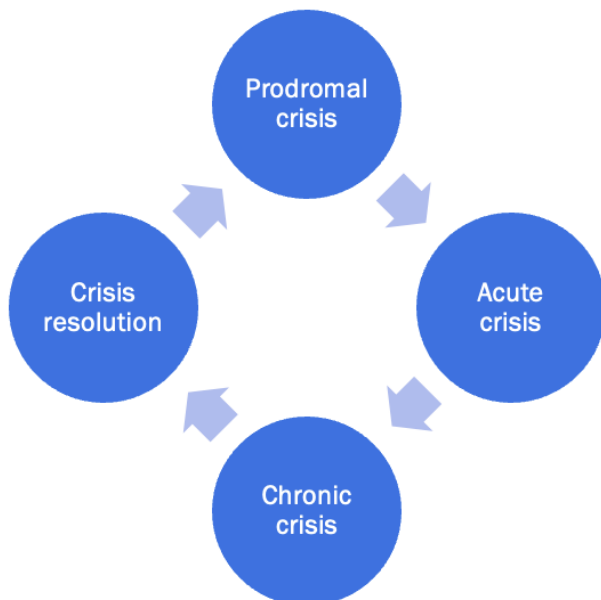

Figure 1: Fink's four-stage model

In the prodromal stage, which is the phase before the crisis occurs, he states the importance of catching the warning signs as it is easier to manage a crisis before it becomes acute, just like an illness (Fink, 1986, p. 20-21). The acute stage is the point of no return, damage has been caused, and requires urgent action. In this phase management can only take actions to control the damage, and not prevent it (Fink, 1986, p. 22-23; Kash & Darling, 1998, p. 181). The chronic stage is about recovering from the crisis, but it also involves cleaning up the damage. Lastly, the crisis resolution stage indicates that the crisis is over and no longer a concern to the stakeholders (Coombs, 2015, p. 7).

Mithoff´s five-stage model

In contrast to Fink's model of four stages, Mitroff's crisis management model consists of five steps: signal detection, probing and prevention, damage containment, recovery, and learning (Mitroff, 1994, p. 105-107).
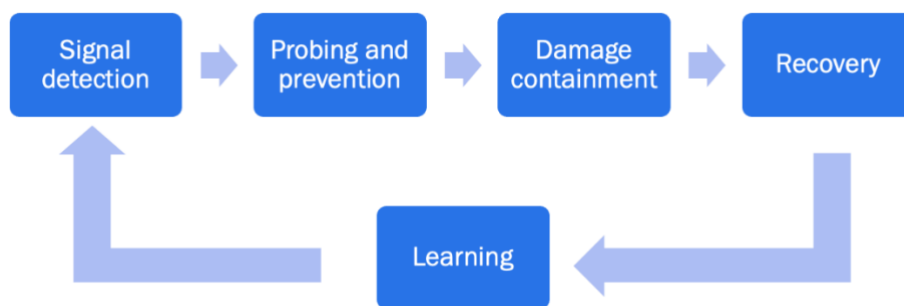
Figure 2: Mitroff's five-stage model

The first stage, signal detection involves detecting warning signs to prevent a crisis and reduce the potential harm of risk factors. The next stage is probing and prevention, which often takes place simultaneously with signal detection (Mitroff, 1994, p. 105). It involves searching for crisis risk factors and reducing their potential for harm (Coombs, 2019, p. 9). Damage containment is about limiting the damages of the event and working to prevent spreading to unaffected areas of the organization or its environment (Coombs, 2019, p. 9; Veil, 2011, p. 118). The recovery stage involves returning to normal operations. The final stage is learning and involves reviewing, critiquing, and learning from what was done well and what could have been done better (Mitroff, 1994, p. 107-108).

The three-stage model consists of pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis (Coombs, 2015, p. 9). The pre-crisis stage involves all the aspects of crisis preparation. The crisis stage includes the actions taken to cope with the crisis. The last stage is post-crisis and reflects the period when the crisis has been deemed and resolved (Coombs, 2019, p. 9).
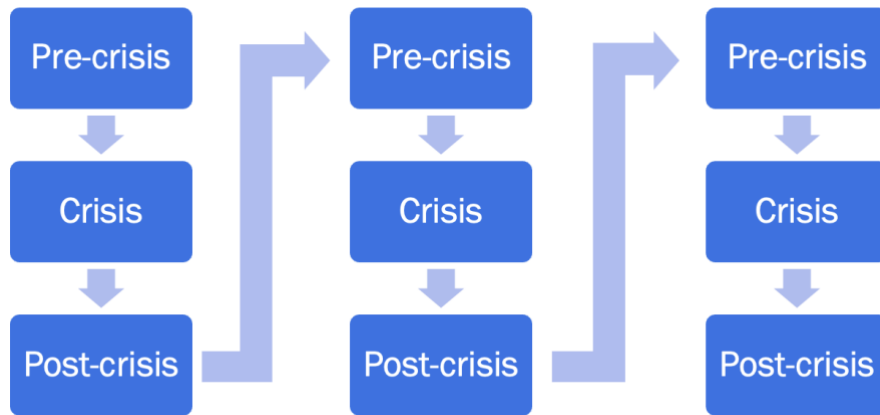
Figure 3: Three-stage model of crisis management

Comparison

Fink's four-stage model and Mitroff's five-stage model both fit into Coombs' three-stage model of crisis management. In the event of pre-crisis, the warning signs appear and the effort of eliminating risks begins, which is equivalent to the prodromal stage, signal detection, and probing and prevention. The acute stage, damage containment, chronic, and recovery, fall within the crisis stage; where the crisis is dealt with. Lastly, resolution and learning fall within post-crisis (Coombs, 2015, p. 9).

As the three-stage approach to crisis management is the most frequently used for separating the surrounding events of a crisis, and both Fink and Mitroff's model fit into the three stages (Veil, 2011, p. 119), the three-stage model will be the basis for this study. An overview of how the frameworks fit into Coombs' three-stage model is described in Table 2.

Table 2: A table describing the fit of the frameworks into the three-stage model

Coombs	Fink	Mitroff
Pre-crisis	Prodromal crisis	Signal detection
		Probing and prevention
Crisis	Acute crisis	Damage containment
	Chronic crisis	Recovery
Post-crisis	Crisis resolution	Learning

For this study pre-crisis is the stage before COVID-19. The stage of the crisis is during COVID-19, and post-crisis is considered the period when the restrictions in the three applicable countries were removed.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the methods for the study. This comprises explanations of the research philosophy, approach, and design, as well as the data collection. All the choices made are justified. Further, the choices for coding and analysis of the data are explained. Lastly, the reliability and validity of the study are discussed.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The objective of this research is to identify critical success factors that are important when municipalities deal with crises. The crisis management strategies of three different municipalities will be analyzed to achieve this. To understand the choices of research methods and the interpretation of findings, the research philosophy adopted will be explained (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 128). The purpose of research philosophy is to get an understanding of the researcher's assumptions regarding the view of the world. The research philosophy is described from an ontological and epistemological perspective. Ontology is about the nature of reality, and there are two different perspectives namely objectivism and subjectivism. Epistemology is concerned with what is acceptable knowledge in the field of study. For this research a subjective approach is adopted, meaning that social phenomena are formed by people's own perceptions and meanings. People have different views of the world, and this affects how they interpret different situations (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 130-132). Based on an ontology of subjectivism, the adopted epistemological research philosophy reflects the position of critical realism, which means the sense of reality is not necessarily the whole truth. Data will be gathered from people who have their own perception of what has happened, which depends on their own perception of reality. This needs to be considered when collecting and analyzing our data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 136).

3.2 Research Approach

There are three main research approaches: deductive, inductive, and abductive. For an inductive approach, data is collected to identify themes and patterns and also create a conceptual framework (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 144). Deductive reasoning is used to test a theory, and abductive reasoning is a combination of both inductive and deductive reasoning (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 26; Saunders et al., 2012, p. 147). As the research does not test a theory but rather observes to draw conclusions, inductive reasoning is suitable.

For an inducive approach it is typical to establish various perspectives on a phenomenon by gathering qualitative data from a smaller sample size, which corresponds to the current research (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 146-147). In qualitative research observations of what people say and do are used to collect, analyze and interpret unstructured data. In comparing municipalities, collecting non-numerical data from interviews and documents is beneficial, because it will give a richer insight into crisis management of the municipalities. Qualitative data collection emphasizes the importance of understanding the "why" behind a phenomenon, making qualitative data collection suitable for this study (Burns & Veeck, 2020, p. 122).

3.3 Research Design

A research design is a plan of how to collect, measure and analyze data and is needed to be able to answer the research question (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 95). There is no research design that is superior in all settings; the design must be carefully chosen based on objectives, research question, access to data, time, and money (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 96). There are three types of categories for research designs: exploratory, descriptive, and causal. They can be used separately, but some research requires a combination of designs (Burns & Veeck, 2020, p. 63). Due to the limited information about municipalities during times of crisis, there is a need to gain background information on the topic. The need to get a primary understanding of the topic and defining terms justifies the need for exploratory research (Burns & Veeck, 2020, p. 64).

The research strategy for this study is a case study with multiple cases. Case studies are used to create a clear picture of a problem by collecting data using multiple methods (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 98). For this study, the data collection will be through in-depth expert interviews and document analysis (see Chapter 3.4). The cases of Oslo-, Stockholm- and Helsinki municipality are chosen because they are similar in several ways. They are individualistic, indulgent, similar in size, and have low power distance, meaning power is decentralized (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

3.4 Data Collection

The thesis relies on qualitative data, both primary and secondary, to gain as much information as possible to answer the research question of the study. Primary data is data that is collected specifically for the purpose of this study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 38). Secondary data is

data that has been collected previously for another purpose than this study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 37). In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted for the collection of primary data, and documents were collected as secondary data. By collecting more than one source of data, the credibility of this study increases, and potential biases are reduced (Bowen, 2009, p. 28).

3.4.1 Documents

The data collection process started by collecting documents that could be relevant to this research. The municipalities' websites were used as a starting point to collect documents about crisis management in general and during COVID-19 in particular. Two out of three evaluation reports about Helsinki municipality during COVID-19 were not posted on the municipality's website. These reports were therefore collected through email from the prospective interview object. A total of 12 documents were found about crisis management in the municipalities. Table 3 gives an overview of all the documents that were found for each municipality.

Table 3: Overview of documents for the municipalities

Municipality	Number of documents	Sources
Oslo	4	City of Oslo (n.d.)
		City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency (2022a)
		City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency (2022b)
		Deloitte (2021)
Stockholm	3	City of Stockholm (2022)
		Rådestad et al. (2020)
		Stålö & Rånlund (2021)
Helsinki	5	Internal document: Confidential 1
		Internal document: Confidential 2
		City of Helsinki (2020)
		City of Helsinki (2022)
		KPMG (2022)

3.4.2 Interviews

To get a deeper understanding of the municipalities during COVID-19, in-depth expert interviews with representatives from the different municipalities were conducted. The interviewees have all worked in the municipality's crisis management team. They were selected because of their ability to answer the questions in the interview guide and meet the objectives of the study. Using judgment to select the study sample is called purposive sampling (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 287).

There are two types of interviews, structured and unstructured interviews (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 113). Interviews that are structured have planned the questions in advance and logical order for them to be asked. These are commonly used when the interviewee knows what information is needed (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 115). Unstructured interviews on the other hand have no specific order of questions planned and give room for asking questions that might arise during the interview that were not planned (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 113). It was decided to combine these and conduct a semi-structured interview, to be able to ask questions outside of those that were prepared, since the municipalities are quite differently structured. Therefore, an interview guide was made with 10 open-ended questions. The questions were divided into three phases: pre-crisis, during the crisis, and post-crisis. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.1.

It was decided to interview one expert from each municipality that could give more insight into their crisis management before, during, and after the pandemic. The process of finding someone to interview in the different municipalities was difficult. The search began on the municipalities' websites to look for someone working with crisis management to contact. This turned out to be more difficult than anticipated, however, not for the City of Oslo. For Oslo municipality, the chat function on the website was used, and contact information for someone working with crisis management was received. After a phone call to the applicable person, it was decided that they would be a good fit as an interviewee for the research. For Helsinki and Stockholm, the search for someone to interview was long. Throughout five weeks, phone calls were made, and emails were sent to different people found on the website. Some of the ones contacted gave contact information to people they thought could help us out, but in most cases, it did not. Eventually, contact information for potential interview objects from both Helsinki and Stockholm was received. After a phone call with the applicable one from Helsinki and the one from Stockholm, it was decided that they would participate in our study.

A total of three interviews were conducted, one from each municipality. Information about each interview is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Interviews

Respondent	Municipality	Date	Duration
O1	Oslo	16.02.2023	70 min
S1	Stockholm	07.03.2023	60 min
H1	Helsinki	24.02.2023	64 min

The interviews were conducted digitally, because the interviewees were located in different countries and there was no funding for travel. Teams and Skype for Business were used to conduct the interviews. The interview with the respondent from Oslo was conducted in Norwegian and the others were conducted in English. All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and further transcribed.

3.5 Coding and Analysis

This study analyzes documents and interviews. According to Bowen data can be analyzed through skimming, reading, and interpretation. To analyze the data in this research, content analysis, and thematic analysis are used. He defines content analysis as "the process of organizing information into categories related to the central questions of the research" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Coding means systematically going through and categorizing the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 60-61). Based on the literature and the interview guide, a set of 15 codes were deducted before going through the data. The interviews and documents were coded manually. During the coding process, three codes were inducted based on the observations of the study because the interview questions did not cover the applicable codes (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p.26). After looking at the interview answers and reading through the different documents they were found to be highlighted in both the reports and by the interviewees. They were therefore seen as relevant for the study, and as a result of that inducted.

After reviewing the data multiple times, four of the deducted codes were removed, because they were not seen as relevant for the study. This led to a total of 14 codes, which were put into themes. Thematic analysis "takes a closer look at the selected data and performs coding

and category construction, based on the data's characteristics, to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Initial themes were generated before the coding. They were based on the three-stage model of crisis management (see Chapter 2.2.2) (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 78). The themes were reviewed after coding to check for validity (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 97). The predetermined themes were still considered most suitable for the data after coding. The purpose of the themes is to enable the identification of success factors. An overview of the codes and themes is shown in Figure 4.
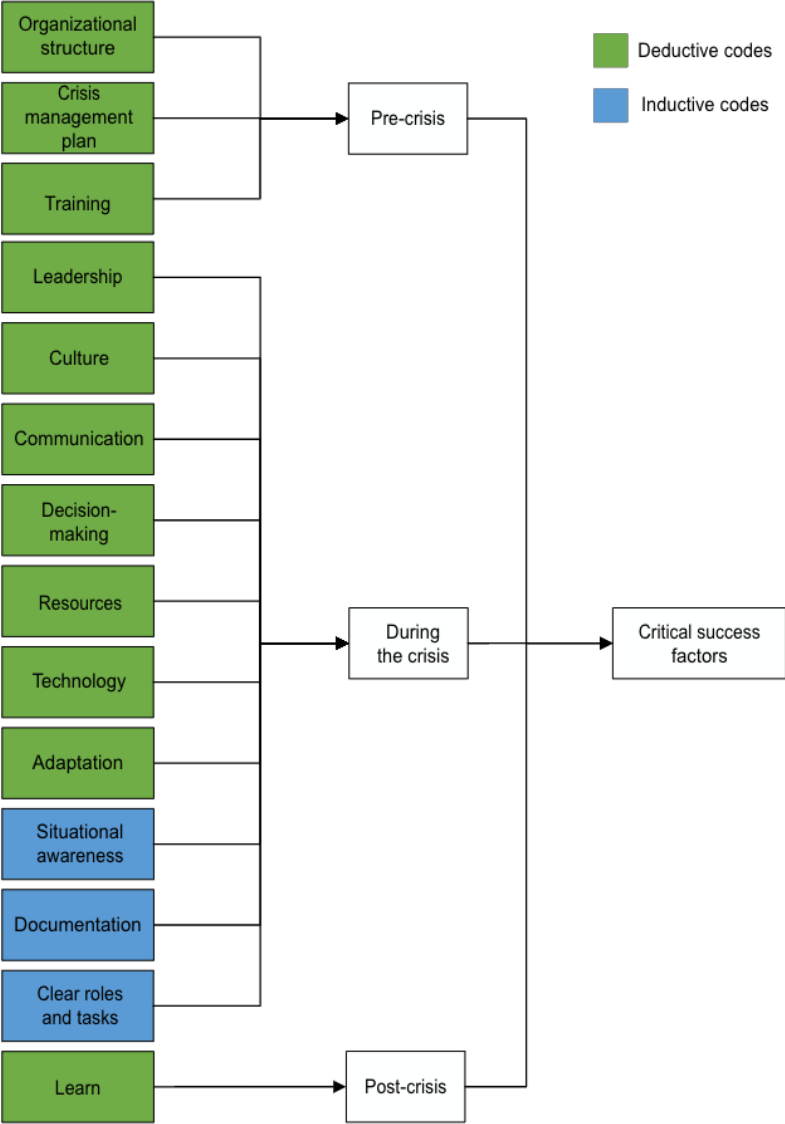
Figure 4: Coding frame

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity is the truthfulness of a study's findings, while reliability is concerned with the consistency of the observations (Neuman, 2014, p. 212). The purpose of reliability is to reduce errors and biases in a study (Yin, 2014, p. 49). Comparing the results from the interviews with the results from the documents increases the validity of this study, as it decreased the risk of respondents withholding information or making things seem better or worse than they are. Additionally, it was made sure that the interviewees understood the nature of the research by giving them adequate information about the purpose of the thesis. The use of expert participants also reduces the risk of having inaccurate or insufficient data (Brink, 1993, p. 35-37). All the methods used are clearly documented to ensure the reliability of the study (Yin, 2014, p. 49).

4. Cases

This chapter presents the chosen cases of the study to show insight into the applicable municipalities and give a deeper understanding of how they are assembled in a normal situation. Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki are the three municipalities selected for the thesis. Municipalities in the Nordic countries are chosen because they are comparable in several ways. They have similar populations, and the countries have relatively low power distance and open political systems (Johansson et al., 2023, p. 13), which makes the data comparable.

4.1 City of Oslo

Oslo municipality contains a population of about 700 000 inhabitants and is one of Norway's biggest employers with over 54 000 employees (Strand, n.d.; City of Oslo, n.d.a). Oslo is administered using a parliamentary system of governance, and the City Government is accountable to the City Council. The City Council is the highest decision-making body, led by the Mayor of Oslo, and is divided into five standing committees. The mayor is also the leader, and one of nine members in the City Government. The City Government serves as the executive body and carries out the decisions that are made by the City Council (City of Oslo, n.d.b). Figure 5 shows how Oslo municipality is organized.
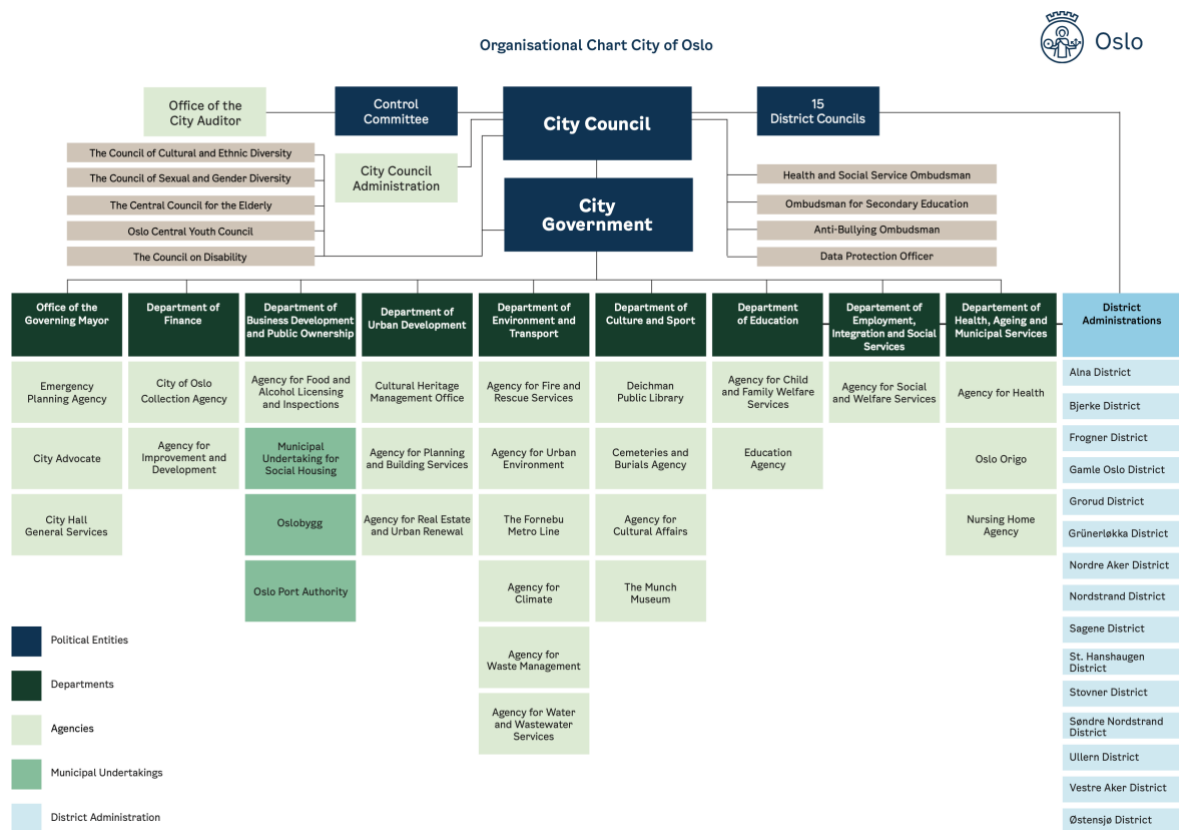

Figure 5: Organizational chart of the City of Oslo (City of Oslo, n.d.d)

As Figure 5 shows, the crisis management team in the City of Oslo is called the Emergency Planning Agency and is under the Office of the Governing Mayor. The Emergency Planning Agency is a strategic staff agency, with the purpose of ensuring that the municipality's emergency response duties are fulfilled satisfactorily in war and in peace. This includes advising, guiding and supervising the emergency response work of the agencies and districts (City of Oslo, n.d.c).

The City of Oslo has three levels of crisis management. Level 1 is the lowest level of crisis management and is at an enterprise level. This signifies that all businesses have the responsibility of establishing crisis management and handling crises in their own area of responsibility. At this level, the department leader oversees crisis management (City of Oslo, n.d.e, p. 3). The department leader is also responsible for evaluating the crisis to see if there is a need for support from a higher level of crisis management or the need for implementing level 2 fully. The City Government department can also make this decision, independently.

If crisis management is raised to a higher level, the businesses will still continue working with the crisis in their area of responsibility. If there is a need for support from level 2, the required communication and reporting lines between the levels are established to help with coordination and interaction. The City Government department thereby supports their underlying businesses at the second level (City of Oslo, n.d.e, p. 4).

Further, the City Government department has the responsibility to evaluate the situation and to request the establishment of level 3. Level 3 is also called central crisis management and is the highest level that can be reached during a crisis. The role of the central crisis management, which is led by the emergency manager, is to get an overall view of the situation, coordinate measures, prioritize resources, and planning of the municipality's efforts on a long-term basis. Central crisis management is established if a crisis affects the municipality as a whole or is of a sort that needs assistance with some of the activities of central crisis management. The establishment of central crisis management is decided by the emergency manager together with the City Government leader (City of Oslo, n.d.e, p. 4).

The overall emergency plan for Oslo municipality outlines how the municipality is organized for preparedness in the case of a crisis where level 3 is required. The emergency plan has been

prepared based on five Norwegian laws and regulations regarding preparedness, protection, preventive security, and municipalities. It describes how central crisis management should organize overall coordination of measures and resources, to support the activities of the municipality, to protect life and health, the environment, material values, and immaterial values (City of Oslo, n.d.e, p. 1).

4.2 City of Stockholm

The City of Stockholm is the largest municipality of the chosen cases with a population of nearly one million inhabitants and employs around 40 000 people (City of Stockholm, 2022a; City of Stockholm, 2022b). The City Council is the main decision maker in the municipality (City of Stockholm, n.d., p. 3). To ensure that all details of a matter are investigated when making decisions, the City Executive Board ensures that the members of the City Council have access to a compilation of all relevant information before they make decisions. The City Executive Board also ensures that the decisions are executed, monitored and evaluated (City of Stockholm, n.d., p. 4). An overview of how the City of Stockholm is organized is shown in Figure 6.
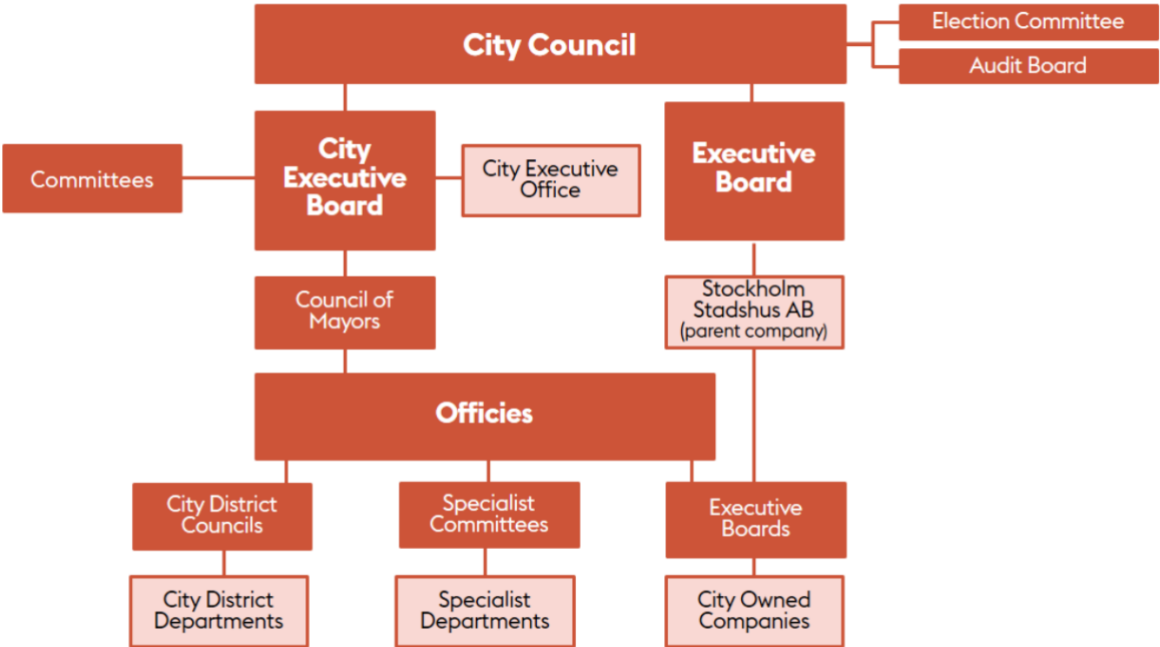

Figure 6: Organizational chart of the City of Stockholm (City of Stockholm, 2022b)

Sweden has no laws that radically change actors' mandates and responsibilities during a crisis in peacetime. Actors therefore keep their usual responsibilities during crises and must act in accordance with ordinary administrative structures. There are three main principles for

handling crises in Swedish crisis preparedness. The first one is the principle of responsibility, which means that whoever is accountable for an activity under normal circumstances has the same responsibility during a crisis. The City Council still makes decisions, and the City Executive Board will execute those decisions during a crisis. The second principle is the equality principle, which states that the location and structure of an organization should be the same during a crisis as they are during normal conditions, to the greatest extent possible (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 13). The last principle is the proximity principle, which suggests that a crisis should be managed as close to those impacted as possible. In addition to the principles, there is a geographical area responsibility at the local level that is governed by the law on measures by municipalities and regions. A municipality must make efforts to ensure that actors operating within its boundaries cooperate and achieve coordination while they make plans and preparations for crises during peacetime (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 14).

The City of Stockholm's ordinary organization handles the vast majority of crises, but administrative managers and company directors are responsible for identifying situations where coordination and central support are required. Central crisis management and/or the Crisis Management Board can be activated to support crisis management (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 17). Central crisis management is regulated by guidelines from the crisis management manual. The manual outlines how to organize the work to enable coordinated management (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 18). The Crisis Management Board has a broader function because it may take over operational areas in other municipal committees. The chairman of the Crisis Management Board may make decisions on his own if the matter is too urgent to wait on the rest of the board, but the board is not allowed to take over the municipal council's decision-making mandate. Decisions made by the board need to be presented at a municipal council meeting (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 19).

A plan for handling crises is made by Stockholm's security program. To create a clear structure, the City of Stockholm utilizes three levels to categorize the severity of crises. The lowest level is "disturbance", which requires the crisis to be handled in addition to regular organizational and working procedures, but it can be handled by the administration or business in question. If more than one of Stockholm municipality's administrations or companies are affected by the disturbance, central support may be necessary. The next level of a crisis is a "serious event", which requires coordination that is citywide and/or central assessments and resource prioritization. All or parts of the central crisis management may be

activated to carry out the coordinated tasks at the central level. This is determined by the acting city manager in collaboration with Stockholm's head of security. The highest level is an "extraordinary event". In this case, the chairman of the Crisis Management Committee may also activate the Crisis Management Board in addition to the central crisis management. The Crisis Management Board has the authority to take over the operations of other boards, redistribute resources, and improve management (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 17).

4.3 City of Helsinki

The City of Helsinki is slightly smaller than the City of Oslo and thereby the smallest case in this thesis, with a population of nearly 700 000 inhabitants (City of Helsinki, 2022b, p. 8). Helsinki municipality employs about 39 000 people, of which 85 are members of the City Council, which is Helsinki's highest decision-making body (City of Helsinki, 2021; City of Helsinki, 2022a). The City Council elects the Mayor, four Deputy Mayors, and 10 other members for the City Board. The City Board makes decisions regarding matters that are not under the authority of another City body or officer and directs the City Administration. The City Board also prepares the issues for the City Council, oversees the Council's decisions as they are executed, and monitors their legality while it does so. The City Council both makes the decisions and executes them (City of Helsinki, 2021; City of Helsinki, n.d.a). The entities and foundations under the administration of the City of Helsinki make up the Helsinki City Group (City of Helsinki, n.d.b). Figure 7 illustrates how Helsinki is organized.
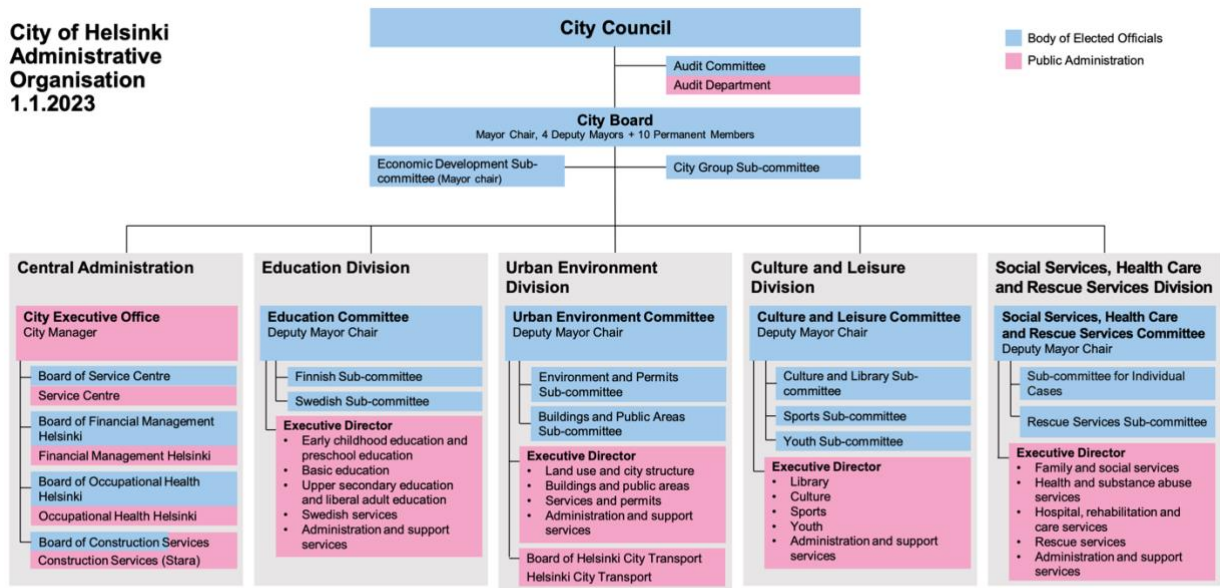
City of Helsinki Administrative Organisation 1.1.2023

City Council

- Audit Committee
- Audit Department

Legend:
- Body of Elected Officials
- Public Administration

City Board
Mayor Chair, 4 Deputy Mayors + 10 Permanent Members

- Economic Development Sub-committee (Mayor chair)
- City Group Sub-committee

Central Administration

City Executive Office
City Manager

- Board of Service Centre
- Service Centre
- Board of Financial Management Helsinki
- Financial Management Helsinki
- Board of Occupational Health Helsinki
- Occupational Health Helsinki
- Board of Construction Services
- Construction Services (Stara)

Education Division

Education Committee
Deputy Mayor Chair

- Finnish Sub-committee
- Swedish Sub-committee

Executive Director
- Early childhood education and preschool education
- Basic education
- Upper secondary education and liberal adult education
- Swedish services
- Administration and support services

Urban Environment Division

Urban Environment Committee
Deputy Mayor Chair

- Environment and Permits Sub-committee
- Buildings and Public Areas Sub-committee

Executive Director
- Land use and city structure
- Buildings and public areas
- Services and permits
- Administration and support services

Board of Helsinki City Transport
Helsinki City Transport

Culture and Leisure Division

Culture and Leisure Committee
Deputy Mayor Chair

- Culture and Library Sub-committee
- Sports Sub-committee
- Youth Sub-committee

Executive Director
- Library
- Culture
- Sports
- Youth
- Administration and support services

Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Division

Social Services, Health Care and Rescue Services Committee
Deputy Mayor Chair

- Sub-committee for Individual Cases
- Rescue Services Sub-committee

Executive Director
- Family and social services
- Health and substance abuse services
- Hospital, rehabilitation and care services
- Rescue services
- Administration and support services

Helsinki

Figure 7: Organizational chart of the City of Helsinki (City of Helsinki, 2023)

The City of Helsinki has preparedness instructions that outline how preparedness and continuity management are organized within the Helsinki City Group. Plans for contingencies or continuity ensure the city group's capacity to function under a variety of crises. The municipality must ensure its tasks by creating contingency plans and activities in advance of a crisis, according to Section 12 of the Emergency Preparedness Act. In extraordinary cases, the government can be authorized to exercise the additional powers that are granted under the Emergency Act. The preparedness instructions state that the city group needs to be able to serve the municipality's residents, the region's economy, and provide its services as uninterruptedly as possible. The instructions, however, have only been made for crises that are short-term and point-like (Confidentiality 1, p. 8).

There are four main principles of crisis management in the City of Helsinki. First, everyday decision-making processes will be kept as consistent as feasible. The same office holders, individuals, and organizations in charge of managing the city's operations will also be in charge of other decision-making and management. Second, the security and preparedness unit of the city office, other employees of the city office (at the city level), office holders, and other people assigned to the task of industries, organizational units, business establishments, and subsidiaries of the central administration make up the emergency organization of the city

group. The rest of the organization at the municipal office, including the security and preparedness team, assists the office manager in crisis management. Third, based on the crisis management model, the city group's organizations are required to notify the city office of any exceptional circumstances. Lastly, the sector and the business unit of the central administration must set up a crisis management team if the situation calls for it or the chancellor decides to do so (Confidentiality 1, p. 9).

5. Results

This chapter presents and compares the results of the interviews and the documents from the different municipalities, categorized by codes.

5.1 Organizational Structure

The code "organizational structure" was deducted to visualize how the municipalities organized themselves when the pandemic broke out. The organizational structure was described in detail in the reports, but the interviewees were also asked to explain it in their own words and to think of successes and challenges related to this.

When the first reports from China were released, the City of Stockholm started monitoring the coronavirus (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 24). All municipalities established some sort of crisis management team when the first cases were confirmed in their country. In the City of Oslo, each of the nine sectors had their own crisis management team (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 45). The municipality of Stockholm established a planning group, while the municipality of Helsinki established a situation group. They are both separate groups established at the beginning of the pandemic to deal with the crisis (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 24; KPMG, 2022, p. 8).

When the pandemic escalated, both Oslo- and Stockholm municipality established central crisis management, which is their highest level of crisis management (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 45; Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 28). The City of Helsinki on the other hand, established a "coordination group" to keep track of the progression of the pandemic and to ensure that the city was ready to take the necessary precautions and make the needed decisions to tackle the crisis (City of Helsinki, 2020; Confidential 2, p. 8). The municipality was organized in line with the preparedness instructions. The only big change they made was due to the municipal election where they elected a new major and three branch managers. This, however, had no impact on their crisis management (KPMG, 2022, p. 8-9).

The City of Stockholm made the most changes to its organizational structure compared to the initial preparedness instructions. Their central crisis management was initially based on a NATO structure, which is a military-oriented structure that suits organizations where

assignments are more defined and normally can be solved inside its own organization, and there is a hierarchical decision order. However, they found out that this pre-planned structure did not work well for this type of crisis because it was difficult to staff central crisis management as well as carry out ordinary operations at the same time (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 39). Therefore, a new, more ad-hoc-based structure was implemented. It was said that a staff structure that is very detailed will be seen as limited and useless if the next crisis is different, but an ad-hoc-based organization lacks clear roles and tasks (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 40-41). There were divided opinions on whether the City of Stockholm reacted adequately to the crisis. Some wished that central crisis management was activated earlier because the workload was too heavy for the security unit, but others believed they geared up the work relatively early (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 29). It was also pointed out that slowly scaling up the staff structure was seen as an advantage because this made the transition natural, uncomplicated, and quick (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 38).

The City of Stockholm further made several other changes to adapt to the crisis. To centralize purchasing of protective equipment, a new staff function (S4 Logistics and Resources) was created when central crisis management was established. They also established the Crisis Management Board to ban visitors from nursing homes, because the municipality cannot legally forbid visitors. This was done to prevent the residents from getting infected (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 30-31). A staffing center was also established to quickly recruit and train municipal employees if those were needed (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 32).

There are different opinions on whether the organization of central crisis management in the City of Oslo was established as planned (Deloitte, 2021, p. 38). It has been mentioned that the municipality should have employees from relevant enterprises attached to central crisis management in the pre-crisis stage (Deloitte, 2021, p. 44). Interviewee O1 also mentioned a learning point regarding this:

> "The thing about having an organization that is large enough and robust enough, so you can have smooth operations through a prolonged crisis, that is probably a very big learning point we take with us in this. This does not mean that you should have thirty men standing ready if you have a crisis, but it does mean that we must have a mechanism that allows us to perhaps press a button and say that now we need people implemented, and then we have them a day later."

Reports from both Helsinki and Oslo municipality mentioned that their crisis management teams consisted of relevant actors for dealing with this crisis (KPMG, 2022, p. 9; Deloitte, 2021, p. 11). They further stated that if needed, other experts were brought in to help with crisis management (Deloitte, 2021, p. 11; Confidential 2, p. 9). In addition to the centralized crisis management, each sector/enterprise also had its own crisis management team to support crisis management in the cities of Oslo and Helsinki (KPMG, 2022, p. 8; City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 45). The coordination group in the City of Helsinki was additionally supported by other groups such as a preparation group (KPMG, 2022, p. 8). The preparation group was responsible for managing information and the situational analysis, preparing for meetings, and managing subgroups (Confidential 1, p. 11). The composition and operation of this group were not seen as systematic and high-quality due to knowledge gaps regarding the operations of the group, conflicting expectations regarding roles and responsibilities, and that the members were assigned to the group without releasing them from their daily duties. These issues were solved by clarifying the responsibilities and appointing a full-time contact manager to be in charge of making coordinated decision preparation (Confidential 1, p. 9).

5.2 Crisis Management Plan

The code "crisis management plan" was deducted from previous literature as it is seen to help resolve a crisis (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 134). Throughout the interviews, it became clear that all the municipalities emphasize the importance of having a crisis management plan. As municipalities constantly face crises to varying degrees, they all have different kinds of contingency plans to prepare them for different kinds of crises such as terrorist attacks, wars, and natural disasters. The crisis management plans of all the municipalities are not adapted to a prolonged crisis such as COVID-19, but more against an acute, short-term event (Deloitte, 2021 29; Stålö & Rånlund, 2021; p. 25; Confidential 1, p. 8). This is pointed out by O1: "This type of crisis specifically is a bad crisis. It is long-term, and most municipalities have prepared contingency plans that are for short-term and more intense crises, more acute crises". Agreeably, S1 pointed out that "meeting a pandemic of this size of this magnitude demanded resources that were never in any plan or even imagined to be fair". The crisis management plan of Stockholm was adapted to the terrorist attack in Drottninggatan in 2017 which was a time-limited crisis with limited geographical scope.

The report by Stålö and Rånlund also states that even though the central crisis management team in the City of Stockholm was established, and they did have a plan in terms of how to deal with a crisis, the plan was not followed. They made several deliberate deviations from the crisis management manual, such as not activating a separate function for coordination (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 24-25). In the City of Oslo, the crisis plans for the municipality consist of action cards. They describe everyone's roles and tasks in the different sectors (Deloitte, 2021, p. 49). Even though there were clear tasks O1 emphasized:

> "In meetings with the crisis, we may see a deviation [from the action cards]. […] Everyone knew what they had to do, like "this is my task as part of crisis management", but the specific actions that each sector had to deliver emerged as the crisis progressed".

5.3 Training

The code "training" is deducted to see how the municipalities deal with crisis management exercises. Emergency exercises are seen as important for avoiding or dealing with a crisis (Moats et al., 2008, p. 397-401). All the participants pointed out that they do have training regarding their crisis management plans but to different degrees. Stockholm municipality has one mandatory training every year for the different organizational units in the municipality, where they practice crisis management. The participant explained they vary in scope, some exercises involve using consultants to set up a scenario, while at other times the different organizational units set up training sessions themselves. S1 discussed the preparedness level in terms of training:

> "I would love to say we were fully prepared, but I would claim that is impossible. We had a good ground plate in terms of we did have a planned crisis management, we had a planned crisis organization and how to work with the central crisis management. Having that said this is a type of scenario that had never been practiced".

Additionally, the municipality occasionally trains central crisis management. Sometimes they also have short-term mental preparedness training, to practice different scenarios. Helsinki municipality, on the other hand, does not have large crisis management training. They have training sessions regarding how to lead the organization during a crisis. H1 pointed out:

"The practice at the hands-on level is kind of limited because we do not really know what the effects are […] we have to kind of adjust our resources […] accordingly to function and for that we need leadership and management".

The City of Oslo has a maximum of two trainings a year, where they practice different types of scenarios. "But unfortunately, we never get to really go through debates, it is rare that we get such large, good exercises" (O1). Furthermore, the evaluation report by Deloitte states that 40% of the emergency staff responded that they agree with the claim of having the necessary training in the work the staff is supposed to do, while 28% somewhat agreed, and 14% slightly disagreed, while the rest responded, "do not know/not relevant". Additionally, 90% of the respondents stated that they agree, or somewhat agree with the statement that their support function had personnel with the right knowledge (Deloitte, 2021, p. 44). O1 points out that the crisis management team should have more practices than two times a year to be optimized. Additionally, O1 emphasized they should have training every month to be optimized, but he explains that it is difficult to arrange more practices because of their busy days.

5.4 Leadership

The code "leadership" is deducted to get insight into the municipalities' views and experiences of leadership during a crisis. During COVID-19 leaders had to use new tools in order to collaborate as they have had to work remotely a lot. This was demanding and required a change in how the leaders operate and is stated in the Evaluation of Oslo municipality's handling of COVID-19 (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 38). A management workload challenge in Stockholm municipality is highlighted in the report by Stålö and Rånlund. There was a need for relief for the leaders as well as substitutes when the leaders were sick. Consultant managers were hired to cover usual management roles to support the leaders (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 34). The municipalities had different experiences with leadership during COVID-19, but S1 and O1 share similar thoughts on how a leader should behave. S1 addressed the importance of trust between the leaders and the staff. He pointed out:

"I think some of the keys here are to delegate, trust your staff to do the work. Because a lot of leaders want full control and that can damage a crisis of this magnitude or a

crisis that is extremely quick. So, I think there needs to be trust that the organization can do their work and delegate mandate".

S1 justified it by focusing on the need for trust to get things done and the characteristics of being able to coordinate and collaborate with your staff. O1 also focused on the importance of being able to delegate tasks as a leader. The participant based this on how the city council leadership style was during COVID-19:

"He [the city council leader] had a very clear and distinct role towards national authorities, and he was good at leading central crisis management when he was involved, and that was quite often. But he was also good at delegating to the emergency manager and to the municipal director".

Even though O1 was happy with the way the leadership worked during the crisis, he wished for more effectively managed meetings. H1, on the other hand, emphasized: "In some situations, especially in a crisis, a more or less kind of dictatorship works in a way that you get decisions made", but he remarked that there is a possibility of people feeling unheard with such a leadership style.

5.5 Culture

The code "culture" is deducted based on Hutchins and Wang's five elements in a crisis system (Hutchins and Wang, 2008, as cited in Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). S1 addressed that a completely autonomous organization may have problems during a crisis. A comparison between Stockholm and Gothenburg was used as an example:

"[...] just comparing to Gothenburg, which is about half our size and almost the only municipality that we can compare to in Sweden. They had trouble doing central crisis management because they do not have the culture that we have. They have a culture of being completely autonomous, so they do not control their organizational units. Where we could make everyone fall in line."

S1 also mentioned how the City of Stockholm were able to create a good working environment, where they all were taking care of one another. In the interview with O1, he

focused on the importance of working for the community. He stated that even though the pandemic was taking a lot of resources in many ways, the world did not stand still and people in Oslo municipality kept on working and helping out one another. Contrastingly, in Helsinki municipality, the culture of discussion internally was emphasized, to come up with great solutions (Confidential 2, p. 16).

5.6 Communication

The code "communication" involves the information flow, both internally and externally, and is deducted to see how the municipalities have communicated during the pandemic. During the interviews, all participants agreed that there was a heavy flow of information during COVID-19. Both H1 and S1 pointed this out to cause confusion and a challenge to crisis management. In the report by Stålö and Rånlund on Stockholm municipality it was stated: "In some occasions, orders and counter orders were served almost simultaneously, leading to confusion. When the instructions from the city come at short notice and sometimes even without a clear direction, it creates challenges" (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 31). The lack of an information flow between the government's decision-making and preparedness organization and the municipalities in the capital region in the City of Helsinki caused a weakening in the development of a situational picture of COVID-19 in Helsinki municipality (City of Helsinki, 2022c; Confidential 1, p. 6 & 24).

During the pandemic, all the participants mentioned that the frequency of meetings increased heavily. Both H1 and O1 mentioned they had meetings two times a day at the beginning of the pandemic, but the frequency of meetings decreased gradually. S1 emphasized they had meetings three times a day, six times a week in the most intense period. In the Staff evaluation report of Stockholm municipality, it appeared that "the central crisis management meetings dealt with the major issues of resource planning, overall tasks and orientations" (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 41). Meetings were also arranged to make necessary decisions, which was also done in the crisis management meetings in the City of Oslo. O1 pointed out that they also dealt with the review of different needs as well as updating the development of the situation. Digital platforms were used in all the municipalities to spread information and have meetings (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 19; Confidential 1, p. 16; City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022a, p. 21-22). All the municipal directors in the City of Oslo disagreed when asked if digital meetings prevented them from carrying out their duties in a satisfactory way (Deloitte, 2021, p. 24).

S1 emphasized that the information gets outdated quickly, and the interpretation of the information was demanding due to the massive flow of information. This is in line with the information about Stockholm municipality that appears in the report by Stålö and Rånlund:

> "Many times, the information was not perceived as relevant based on the needs of the recipients. Certain information was also repeated from several different senders both within and outside the city and on several different occasions. It has also been difficult to determine what in the information is new, updated, or unchanged" (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 30).

Both reports from Helsinki- and Oslo municipality underlined that the external communication has been good overall, but there is an issue with communication with minority groups (Confidential 1, p. 17; Deloitte, 2021, p. 68). This is pointed out in the evaluation report on the municipality of Oslo:

> "There has been a clear development in the communication work during the pandemic. The municipality did not have sufficient plans and strategies for targeted and effective communication aimed at minorities and the immigrant population at the start of the pandemic" (Deloitte, 2021, p. 68).

In one of the evaluation reports of Helsinki- and Oslo municipality emphasized that the external communication has been through videos, posters, social media, and the municipality websites to reach out to the society (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 79; Confidential 1, p. 19). Translations of important messages into several different languages were prepared to address this issue. The rapid changes in advice and rules caused a challenge to update the information in time, and in particular to keep the translation in different languages updated (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 78; Confidential 1, p. 18).

5.7 Decision-Making

"Decision-making" is a code that is deducted to see how the municipalities make decisions during times of a crisis. Both H1 and S1 mentioned the challenges of making decisions during crises. H1 pointed out that there has been uncertainty regarding who was in charge of the ultimate decision. He said:

> "Sometimes it is better to make a decision than not to decide in a way and make the wrong decision [...] like either to continue vaccinations or deal with patients – both are okay, but not to decide will not do either. By postponing the decision, we will not get anything done. So, I think that is the biggest problem we have seen".

This is in line with information in the report by Stålö and Rånlund on the City of Stockholm. It is pointed out that it is better to do something and decide even though it might not work out well, rather than not do anything (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 58).

All the municipalities had a decision-making body at the city level. In the City of Oslo, the decisions were made by the city government, in accordance with their equality principle. Central crisis management was not decision-makers, but strengthened the decision-making for the city government's decisions (Deloitte, 2021, p. 29-30). In Helsinki municipality the coordination group made decisions. The size of the coordination group remained moderate during the pandemic. There was also an understanding that the decisions had to be made faster than in normal situations, which made the decision-making process efficient (Confidential 1, p. 13). In the City of Stockholm, the decision-making was decentralized in the different enterprises. Meaning that the decisions were made in the same way as in a normal situation (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 41).

5.8 Resources

The code "resources" was deducted to see how the different municipalities deal with resources during a crisis. During the interviews all the participants agreed that the pandemic caused a high demand of resources in several ways, including both staff and equipment needed to deal with the crisis. "Many activities, large amounts of information, and various communication channels triggered significant resource requirements" (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 6). All of the participants emphasized that the municipalities had to reallocate resources. O1 pointed out:

"We had to move around, and we needed more resources than we may have automatically mobilized. So, it is perhaps one of the great learning points for this type of incident, that both we as an emergency response agency are far too understaffed to handle a long-term crisis in terms of permanent employees who were involved in functions, and the same applied to the health sector".

Both S1 and H1 agreed to the statement of needing more staff in certain positions and therefore having to prioritize where to put certain resources. S1 remarked that they did not let the budget stop them from getting enough resources to tackle the crisis. He emphasized the importance of addressing sufficient budget during crisis management to make sure that there is enough staff in critical positions. In addition to reallocating staff, O1 pointed out that the City of Oslo hired people such as students and retirees to match the needs of the organization. The redeployment of personnel was easier in some parts of the pandemic than others. When the society was shut down it was easier to reallocate resources and operate responsibly compared to when everything was open (City of Oslo Emergency Response Agency, 2022b, p. 69). This is comparable with information in the evaluation report by Deloitte:

"At the same time, it has been shown that while in an acute crisis it may be appropriate to order personnel to other tasks. It is an important consideration to use the line in the usual way when recruiting personnel, to not drain the line organizations of personnel to maintain ordinary operation" (Deloitte, 2021, p. 62).

The central crisis management in the City of Stockholm also had challenges in carrying out regular operations as well as having enough staff for all staff functions (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 5). The establishment of staff function S4 Logistics and Resources at the end of March 2020 was crucial for the county's access to protective equipment (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 29 & 52). The evaluation report by Deloitte also highlights that the municipality had to "redeploy municipally employed personnel in order to optimize the work with crisis management" (Deloitte, 2021, p. 61). This was also done in the City of Helsinki (Confidential 1, p. 14). The redeployment of personnel has been voluntary for the individual employee in the City of Oslo, which led to a challenge because the different sectors signed up too few personnel with the right skills to be redeployed. However, when the City Council's office got involved, there was a progression with the staffing pool (Deloitte, 2021 p. 62).

5.9 Technology

The code "technology" was deducted based on the five elements in a crisis system by Hutchins and Wang (Hutchins and Wang, 2008, as cited in Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). Technological aspects were mentioned by all the different participants and further enhanced in the reports.

The use of technology evolved in the municipalities because of the pandemic (City of Stockholm, 2022c, p. 4; Confidential 1, p. 22). It is stated in the report by Stålö and Rånlund that digital transformation has contributed to more efficiency regarding meetings. However, the digital working methods were a challenge for leaders and the creation of a working environment (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 37). H1 also highlighted the positive change digital meetings have had: "[…] now that we are on Teams because of COVID-19 everything is much easier to organize. It is easier to get those regular meetings, and it has enhanced communication". Digital meetings in the City of Oslo also had positive outcomes. The information spread, and the distribution of tasks became more efficient. However, there were some limitations regarding quick clarifications and creativity (Deloitte, 2020, p. 24).

Regarding data collection, O1 explained that the City of Oslo developed new tools for data collection and data processing to see the public's mobility and give an overview of the development of the situation. The digital tools were seen as useful for Oslo in collecting and designing measures throughout the pandemic (Deloitte, 2021, p. 57). Contrastingly, the City of Helsinki was not able to collect data automatically as available information systems have not fully supported the production of data. Therefore, the data had to be collected manually throughout the pandemic (Confidential 1, p. 12 & 23).

5.10 Adaptation

The deducted code "adaptation" refers to how an organization can adapt to situations and sudden changes. The importance of adaptation is mentioned in all three interviews as well as several reports. A common denominator for all the municipalities was that they all adapted to the evolving situation. Both the City of Stockholm and the City of Oslo had crisis management plans based on crises that do not relate to COVID-19 (Deloitte, 2021, p. 47; Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 40). The contingency plan for the City of Oslo was made to tackle small and acute crises, not long-term crises such as COVID-19. Because of that they did not

strictly follow the plan but adjusted it when needed (Deloitte, 2021, p. 47). However, O1 emphasized that to make changes quickly there is a need for the right resources.

Similarly, the plan for Stockholm municipality was based on experiences during a previous crisis, not comparable to COVID-19. Due to that, they made adaptations to the staff structure, such as the development of S4 Logistics and Resources (see Chapter 5.1). This is in line with information from S1, he said: "We did have a preparation, but we were not scared to change what needed to be changed depending on the situation". Contrastingly, H1 mentioned that the City of Helsinki did not make a lot of changes to its strategy at first. However, if something required a change, they did it. As the pandemic evolved the City of Helsinki adapted to the changing surroundings and renewed different processes required to maintain the operations and service offerings (KPMG, 2022, p. 19).

5.11 Situational Awareness

The code "situational awareness" is inducted to get insight into how the different municipalities keep an overview of the situation in times of crisis. No specific question was asked about situational awareness, but all the participants mentioned it to different degrees.

Both O1 and S1 mentioned the challenge of getting everyone in the organization to get the same picture of the situation because the organizations are big in size. O1 underlined this by explaining that at the beginning of COVID-19, the different sectors in the municipality were not affected in the same way, causing differences in how they evaluated the situation. A responsibility of central crisis management is to maintain situational awareness across the different sectors (Deloitte, 2021, p. 53). Additionally, both S1 and the evaluation report on Helsinki addressed the difficulty in creating a situational picture in real time. S1 stated:

> "[…] the amount of effort it takes just to make these situational awareness pictures is immense. Because at any given point; if you wait two minutes longer it is going to be outdated, because there is so much information coming all the time".

This is in line with information in one of the internal documents about the City of Helsinki. The report mentioned the challenge for the municipality in creating a situational picture in real time because of limited resources that decreased the capability to conduct analysis

(Confidential 1, p. 12). Throughout the pandemic, there were weekly situational reports describing the development of the situation. However, it has been discussed whether the reports have actually been beneficial in creating a situational picture across different sectors (Deloitte, 2021, p. 54). The City of Stockholm also took measures to create a situational picture throughout the pandemic. They created "orientations" to give a view of the evolving situation and guidance on how to tackle it. However, the situational picture lacked information about how COVID-19 would affect operations in the municipality and the measures needed (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 37). S1 also mentioned that to get a view of how the different sectors in the municipality are doing, the central crisis management made the different sectors create weekly PowerPoint presentations. The presentations were about how the sector was doing regarding sickness, staff, etc., for the central crisis management to know where to intervene.

5.12 Documentation

"Documentation" is a code inducted to see the importance of documentation in a crisis. During the interviews, there was no specific question regarding documentation. However, the different evaluation reports mention the need for more documentation. Additionally, H1 mentioned the lack of documentation in meetings making it difficult to follow up. He emphasized:

> "I wonder if it should have been better documented to follow up. The meetings were documented in some manner, but I think one of the things that did not work was that there was not and there still is not a clear view of what should be done".

Information that appears in the evaluation report of the City of Oslo states that there has been too little documentation from staff meetings which caused conflicts and uncertainty about what information has been communicated at what time (Deloitte, 2021, p. 43). Stålö and Rånlund pointed out that the City of Stockholm had the same struggle with documentation at the beginning of the pandemic. The lack of documentation in central crisis management caused uncertainty about what degree the municipality was prepared for a more extensive impact on the operations (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 28). Furthermore, there was a lack of reference frames for cross-border crises and there was uncertainty about what the event log should contain. This led to the information being documented in several different documents

which did not overlap in information, causing missing dates of incidents and a lack of detailed descriptions (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 45).

Additionally, no one in Stockholm municipality's central crisis management kept a personal log during COVID-19, which made it difficult to trace and explain decisions made based on the knowledge at the time the decision was made (Rådestad et al., 2020, p. 56). Moreover, the evaluation report of Helsinki municipality described the need for more documentation about the structure of the crisis organization including main tasks and responsibility of the different institutions, as well as the information flow (KPMG, 2022, p. 26).

5.13 Clear Roles and Tasks

"Clear roles and tasks" is an inductive code created to see how the municipalities roles and tasks have been conveyed during COVID-19. The evaluation report by Deloitte on the City of Oslo mentions that several central crisis management members indicate a greater need for clearer and distinct roles in relation to decisions being made. However, 86% of the respondents totally agree with the statement of knowing exactly what their tasks in crisis management are, while 14% somewhat agree with the statement (Deloitte, 2021, p. 25 & 30). Similarly, information in the report by Stålö and Rånlund, it is stated that coordination internally has not always been spotless, especially regarding questions about roles and tasks. A reason for this is due to a lack of information (Stålö & Rånlund, 2021, p. 26-27). The City of Helsinki also had struggles regarding roles and tasks. H1 pointed out that the legislation they have is very clear in the description of tasks, but crisis management sometimes had contradictory information to the legislation. This caused uncertainty about who is actually responsible for certain things.

5.14 Learn

The code "learn" is deducted to see how the different municipalities are able to learn from previous events and their willingness to change behavior. The pandemic has changed the way municipalities view crisis management in several ways. All participants mentioned they were not prepared enough. The importance of being prepared for different types of crises is emphasized during the different interviews. However, O1 highlighted that preparedness is crisis dependent and that what worked well under the pandemic might not be necessary for a prospective crisis. This is in line with information by S1, he pointed out that there is not a specific plan for every single outcome and there is an importance of flexibility in a crisis

management plan. H1 also stated the importance of having generalized plans for prospective crises. O1 additionally underlined the importance of developing computer systems and data processing systems for prospective crises to amongst other things, analyze the data.

6. Discussion

This chapter aims to link the findings of the study to existing literature and discuss the gaps in the literature.

6.1 Pre-Crisis

Looking at previous research, the importance of being prepared has been mentioned several times. The observations showed that having a crisis management plan is essential when preparing for a crisis. Reflecting on what preparedness involves, the observations are in line with previous research which found that bigger organizations are usually more prepared for crises (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019, p. 1845-1846). However, the present study finds that the municipalities were not as prepared for COVID-19 as they might have wanted. A potential explanation for these findings is that it is not possible to anticipate all types of crises (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019, p. 1845; Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41) and that they did not have enough training regarding their crisis management plans. The observations are consistent with previous literature about training and how important it is to implement exercises to deal with crises (Moats et al., 2008, p. 397-401). It is interesting to note that having an adaptable plan for crisis management is not enough for dealing with a crisis. It is crucial to have scenario-based training to optimize crisis management. Interrelated to the crisis management plan is leadership. Connecting the previous literature to the current findings, the previous literature states that leaders and decision-makers benefit from training, and findings indicate that leaders need to work together to create time for trainings. This implies that there is a positive correlation between good leadership and trainings.

It is also interesting to note that the organizational structure plays a vital role in the stage of pre-crisis. The findings indicate that the organizational structure lays the basis for how the municipalities act during a crisis and how they adapt to the evolving situations. This extends the literature that emphasizes that an organizational structure can limit failure in an organization if it enables quick execution of established solutions (Bigley & Roberts, 2001, as cited in Bundy et al., 2017, p. 1667).

6.2 During the Crisis

The study provides evidence that a type of leader who is good at delegating and has trust in his/her people is the most effective in a crisis. This is consistent with previous literature that has shown trust as an important factor during a crisis (Harwati, 2013, p. 178-179). Because all leaders had to make use of new tools and work remotely, it showed that they were adaptable, which characterizes a transformational leader (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 554). Previous research found this type to be most suited for crises (Harwati, 2013, p. 178-179). On the other hand, as part of a municipality, one is bound by specific rules and regulations, which relate to a transactional leader (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 554). The authoritarian leadership style in the City of Helsinki does not fit into any of the three suited leadership styles that were found in previous literature (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 554; Rjoub et al., 2017, p. 111). The results showed that even though this type of leadership style got things done, people might feel unheard, indicating an authoritarian leadership style is not suited for crisis management.

The desired leadership style has also been found to depend on the organizational culture of the organization and the nature of the crisis (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 555). Previous literature states that organizational culture is one of the most important factors during a crisis (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). The findings indicate that the City of Helsinki has a more elitist culture, due to its more authoritarian leadership (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 555). Nevertheless, the size of the decision-making group and its culture of discussion may contradict this. Their organizational structure also points towards a more hierarchical culture. All municipalities had a similar rigid and tiered organizational structure. However, the City of Stockholm changed its structure to a more ad-hoc-based structure, which led them toward a clan/adhocracy culture (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 555). Additionally, because the City of Stockholm was the only one that talked about having a culture of taking care of each other, one can suggest that a clan/adhocracy culture is better in a prolonged crisis. On the other hand, people in the City of Oslo did help each other out, which also reduces the risk of burning out. As the pandemic is an external crisis, the type of organizational culture is stated to be insignificant in determining the optimal leadership style. This is because a transformational leader is seen as most efficient for external crises regardless of the culture (Bowers et al., 2017, p. 555).

The collected data also found that communication was hard to manage, due to the quickly outdated and heavy flow of information. Previous literature agrees that efficient communication is challenging during a crisis (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 10-18). In relation to the

technological findings, better digital tools could be useful to manage quickly outdated information. Developing digital tools was demonstrated to be more efficient than doing things manually. In addition, the results of this study present digital meetings as effective to spread information to many people. However, there could be a risk that people spend unnecessary time on these meetings where only a small fraction of the information is relevant to themselves. The findings imply that the information should be sorted before communicating it. Further, the challenge regarding external communication to minorities indicates that more resources are needed for this in future crises. Because the information constantly changes and needs to be updated and translated on digital communication platforms, a person or group could be established to be responsible for updating this. Appointing a person or group to a specific task has been proven to work out well, as seen in the City of Stockholm regarding the centralization of purchasing equipment.

Decision-making is found to be challenging during a crisis, and no evidence showed either centralized or decentralized decision-making to be better during a crisis. However, it is noteworthy that it should be clearer who is responsible for making decisions. This can be connected to the crisis management plan in the pre-crisis phase, which thus should contain a clear picture of roles and tasks. In addition, training the decision-makers to understand that a crisis demands a more efficient process of making choices can improve overall decision-making. The importance of training is supported by previous findings which state that training encourages creative decisions and makes them more efficient (Şuşnea, 2013, as cited in Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 19; Moats et al., 2008, p. 397-401). Arranging training sessions can also improve the thought process of the ones in charge of making decisions. However, more research is needed to establish how decision-making can be optimized during a crisis.

The findings also reveal that a lot of resources are needed to handle a crisis. It was particularly found that there was a lack of people in several places. This indicates that there needs to be more people appointed to crisis management from the start. However, it is not easy to predict what resources are needed since crises differ in nature (Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41). This is a possible explanation for why they did not have enough resources mobilized initially and why they had to reallocate resources. Moreover, the results show that when people are redeployed, there is a need for people to take over their initial tasks and positions. This is because there is still a need for carrying out the regular operations. Managers should therefore make sure that they have enough resources to take over those ordinary tasks.

Recent literature states that technology is one of five inherent elements in a crisis system (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 535). The findings in this study agree that technology is important for crisis management. The observations indicate being innovative and improving and developing new digital tools can make crisis management easier. Those that developed and used digital tools when collecting data, found the process more effective and easier than those that collected data manually. This also correlates with the fact that IT was found to be positively correlated to crisis management in a previous study (Hazaa et al., 2021, p. 8). It is noteworthy that the implementation of digital meetings has been proven to positively influence the efficiency of crisis management. Digital meetings have improved the decision-making process, providing a quicker way of sharing information which is crucial during a crisis.

The data has additionally proven the importance of adapting to a crisis. This corresponds with previous research which shows that having an adaptive approach to crisis management is crucial because it is impossible to anticipate all types of crises (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019, p. 1845; Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41). Adaptability has been connected to several of the other factors in this study such as organizational structure and crisis management plan. Having the needed resources to be able to adapt the organizational structure and crisis management plan is necessary for making changes quickly during the specific event.

Moreover, getting everyone in an organization to get the same situational picture was found to be difficult in a big organization. It was a major challenge to inform people internally about the status of the crisis because of the major flow of information. Because communication is central to creating a common situational picture, the challenges are similar for the two factors. Limited technological resources pose a need for developing digital tools to analyze the specific situation and make the process of creating a situational picture more efficient. However, further research is needed to understand how a common situational picture can be established so that everyone in the municipality has the same view of the situation.

The data also states a need for more documentation during a crisis, regarding decision-making, and roles and tasks. It was indicated that the crisis management teams should keep a log to be able to trace and explain decisions. Many decisions are made during a crisis, which can be difficult to keep track of. Documentation regarding who has the responsibility also makes it easier to know whom to ask when there are any questions regarding specific

decisions. The findings further highlight the need for a framework for documenting, due to confusion regarding what to document and how to document it. This also requires a clear picture of who is responsible for documenting what. Furthermore, the documentation needs to be available for everyone to document, to make sure nothing is missing or overlapping in regard to previous documentation. What the findings did not cover was how important documentation is for learning for the next crisis, resulting in a need for more research.

Lastly, the findings show a lack of clear roles and tasks, which already have been highlighted in connection with several other factors in this study. This is in line with previous research which states that having a crisis management team with clear roles and tasks is important during a crisis (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 133-134). The lack of clear roles and tasks is connected to a lack of communication and documentation. Sometimes it was not documented who was responsible for what, while other times it was clearly documented, but contradictory information was communicated. This indicates that the roles should be clear prior to a crisis. If changes are needed, they should be communicated clearly, so that there does not arise any misunderstanding regarding roles and tasks.

6.3 Post-Crisis

Looking at previous research, several models emphasize the importance of learning from previous experiences and the possibility to unlearn behavioral patterns which is emphasized in the last stage of Mitroff's five-stage model (Mitroff, 1994, p. 105-107). The observations support the literature as the interview objects highlighted that their view on crisis management has changed because of COVID-19. However, it is noteworthy that the findings also indicate that previous experiences might not be valuable for prospective crises as they vary in nature, but they can contribute to new views. As the code involves a change of behavioral patterns it connects to several of the other codes looked at. The findings highlight the need for more documentation to reduce uncertainty, as well as the importance of adaptivity in a crisis management model to better tackle a crisis.

Based on the observations the crisis management teams can benefit from reviewing all of the different factors looked at in this thesis in order to evaluate what worked well and what did not in order to learn for prospective crises.

7. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study and answers the research question. The chapter will also present the implications of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

7.1 Conclusion of the Study

This study sought to identify critical success factors for municipalities' handling of a crisis. Using qualitative methods, three Nordic municipalities' crisis management throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was analyzed and compared. The applicable municipalities are Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki. The three-stage model by Coombs was used to identify success factors in the different stages of a crisis. The goal was to answer the research question "What are important success factors in managing a crisis for municipalities?".

In the thesis, there are identified several important factors for municipalities in dealing with a crisis. However, determining success factors requires certainty. Even though some factors can be seen as important for crisis management, they may not have enough validity to be considered critical success factors based on the data collected and previous literature. The critical success factors determined are based on the interviews and documents in relation to the previous literature. Several of the factors are interrelated meaning that some of the success factors can be enhanced or dependent on other elements looked at.

The most important success factor during the stage of pre-crisis has been shown to relate to the crisis management plan. Because crises are different, and one cannot predict how the next crisis will be (Steen & Morsut, 2020, p. 41), the crisis management plan should be adaptable. This indicates that the plan should be generalizable with possibilities to adjust to the specific crisis. Even though the plan is adaptable, there should be clear roles and tasks for the different team members. This implies that when a crisis occurs, everyone knows what their role is and what tasks they are supposed to execute to make crisis management more efficient and reduce possible uncertainties.

During the pandemic, leadership and culture are seen as two important aspects of crisis management. However, with the data collected, it is not possible to determine what type of leadership or culture is seen as crucial for municipalities in handling crises. Communication, involving the use of technology and enough resources has been crucial for dealing with crises.

Effective communication is essential for crisis management and is a key success factor. The use of technology when spreading information can facilitate timely information and reduce possible confusion. For communication to be effective, there is a need for adaptability regarding the resources needed. It is essential to have enough people in charge of spreading the information, both internally and externally. Additionally, having enough resources for documentation is also crucial. Clear documentation is seen as a success factor for municipalities in handling a crisis. It reduces confusion and is an important part of learning how to deal with prospective crises in terms of knowing what worked well and what did not. Clear roles are also related to this element, as it is important to know who oversees documentation to make sure that it is done. For the last stage of a crisis, there was not determined any critical success factors based on the data collected. However, learning is seen as important to better prepare for prospective crises.

For all the determined success factors, adaptability is a common element that is needed. Based on this study, adaptability is the most important success factor for municipalities in handling crises. It is critical that they are able to be adaptable as crises vary and demand different actions and resources.

7.2 Limitations

Limitations of the study are connected to the scope, the time frame, funding, and interviews. First, the study focuses on big municipalities of similar size in Nordic countries. Thus, another context might give a different view of the factors studied. There is a possibility that the findings might not be generalizable to municipalities with other characteristics and demographics. Secondly, the focus on just one crisis, COVID-19, highlights another shortcoming of the study as crises vary in nature. Third, because the study's time frame was constrained and there was no funding for the research it was necessary to conduct the interviews online. This is also due to the fact that the interview subjects were spread out across different nations. Due to the time constraints, it was also difficult to find interview subjects from the different municipalities. Having the interviews online limits the depth of interaction and can cause response bias, as nuances in the response may be overlooked.

7.3 Future Research

The limitations of the study provide possibilities for further research on the topic. The study can be used to compare with other sized municipalities/organizations to get a broader understanding on critical success factors for crisis management. One might also consider repeating the study with a bigger sample size as the thesis only focuses on three municipalities. Furthermore, focusing on several crises might increase the generalizability of the findings and lead to a more comprehensive understanding. Lastly, conducting the interviews in person can enhance the data quality and allow for non-verbal communication, making sure that nuances in the response are not overlooked.

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Appendices

A.1 Interview Guide

Interview guide		
The purpose of the project is to investigate crisis management strategies in three different municipalities to see if there are any clear success factors for crisis management.		
Dimension	**Question**	**Follow-up questions**
General	1. How is your crisis management team organized?	1.1 Are there several departments included? 1.2 How is the decision-making process? 1.3 How is the composition?
Pre-crisis	2. What type of crisis management strategy did you have before COVID-19, if you had one? 3. How was the communication between departments/Sectors before COVID-19?	2.1 How well prepared were you for a global crisis like COVID-19? 3.1 How has it changed during COVID-19?
During the crisis	4. How did your team react to COVID-19 when first erupted? 5. What challenges did you face during COVID-19? 6. What worked well in the way you handled COVID-19?	4.1 To what degree did you implement your crisis management strategy? 4.2 Did you change your strategy during COVID-19? 5.1 How did you solve those challenges? 6.1 What would you say you succeeded with?

Post-crisis	7. What is the most important thing you have learned from COVID-19 in terms of how to handle crises? 8. Has the organization of the department changed during or after COVID-19? 9. What strategy would you use in future crises?	9.1 Same strategy for all crises? 9.2 How has your crisis management strategy changed because of COVID-19?
	10. Is there anything you would like to add?	

A.2 Discussion Paper – Helene Wolff Helgesen

Master's Programme in Business Administration

Competency goal: RESPONSIBLE

Introduction

This paper is written as a part of my master's thesis at the School of Business and Law, at the University of Agder. The discussion paper focuses on exploring the term responsibility in the context of my master's thesis, one of the key concepts in the University of Agder's mission statement and strategy. It also aims to examine potential ethical challenges that might arise throughout the research process and propose solutions to address them.

Presentation of Master Thesis

My master's thesis is written in the field of strategy. The thesis examines how three different municipalities in the Nordic countries, namely Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, have responded to the COVID-19 crisis. These municipalities were chosen due to their population size, power distance, and political systems, which allow for meaningful comparisons (Hofstede Insights, 2023). The main objective of the thesis is to identify the critical success factors for municipalities in dealing with prospective crises.

The research question that the thesis aims to answer is: "What are important success factors in managing a crisis for municipalities?". A combination of data collection methods has been utilized to address the research question. Firstly, relevant documentation from the municipalities' way of dealing with COVID-19, such as evaluation reports has been analyzed. Additionally, expert interviews were conducted to get further insights into the strategies and fill the gaps in the available literature. After collecting the relevant data, a content- and thematic analysis was used to code the data to get a better overview of the findings and not miss out on any data (Bowen, 2009, p. 32).

The findings of the study highlight adaptability as the most crucial success factor in municipal crisis management, it is crucial in all phases of crisis management. During the pre-crisis phase having a well-defined crisis management plan with clear roles and tasks is a critical factor for success. The plan should be generalizable, with possibilities to adapt to specific crises.

Further, effective communication is a key success factor during the crisis itself. Other elements such as technology, resources, and adaptability can enhance the effectiveness of communication during crises. Leadership and culture are also seen as two important aspects of crisis management, however, with the data collected there is not enough validity to determine what kind of leadership or culture is more efficient.

Responsibility

The thesis that I am writing relates to responsibility in several ways, both the topic and the general process of writing a research paper. Responsible is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as "to have control and authority over something or someone and the duty of taking care of it, him, or her" (Cambridge, n.d.). During the master's program in Economics, the term responsible is central to several subjects studied. Responsibility is important to consider when making decisions, especially regarding the environment. It is also important when analyzing data, to make sure that no assumptions are made without a valid reason. Lastly, it is important to consider responsible actions when executing the organization's strategy. These are all important aspects that relate to my master's thesis. Municipalities have a responsibility to be environmentally aware in decision-making and act responsibly outwardly. For me as a researcher, it is important to deal correctly with the data gathered.

The topic of the thesis is crisis management, and for the ones doing crisis management, it is important to act responsibly, both for the internal organization and also for the external environment. Depending on the crisis occurring there are different degrees of responsibility relating to if the crisis is preventable, accident, or a victim crisis (Coombs, 2007, p. 8). Even though COVID-19 was not preventable for the municipalities studied, they have responsibility regarding the way they deal with a crisis. They are all big compounded organizations that affect society in several ways due to how they operate. Different government policies affect the measures taken (Hale et al., 2020, p. 4). For Stockholm, Helsinki, and Oslo municipality the measures were similar, but the timing differed.

In crisis management, the municipalities are responsible for mitigating the consequences of the specific crisis. The responsible of the municipalities is to do what is needed and consider the broader picture of the crisis at hand. The internal environment in the municipalities is also important to consider. The data collected emphasized the importance of taking care of the employees during a crisis. The workload increases, and the stress level tends to rise.

Therefore, the municipalities' leaders have a responsibility to take care of their employees and ensure they do not burn out.

There is a great responsibility for us researchers in dealing with data. It is crucial to handle this information with care, ensuring that it is interpreted accurately and objectively, and not drawing unwarranted conclusions. We have a responsibility to present the information as it is without introducing personal biases or assumptions. To ensure that the information is presented as it is, which is the data integrity. Data integrity involves being truthful, promoting accuracy, and avoiding deception, dishonesty, and misrepresentation of data (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 231). Coding the data helps to make sure that no important data is missed out on. It also assures that there is transparency and reproducibility, which means that it increases the trustworthiness of the findings (Saunders et al., 2012, P. 44).

Ethics

Crisis management poses several ethical challenges such as ethical reasoning and decision making. An ethical challenge during a crisis has been characterized by President Lyndon Johnson: "Our problem is not to do what is right. Our problem is to know what is right" (Dunn, 2008, p.3 as cited in Svedin, 2011, p. 3). That relates to the choice of rationality and the possible challenge of making decisions when managing a crisis. Making decisions based on rationales and decision criteria can assist in making decisions (Svedin, 2011, p. 5). There are several different rationales that can be chosen when deciding, such as social rationality, technical, legal, economic, and substantive. They might compete or conflict with one another which can cause a challenge, but several of the rationales can also be combined in order to meet several needs simultaneously (Svedin, 2011, p. 4).

From the interviewees, it was highlighted that there sometimes was a struggle with decision-making because of a lack of information regarding roles. They argued that it was better to decide than to not do anything, something that can pose challenges to the rationality of the decision-making. Not having clear roles regarding who is in charge of making decisions can pose ethical challenges regarding the choices made. It can lead to someone deciding on something without knowing the possible consequences. A solution to this ethical challenge is to have a crisis management plan with clear roles so that the ones in charge of decision-making know the rationality they need to have when deciding.

Furthermore, making decisions during times of crisis truly matters because of the consequences they pose to those that are directly subject to the choice made, but also to the society at large (Svedin, 2011, p. 5-6). The goal is to act to minimize the harm to the stakeholders (Coombs, 2015, p. 5-6). Therefore, it is important to address the decision criteria. such as effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness (Svedin, 2011, p. 5-5). Even though decisions are often needed to be made quickly in times of crisis a way of addressing decision-making challenges is to establish a clear decision criterion to reduce possible tragical consequences (Svedin, 2011, p. 7-8). Having a clear crisis management plan will also help to address this possible consequence.

We as researchers must behave ethically when using the data, we have obtained. Our responsibility is to listen to what the subjects of the interview say and respect their preferences regarding the use of the information they provide us. It is crucial to not make use of data or insights that they do not wish to be included. Additionally, as researchers, we have a responsibility to not preserve the privacy of information and confidentiality of the participants in the research. The participant letter provided to the interviewees at the onset of the research outlines measures to ensure the protection of sensitive information. By strictly following the guidelines, we can uphold integrity and ensure the ethical treatment of the participants' data.

For our study, we are comparing three municipalities with similar size, power distance, and political power (Hofstede Insights, 2023). The goal is to establish success factors for municipalities in general for dealing with crises. The research question is: "What are important success factors in managing a crisis for municipalities?". The research question poses possible ethical challenges regarding biases. Biasness is the lack of internal validity and can occur in the collection of data and selection of the population (Delgado-Rodríguez & Llorca, 2004, p. 635). Selection bias is a potential bias that results from the fact that the selected municipalities do not accurately reflect the target population (Delgado-Rodríguez & Llorca, 2004, p. 1). The possibility of selection bias can be managed by using a broader sample to increase the generalizability of the results. However, for this thesis, the time limit for the study was an obstacle to having more cases. There can also occur a challenge when determining the success factors. There has to be enough evidence in the data collected for the factors to be considered a success factor. To make sure that they actually are a success factor one has to use an objective mindset and be sure that there is enough evidence to support the

decisions made. The conclusions drawn in the study have to be derived from the actual data and not from emotional or subjective values (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016, p. 21).

The respondents of the study unanimously highlighted the high amount of resources required to address the demands of the COVID-19 crisis, including both staff and equipment. Consequently, the municipalities had to reallocate their resources in order to effectively manage the crisis. Resource reallocation demanded a prioritization of where these resources should be directed. Municipalities face the challenging task of determining what aspects require the resources the most as they actively had to address the crisis while ensuring that normal operations continued. Determining resource allocation is an ethical dilemma because it is critical to solve the crisis and do what is demanded. At the same time, it is essential to recognize the importance of providing services and consider the different stakeholders and how they might be affected. Having a crisis management plan with clear information about the prioritization of resources can address this challenge.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper summarizes some of the ethical challenges that might arise in relation to the research question, the topic, and the findings, as well as connecting the thesis to the concept of responsibility. Responsibility and ethics are related in several ways, as there lies a great responsibility in handling ethically when writing a thesis and doing crisis management there are a lot of challenges that rely on responsible considerations. As a researcher, I have a responsibility to act ethically toward the interview objects during the research. I also have a responsibility to present the information correctly. For municipalities there are several crucial responsibilities, they have the responsibility to act ethically towards their stakeholders and also against their employees and make decisions that are well thought through.

In times of crisis, there are several ethical considerations, such as the allocation of resources and decision-making. To deal with ethical challenges that might arise in crisis management there is a common ground, which is having a crisis management plan. The plan should consist of a concrete plan for the decision-making process, roles, and tasks for the crisis management team so that everyone knows what to do at all times. It should also have clear information about resources, such as how to reallocate personnel and how equipment should be divided. For researchers to tackle possible ethical challenges they should follow the participant letter and be aware of possible biases that may occur in order to avoid biases from occurring.

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A.3 Discussion Paper – Sarah Julia Gastinger

Master's Programme in Business Administration

Competency Goal: Responsible

Introduction

This discussion paper is written as part of my master thesis, to contribute to the improvement of the master's programme in Business Administration at the University of Agder. This paper addresses the term Responsible, which is one of three key concepts in the mission statement and strategy of UiA School of Business and Law. First in this paper, a summary of my master thesis will be presented. Further, it will be discussed how my thesis relates to responsibility. Potential challenges will be identified related to the thesis and responsibility, and it will be discussed how these challenges can be managed. Finally, this discussion paper will be summarized.

Presentation of the Thesis

Throughout the master's programme, there were many interesting topics that one could write about in a master thesis. However, in the subject Strategy, me and my co-writer Helene Wolff Helgesen both found the topic "adverse events" specifically interesting. Especially with the recent pandemic, we found this topic to be highly relevant. The frequency of crises is increasing and has considerable impact on its surroundings (Leta & Chang, 2021, p.1). Even though no one knows when the next pandemic will arise, it is certain that there will be another one in the future (World Health Organization, 2022). It is difficult to prepare for all types of crises, so it is essential that organizations learn from previous crises to create better systems that enable effective crisis management (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, p. 181-186). We therefore found it interesting to look at how organizations handled the COVID-19 pandemic, and to identify how they can prepare for future crises.

Previous studies showed that there has been done a lot of research on crisis management. The importance of leadership has been enhanced in a crisis management context (Bhaduri, 2019, p. 541; Kessel & Masella, 2016, p. 134). However, we found that there was a gap in the literature, as there were mainly studies on smaller organizations and a lack of studies regarding bigger organizations such as municipalities. We therefore decided to do a

comparative case study on three comparable municipalities and analyze their crisis management strategies during COVID-19. The Nordic municipalities Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki were chosen because they have similar populations, relatively low power distance, open political systems, and are individualistic and indulgent (Johansson et al., 2023, p. 13; Hofstede Insights, 2023).

Through a qualitative case study, our goal was to answer the research question "What are important success factors in managing a crisis for municipalities?". Data was gathered through collecting documents and conducting in-depth expert interviews. A total of 12 documents were collected and analyzed, and one interview was conducted for each of the municipalities. A set of 14 codes were deducted and inducted to sort the data. The 14 codes found were organizational structure, crisis management plan, trainings, leadership, culture, communication, decision making, resources, technology, adaptation, situational awareness, documentation, clear roles and tasks, and learn. These were further sorted into three themes, based on a crisis management model that puts a crisis into three stages: pre-crisis, during the crisis and post-crisis.

The results revealed that it was difficult to implement the pre-planned crisis management plan during COVID-19 because the crisis was different from previous ones. The crisis management plan therefore had to be adapted to the situation. All municipalities had some form of crisis management training before the crisis occurred, but there was a wish for a greater number of trainings. The organizational structure also required some change to fit this type of crisis, because of its extensiveness and more resources were needed to handle it. Digital tools were needed to make processes more effective such as communication and data collection. There was also a lack of clear roles and tasks, which caused confusion for decision-makers because they did not know who was in charge of the ultimate decision. The need for enough resources was also important in a global long-term crisis, to be able to keep the organization going.

Our study found several factors that are important when municipalities deal with crises. However, it was difficult to determine some of them as success factors, as they did not have enough validity to be considered as that. Regardless, 4 success factors were identified. In a pre-crisis stage, having an adaptable crisis management plan is essential, because crises differ and are unpredictable. Further, effective communication and documenting enough throughout

the crisis were found to be success factors. Effective communication is essential when the crisis constantly changes, and new information needs to be communicated continuously. Documenting everything is important to learn for future crises. Both are also important to avoid confusion. Lastly, it was concluded that adaptability was the most important success factors for municipalities in handling crises. Since crises vary and are unpredictable, it is critical that the organization can adapt to different situations throughout a crisis.

How the Master Thesis Relates to the Concept Responsible

Responsible is defined as "to have control and authority over something or someone and the duty of taking care of it, him, or her" (Cambridge, n.d.). Taking everything I have learned throughout the master's programme in Business Administration into consideration, the term responsible relates to the responsibility everyone in an organization has. In context with the definition, this means having control and authority, and taking care of the organization. This includes responsibility regarding factors both internally and externally. By this I mean responsibility regarding maintaining the organization's operations, ensuring profitability and taking care of the staff, but also a responsibility regarding the external environment and the community. This interpretation has laid grounds for the further discussion.

Managing an organization during a crisis is a big responsibility. Throughout the pandemic, the municipalities not only had to be responsible in terms of their own organization, but in a sense also for the whole world by minimizing the spread of the coronavirus. It can be difficult to manage a big organization to please so many different parts, especially when the crisis constantly changes. Ethical challenges related to crisis management and responsibility will further be discussed.

In a pre-crisis stage, it was important with a crisis management plan, which visualized how the organization works during a crisis. This includes who has what responsibility (Coombs, 2015, p. 90). The organization has a responsibility for training the staff to make sure they are ready to tackle any crisis. Further the employees are responsible for knowing their roles and tasks during a crisis. If the plan and roles are not clear before a crisis occurs, there can arise confusion regarding what is supposed to be done. When a crisis occurs, it is inherent to act quickly and effectively (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019, p. 4). Confusion regarding people's roles and tasks can therefore delay an organizations reaction-time. This can potentially lead to things not getting done, or people doing the wrong things.

To avoid this, the organization needs to make sure the right training is established. Making sure that everyone not only knows their role but also understands what this role requires is also essential to not only be proactive in a crisis, but also make crisis management more effective.

Leaders are important for managing crises (Kessel & Masella, 2016, p.134). Making sure that the organization can function throughout a prolonged crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic can be difficult. In a long-term crisis there is a potential ethical issue related to the workload. The thesis revealed that many of the staff that dealt with crisis management still had to take care of their ordinary tasks. When managers give their staff members an excessive amount of work, there is a greater chance that they may become overwhelmed and burning out, especially in a prolonged crisis. Regardless, a lot of work is required during a crisis. To make sure that the needed work gets done but also that the people are not overloaded with too much work, they organization should ensure that there are enough people to take care of the tasks. The ordinary workload of the crisis management staff can be assigned to other employees, or more people can be hired.

Decision-making can also be tied to responsibility, especially in the context of health crises. Making the "right" decisions can be challenging during a crisis, because you need to take into account potential consequences and risks for all stakeholders. An ethical challenge could arise when you cannot please all the stakeholders, and need to make a decision of who you should prioritize. Our thesis found that even though it is hard to make those decisions, it is better to make a decision than not to decide anything, because otherwise you will not help anyone. Collecting information has also been essential for making decisions. Because the decisions need to be made quickly in a crisis, getting the right information fast is crucial (KPMG, 2022, p. 13). Our thesis has proven that data collection and communication can be challenging during a crisis. The right tools were found to be inherent for collecting data and communicating the collected information effectively. Clear communication is essential because important information can get lost in the communication, which could cause the decision-makers to make the wrong decisions. Digital tools make these processes more effective, which suggests that organizations continuously need to develop and improve their digital tools.

During the pandemic, all individuals had a responsibility to follow the measures that the government established to limit the spread of the virus (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). This also applied for organizations and for example having people work from home and not arranging gatherings. An ethical challenge the municipalities could face during a health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic is in a case where the organization wants to do one thing that is positive for the organization, but this action faces negative consequences for the community. An example could be if the organization wants to arrange a social gathering to improve the work environment after the employees have worked from home for a while. This could potentially lead to a spread of the virus, either if people that show up do not know that they carry the decease or if they show up knowing they are sick. The organization has a responsibility to reduce the spread of the virus. This could in this case be solved or minimized through providing resources such as required testing at the arrival of the event and providing masks for all participants. Another option is making the event digital or in smaller groups. Also, if the organization wants to travel to a business partner in another country to solve an issue, there is a risk of bringing a decease back to your country. Again, digital solutions can be utilized, or the visit can be postponed if it is not crucial to have it at that point of time.

Even though organizations have a responsibility of making the best decisions for all stakeholders, everyone can make mistakes. When the decisions and operations are less successful, it is important to learn from it. Learning from a crisis is important for better handling and preventing future crises (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2008, 180-181). Ethical challenges can arise when an organization faces a decision where they know from experience what not to do, but they still do it. Organizations are responsible for not making the same mistakes again. After a crisis, the organization should therefore evaluate their crisis management, to see what was more and less successful. This way, they can make better choices in future situations. To be able to evaluate crisis management, it is also essential that everything that has been done is well documented. It can be hard to remember everything that has happened, especially details. However, there may be ethical challenges related to documenting mistakes. Admitting that a decision was a failure can be difficult. The organization should therefore promote a culture where making mistakes is acceptable and where failures are shared, so that everyone in the organization can learn from it.

Summary and Conclusion

Crisis management is highly connected to the term responsible. Dealing with a crisis comes with a big responsibility in many ways. The concept of responsibility in an organization includes having control, authority, and caring for its operations, staff, and external environment. Clear crisis management plans and well-defined roles are important to avoid confusion and ensure efficiency. Leaders have a big responsibility of delegating tasks and hiring new people to make sure that their employees do not burn out. Digital tools are also useful for data collection and communication. This further helps decision-makers make the best decisions for all stakeholders. Both the organization and the individuals are responsible for following the measures that are needed to bring the crisis to an end. They need to work proactive to make sure the crisis does not evolve because of their operations. Additionally, they should evaluate their mistakes, to learn from them. It is overall important that an organization not only thinks about their own business, but also all other stakeholders that can be affected by their actions.

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