



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

MSc. International Strategic Management

BUSN09 - Degree Project

Date: May 2022

## **- One Size Does Not Fit All -**

*A study on crisis management within a Swedish university during the COVID-19  
pandemic*

### **Authors**

Danielsson, Emilia

Lyoubi, Aya

### **Supervisor**

Mattsson, Pauline

# Abstract

- Title:** One Size Does Not Fit All: A study on crisis management within a Swedish university during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Seminar Date:** June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022
- Course:** BUSN09: Degree Project in International Strategic Management
- Authors:** Aya Lyoubi and Emilia Danielsson
- Supervisor:** Pauline Mattsson
- Keywords:** Crisis Management, Higher Education, Crisis Planning, COVID-19, Sweden
- Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the current field of research on crisis management within higher education. More precisely, this thesis aims to increase the understanding of the scope and dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing and planning for a potential crisis.
- Research Question:** How did a Swedish university implement crisis management to navigate COVID-19 pandemic?
- Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical chapter will begin by providing an overview on previous research within the field of crisis management within higher education. Later a theoretical framework will be developed and presented based on general crisis management literature. This framework is later used as the foundation for the interview guide and data analysis process.
- Methodology:** A qualitative study with abductive reasoning has been conducted to fulfill the purpose of this thesis. A multiple case study was selected with a focus on two faculties within a Swedish university. The empirical data used in this study was collected through 13 semi-structured interviews with both academic and managers at each faculty.
- Conclusion:** The aspects to be considered when planning for a crisis, in the context of higher education, have not been sufficiently discussed in previous research. Hence, this study aimed to emphasize not only the importance of individualized and unique crisis management for each faculty, but also the importance of generic planning which can facilitate the handling of unexpected crisis events, highlighting the main aspects to be prioritized when establishing a plan. Additionally, by exploring the Swedish context, the results further increased the understanding of the interconnectedness between the university and the state in which it operates.

# Acknowledgement

To start with, we would like to thank everyone who has been a part and contributed to the possibility of conducting this thesis. In this respect, a special appreciation will be directed to managers and academics from both faculties. We acknowledge your willingness and openness to allocate time to share valuable insight which further enhanced the quality and created the foundation of this thesis. We wish to also express our gratitude to our supervisor, Pauline Mattsson, who has been a great support during the whole process. Without you, this thesis would probably still be considered a draft.

Additionally, we would like to thank our fellow students who have contributed to great feedback and an amazing time here in Lund. Without you, this program would not be the same. On a similar note, we would like to thank our friends and family who have supported us during the whole process.

Lund, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022



Aya Lyoubi



Emilia Danielsson

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background & Relevance of Topic	1
1.2 Purpose & Research Question	3
1.3 Thesis Outline	4
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Crisis within Universities	6
2.2 Crisis Management within Universities	7
2.2.1 Duty of Care	10
2.2.2 Main Implications of the Structure, Hierarchies, & Governance of Universities	11
2.3 Theoretical Framework: Three Stages of Crisis Management	13
2.3.1 Pre-Crisis Stage	14
2.3.1.1 Assessing Possible Crisis	16
2.3.1.2 Crisis Management Team	16
2.3.1.3 Crisis Management Plan	17
2.3.2 Crisis Stage	18
2.3.2.1 Communication	19
2.3.3 Post-Crisis Stage	20
2.3.3.1 Lessons Learned	20
2.4 Summary & Theoretical Framework	21
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 General Research Design & Approach	23
3.2 Process of Data Collection	24

3.2.1 Identification of Cases	24
3.2.2 Sampling Strategy for Interviews	25
3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews	27
3.3 Data Analysis	28
3.4 Validity & Reliability	29
3.5 Ethical Consideration	30
<b>4. Empirical Result</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1 Pre-Crisis Stage	31
4.1.1 LUSEM: A Reactive Approach towards Crisis Management	31
4.1.2 The Faculty of Medicine: A Reactive Approach with an Attempted Proactive Planning	33
4.2 Crisis Stage	34
4.2.1 LUSEM	34
4.2.1.1 Impacts & Main Challenges of the COVID-19 Crisis	34
4.2.1.2 Decisions Taken & Actions Made	37
4.2.2 The Faculty of Medicine	42
4.2.2.1 Impacts & Main Challenges of the COVID-19 Crisis	42
4.2.2.2 Decisions Taken & Actions Made	45
4.3 Post-Crisis Stage	49
4.3.1 LUSEM	49
4.3.1.1 Lessons Learned: Generic Planning	50
4.3.2 The Faculty of Medicine	52
4.3.2.1 Lesson Learned: A Combination of Generic & Step-by-Step Planning	53
4.4 Summary & Edited Theoretical Framework	55
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>57</b>
5.1 Pre-Crisis Stage	57

5.2 Crisis Stage	59
5.3 Post-Crisis Stage	62
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1 Theoretical Implications	66
6.2 Practical Implications	67
6.3 Limitations & Further Research	68
<b>References</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Management</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Academics</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Coding Template</b>	<b>83</b>

# List of Tables

<b>Table 1:</b> Interviews - Faculty of Medicine at Lund University	26
<b>Table 2:</b> Interviews - School of Economics and Management (LUSEM)	26

# List of Figures

<b>Figure 1:</b> Thesis Outline	4
<b>Figure 2:</b> Theoretical Framework	22
<b>Figure 3:</b> Edited Theoretical Framework	55
<b>Figure 4:</b> Planning for Possible Crisis Events	56



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background & Relevance of Topic

“With the outbreak of the coronavirus which causes the illness COVID-19, the Government is following developments carefully and is in continuous contact with the responsible authorities. ... It is recommended that Sweden’s ... higher education institutions provide distance learning until further notice.” ~ March 2020 (Government Offices of Sweden, 2020)

As the quote implies, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be marked by the unprecedented health, economic and social pandemic: COVID-19. It is undeniable that this pandemic has shaken many industries and fields, and higher education was not an exception as this unexpected event dramatically interrupted the well-functioning and daily routines of core activities within higher education. In fact, as Strielkowski and Wang (2020) argues, higher education and academia were one of the most impacted by the pandemic. Universities were not exempt from the drastic change that the field of education has witnessed. The impact of COVID-19 required stricter measures, starting with distancing, reducing social contacts, to even closing institutions and universities (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). Accordingly, remote teaching and learning was implemented, which led universities to envisage new strategies to make the shift as seamless as possible (Morales, Moreno, & Rojas, 2021). Adapting, however, was not an easy task especially for universities where campus education is seen as a competitive advantage. In fact, the conventional educational system in universities had to operate in *unfamiliar terrain*, as academics arguably lacked technological capabilities and skills needed to adapt to the digital transformation brought by the pandemic (Morales, Moreno, & Rojas, 2021).

Consequently, the unanticipated shifts that universities needed to make required fast strategic decision-making and the elaboration of an *emergency* reaction to adapt (Marinoni, Van’t Land, & Jensen, 2020). This paves the way for the introduction of the concept of crisis management which in short refers to the decisions and actions decision makers take to prepare for, manage, recover, and learn from crises (Coombs, 2019). To achieve this, different stages of crisis management models have been introduced by authors (e.g. Coombs, 2007; Birch, 1994; Zdziarski, Rollo &

Dunkel, 2021) where focus is mostly put on preparing, managing and learning from a crisis event (Coombs, 2019). A good management of a crisis event can remarkably minimize the harms of a crisis, as much as an inept handling of it could amplify its impacts (Wilson, 1992). The importance of the implementation of crisis management has been emphasized by the heightened frequency of crisis events within universities, which has contributed to a slow increase in research within the field of crisis management within higher education (Wang & Hutchins, 2010). COVID-19 pandemic, considered the largest crisis to hit the world in years (Boin, Lodge & Luesink, 2020), has fueled this increase in research even more. Importantly, this led to the resurface of the concept of crisis management, highlighting its importance and relevance within the context of universities. The COVID-19 crisis also gave research the amplitude to discuss preparedness for and anticipation of a crisis as a strategic, systematic way (see Karimian, et al, 2022; Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021; Rollo & Zdziarski, 2021).

With that being said, previous research within the field of crisis management within higher education has argued that universities should prepare for possible crisis events by conducting a proactive crisis management and planning (Schneid & Collins, 2001; Mitroff & Gus, 2001, cited in Booker, 2014). However, it has also argued that universities tend to have an inadequate awareness of the concept of crisis management and its implications when it comes to possible crisis events (Zhen & Bian, 2015; Booker, 2014; Claus & Yost, 2010). Consequently, previous research shows that universities usually adopt a reactive approach towards crisis management (Spillan, 2000) which implies that they are generally not only underprepared but also under equipped when it comes to managing a crisis (Helsloot & Jong, 2006; Booker, 2014; Foster & Smith, 2015; Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006). Indeed, the lack of preparedness has been seen as one of the main struggles universities faced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Parpala & Niinistö-Sivuranta, 2022; Moerschell & Novak, 2019). However, the pandemic also gave rise to the arguments of the importance of flexibility and agility when handling a crisis (e.g. Karimian., et al 2022; Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021), an argument that could be seen as contradictory to previous literature that mostly argues for preparing and planning when handling a crisis (e.g. Schneid & Collins, 2001; Mitroff & Gus, 2001, cited in Booker, 2014). This leaves ambiguity around the scope and dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing and planning for a crisis event; an aspect of crisis management that has not been sufficiently covered in previous literature.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic increased the attention towards crisis management within higher education as a research field, there is still the need for more studies especially when it comes to the degree of planning and preparation needed to navigate a crisis. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to understand the relevance and practicality of preparation and planning for a crisis. By investigating how a Swedish university handled the COVID-19 crisis, this thesis will also shed light on the role and implications of the government on the approaches followed by the university to handle the pandemic. As a leading regulator, the government communicated several health protocols strictly directed to higher education institutions, which inevitably impacted many aspects such as governance and management, academic integrity, and course designs (Hou, Hill, Ince, Lin & Chen, 2021). Therefore, institutions need to adapt their crisis management strategy based on measures and regulations developed at the state level (Clark, 2003, cited in Karimian, et al, 2022). Indeed, the Swedish context adds on an interesting aspect as it can be argued that Sweden's strategy to handle the COVID-19 pandemic was unique (Bylund & Packard, 2021). While other countries emphasized strong rules and regulations to cope with the pandemic, Sweden went the opposite direction by relying “... upon individual responsibility and information sharing.” (Bylund & Packard, 2021, p. 1301). Hence, with these differences in mind, the strategy taken by a Swedish university could add interesting perspectives to the existing sparse research within the field.

## **1.2 Purpose & Research Question**

The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the current field of research of crisis management within higher education by exploring how a Swedish university handled the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this thesis aims to increase understanding of the scope and dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing and planning for a potential crisis. To meet this contribution, the crisis management process followed by two faculties will be investigated. This will be done following the three stages model, namely the pre-crisis, crisis, and post crisis stage, as it provides a macro view process to manage and navigate a crisis (Coombs, 2019). Hence, this thesis will reflect on the pre-crisis stage, analyze the strategies and plans put forward to immediately face COVID-19, and eventually identify key lessons learned to effectively manage potential crises. Additionally, contextualizing crisis management within the Swedish model paves the way for this thesis to shed light on the implications of decisions made and measures developed

at the state level on crisis management within universities. To fulfill its purpose, this thesis will examine the following research question:

*How did a Swedish university implement crisis management to navigate COVID-19 pandemic?*

To answer this research question, a qualitative research approach has been chosen. A multiple-case study will be conducted, focusing on two faculties within Lund University, namely the School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) and the Faculty of Medicine. The choice of these faculties is mainly motivated by the differences in the educational offerings and research conducted as certain activities within the Faculty of Medicine, considering the unique characteristics, could not be transferred online as opposed to LUSEM. These differences became more prominent in times of the pandemic, when priorities shift and types of decisions made differ from one faculty to another, implying the need for a degree of autonomy and thus personalized crisis management strategies and plan, which we aim to highlight in this thesis.

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into the following six chapters, *see Figure 1*:



*Figure 1: Thesis Outline*

Chapter one paved the way for Chapter two, literature review, which aims to extend the knowledge provided in the introduction. Hence, this chapter will cover previous research within the field of crisis management within higher education and provide definitions of common concepts. A theoretical framework will also be presented which will lay the foundation of the empirical analysis. Chapter three will outline the methodology used by providing information and argumentation on the general research design and approach, data collection processes, data analysis, issues of validity and reliability, and ethical consideration. Chapter four will provide an empirical analysis of the data collected. The structure of the main headings in this chapter follows Coombs (2007) three-stage model, namely the pre-crisis, crisis, and post crisis stage. In Chapter

five, the findings in Chapter four will be discussed in relation to previous literature provided in Chapter two. Finally, Chapter six will cover the practical and theoretical implications of the findings, discussing limitations and suggestions for further research.

## 2. Literature Review

In this chapter previous literature within the field of crisis management higher education will be covered. The aim is to create a common understanding of the topic by providing the reader with an overview of previous research within the field and provide definitions of common concepts. Later in this chapter, a theoretical framework based mostly on general crisis management research will be developed and presented. As the field of crisis management within higher education is underresearched, general existing literature is often used as a stepping stone to further explore the field. Hence, the theoretical framework presented in this thesis will be used as a foundation for the empirical analysis.

### 2.1 Crisis within Universities

The definition of a crisis within higher education has been changing over time (Tight, 1994). Compared to more general definitions of organizational crisis, the term crisis has a different connotation within the field of education, especially in university settings. Part of this is linked to the unique characteristics of universities (Zhen & Bian, 2015). In fact, with the high population density, the rapid speed of information diffusion, as well as the increasing level of socialization, the impact of a crisis could be amplified, requiring a more careful attention and strategic handling (Zhen & Bian, 2015).

In addition, as universities' organizational structures are large and complex, changes of processes become affected and often call for incremental changes (Tight, 1994). As Zhen and Bian (2015, p. 273) explain it, crises in universities are differently defined than the common social and economic crises, referring to "... any unexpected event that happens suddenly on the campus of university or members from the university are involved which seriously threatens the normal order in the university...". Such an event might lead to physical or emotional damage for members involved, as well as damage to facilities and buildings (Zhen & Bian, 2015). However, for the purpose of this research, the definition of crisis will be contextualized within universities and higher education, following Zdziarski (2006 cited in Rollo & Zdziarski, 2021 p. 27) definition:

A crisis is an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution.

A brief journey down the memory lane to evoke examples of some major crises, both natural and manmade disasters, that universities had to strategically overcome. Among many crises, Rollo and Zdziarski (2021) recall the hurricane Katrina and the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, two dangerous events different in nature but that impacted the functioning of universities in fairly the same way. In fact, beyond the physical damage to the local campuses, these crises exposed the unseen ripple effects of a crisis. Even after repairing the buildings, institutions had to recover lost faculty and student records as well as tuition revenues, and recruit and retain faculty and staff (Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006). In addition to these two crisis events, Mitroff, Diamond and Alpaslan (2006) have completed a summary of the most common types that universities face.

1) Serious outbreaks of illness 2) Major food tampering 3) Employee sabotage 4) Fires, explosions, and chemical spills 5) Environmental disasters 6) Significant drops in revenues 7) Natural disasters 8) Loss of confidential/ sensitive information or records 9) Major lawsuits 10) Terrorist attacks 11) Damage to institutional reputation 12) Ethical breaches by administrators, faculty. and trustees 13) Major crimes 14) Athletic scandals'. (Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006, p. 62).

Hence, when it comes to the types of risks, higher education usually faces similar ones that other types of organizations face (Helsloot & Jong, 2006). However, if the risk evolves into a crisis, the way it affects higher education compared to other organizations may differ (Helsloot & Jong, 2006). Needless to say, it is more or less impossible to be aware of all types of crises considering the endless numbers of possible events that an organization can face (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

## **2.2 Crisis Management within Universities**

Although the concept of crisis management is relatively a new research field in the context of higher education, the increasing number of crises have attracted research attention and fueled the urgency to explore it more and dive into its dimensions (Wang & Hutchins, 2010). Previous research has identified the main challenges that universities face. However, it is important to

highlight the root of these challenges, which is linked to the perception of the concept of crisis that most universities have; perceiving a crisis as a “... rare occurrences or as anomalies and therefore generally [university] is not equipped or prepared to respond ...” (Booker, 2014, p.17). Consequently, this misconception could negatively impact its decision-making and responses to crises (Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan 2006). This is manifested through the weak awareness of crisis and crisis management within universities (Zhen & Bian, 2015, Booker, 2014). One explanation for the weak awareness is the focus that universities have on their teaching and management duties, leading to a neglect of the elements linked to crisis management (Zhen & Bian, 2015). Additionally, Pearson and Clair (1998) put forward the fact that several universities and education institutions avoid discussing the experience of crisis events they face, as that could put them in a position of scrutiny for the overall handling of the event. Another major challenge that universities are exposed to when faced with a crisis is related to the uniqueness of its structure, known for its complexity including elements such as the hierarchy, resources and technology of the different departments and faculties (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010), which will be further discussed in a later section.

As mentioned in the beginning, the interest and need for more reach in the field of crisis management within higher education has increased (Wang & Hutchins, 2010). The urgency to highlight the importance of crisis management within higher education has been further fueled by the unprecedented health, economic and social pandemic that the world faced in the beginning of 2020 (Boin, Lodge & Luesink, 2020). The impact of COVID-19 required stricter measures, starting with distancing, reducing social contacts, to even closing institutions and universities (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). In order to adjust, every institution and educational system followed the measures and regulations within the context of its state, based on the availability of resources and infrastructure (Clark, 2003, cited in Karimian, et al, 2022). This was also the case for institutions and universities in Sweden where the decisions taken on the national level highly affected universities’ handling of the pandemic. Previous research even pointed out the expectation from the governments to offer guidance when it came to the changes that revolved around online education, as a major shift caused by the pandemic (Hou, et al, 2021). Indeed, the role of the government becomes stronger as the pandemic gets more serious and impactful (Hou, et al, 2021).



Even though there has been an increased understanding of the need to conduct crisis planning (Foster & Smith, 2015), it could be argued that crises are usually seen as unusual events within higher education (Booker, 2014). Hence, most educational institutions and universities are generally not well prepared and equipped to manage crises (Helsloot & Jong, 2006; Booker, 2014; Foster & Smith, 2015; Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006). This is mainly due to the time frame during which plans for a crisis are usually designed, being mostly after a crisis event has occurred, and has impacted universities' activities, premises, and campuses (Booker, 2014). Hence, crises are usually neglected until they have affected the activities within the university (Brooker, 2014). Although many institutions attempted to design plans to manage the spread of the flu, very few were able to anticipate the magnitude and the speed of spread of the COVID-19 (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). This hints to a reactive approach followed by universities to deal with a crisis, which, agreeably, hinders the quality of their preparedness for the event (Booker, 2014).

Indeed, lack of preparedness, the sudden shift to a new approach of teaching and learning as well as the uniqueness of COVID-19 as a crisis has been identified by previous research as one of the main challenges faced by universities (Parpala & Niinistö-Sivuranta, 2022; Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Following this, Zdziarski, Rollo and Dunkel (2021) argue that administrators within universities should conduct crisis preparation, since organizations all too often only respond to a crisis with minimal to no preparation. Planning for a pandemic, as explained by Dunkel, Zdziarski and Rollo (2021), is particularly characterized by being a dynamic process. This is mainly due to the constant change of information, protocols, and guidelines to follow as well as research, which are to be continuously updated by employees at the state, federal and local level (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta (2022) further suggest a more focus on training and continuous development of skills needed to manage and communicate during a crisis. Communication is indeed essential during the crisis and should be carried collectively, in some cases even in informal ways (Parpala & Niinistö-Sivuranta, 2022).

With this new emphasis on crisis management in the field of higher education, universities are reconsidering their perspective of crises and reevaluating their plans for crisis management accordingly (Zdziarski, Rollo & Dunkel, 2021). Interestingly, the concept of crisis management is further relevant when discussing duty of care and its different dimensions. Indeed, planning for potential crises aligns with the responsibilities universities have to protect its stakeholders

(Schneid & Collins, 2001), an aspect that will be discussed in the following section. Needless to say, the uniqueness of COVID-19 pandemic has led to the resurface of the concept of crisis management, shedding light on its relevance within the context of universities in today's world.

### **2.2.1 Duty of Care**

The concept of duty of care, also called duty of protection, due diligence, or framework for accountability (Guttry & Capone, 2017), refers to the obligation that an organization has to assume the responsibility to protect its personnel from harm and any risks when exercising their work all over the world (Claus & Giordano, 2013). In this context, it refers to faculty, employees within the administration and staff, but also students enrolled in the different academic levels and programs (Claus, 2015). Accordingly, Pearson and Beckham (2005) highlight the obligation to provide safety in the learning and working environment within and outside campus. Rollo and Zdziarsky (2021) argue that caring for the individual and improving the human experience is the foundation of what higher education strives to achieve.

As discussed earlier, the misconception of the concept of crisis within universities hinders the handling and responses to crises, thus impacting its obligations of duty of care. This false perception was recognized by Claus and Yost (2010) as a major obstacle for universities, which is implied by the quote below.

... the lack of awareness, know-how, a flawed view that they are not at risk, a focus on cost containment, and a lack of coordination among the university's decision makers to implement an integrated risk management. (Claus & Yost, 2010, p. 32)

The quote highlights the major challenges and barriers that universities might face when aiming to effectively design and plan for potential crises. Nevertheless, the concepts of duty of care includes elements of crisis management planning and the development of disaster management related frameworks, in order to prepare for any harmful event, man-made or natural disasters, that could put employees at risk (Schneid & Collins, 2001). In line with this, Mitroff and Gus (2001, cited in Booker, 2014) argues that duty of care implies the addition of the element of proactive crisis management and planning which is believed to decrease the damages of any potential crisis. The obligation of a university to protect its students and employees implies that administrators of

departments and campuses should put forward a crisis plan to effectively protect the community related to the university as a whole (Zdziarski, Rollo & Dunkel, 2021).

## **2.2.2 Main Implications of the Structure, Hierarchies, & Governance of Universities**

A major challenge that universities face when exposed to a crisis is linked to the uniqueness of its structure, hierarchy, and governance as it hampers their immediate response and the management of the crisis (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010; Smits & Ally, 2003). Indeed, higher education institutions are characterized by their distinctive structure, services, human activity, and surrounding environment (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010).

Often spread over considerable geographic areas (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010), most universities are composed of several buildings (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simmons, 2010) which contributes to the complexity of its structure (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). This geographical spread often causes separation between faculties, making communication fragmented, as opposed to other organizational environments (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simmons, 2010). In fact, in times of crisis, effective communication with its various constituencies constitutes the pillar of leadership within higher education (Schoenfeld, 2021). Controlling the information flow and aligning the messages throughout the wide range of communication channels to be shared with the deeply connected stakeholders can therefore be difficult (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Communication protocols become complicated for individuals involved to assimilate and follow, which could impact the effectiveness of the information shared especially considering the frequency of unofficial information released at the earlier stages of a crisis (Whitt, 2014). This only amplifies the challenge to create a harmonious and single communication throughout the different stages of the crisis (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Having several communication paths rather than a single dedicated path might lead to disorganization and chaos, resulting in universities losing control over the messages shared (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Moreover, such inconsistencies in communication could delay the speed of the immediate responses needed to face the issues that surface during the crisis stage, unabling universities to gain momentum and solve problems within the given time frame (Moerschell & Novak, 2019).

Although the complexity of universities organizational structure implies a degree of autonomy, which is encouraged on regular daily operations, it might need to be taken into consideration when discussing the major themes of crisis management including communication protocols and leaderships (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). As engagement in crisis training is voluntary in many universities, the relevance of a formal authority remains questionable during a crisis phase (Drysdale, Modzeleski & Simons, 2010). Even further, universities, alongside the academic programs, are involved in other services for which it operates complex enterprises including among other things research and development facilities (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010). This variety of services contribute to the complexity and challenges linked to control and decision-making processes, particularly when decisions are to be the foundation for designing a crisis management plan (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Therefore, the differences in size, resources and technology of the various departments and faculties makes it impossible to design a one size fits all crisis management plan within the entire institution (Smits & Ally, 2003). Hence, each university should be individualized and consider the characteristics of each of its campuses (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010), with crisis management plans adapted to the resources available to meet the specific requirements of the internal processes and structures (Somers, 2009).

When it comes to governance within universities, it is often dispersed, unique and differs from other organizations and institutions (Muffet-Willett, 2010). As Birnbaum (2003, p.5) defines it, governance refers to "... structures and processes that academic institutions invent to achieve an effective balance between the claims of two different, but equally valid, systems for organizational control and influence". The first system is based on legal authority, which is mainly linked to the roles of administration and trustees and the second system is based on professional authority, linking it to the role of faculty (Birnbaum, 2003). This implies a degree of shared governance which could generally be described as imprecise by nature, which can cause frustration in situations where efficiency and rationality are the goal (Birnbaum, 2003). Importantly, it is especially criticized for limiting institutions' ability to become agile and have quick decision-making (Birnbaum, 2003). Additionally, the idea of shared governance can leave a level of ambiguity when it comes to the roles and clarity around who is in charge within the administration, faculty, and trustees (Toma, 2007). Similarly, Kezar (2005) argues that decision-making mechanisms used by institutions might not be suitable to deal with increasingly complex challenges.

Another critical point to be noted is the nature of universities' hierarchical structure, with a degree of involvement of faculty in the governance process, which is different from other organizations (Muffet-Willett, 2010). Indeed, such an environment could be characterized by slow decision-making, which could hamper the effectiveness of the immediate responses when a crisis emerges (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010). In fact, it is during and after a disruptive crisis event that these issues surface and dictate the way universities cope with the changes (Drysdale, Modzeleski, & Simmons, 2010). For this reason, any degree of preparedness for a crisis will require the establishment of obvious lines of authority, with clear roles for decision-making (Muffet-Willett, 2010). Having clearly defined roles is further important when it comes to the obligations and responsibilities universities have towards its stakeholders, especially in times of crises (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010). This is important as it is often challenging to draw the line between certain roles within the university as they are sometimes overlapping (Guttry & Capone, 2017). Nevertheless, some degree of decentralization of organizational structures as well as academic faculties is reflected in the layout of the various buildings, which tend to follow different methods for decision-making (Muffet-Willett, 2010). This explains the constant insistence on taking collaborative approach in both the internal and external environment in which a university operates when planning and establishing a crisis management strategy (Muffet-Willett, 2010).

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework: Three Stages of Crisis Management**

In this part of the literature review, we will present general literature on crisis management which will lay the foundation for the development of a theoretical framework. The framework will be used as the basis of the empirical analysis which will facilitate the understanding of how two faculties implemented crisis management to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

To start with, organizational crisis management is a systematic process that enables an organization to identify, even predict potential crises it may face, and take preventive actions and precautions to effectively manage the situation (Wilson, 1992). It involves, among other things, reducing risk and uncertainty and developing pre-made plans to minimize the effects of the crises (Fink, 2002). Researchers explain that organizational crisis management goes beyond the

knowledge base and existing technical skills as it requires a broad vision and way of thinking from diverse perspectives (Coombs, 2019; Seeger & Ulmer, 2001). Importantly, the conceptualization of complex problems in the context of different interconnected systems and subsystems across the individual and organizational levels is essential to not only navigate a current crisis but also to learn from it to prevent future ones (Mitroff & Pearson, 1993 cited in Simola, 2005).

Caywood and Stocker (1993, p. 410), explained crisis management as both “... the management of operations during the actual crisis ...” and the “... management of the corporation before ... and after the crisis ...”. Thus, this argument puts emphasis on different phases of crisis management which other researchers also have argued for (e.g. Birch, 1994; Coombs, 2007; Fink, 2002; Mitroff, 1988; Richardson, 1994; Zdziarski, Rollo & Dunkel, 2021) However, the number of stages differ between different authors. The one that will lay the foundation of the theoretical framework for this thesis is the three-stage model of crisis management (see Richardson, 1994; Birch, 1994; Coombs, 2007). Coombs (2007) calls these three stages (1) pre-crisis, (2) crisis response, and (3) post-crisis. The reason why this model was selected is because the phases in the three-stage model are referred to as macro stages which implies that each stage includes substages (Coombs, 2019). Hence, models with more stages are often included as subparts in the three-stage model. Therefore, each stage will have different subheading highlighting processes commonly recommended to implement during that stage to facilitate the crisis management as much as possible.

### **2.3.1 Pre-Crisis Stage**

The first stage is the pre-crisis stage which is connected to crisis prevention and risk management programs in an organization (Coombs, 2007). This is argued to be important as it can contribute to a shorter reaction time and more effective decisions (Coombs, 2007) as managing a crisis in the pre-stage is more controllable (Fink, 2002). Research has argued that organizations can adopt several approaches to conduct crisis management (Mikušová & Horváthová, 2019; Mitroff, Pauchant & Shrivastava, 1988; Spillan, 2000; Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015). One example is the distinction between a proactive and reactive approach of crisis management (Spillan, 2000). This implies that the organization either does crisis planning and preparation before the identified crisis hits with the possibility to avert the event or ignore these steps and just react when the crisis hits the organization (Spillan, 2000).

On the one hand, the reactive approach is argued to be suitable to handle smaller crises and not medium to large scale crises (Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015). This is because the reactive approach to crisis management can be considered risky as it can hamper the relationship with internal and external stakeholders (Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015). On the other hand, the proactive approach, with focus on crisis preparation, has become more important within organizations since crises can severely disrupt an organization (Kovoor-Misra, Zammuto & Mitroff, 2000). The aim of crisis prevention is for an organization to implement activities to avert a crisis and its outcomes (Kovoor-Misra, Zammuto, & Mitroff, 2000). However, even though it can be argued that the best way to manage a crisis is to prevent it from happening, prevention is not always possible due to the characteristics of the crisis (Coombs, 2019; Parnell, 2017). Nevertheless, it is not possible for an organization to protect itself from the endless number of possible crises (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

Another important aspect when it comes to crisis prevention is to adopt a strategic perspective, thus integrating crisis management and strategic management (Preble, 1997; Spillan & Crandall, 2002). Mitroff, Pearson and Pauchant (1992 cited in Preble, 1997, p. 774) argues for this integration as crisis management and strategic management share the following six characteristics:

... a focus on environmental relations; a complex set of stakeholders; the involvement of top management; a concern for the whole organization; the expression of a consistent pattern; and a representation of emergent processes.

This integration can be connected to Kovoor-Misra, Zammuto, and Mitroff (2000) arguments stating that crisis preparation has become more important because of an increasingly complex society. Hence, due to the complexity Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argues that crisis prevention measures can be integrated in the strategic management process as a way to mitigate the risk of crises. Additionally, when it comes to the pre-crisis stage, research have mostly argued for three important aspects that should ideally be prepared in advanced, namely form a crisis management team and develop crisis management plans (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017). These will be discussed more in depth in the following sections.

### **2.3.1.1 Assessing Possible Crisis**

When it comes to assessing possible crises, Pearson and Mitroff (1993) argue that organizations can reduce the risk of facing a crisis by planning ahead and preparing for a range of different types of crises, beyond the ones that only affect the core technologies of the organization. As the sources of organizational crises are both external and internal, a scan of both should be conducted (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017). When conducting external scanning, the focus is on the emerging patterns and other events (Gonzalez-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). The aim should be to screen for potential opportunities and threats within the external environment, while internal scanning aims to identify strengths and weaknesses within the organization (Parnell, 2017). Indeed, scanning for crises is possible as almost all crises send some form of early warning signal which organizations can pick up and use to prevent the crisis from happening (Mitroff, 1994). However, missing out on foreseeable signs is one of the most common reasons why businesses fail (Finkelstein, 2004).

Even though predictability is argued to be important within the pre-crisis stage, Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) acknowledge that it may not be that easy according to the chaos theory. They argue that the emphasis in this theory is that predictions of crisis within the long term are impossible due to the nonlinearity that exists in the environment. Nonlinearity implies that changing one variable may not give the outcome expected from past knowledge as other variables may affect and cause an unexpected outcome (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Murphy, 1996). This is often the case when natural events happen, as they are mostly hard to predict (Murphy, 1996). Therefore, chaos theory implies that the focus should be on predicting crises within the short term and adjusting the pre-made plans for the unique characteristics of the visible crisis which creates more flexibility in the crisis management (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010).

### **2.3.1.2 Crisis Management Team**

Another implementation that researchers have argued for is the creation of a crisis management team (e.g. Augustine, 1995; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Regester, 1989; Sahin, Ulubeyli, & Kazaza, 2015; Massey & Larsen, 2006; Coombs, 2019; Mitroff, 1988). Mitroff (1988) argues that due to the complexity existing within crisis management, an organization should have a permanent crisis management team with sufficient training. The team should be cross-functional, with



members from different functional areas, to ensure sufficient experience and knowledge that is required to handle specific crises (Coombs, 2019). The team's responsibility is both connected to the pre-crisis stage and the crisis stage as it is responsible for the planning before the crisis occurs as well as the management of any challenges as the crisis unfolds (Spillan & Crandall, 2002). A crisis management team also helps facilitate information flow during all phases to facilitate the crisis management process even more (Massey & Larsen, 2006). The team should regularly be trained to perform effectively if a crisis occurs (Williams & Olaniran, 1994; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). Having a crisis management team or a crisis manager have been shown to impact the organization positively during a crisis as motivation and engagement loss tend to be less than within organizations that do not have this function (Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen, 2012).

### **2.3.1.3 Crisis Management Plan**

When the composition of a crisis management team is done, the crisis management plan can begin to take shape (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). Cavanaugh (2006) argues that crisis management planning is the most important step in crisis management. The crisis management plan is a tool that provides contact information, information of what is usually done when a crisis occurs and how to document the process (Coombs, 2007). However, it is important to not provide an inflexible list on how to handle a crisis (Coombs, 2019) as each crisis is unique and in need of different methods to combat them (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). These plans are argued to reduce the time it takes to respond to a crisis (Coombs, 2019). It is further argued to test these plans (Coombs, 2019; Dyer, 1995) as a plan that is not tested is argued to be equally good as no pre-made plan (Coombs, 2019).

To integrate an effective crisis planning organization often needs to have a cultural shift (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). Having a culture permeated by crisis preparedness can mitigate the risk of denial and increase an organization's awareness of potential crises (Mitroff, Pauchant, Finney, & Pearson, 1989; Bhaduri, 2019; Pearson, & Mitroff, 1993). An important step here is to communicate the crisis management plans in advance to make sure that employees and students have the time to learn how to act and behave during a crisis (Cavanaugh, 2006). Another suggestion is to involve employees in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the plan as it can contribute to increase integration within organization's practice (Dyer, 1995)

### **2.3.2 Crisis Stage**

The second stage which arguably attracts most attention when it comes to research is the crisis stage (Coombs & Laufer, 2018). When a crisis begins, it often starts with initial triggering events, however recognizing these triggers remains challenging as a crisis event has, to a high extent, a subjective element to it (Coombs, 2019). Indeed, an organization could possibly be unaware of its involvement in a crisis (Kamer, 1996 cited in Coombs, 2019). The determinants of a crisis event remain the key stakeholders, as their evaluation and assessment of the situation decides if it is in fact a crisis (Snoeijers & Poels, 2018). However, management and stakeholders might have conflicting opinions when it comes to what qualifies a situation to be a crisis and early triggers as warning signs, leading to late preventative actions or even inaction (Fink, Beak, & Taddeo, 1971; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

In fact, the pre-crisis stage, to a great extent, impacts the way an organization faces a crisis and deals with its repercussions. This can be seen since many researchers refer to all the important elements ideally created in the pre-crisis phase, which is suggested to be implemented immediately when a crisis occurs (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Rollo & Zdziarski, 2007). This is linked to the quick and automatic reaction that a crisis requires, as some authors argue that it usually occurs in a sudden way, without warnings (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the importance of organizational preparedness as it can facilitate crisis management when the actual crisis surfaces (Bundy, et al, 2017). A crisis that was not anticipated or planned for can contribute to a larger and more negative perception of the crisis event (Billings, Milburn, & Schaalman, 1980).

Nevertheless, a well-designed crisis management plan is not enough, as the implementation during a crisis requires a decision-making process that is permeated by clear and decisive decisions (Cavanaugh, 2006). Therefore, the leadership team must quickly adopt what Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2017) referred to as command, control, and contain mindset, with the aim to not only face the current situation but also to alleviate the negative long-term effects. In the end, the key is to mitigate and prevent the spreading of the crisis and limit the period of the crisis's existence (Mitroff, 1994). Subsequently, when the initial crisis is over it is argued that the organization should start its recovery (Fink, 2002; Mitroff, 1988) and clean up the effects of the crisis event (Fink, 2002). Additionally, another concept that is highly discussed within crisis management

literature is communication (e.g. Coombs, 2019; Cavanaugh, 2006; Portmann & Pirzada, 2008; Piucus & Acharya, 1988; Schoenfeld, 2021; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010), which will be developed more in-depth in the section down below.

### **2.3.2.1 Communication**

As presented in the previous phase, a crisis management team is vital to ensure an effective flow of information (Massey & Larsen, 2006). This sheds light on an aspect that grows in importance when a crisis hits which is communication (Coombs, 2019; Piucus & Acharya, 1988). Crisis communication should ideally be implemented within all stages of crisis management (Coombs, 2019). Even further, a fundamental aspect of communication during a crisis is regular and well-maintained two-way communication between the organization and stakeholders (Coombs, 2019). With a focus on internal stakeholders, it is argued that during a crisis it is increasingly important to conduct a fast and open communication as the need for information increases during uncertain times (Piucus & Acharya, 1988). Within the context of higher education, the importance of communicating with highly connected stakeholders, such as students and faculties, is considered important as failing here can imply long-term effects for the institution (Schoenfeld, 2021).

Communication during a crisis should remain available and active throughout the stages of the crisis with continuous updates and reporting (Coombs, 2019). This is valid regardless of the content of the information, as the need for immediate response and minimal information fuels frustration and impacts the level of trust with stakeholders (Coombs, 2019). Hence, during a crisis, research has argued for a more open and honest approach where it is better to inform than not inform at an early stage, even though sufficient information is not available to answer the questions (Coombs, 2019; Schoenfeld, 2021). Further, scholars have also argued that a spokesperson should be appointed (e.g. Schoenfeld, 2021; Coombs, 2019) and should be the one providing the first information regarding the crisis (Coombs, 2019; Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 1998). Therefore, in a crisis, it becomes important to choose a suitable spokesperson for the organization as a crisis event threatens the credibility of the organization (Arpan, 2002).

### **2.3.3 Post-Crisis Stage**

The post crisis stage is when the urgency of a crisis is near its end and the organization can go back to normal or to the *new normal* caused by the crisis (Coombs, 2019). However, the importance here is to not forget that even though the immediate effects are over, there is still work left such as learning from the crisis (Mitroff, 1988). Fink (2002) argues that the aim should be to turn the event into an opportunity. However, he also emphasizes the importance of continuing scanning the environment as crises usually come in a circular pattern. He puts it “...the light of resolution you begin to see at the end of one crisis tunnel usually is the prodromal light of an oncoming crisis...” (Fink, 2002, p. 25). Further, even when entering the post-crisis stage, communication is still important which implies that follow-up communication may be conducted depending on what was promised during the crisis stage (Coombs, 2007). Here is the importance of keeping stakeholders updated on the process of the organizational recovery after the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Additionally, researchers have argued for the importance of learning after a crisis (e.g. Coombs, 2019; Mitroff, 1988; Smith & Elliott, 2007; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). This will be further discussed in the next section.

#### **2.3.3.1 Lessons Learned**

When it comes to learning, the focus is on evaluating the crisis management used during the crisis which is important as it will contribute to learning and improvements of the crisis management within the organization (Coombs, 2019). In fact, crisis events can foster increased learning within organizations (Dodgson, 1993) as it can yield an opportunity to expose inadequate processes as they become more visible during a crisis event (Smith & Elliott, 2007; Christianson, Farkas, Sutcliffe & Weick, 2009). A crisis event can also give the organization an opportunity to re-imagine their operations as a disruption in the core operations can question previous assumptions and operations within the organization (Christianson, et al, 2009). Hence, crisis events can contribute to increased environmental and self-awareness within the organization (Christianson, et al, 2009).

When learning from a crisis experience, it is necessary to understand the root cause of the event to be able to understand the strengths and weaknesses in all aspects of the crisis management (Coombs, 2019) both from own and others' experience of the crisis (Smith & Elliott, 2007). Even

though organizations most often benefit from spending time and resources on the evaluation process, they often skip it in the belief that it will only reopen the negative experience from the crisis (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). However, ideally, for an enriching learning experience, learning from a crisis should be conducted throughout all stages of crisis management (Smith & Elliott, 2007; Wang, 2008). To further increase effectiveness of learning, double loop learning should be used (Smith & Elliott, 2007) which implies critical thinking, questioning the underlying processes on a deeper level (Argyris, 1977). A deeper learning becomes important as it re-adjusts the culture since it challenges the main paradigms within the organization (Smith, 2003 cited in Smith, 2002) while the more superficial learning only focuses on error detection and correction of them, thus not questioning the process of decision-making (Argyris, 1977).

## **2.4 Summary & Theoretical Framework**

Although the COVID-19 pandemic fueled the increased flow of research within the field of crisis management within higher education, further studies are still needed, especially when it comes to the degree of planning and preparation necessary to navigate a potential crisis. Indeed, the dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing for a crisis event remain unclear. To cover this existing gap in previous research, the developed theoretical framework provided the main themes used when coding the empirical data. *See Appendix 3* and section 3.3 *Data Analysis* for a more in-depth explanation of the usage of the framework.

The framework summarizes the key relevant parts research has argued for in the different stages, *see Figure 2*. Firstly, in the pre-crisis stage, the organization can either adopt a proactive approach, which involves planning for a potential crisis, or a reactive approach, thus only reacting to the crisis when it occurs. Secondly, in the crisis stage, mitigation and communication is argued to be important in order to handle the crisis in an efficient manner. Finally, in the post-crisis stage, an evaluation should be conducted to highlight the lessons learned, which ideally should be used to prepare for potential crises.

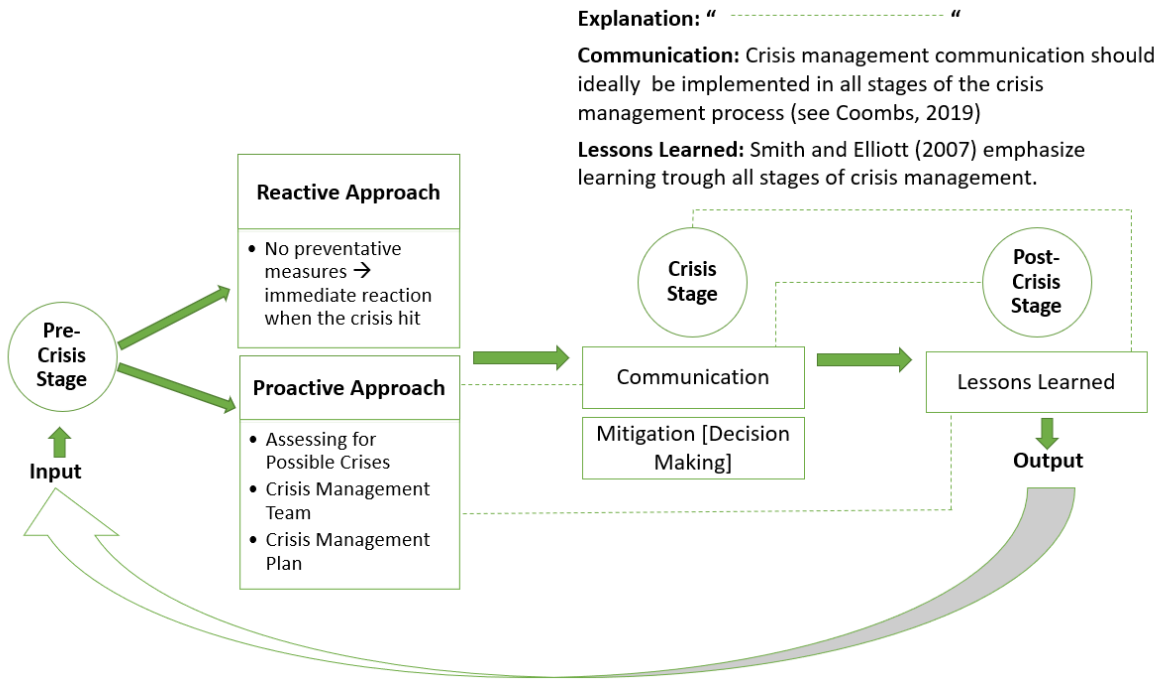


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework (Developed by authors, inspired by the literature review above)

## 3. Methodology

This chapter presents the research design followed to answer the research question and achieve the purpose of this thesis. Firstly, the research approach and design used for this thesis is presented alongside the motivation behind these choices. Secondly, the process of data collection will be explained, with an emphasis on the sampling of the cases as well as the corresponding interviews. This will be followed by a description of the data analysis process used, including the coding methods and analysis approaches adopted. Throughout this chapter, the main limitations and biases will be highlighted. This paves the way for the validity and reliability and ethical considerations as important parts of the research process which will be discussed in turn.

### 3.1 General Research Design & Approach

The aim of this thesis was to increase the understanding of the scope and dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing and planning for a potential crisis, by exploring how a Swedish university handled the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the following question has been examined:

*How did a Swedish university implement crisis management to navigate COVID-19 pandemic?*

When it comes to the nature of the research question this thesis aims to answer, qualitative data is needed for a detailed and a thorough analysis (Neuman, 2011). Hence, this requires the application of a qualitative research design which is an umbrella term involving various interpretative techniques used to describe, decode, and translate with the aim to deduce the meaning of a given phenomenon (Van Maanen, 1979). As qualitative research is, by default, descriptive, interpretative, and detailed, it suits the aim of this research to achieve a deep insight into the experience of all the actors involved in the field studied (Rahman, 2017). Importantly, as qualitative research follows an interactive approach, the authors are interested in the flexibility of its structure as it can be, to some extent, constructed and reconstructed (Maxwell, 2012).

Additionally, an abductive approach was selected, as it allowed the possibility to iteratively move between creating a theoretical framework and analyzing the empirical material (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Thus, this approach provides more flexibility, enabling the research question to be explored from many angles and sources (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). The abductive reasoning is further argued to provide a better understanding of both previous research and the collected empirical material (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

To conduct a qualitative research, in the context of the research question, this thesis will follow a case study design, with the multiple case format. Initially, the intention was to keep the focus on a single case study. However, to explore the research question from wider perspectives, the multiple case is a wiser choice (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). A multiple case study increases the possibility to theoretically replicate the study, hence, the results will be more grounded than what is provided by a single case study (Yin, 2009). In fact, as Gustafsson (2017) supports, this format creates a more convincing theory since the findings are grounded in various empirical evidence. Therefore, it can be argued that evidence created based on a multiple case study is rated strong and reliable (Baxter & Jack, 2008), thus providing better possibilities for theory building (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Hence, this adds to the accuracy and relevance of research and results that this thesis seeks.

## **3.2 Process of Data Collection**

### **3.2.1 Identification of Cases**

We have chosen to conduct a multiple case study by investigating two out of nine faculties at Lund University (Lund University, 2022). Firstly, the choice to conduct the study at two faculties at Lund University was based on the convenience to access them. Although the convenience sampling is prone to biases outside our control (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), this sample strategy remains favorable due to the short timeframe of this study. Further, the reasoning behind the selection of two faculties is to access on the one hand, a faculty that was able to conduct full online education during the pandemic, and on the other hand a faculty that conducted a combination of online and on campus education. Therefore, a purposive sampling was used as it enabled us to select two specific cases that fulfilled the criteria of our research (Neuman, 2011).



This sampling strategy is, according to Neuman (2011), common when conducting qualitative research as it enables the researchers to access and obtain in-depth information of specific cases.

Based on the presented criteria, the following two faculties were selected: School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) and Faculty of Medicine. LUSEM represented the faculty where education was conducted fully online. The selection of this case was also partly based on convenience sampling as both authors are students at the faculty. Further, the Faculty of Medicine conducted a combination of online and on campus activities as certain activities could not be transferred digitally due to its unique characteristics. Therefore, by investigating faculties with these contrasts, an in-depth understanding of the differences and similarities of arguably two diverse crisis management strategies can be obtained.

### **3.2.2 Sampling Strategy for Interviews**

All interviewees are part of either LUSEM or the Faculty of Medicine. The choices were made to interview both the management team, the ones making the strategic decisions, and academics, the ones receiving the decisions. This decision is partly based on Bundy et al (2017) argument that organizational crises can affect the relationship with stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that students are also perceived as key stakeholders to higher education (Duncan, Jennings & Modzeleski, 2010). However, due to the short time frame of this research, the focus was rather emphasized on academics. The reason behind selecting academics is because they are perceived as one of the drivers within universities (García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno & Martín-Rojas, 2021). Focusing on academics further provides the opportunity to understand how COVID-19 affected both research and education which would not be possible if only students were selected.

To make sure that relevant people from each group were targeted, different types of purposive sampling methods have been used (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). To target managers, a snowball sampling was used (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019), meaning that the authors reached out to a person that could connect them to managers with the relevant knowledge needed for the quality of our data collection (Neuman, 2011). The only criteria when sampling managers was that the person should have been involved in the strategic decision-making throughout parts of the crisis, as some changes of managerial roles occurred during the crisis. This may imply variations of the

perceptions and the depth of knowledge of crisis management, which consequently could have impacted the data collected, and therefore should be considered when reading the results.

When it comes to academics a purposive sampling strategy was used (Neuman, 2011). The selection criteria for academics were that the person should have been working and conducting education at the faculty at least since March 2019. This was important to obtain academics' perception of the handling of the pandemic throughout the three stages of crisis management, namely the pre-crisis, crisis, and post crisis stage (Coombs, 2007). With that being said, 13 interviews were conducted in total which are summarized in Table 1 and 2 down below.

**Table 1: Interviews - Faculty of Medicine at Lund University**

No.	Position	Pseudonym	Place	Length
1	Manager (M)	M-MED 1	Digital: Microsoft Teams	55 minutes
2	Manager	M-MED 2	Physical	90 minutes
3	Manager	M-MED 3	Digital: Zoom	55 minutes
4	Academic (A)	A-MED 1	Digital: Zoom	40 minutes
5	Academic	A-MED 2	Digital: Zoom	30 minutes
6	Academic	A-MED 3	Digital: Zoom	55 minutes
7	Academic	A-MED 4	Digital: Zoom	35 minutes

**Table 2: Interviews - School of Economics and Management (LUSEM)**

No.	Position	Pseudonym	Place	Length
1	Manager (M)	M-LUSEM 1	Digital: Zoom	60 minutes
2	Manager	M-LUSEM 2	Physical	50 minutes
3	Academic (A)	A-LUSEM 1	Physical	40 minutes
4	Academic	A-LUSEM 2	Physical	60 minutes
5	Academic	A-LUSEM 3	Digital: Zoom	30 minutes

6	Academic	A-LUSEM 4	Physical	50 minutes
---	----------	-----------	----------	------------

### 3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

The approach for primary data collection used in this study consists of semi-structured interviews which combine elements from both the structured and unstructured interview style (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The semi-structured interview style was chosen as it allowed for more flexibility than a structured interview as it enabled on-spot follow up questions while also making sure that the relevant aspects were covered (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, the flexibility and depth that the semi-structured interview allowed for were an essential reason for the choice.

As managers and academics have differing roles, two interview guides were designed based on the elements to be addressed accordingly. This implies that the perception of the interviewees is linked to the position they take within the organization, as well as the activities they were part of during the pandemic. Thus, the interview guide for managers focuses on the view of crisis management within the faculty and its application during the pandemic, *see Appendix 1*. The interview guide for academics focuses on their general perception of crisis management but also within the context of the pandemic, *see Appendix 2*. Further, the questions in the interview guide were influenced by the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. This allowed for the questions to be developed in a way to cover the necessary themes that general crisis management argues as essential. The importance of this decision will be further discussed in *Data Analysis*.

All interviews were held in English, both digitally and in person, depending on the interviewee's preference, with Zoom and Microsoft teams as the main tools. Importantly, all interviews were recorded with the approval of the interviewees. Moreover, all questions in the interview guide were covered in all interviews, either by us asking the interview or the interview covering it when answering other questions. However, the order of the questions and follow up questions were different between interviewees as they highlighted different aspects and different depth in their answers. Further, to transcribe the interviews, Otter and Microsoft Word have been used. The decision to use different softwares was dependent on the functions provided but also the preference of each author. In fact, both softwares had its pros and cons where Microsoft Word provided higher

accuracy, but less structure and Otter provided the opposite. To ensure the quality of the transcriptions, a careful review and comparison of the audio and the text had been performed.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Conducting qualitative research requires a strategic and meaningful analysis of the data collected. The purpose is to make sense of findings from primary data through segmenting, breaking apart and forming back together (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This section will provide an overview of data analysis which was based on a thematic analysis process (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). To make sense of the data collected, the authors followed the advice of Kval (1996 cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009), who argues that the process of analyzing qualitative data should ideally start at the same time as the process of data collection begins, and continues simultaneously (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This process allowed for the possibility to shape the direction of data collection depending on what was found relevant and prominent in the initial process of data analysis (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Particularly, the iterative nature of this process enabled the authors to recognize important patterns that emerged throughout the period of data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 2008 cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

To organize the raw data material and facilitate coding, NVivo was used. The coding process was divided into three steps. Firstly, the transcriptions from each faculty were coded separately in accordance with the main and sub-themes in the theoretical framework developed and presented in the literature review. These codes were prepared and structured in advance to ensure that the critical elements emphasized in general crisis management literature were covered. Secondly, patterns were found in each theme which became the third layer of coding. Important to mention that the authors conducted the data analysis thus far separately. The aim was to minimize the risk of subjective coding, which is often common when conducting qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

Thirdly, the individual coding were compared in order to unfold the main patterns deduced from the data collected; an overview of the final codes decided on and used is presented in Appendix 3. It is in this step that the iterative process between data collection and data analysis previously mentioned became an essential element, as it allowed for the possibility to extend the literature review and the theoretical framework depending on interesting patterns found during the data

analysis. This further supports the abductive research approach that this study takes. For example, as found during the interviews, a reactive approach was taken by the university when managing the COVID-19 pandemic as the event was perceived as highly unexpected. In this case, the reactive approach was added in addition to the proactive approach which is mostly argued for in crisis management literature. Therefore, additional codes were developed along the process to cover the interesting patterns found in the material. In this step, the material from each faculty was also compared to identify differences and similarities in management of the crisis. A dialogue was constantly held when deciding upon quotes to make sure that the quotes were representing the material in a truthful and accurate way.

### **3.4 Validity & Reliability**

The quality of a research is often evaluated in regard to validity and reliability (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). In a qualitative study validity is connected to the accuracy of the study, while reliability refers to the consistency of the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To start with, it needs to be addressed that both authors have studied at the School of Economics and Management, one of the selected case faculties. Hence, the possibility for biases should be acknowledged. Therefore, due to the personal connections to the organization, multiple validity strategies have been applied to mitigate the risk of, for example, biases in the interpretations, thus making sure the accurate variables are measured (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). This was especially important when coding the data. A strategy for data analysis was therefore developed to decrease the risk of imposing individual biases as both authors coded the material separately in the initial steps of the process. Both authors were also present during all interviews which helped decrease the risk of leading questions as one author was passively listening and guiding the other to prevent biases from becoming too apparent.

Furthermore, reliability can be divided into external and internal reliability. External reliability acknowledges the possibility to replicate the research (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). The focus on external validity has been present during the whole study, detailed descriptions have been taken during the process which have been provided in the method chapter. Further, the interview guides are attached in the appendix to provide for increased possibility to replicate the research. However, it needs to be acknowledged that even though material has been

provided to replicate the method used, the empirical material will most likely not give the same results. This is mostly due to the nature of qualitative data as it includes social dimensions that can be hard to replicate (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). The process of detailed documentation has also contributed to the internal reliability which acknowledges the process within the team conducting the research, especially connected to the data analysis process (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982 cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015). For this reason, in section 3.3, Data Analysis, a detailed description is provided on how the process was conducted and what main codes were decided beforehand.

### **3.5 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical consideration has been adopted and revisited throughout the research process to mitigate the risk of negative consequences on the research and organization in general (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). Ethical consideration has been broken down into four areas using Diener and Crandall (1978 cited in Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019); *harm, informed consent, privacy and preventing deception*. To mitigate the risk of causing *harm*, the choice was made to use pseudonyms, which is a common step to take in qualitative research (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). We further chose to send sufficient information of our research on email to all participants beforehand to enable them to read through and decide if they wanted to participate or not. Therefore, providing the possibility for respondents to give voluntary *informed consent* to participate. The *privacy* area was also addressed with informed consent as it provided respondents with sufficient information to understand the scope of our research which gave them an understanding of what their involvement entails (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). To *prevent deception*, full transparency for participants was provided via both the email beforehand and as an introduction of the interview where the scope of the reaction was repeated.

## 4. Empirical Result

This chapter presents the findings collected from the 13 interviews conducted within LUSEM and the Faculty of Medicine. The three stages model of crisis management, namely the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stage (Coombs, 2007), has been used as a foundation to present the findings. Even further, the theoretical framework, including the three stages, have influenced the focal themes in each stage. Therefore, firstly, the pre-crisis stage will analyze each faculty's approach to cope with the crisis, and determine the strategy adopted. Secondly, the crisis stage presents the main impacts and challenges within each faculty as well as the decisions taken to mitigate these effects. This stage will highlight, among other things, the relevance of communication, clear managerial roles and the importance of solidarity when managing a crisis. Finally, the post-crisis stage will mainly reflect on the overall event within the organization, identifying the main lessons learned to cope with potential crises.

### 4.1 Pre-Crisis Stage

#### 4.1.1 LUSEM: A Reactive Approach towards Crisis Management

It was visible from the interviews that not much crisis management was conducted within LUSEM before the COVID-19 pandemic started. The interviewed managers had little to no prior experience of handling a crisis as large as COVID-19. Further, the concept of a crisis was not heavily discussed within the faculty as all interviewees within LUSEM mentioned that they have not, to a larger extent, thought about a crisis within the university context. All these aspects can be summarized in the quote below.

*I am not even sure that we thought about it [a crisis]. I think at the university level, the central level at university, they might have some crisis management plans and contingency plans. The school [faculty] didn't have any as far as I know. [M-LUSEM 1]*

One explanation for this lack of preparation for a crisis was presented by A-LUSEM 1 who contextualized the pandemic in the Swedish environment, arguing that “... *there are not that many*

*things happening.*” which implies a general denial that exists to crisis events within Swedish society. Indeed, almost all interviewees explained the unexpectedness they felt when COVID-19 hit. In connection to this, the majority explained that the pandemic was impossible to predict as it was a unique event, which influenced the possibility to prepare and plan.

When it comes to the initial warning signals, news media was mentioned by two academics. However, both expressed the confusion regarding the accuracy and relevance of the information during this time as the news changed very frequently; thus, complicating the predictability when it came to the development of the pandemic within the society. The majority of the interviewees however recalled the reactions of students and teachers as a triggering sign that a crisis was surfacing. The reactions from teachers were both based on their own worry about the situation but also on the fact that students were not showing up to class as they started to have empty classrooms. This was also stated by M-LUSEM 1 who mentioned that “... *the frontline, the teachers, the directors of studies at the different departments, they reacted before the faculty reacted in this case.*”. This slow reaction from the faculty was explained by two interviewees as mainly due to the lack of reaction to initial signs. They both further connected it to the Swedish government's decisions on this matter, which is visible in the quote below:

*What could have been better is a quicker response from the central level but also the faculty level when it comes to when new things happened and maybe that falls back all the way to the government because they decide what we could do and not do. [M-LUSEM 1]*

Hence, the interviews indicate that LUSEM, and the society in general, were not prepared for a pandemic. The confusing news flow and the government's decisions coupled with the general perception of a crisis within the Swedish context could explain the reactive approach to COVID-19 applied by the faculty.



## 4.1.2 The Faculty of Medicine<sup>1</sup>: A Reactive Approach with an Attempted Proactive Planning

Diving into crisis management within LUSEM and analyzing the different stages revealed many aspects that are noticeably similar to the Faculty of Medicine yet are worth emphasizing. Indeed, lack of adequate crisis management training was expressed by managers within the faculty. As expressed by M-MED 1:

*I don't think I thought about a crisis in this way before... seeing it from like, organization management perspective that's new and to be honest, in that way, I am not trained in that, we, I am a scientist... [M-MED 1]*

Once again, the Swedish context was brought up by managers when arguing for the perception of the crisis and the reason for the current unpreparedness. As M-MED 2 explained it “*I think Sweden is very unique in that way, that they haven't been threatened by natural crises or wars, that they haven't maintained their crisis infrastructure.*”. Lack of exposure to crises shaped the connotation of crisis management, which could be seen through the minimal investment on developing skills needed for such sudden events.

The unexpectedness COVID-19 dictated to a great extent the reactive approach that, similar to LUSEM, the Faculty of Medicine mostly adopted. M-MED 2 describes the initial reaction as “*From nothing was said to suddenly we were in crisis. So it went very very quickly*”. Indeed, early signs did not trigger enough attention from the faculty to react earlier. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that some proactive actions were noted within the faculty, which both M-MED 1 and M-MED 3 brought up during the interviews. This involved a preparation for what seemed at that time an approaching crisis, a few weeks before the government announced the recommendation to work from home. This preparation was mainly fueled by the decision taken by another university in Europe to close their facilities. M-MED 3 identified some of the actions taken, including making plans, identifying risks, and preparing for worst case scenarios. Even further, M-MED 1 explained:

---

<sup>1</sup> The Faculty of Medicine refers to the Faculty of Medicine at Lund University.

*... we were really discussing it vividly for three weeks before. So we were prepared for that to a certain extent... We were totally unprepared ...to transform the teaching to go online... but at least we had a very good group of people that worked day and night trying to solve it. [M-MED 1]*

Therefore, even though some planning was attempted in the initial stage, the major impact caused by the pandemic remained unfamiliar. This unfamiliarity mainly revolved around the online transformation, for which the faculty was not prepared. The difficulty connected to online teaching is, to some extent, linked to the educational offerings that the Faculty of Medicine provides, which will be further analyzed in the following section.

## **4.2 Crisis Stage**

To start with, the handling of the crisis within the faculties was highly linked to the speed and way of detecting early warning signs of the pandemic. Pre-crisis stage was short lived, as the university realized the seriousness of the crisis, and acted as quickly as possible. For this reason, there is a fine line between the pre-crisis and crisis stage, as the announcement of the pandemic was immediately followed by reactions and decision-making. The following section will dive into the major impacts and challenges faced, to then present decisions made within both faculties emerging from COVID-19.

### **4.2.1 LUSEM**

#### **4.2.1.1 Impacts & Main Challenges of the COVID-19 Crisis**

##### **Digital Transformation**

The COVID-19 had a significant impact on LUSEM's core activities, most of which could be linked to the digital transformation. Indeed, it was visible that education was the most affected by the pandemic. However, some interviewees mentioned how the timing of the digital shift facilitated to some extent the transition. In fact, during the initial stages of the pandemic, several teachers within the faculty had supervisions, which were easier to transfer online as opposed to an entire course. Examination was also impacted by the digital transformation. As explained by A-

LUSEM 2, having remote learning caused the university to lose control over two core processes which are “... *making sure that people don't cheat on their exams and check your identity, those are very two core processes, much more difficult to implement.*”. The inability to oversee the conditions in which exams took place made it challenging to ensure the quality and accuracy of the outcomes. Although this was not an issue that was openly reported, it was nevertheless problematic for some professors, which depended on the type of material covered. Therefore, it is noted that there were differing opinions on this matter:

*I'm a little bit more laissez-faire so I would be like ok to do take home exam, some people are cheating, you know. That it's their loss in the long run. That's my approach. I know that some of my colleagues were not so happy about the fact that you know there was that we lost control of those two processes. [A-LUSEM 2]*

*I think the students cheated more than normal, and we couldn't prove it. That's a problem of course. Especially we did it for a couple of semesters. I think it was unfortunate. [A-LUSEM 3]*

Further, the majority of interviewees mentioned that research was not heavily affected by the digital shift, as it was already mostly conducted digitally. Therefore, the primary focus within LUSEM was on education as this was the most impacted, as implied by the following quote from M-LUSEM 2: “*This is a moment where the university should focus on education because... research can always ... [be done] electronically.*”.

### **The Organizational Structure of the University**

One aspect that became challenging when handling the crisis was the organizational structure of the university, as its complexity complicated to some extent the decision-making throughout the pandemic period, mainly at the beginning stage of COVID-19.

*University as big as Lund is not very agile, it's not very fast moving. It's a bureaucracy and it has to be a bureaucracy to some sense because it's about equal treatment. All those are rule-based and based in regulation and legislation and it's very important that we keep that up so it's not in our blood to be very agile. [M-LUSEM 1].*

This implies slow internal processes and reactions before taking official actions within the faculty. Therefore, some agility needed to be adopted which signified that the usual strict regulations when changing a course needed to be eased to enable the quick change to online education. As M-LUSEM 1 explains it, these procedures usually take months to change, but due to the pandemic, they were adapted in a quicker manner, which facilitated the possibility to transfer to online education, as implied by the quotes below:

*Normally we have strict regulations on how to change the course and how to proceed with those changes and those it can take months to change an exam... but this kind of eased up those regulations so we could change very quickly and the courses to make the best for students. [M-LUSEM 1]*

This marked the need for a change of approach, detaching to some extent from the usual regulation and decision-making processes and adopting more flexibility and agility to ensure smooth and efficient decisions in crisis times.

### **Communication Challenges**

To start with, due to the impact that the pandemic had on the faculty, all interviewees mentioned an increased need for communication. This can be connected to the challenge of finding the right balance between autonomy and the need for guidelines. In fact, most interviewees explained that they are usually autonomous, nevertheless, taking into consideration the nature of the pandemic, it was essential for academics to get more clarity than usual. A new dynamic was therefore emerging which was especially noted by M-LUSEM 1, who argued that academics wanted “... *more guidelines, more directives and more support and that... it was new because normally they are very independent and autonomous.*”. However, in the initial stage, guidelines were arguably hard to give due to the confusion of the situation which was mentioned by some interviewees. Consequently, as noted by A-LUSEM 2 the uniqueness of the pandemic, coupled with the urgency to make, and execute decisions within a short time frame led to, what could be referred to as, an unfavorable and mistimed delegation of power. This sudden reliance and dependence on the faculties and departments’ last words and decisions before acting contributed to more difficult communication and thus, hampered the speed of reaction, which during the period when COVID-19 was at its highest, time was not a luxury.

Additionally, the initial stage of the crisis was characterized by an overflow of information, which, as both managers argued, gave room for various interpretations between faculties within the university and within the faculty itself. As M-LUSEM 2 explains it: “... *you have someone saying that we should do it like this, but you will interpret it yourself. So we had divergence also within the university.*”. This divergence was in fact a source of confusion in communication which further emphasized the importance of focusing on the process of communication when navigating the changing times of the crisis.

### **Mindset Shift**

Inevitably, the challenges emerging from the pandemic marked the need for various degrees of changes. Therefore, many aspects within the faculty had to be reconsidered. A foundational shift that was needed during the initial stages of the crisis and what could be considered a stepping stone for the decisions made and actions taken was the adoption of the right mindset. This involved a high degree of open-mindedness as well as the acceptance of uncertainty as the university navigates the pandemic. As confessed by a manager:

*... to be prepared for the fact that you have to move when things around you move and you have to be secure enough to admit that you don't have the answers and you don't know what's going to happen, and that's OK to and you have to also be prepared that people have people are afraid, they have very strong opinions... They don't like uncertainty ... [M-LUSEM 1].*

Indeed, this was essential for decision-makers and managers within the faculty to not only make decisions that are suitable for the unstable times of the crisis, but also lead and guide in a considerate and conscious way. Furthermore, this implied an openness to a higher degree of flexibility when it comes to communication, decision-making, changes in existing procedures.

#### **4.2.1.2 Decisions Taken & Actions Made**

##### **Group Creation: Increase Collaboration and Communication**

The continuous change of protocols and guidelines that occurred throughout the crisis phase was inevitable during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in an early stage of the crisis, the university

and the faculties created groups that handled specific areas of the hierarchical structures, discussing decisions, communication, and assignment of roles. Further, creating groups allowed for coordination within the faculty, which facilitated the handling of the pandemic. A brief description of the functioning of some of the main groups is presented in the following quote:

*...they [central level] had a crisis management group at Lund University with different representatives from different types of areas of functions at the university, but they also had for the Educational Board Assembly this smaller group of Deans, vice Deans responsible for education at the different faculties so they started to work more frequently with the crisis and then these vice deans for each faculty had to communicate with their respective departments. And then at the department level we had to communicate with the teachers and the communication with the students were made from the university level and the faculty level. [M-LUSEM 1]*

Hence, special attention was given to the flow of communication through the hierarchy which not only increased communication and collaboration within the faculty but also between faculties within the university. In particular, communication was transmitted and shared through the various levels of the hierarchy within the university with the help of several crisis groups that were created at different levels within the university. Further, establishing a clear layout of specialized groups was beneficial, as some academics within LUSEM noticed a difference when it came to assigning roles, making it easier to identify the source and relevance of the information which can be summarized by the quote below

*I could perceive these kinds of rules regarding who is making the rules more clear... in this respect, I think that it would be useful to know who is making the decisions and who is just implementing those decisions. [A-LUSEM 4]*

Creating groups was therefore essential to establish clear roles and guidelines. This eased the way for a consistent and frequent flow of communication throughout the hierarchy, which was needed during the crisis.

## Centralized Communication

Focusing on the process of communication involved not only receiving information and instructions from the university, but importantly the way the information was perceived, interpreted, and implemented. Therefore, certain strategic questions had to be answered to effectively control communication during the early phase of COVID-19 and ensure a common and unified interpretation of information within the university:

*This is because informing people, asking questions, making new decisions, “how are we going to post this information in canvas?” “What are we supposed to write?” “How is this supposed to be interpreted?” which was the biggest part. “How do we interpret this new decision they made?” [M-LUSEM 1]*

To further decrease the risk of interpretation issues, it became vital for communication channels to be tested and adapted throughout the crisis phase, to guarantee qualitative two-way communication. Agreeably, the main channels used were Emails, Zoom, information pages, as well as periodic information meetings. Canvas was also noted by several interviewees, a tool that the faculty recently transitioned to. Indeed, as M-LUSEM 2 explains it, having selected channels was essential to centralize communication within the university, which consequently ensured a reliable and unified share of information. This was relevant since the manager noticed how “... *it was a bit too dependent on a few persons selecting information...*”. Hence, a change was needed.

*Bit of a different models tested...I basically changed the communication patterns. We are conveying what the University says, because it's better to have, in crisis, to have few and reliable communication channels rather than having a multitude because otherwise, people start interpreting. [M-LUSEM 2]*

Therefore, the same information that was distributed from the university was conveyed and forwarded by the faculty. This importance allocated to the reliability and quality of communication source and channels was indeed vital for some academics, who could notice the difference in the way they perceived and handled the information, and confirmed the trustworthiness around referring to the university decisions when sharing information on the faculty and department level:

*So I really appreciate when I have like clear directions from the center part... So in this respect, the fact that the faculty many times was referring to the general directions of the of the university was something that I appreciated. [A-LUSEM 4]*

### **Open Communication: Importance of the Managerial Role**

Arguably, one key contributor to the quality of communication within the faculty during the crisis phase was the role managers and decision-makers play when delivering information. This explains the emphasis put on the open and honest communication approach during the crisis phase, especially the early stages. The overflow and speed of information could get overwhelming which can be summarized by M-LUSEM 1 who describes a matter that “... *one day seemed really urgent. Two days later was not urgent at all anymore ...*”. The constant change of relevance required continuous updates and follow-up information as it paved the way for decisions made and actions taken. This is highly linked to the shift in mindset mentioned earlier as the uncertainty time required flexibility and adapting to the current situation which was mentioned by most interviewees. In addition, the increased demand for guidelines, according to both managers, contributed to the importance of prioritizing clarity, honesty and transparency when communicating.

*I think as a manager you have to be prepared to answer questions that you don't have the answer to and also be able to say “I don't know, we don't know” ... You cannot be afraid of saying that because you don't have the answers, because you cannot predict the future. [M-LUSEM 1]*

Importantly, clarity around guidelines required follow-ups regardless of the sufficiency of the information communicated to answer the many questions asked. As A-LUSEM 2 argues, “... *lack of communication is also communication, we're always communicating.*” implying an open format of communication. With that being said, some dividing opinions were found regarding the efficiency of communication.

*The first thing that I would probably have posted in this news flow is: “We're entering a period, probably a week or days week, where we would not know” ... I would communicate*



*that, I would have said that from the beginning because it has, it is about managing those expectations.* [A-LUSEM 2]

*I would say quick on informing us and also informing when [the manager] didn't know...really open, honest and straightforward... and answered really quickly...* [A-LUSEM 1]

Nevertheless, academics agreed that, generally, communication was good and quick enough to make sound decisions, considering the context, unexpectedness, and uniqueness of COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The Role of Solidarity**

Beyond seeking instructions, academics needed support. Yet what should be highlighted is that support needed to be mutual from both academics and managers in order to make sense of the unknown. This is where solidarity played a significant role in enabling a quicker and smoother flow of interactions, decision-making and communication. M-LUSEM 2 expressed his satisfaction with the feeling of community and care that was observed throughout the pandemic. As M-LUSEM 2 simply puts it “...we took care of one another...”. This can be connected to the motivation to keep core activities going which was implied by all interviewees. Especially, all interviewed academics indicated a high compliance as they more or less started working to adapt the content of the course without any hesitation. This high compliance from academics, noted by both managers, eased the way for managers to make decisions and exercise their role. As M-LUSEM 2 puts it “You didn't have to do that much as a manager. You didn't have to go walk around. I mean, you needed to sometimes ask ... a few questions.”. M-LUSEM 2 further connects the increased solidarity to the understanding of the Swedish model to handle the pandemic.

*People were very in a way open to, and understood more or less responsibility they understood,... they understood the Swedish model: Take responsibility.* [M-LUSEM 2]

The responsabilization that characterized the Swedish model eased the way for the faculty to transition to remote learning. Importantly, the willingness of people from different roles to comply, take responsibility and be open to continuous change enabled the faculty to manage the crisis as best as they could.

## 4.2.2 The Faculty of Medicine

### 4.2.2.1 Impacts & Main Challenges of the COVID-19 Crisis

#### Unique Characteristics of Research and Education: Amplified Challenges

Similar to LUSEM, all core activities within the Faculty of Medicine were impacted due to COVID-19 and the digital transformation that it implied. However, as explained by most interviewees within the faculty, this transformation became increasingly challenging due to the characteristics of education and research. In fact, certain aspects of education and research could not be transferred online and had to remain ongoing during the pandemic, an aspect that required a lot of coordination and planning. An additional challenge linked to education is the close connection to the Swedish healthcare system, where several programs and hospitals rely on clinical placements.

*What differs us from other faculties is that we have had all through the pandemic we have had to have our students in house to such an extent, because the clinical practical work and that has been ongoing all through the pandemic. [M-MED 1]*

This quote hints to the uniqueness of the services and routines the faculty is involved in. As M-MED 1 words it, “... we have a responsibility to the society that our students have a certain level when they're done ...”. Indeed, different responsibilities mean different priorities and thus decisions. Consequently, this was manifested within the faculty when it came to examinations where the interviewees within the Faculty of Medicine emphasized examination as a larger problem than what was implied by interviewees at LUSEM. The close link to the healthcare system further emphasized the need to take into consideration on the one hand the student perspective by ensuring equal rights and the societal perspective on the other hand by guaranteeing that students are tested accurately and appropriately.

*We have actually had our exams on site and I don't know if you saw that in the news, but it was we were heavily criticized. We were heavily criticized no matter what we did, I should say... we have digital exams to a large extent at the Medical Faculty. So in that*

*sense, we were prepared but we had digital exam at campus where it's easier to monitor to avoid cheating, but also to provide every student with the same opportunity. [M-MED 1]*

Further, unlike LUSEM where the research was, as reported by most interviewees, relatively unaffected, the views within the Faculty of Medicine were different depending on the research area. Therefore, some interviewees considered their research relatively unaffected while others expressed visible challenges, mostly connected to laboratory practices that could not easily be transferred. In line with the uniqueness of the faculty is the special maintenance its facilities needed to protect living animals and cells.

*We work with life science so we had to maintain the facilities... our cell, animals and so forth, even though there was a pandemic going up, we couldn't let those things die out. [M-MED 2]*

To summarize, similar to LUSEM, the Faculty of Medicine faced impacts and challenges from the pandemic. However, it is also visible that due to the characteristics of education and research, certain impacts got amplified and created follow up problems that are unique to the Faculty of Medicine.

### **Decentralization within the Faculty and University**

A key challenge that came to surface with the increasing magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic was decentralization, which is the common approach followed within the university. As M-MED 2 explains “...*the decentralized model, here in Lund, has contributed to unnecessary more work than we needed to do.*”. In line with this, the importance of allocation of responsibilities and coordination was amplified during the crisis, as the decentralized approach was argued by all managers a contributor to the challenges faced. For instance, as guidelines and regulations were shared by the Swedish government, certain decisions had to be made within the faculty. That is, new questions had to be answered to act accordingly which was more challenging considering the decentralization within the university. Accordingly, the unique requirements of each faculty only fueled inconsistent application of guidelines within the university, creating possible frictions between faculties which was also emphasized as an issue from managers within LUSEM. All these challenges were noticed and had to be dealt with during COVID-19 pandemic.

*In the academic situation...It goes basically out to those that have responsibility for students, but it's not done coordinated. It's left very much the faculties. So what we do here? Or what they do? And that variation can lead to all different types of reactions within the system. Why can they do it, but we can't? ... The delegations of who has responsibility, it's not always clear. [M-MED 2]*

M-MED 2 further argues for the need for active leadership to mitigate the unclear delegation of responsibilities. Indeed, the ambiguity around *who is in charge* hindered the speed and effectiveness of the initial handling of the crisis within the faculty.

### **Communication Challenges**

Similar to LUSEM, communication represented a major challenge especially during the initial stages of the crisis. In fact, communication is an element that the faculty needed to improve to navigate the crisis. Thus, investing time, energy and planning on the main aspects of communication to ensure an effective delivery of the messages and an accurate implementation of guidelines was highly prioritized. However, communication was reported to be less effective in the beginning stages of the pandemic. A common description that was used by an academic and a manager who argued for passive and not straightforward communication. As A-MED 1 stated “... *they [department or faculty] send an email,... and I think that's like it's very passive way of delivering information, and there could be a more active way.*”.

Similarly, M-MED 2 expressed how “... *there was no one saying you must do this...*” linking it to the logic of the Swedish model to primarily recommend guidelines, with a significant extent of interpretation and consideration of the way the instruction could be implemented. The surfacing of these various interpretations only hindered the quality and effectiveness of the communication. Additionally, A-MED 1 explains the level of frustration at the early stages of the crisis when she was “... *never really sure like who do I talk to if I have questions about this... I've noticed that there's not really clear communication channels at the university.*”. This could be linked to increased need for guidelines which was also visible within LUSEM where usually autonomous academics were in larger need for support and guidance in day-to-day work. These challenges had to be addressed and strategically adapted to cope with pandemic.

## **Mindset Shift**

Nevertheless, an impactful change that set the foundation for the decisions made within the faculty was the mindset shift by most of the managers and academics to handle the turbulent times of the crisis. Similar to LUSEM, a major part of this shift involved the ability to be comfortable with continuous changes, which not only the faculty but the university as a whole found challenging.

*... then you need to be ready to adopt a decision and change it and so that's also difficult, but I would say, in a huge organization... If we decide one thing last week, we shouldn't be afraid to tweak it a little bit. [M-MED 1]*

The uncertainties caused by COVID-19 required the adoption of a flexible mindset. This eased the way for managers within the faculty to adapt according to the changes arising and thus make adequate decisions, which will be further elaborated in the following section.

### **4.2.2.2 Decisions Taken & Actions Made**

#### **Group Creation and Clear Role Assignment**

As within LUSEM, it was vital for faculty members to collaborate and work as a team when communicating, making decisions, and taking actions. Therefore, the Faculty of Medicine also introduced several crisis management groups to both facilitate communication and collaboration. Indeed, M-MED 1 pinpoints the need for quick collaboration, by “... *forming operative unit to collaborate in new ways.*”. Additionally, within certain programs, clinical placements are mandatory to be able to graduate. Therefore, as explained in the following quote, collaboration needed to be extended outside the university

*... we have had a constant collaboration with Region Skåne and the hospital to make it possible for our students to be in hospital and the clinical ... [M-MED 1]*

Hence, external collaboration became essential to be able to have clinical placements ongoing during the pandemic. Further, several of the interviewees explained the importance of assigning clear roles within the faculty to facilitate the process of decision-making, considering the constant updates the faculty needed to keep up with the continuous changes. As M-MED 1 explains it, “I

*think the common denominator for every plan is that everybody will benefit from knowing what to do so you need to have a defined group that takes the lead.*”. This was something that in the beginning stage was perceived by some interviewees as lacking within the faculty. However, it improved throughout the crisis, which can be seen in the following quote from A-MED 1: *“I think the most helpful was when we, when it became really clear that we could make the decision.”*. Consequently, creating groups and clear role assignments was argued to be an effective approach the faculty followed to be strategic with its decisions.

### **Balance between Centralization and Decentralization**

An important decision that had to be considered at the beginning stage of the pandemic was the adoption, to some extent, of a centralization approach when navigating the crisis. Hence, during the crisis phase, the key was to find the right balance when it came to centralization and decentralization, rather than follow one approach. The issue with decentralization fueled the need for increased communication and coordination, something that was argued by all managers. As M-MED 1 explains it, *“... communication has been the key factor to unify a large organization ...”*. Hence, communication became the focal point to centralize the main operations within the faculty, something that also happened within LUSEM. In addition, similar to LUSEM, the Faculty of Medicine mainly operates in autonomy, which was still relevant and needed during the crisis. Indeed, although academic freedom remains necessary for daily tasks and activities, centralization was essential to set the foundation to unify and coordinate the process of decision-making.

### **A Focus on Communication**

As it has been permeated throughout this analysis, communication has been the crucial element that allowed the faculty to navigate COVID-19. Thus, investing time, energy and planning on the main aspects of communication to ensure an effective delivery of the messages and an accurate implementation of guidelines was highly prioritized. As M-MED 1 confirms it *“...communication has become even more important ... we have spent lots of time on communication.”*. This links back to the faculty’s intention to adopt a more centralized approach, which was highly needed to face the pandemic in a strategic way. Communication, therefore, was the focal point to centralize the main operations of the faculty. Hence, it was important to identify the essential elements, which agreeably characterize the organizational structure of the faculty that eased the way for effective

communication. M-MED 1 shares the two key factors. First, the faculty had parallel processes to the university which enabled fast communication. In fact, staying connected with the university level allowed the faculty to follow upon the university's decisions. Although, as confessed by M-MED 1, "*LU [Lund University] as a whole was a little bit slow...*" and the faculty had to take initiatives, parallel processing was nevertheless essential when communicating during the pandemic. In fact, it allowed for a "*... shorter way to reach all the students, faculty, and all the teachers involved in the faculty.*" which is always needed during a crisis.

Second element mentioned by M-MED 1 is that the Faculty of Medicine "*... is kind of unique in the sense that our educational path is as organized as a matrix organization which has been super good during the pandemic.*". For this reason, it was essential to set the stage with these criteria as they impacted the way the faculty approached communication. An aspect that needed to be reconsidered was the usage of the right tone and content to get everyone to understand and react accordingly which is expressed in the quote below:

*... sometimes in academia we're not very good at communicating, we tend to communicate with long emails with lots of words. And when it's cohesive, you need to communicate with short sentences to the point, but also sensitive in the way that like we need to explain that we do understand this difficult situation. [M-MED 1]*

For this reason, communication channels were used to ensure an accurate and effective deliverance of the messages to all concerned actors. This is what M-MED 1 discussed, as "*...it's been crucial to to get both our students on board so they know what's happening, and our teachers of course so they know what's happening*".

Similar to LUSEM, emails, Zoom meetings as well as planned meetings were identified by most interviewees as most used communication channels. In addition, M-MED 1 explained that for the very urgent messages, "*... we have activated our SMS list, as well as emails to reach all students quickly.*". A-MED 2 also mentioned the usage of Slack mainly to write "*... more quick writing instead of formal emails.*". She further adds "*we used the phone a bit more*" linking back to the shift from formal communication and a more active and practical one.

## Increased Workload

With these changes within the faculty, a shift in the nature of the roles and tasks was noticed by managers. As the quote below shows, the speed of the spread of the virus and thus the need to take measures and make decisions to face the pandemic required a faster decision-making process.

*The time for towards a the decision has become shorter, because there has been a need for it I think that's crisis per se... So that's the biggest change for my role as it has become, the role has become more operative... the operative part of my role has been much larger.*  
[M-MED 1]

It could be further noticed that, collectively, interviewees expressed the increase in workload and level of responsibility, as what were once simple and straightforward decisions became complex questions that needed to be answered. This can be exemplified by A-MED 3 who describes the experience as “*too exhausting*” and “*I've been working very, very much, I'm not sure that it was actually worth it.*”. An increase in workload was also mentioned in connection to research.

*I had to go back into the lab and I was doing a lot of experiments to meet the requirements of the funders and ... it was nearly impossible to get extra support with personnel or things because of how fast we were expected to deliver results.* [A-MED 1]

Needless to say, similar to LUSEM, managers and academics noted the role of solidarity and sense of community to face the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic and get the desired results as best as possible. A-MED 3 states that “*... it's also a matter of people taking responsibilities...I think there's some more of that question rather than the organizational structure per say.*”, which M-MED 3 agrees with adding that “*It was clear for everyone that we have very committed, responsible employees everyone wanted to help to make the best of the situation.*”. Therefore, it can be seen that the willingness from people within the faculty, both in LUSEM and the Faculty of Medicine, played a huge role in the outcome of crisis management.



## 4.3 Post-Crisis Stage

In this section, it is important to notice that we do not imply that the pandemic is over. However, the Government Offices of Sweden (2022) has, on the first of April, declared COVID-19 as a non-threat to public health in Sweden. This classifies, to some extent, the time frame of this study in the post-crisis phase. Therefore, it should be noticed that some suggestions from general crisis management literature on how to manage the post-crisis stage may not be covered as the timeframe of the thesis and data collection could conceal these aspects as they may be conducted afterwards.

### 4.3.1 LUSEM

At LUSEM, the faculty has entered what could be called a *new normal*, as on campus activities have started again, which “... *just happened overnight, more or less.*” [M-LUSEM 1]. M-LUSEM 1 explained that each faculty had the possibility to decide how to transition back to the regular setting. Generally, COVID-19 is no longer the focus of discussion within the faculty. M-LUSEM 1 mentioned the ongoing events in Ukraine as a factor, “*COVID just ended, yeah, when Russia invaded Ukraine.*”, thus shifting the focus towards a new crisis. However, some academics expressed concerns regarding the pandemic, implying that their focus has not shifted:

*So that concerns me that we don't have any guidance right now... I mean, we're still in a pandemic ... the risk might be lower, but nobody has said, yeah “We're out of this”.* [A-LUSEM 2]

Hence, some academics still have the feeling that the crisis stage is ongoing as opposed to managers, which has arguably entered the post-crisis stage. Therefore, an inconsistency between the perception of when the crisis management is “over” could be visible between the two parties. Further, within the post-crisis stage the goal is to ensure the transfer of lessons learned from the crisis to guarantee the effective usage of the developed skills. Currently, some documentation of the process is being conducted, however, no extensive work could be identified, which is implied in the following quote:

*How do we save this knowledge or transfer this knowledge to new leaders? ... I have not seen any more systematic work on that, but of course that is something that we should do.*  
[M-LUSEM 1]

However, the major lesson discussed by all interviewees is how to handle future crisis events, which will be analyzed in the following section.

#### **4.3.1.1 Lessons Learned: Generic Planning**

Most of the lessons learned mentioned by interviewees were connected to how to plan and prepare for future crisis events. The university as large have also learned from this process by giving the faculties directives to conduct contingency planning.

*We have now been given the directive [from the university] to think about contingencies and just the other week I had to fill in a form when it comes to electricity shortage.* [M-LUSEM 1]

Being prepared for future crisis events was also argued for by most interviewees within LUSEM where the emphasis was put on generic preparation that can easily be transferred to future crisis events. Main activities of the planning referred to included environmental scanning, training and clear management roles. In contention to environmental scanning, M-LUSEM 2 argues “...*that we [should] constantly keep aware of in a way challenges that we have around us and that we are prepared for them...*”. Additionally, two interviewees mentioned training where the emphasis was on training generic skills, such as communication and crisis management groups. For example, M-LUSEM 1 talked about training as an activity to help to improve on the skills learned during the pandemic to be able to put them into practice when needed which was something that happened automatically due to the situation in Ukraine.

*In terms of learning, we actually got to use what we learn just immediately...we used ... the same groups [e.g. the COVID-19 group]. So maybe that is also a way of institutionalizing the learning process... we actually got to reuse it very quickly.* [M-LUSEM 1]

Furthermore, two academics argue for generic preparation in the form of clear management roles. As A-LUSEM 1 puts it “*I think it's important that those people [managers] are prepared for that [step in and do that work].*”. A-LUSEM 4 expresses similar thoughts:

*... I really like these kinds of adaptability skills so I would say that maybe it's something in between, something like some guidelines on rules but also some skills preparing us to the unknown. ... one of those rules is who is making those rules... I think that it would be useful to know who is making the decisions and who is just implementing those decisions... [A-LUSEM 4]*

With this said, it is visible that all arguments for more generic preparation are built on the difficulty to predict and foresee all types of contingencies that could affect the organization. Hence, a flexible approach could allow for lack of preparation as implied by the quote below:

*The advice I would give someone else would be that you cannot have a plan. You have to adjust and admit that. Plans are useless and that's OK, so just try to be ready to rethink what you thought the other day and if you don't move everyone else, we move around you so ... you don't control the events. You just adjust to the events. [M-LUSEM 1]*

In line with the above quotes, A-LUSEM 2 promoted less structure and instead moved the focus towards “... *relying on the improvisation of individual coworkers, [as] we cannot have a manual for everything ...*”. Hence, most arguments within LUSEM point towards the importance of having a flexible organization where people can quickly and efficiently adapt to change. However, it is also visible that some form of preparation is still seen as important which implies that a right balance should be adopted between being flexible and having structure, something that is emphasized by A-LUSEM 2

*It's always this dilemma, structures versus... improvise... and finding that balance and working with that balance. ... too much structure will not pay off. You need to empower your coworkers. [A-LUSEM 2]*

Hence, finding the balance between planning and structure will become increasingly important for managers in the future to be able to prepare for a variety of crisis events.

### 4.3.2 The Faculty of Medicine

To start with, the thoughts around the concept of a crisis have to some extent changed within the Faculty of Medicine. Most managers mentioned that planning for future crises has started. M-MED 2 also implied a change in mindset regarding unanticipated change, especially as there is “*A slight vibration that something is going to happen there, much more reaction that happens directly.*”. Nevertheless, the faculty has not fully recovered from the repercussions and remainder impacts of the pandemic, as there are still several consequential crises affecting the functioning of the unique activities within the faculty. Hence, it is noticeable from the quotes that the faculty is part of a larger system which will affect their possibility to proceed with their core activities.

*...we're still suffering from the effects of COVID, and that if a machine goes down I can't repair it, so I just have to sit and wait. So that means research has to stop. ...now we've of course what's happening now with energy costs. The current situation in Europe. It's also affecting so couldn't come at a worse time... We haven't had the chance to recover. [M-MED 2]*

*We still suffer from COVID. Hospital side is still under an enormous crisis...for example, just as easy as all the planned surgeries, there is an enormous backlog. So we are still facing this hospital side stress that limits to some extent our students to clinical placements...[M-MED 1]*

Another consequential problem highlighted by both an academic and a manager is the difficulty to get people back to campus. A-MED 1 explained that students are struggling with social anxiety as they are not used to being on campus, to which M-MED 1 added that “*... we have to push towards people on campus...*”. Further, as stressed throughout the analysis, the faculty has core activities that are less agile which affect their ability to be flexible and move fast if certain events happen. This aspect can be further visible when looking at the relationship between a more flexible generic planning and a more detailed planning which will be analyzed more in depth in the following section.

### 4.3.2.1 Lesson Learned: A Combination of Generic & Step-by-Step Planning

It was visible that more arguments regarding planning for future crises exist within the Faculty of Medicine. Therefore, when looking at LUSEM there was a more unified belief that flexibility and generic planning are essential to handle future crisis events. However, when looking at the Faculty of Medicine, the belief regarding how to plan for a future crisis can, to some extent, be traced back to the unique characteristics that a faculty has in regard to research and education. M-MED 2 described throughout the interview the unique research, namely “... *cell samples stored in freezers...*” that require maintenance by refilling liquid nitrogen, so it does not evaporate. M-MED 2 further explains that the faculty also conducts research on animals that “... *had to be fed and taken care of ...*”. Both animals and the cell-samples are critical for a lot of research within the faculty and should therefore not be exposed to risk. Thus, arguments regarding a more step-by-step planning can be connected to the critical aspects of the core business. It can further be linked to the important connection to the society.

*Keep the research going at a low level, so ... What will be the consequence of delayed integration of research results in society? We may push forward boundaries by 10 years, [it is] Importance to keep research going. [M-MED 2]*

Therefore, certain aspects cannot be left to the more flexible generic planning as they are critical for both the faculty and society at large. Hence, an increased awareness regarding the usage of scenario planning has been developed and adopted within the faculty to be able to better prepare and plan for crisis events. Plans regarding electricity shortage have been developed and scenarios connected to controlled shutdown of facilities have been considered. As M-MED 2 explains “*Controlled shutdowns, that we can buy enough time that we don't damage what we do with its educational research...*”. M-MED 3 also explains:

*Due to the war in Ukraine we have started to make plans [for] what would happen with the university if there would be ... like, power cuts or that we would if we would experience cyber attack... I think that we are more aware of the importance to do that in advance now than before the pandemic... [M-MED 3]*

Another proactive activity argued for is having a *crisis group* that can be activated if something happens. As M-MED 1 puts it “...we need these small crisis units, crisis teams that get together and talk and can move forward.”. This type of crisis preparation could be connected to the more generic planning that is highly emphasized within LUSEM. Some interviewees from the Faculty of Medicine highlighted the importance of knowing the flow of decision-making by having clear management roles as this was a factor that facilitated the handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Another aspect mentioned was communication, summarized in the quote below.

*... I think the common denominator for every plan is that everybody will benefit from knowing what to do so you need to have a defined group that takes the lead, and who is responsible for communication, so that not everybody starts communicating because that's difficult... one needs to have a pre decided way or person that will be the the ones responsible for pressing the send button for a message for example. [M-MED 1]*

An important lesson learned highly emphasized by several interviewees was the increased ability of being flexible and changing. As A-MED 4 explains “We learn how to switch from one decision to another.”. This notion of flexibility and the ability to improvise are also visible within certain parts of the management team where focus is also put on collaboration, both within the faculty itself and the university at large.

*So I think that's the biggest lesson for me at least that you need to have this overarching strategy. And you need to be able to work quickly, because ... you don't know what the crisis is until you are there. So you need to be very flexible, and that's easier said than done when you have large scale organizations. ... we need to work together and try to solve the problem and not be too locked in to this unit works like this because we simply don't know. [M-MED 1]*

This quote highlights one of the key takeaways from the crisis, which is to put forward a strategy and plan while also developing the ability to be flexible and open for change. COVID-19 indeed proved that both more detailed planning and more generic flexibility are needed to navigate a crisis. Needless to say, the degree of the need for each of the approaches depends on the unique criteria of the faculty. This can be seen as LUSEM had a more unified belief of the importance of generic planning rather than detailed planning than what is implied within the Faculty of Medicine.

## 4.4 Summary & Edited Theoretical Framework

In summary, the empirical analysis revealed that both faculties adopted a reactive approach to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. In the crisis stage, both faculties highlighted the importance of centralized and open communication. The proactive activities such as crisis management teams and plans were implemented during the crisis to facilitate communication and coordination within and between faculties. Moreover, the impact of the Swedish model to handle the pandemic was highly visible during this stage, which was manifested through the decision-making, where emphasis has been put on more centralization than usual to reduce risk of interpretation issues. The decisions taken within the faculties were also impacted by both the central decisions on university level and the characteristics of each faculty, which significantly determined how the crisis was handled. *See Figure 3.*

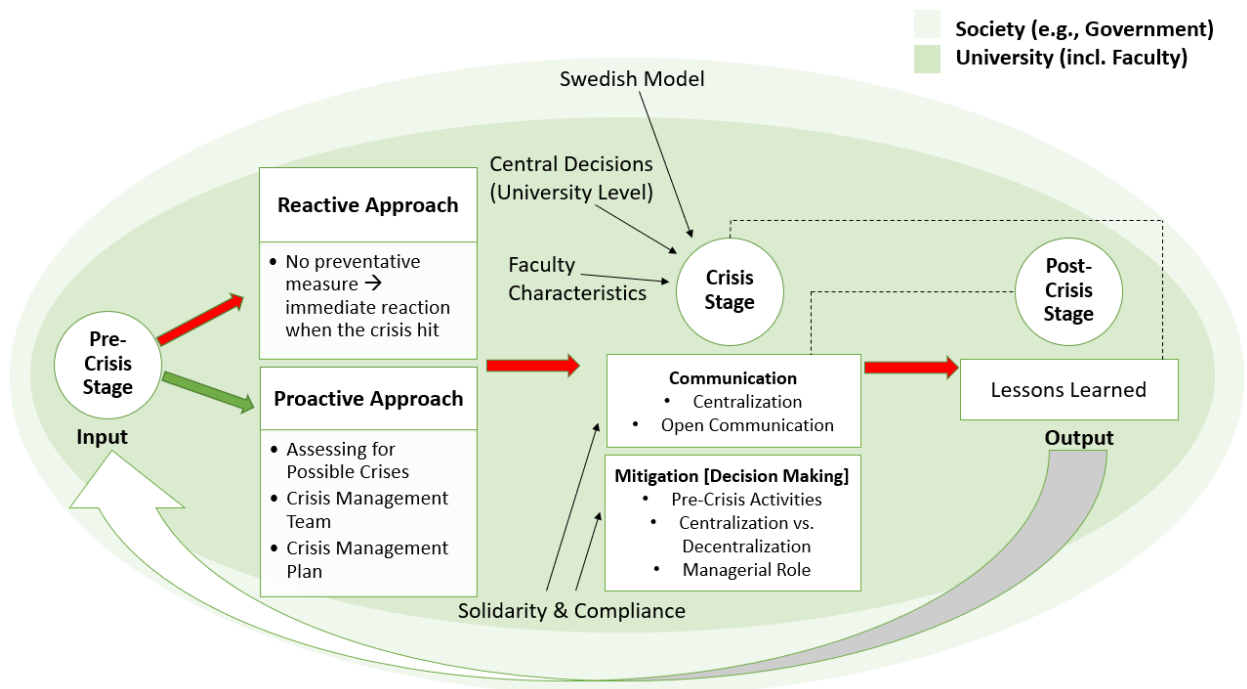
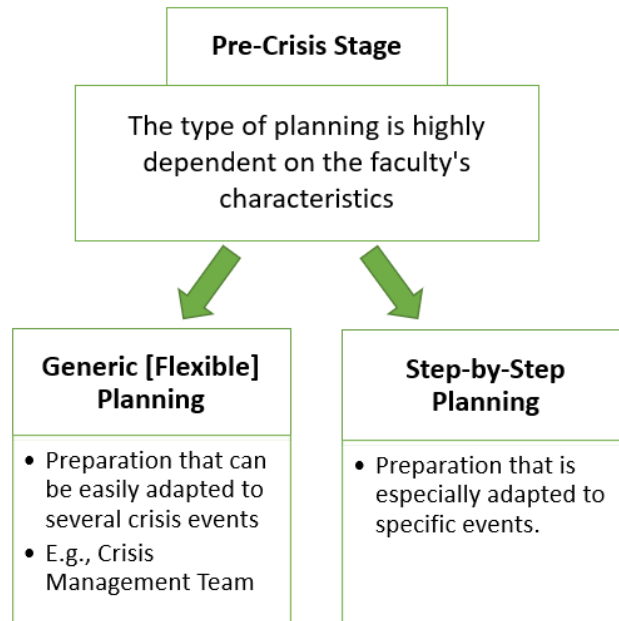


Figure 3: Edited Theoretical Framework (Developed by authors)

However, the most interesting aspect from the analysis becomes visible in the post-crisis stage, where arguments regarding lessons learned to handle potential crisis events are emphasized. In this regard, the emphasis on generic planning is highlighted as a possibility to handle a wide variety of crisis events by preparing easily transferable skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, more

structured planning is also relevant as certain aspects within a faculty require unique maintenance that cannot be risked. Hence, the degree and type of planning is highly linked to the faculty's needs and characteristics, *see Figure 4.*



*Figure 4: Planning for Potential Crisis Events (Developed by authors)*



## 5. Discussion

Building upon the findings presented in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses the results in relation to previous research by positioning it to the identified body of literature. Using the theoretical framework as a foundation to present the findings enabled for this discussion to be aligned with the critical elements emphasized in crisis management literature and apply it in the context of higher education. Indeed, managing COVID-19 within both faculties required a high degree of adaptability and shift in perspective, a shift that had to be done in a timely manner, followed by immediate actions. Importantly, the handling of the crisis was highly shaped by on the one hand the implications of the Swedish model, and on the other hand the uniqueness of the educational program and structure of each faculty. Taking this into consideration, first this chapter discusses the approach used by the faculties to navigate the crisis. Second, the crisis phase highlights the relevance of communication, crisis management teams and managerial roles within the faculties throughout the crisis. Third, the main lessons learned from the pandemic times will be emphasized.

### 5.1 Pre-Crisis Stage

Previous literature in the field of crisis management within higher education focusing on the pre-crisis stage is limited as universities and educational institutions mostly start planning for potential crisis events after they have been affected by one (Brooker, 2014). Research has further argued that universities tend to be underprepared and underequipped to manage a crisis event (Helsloot & Jong, 2006; Booker, 2014; Foster & Smith, 2015; Mitroff, Diamond & Alpaslan, 2006). Consequently, this lack of preparation leads to the adoption of a reactive approach when a crisis occurs (Spillan, 2000). These findings have been further supported when analyzing the reaction from both LUSEM and the Faculty of Medicine. Although the Faculty of Medicine did some prior preparation a few weeks in advance before the recommendation from the government came, both faculties arguably adopted the reactive approach. This has also been the case within other universities since they have not been able to anticipate the outbreak and the magnitude of the crisis (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021).

To further build on the reactive approach taken by the faculties, the perception of the crisis should be mentioned. It could be noticed that the perception of a crisis was rather limited before COVID-19. This further supports the findings regarding weak awareness on both crisis and crisis management observed within universities (Zhen & Bian, 2015; Booker, 2014). Even though a reactive approach is not recommended for medium to large crisis events as it can hamper the relationship with internal and external stakeholders (Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015), no evidence within the empirical findings was found supporting this.

The initial reaction within the university can be linked to the reaction from students and teachers as well as the reaction from other universities. Thus, minor internal and external scanning was conducted which is highly argued for within research (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017). However, the timing of the initial reaction can mainly be connected to the Swedish government's announcement regarding digital activities. In line with that, some interviewees mentioned a slow reaction which could be explained by a conflicting view between the university and its stakeholders on when the crisis started, which research has argued could lead to the perception of a late reaction (Fink, Beak, & Taddeo, 1971; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992).

However, it should also be mentioned that there are indications that the predictability of the event was harmed due to confusing signals, mostly in the form of news. Hence, complicating the possibility to foresee the disruption, therefore moving the focus towards the arguments within chaos theory. Namely, that predictability of a crisis within the long term is hard due to the nonlinearity that exists (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). Therefore, stressing a more flexible approach where re-adjustments of the pre-made plans should be conducted depending on the development of the event (Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010). This was also evident in the empirical material, and it will be further discussed as one of the main lessons learned towards future crisis management strategies. An additional aspect identified that could have amplified the denial universities usually have towards crisis events (Zhen & Bian, 2015; Booker, 2014) is the Swedish society. Particularly, the emphasis was put on the minimal exposure to crisis events as a factor influencing the perception of possible crises, and thus affecting the preparation and the reaction towards it.

Moreover, as mentioned before, the reactive approach is not suitable when facing a large crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered (Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015). Research instead suggests a proactive approach (Sahin, Ulubeyli & Kazaza, 2015) where organizations prepare for the event in advance by assessing possible crises, form a crisis management team and develop crisis management plans (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017). These steps that arguably should be done in advance were however developed and implemented by both faculties during the crisis.

## **5.2 Crisis Stage**

It is undeniable that the uniqueness of COVID-19 pandemic impacted to a great extent the way the university handled the crisis. However, it is essential to set the stage of the understanding of the crisis phase by highlighting the Swedish context, as it dictated the decisions taken and approaches followed by the faculties to navigate the crisis. Previous research covered the implication of the context of the state in which a crisis takes place on the way universities and educational institutions handled the pandemic (Clark, 2003, cited in Karimian, et al, 2022). This is linked to not only the measures and regulations announced by the government, but also the availability of infrastructure and resources (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). Further, the role of the government becomes more prominent as the pandemic gets more impactful (Hou, et al 2021). Although this aspect is not usually at the center of discussion when it comes to crisis management, it was nevertheless emphasized during the interviews. Indeed, it was agreeably a significant contributor to the way the university generally and the faculties specifically handled the crisis, including the speed of response to the early signs, the execution of the guidelines, as well as the type of communication established within the university.

The empirical findings could reveal some characteristics of the Swedish approach in the context of the pandemic which are relevant to crisis management. We notice the emphasis on the notion of recommendations interchangeably used with the terms of guidelines and announcements. Inevitably, this led to a wide range of interpretations of the news and information shared by the government, and thus some noticeable confusions, even delays in the direction to take, and the way to proceed to face the pandemic. From a different angle, the notion of recommendations, as deduced from the findings, had an underlying meaning of responsibility to be taken on a collective

and individual level. This was argued to be a foundational element in the way the faculties faced the crisis throughout its various waves.

As introduced earlier, the pre-crisis phase was short lived. Therefore, major elements, including a crisis management team and plans, discussed in previous literature that should ideally be part of it (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017), were established and executed during the crisis phase. This process however started with the adoption of the right mindset which was naturally established within the faculties as both managers and academics realized its importance in not only making decisions that are suitable for the uncertain times of the crisis, but also in exercising their tasks in an effective way. This is manifested through both the role of managing and leading as well as the role of teaching and researching, while simultaneously collaborating and working together. The idea of collaborating was manifested through the groups created to address COVID-19 related matters, which will be further discussed. Yet the main point to highlight is the composition of the groups, which links back to what Coombs (2019) described as cross-functionality. In fact, they encompassed representatives of academics, students, and staff to include main stakeholders in parts of the decision-making process and ensure an adequate diffusion of communication.

Accordingly, this paved the way for faculties to take the necessary steps to tackle the pandemic on the practical level. First, as introduced earlier, crisis management groups were created to discuss decisions linked to specific areas of the structure of the hierarchy, including the university as the center, the faculties, and the various departments. On the faculty level, several smaller groups have been created to continuously coordinate with academics, answer the daily questions in an effective way while keeping the requirements of the faculty at the center when managing the crisis. This was collectively argued to have facilitated the management of the crisis, which emphasizes the arguments on the importance of crisis management teams presented by Johansen, Aggerholm and Frandsen (2012). In addition, a crisis management team is responsible for facilitating information flow throughout the phases of the crisis (Massey & Larsen, 2006). Indeed, creating crisis groups in both LUSEM and the Faculty of Medicine acted as a communication hub for academics, who considered these teams as a point of reference when it came to information requests and clarifications. In line with clarification, a crucial feature of crisis groups that was argued to be key in navigating the crisis was the assignment of roles and leadership it established. The constant

changes experienced during the crisis created the need for an active and engaged leadership that assigned clear roles and provided direct instructions, which both faculties needed. In fact, with the unique organizational structure of universities a high degree of autonomy is noticed when it comes to the regular operations within faculties. However, this autonomy should be reconsidered within the context of a crisis, especially when it comes to communication protocols and leadership (Moerschell & Novak, 2019). This was highly discussed within both faculties, which was manifested through the need for a balance between autonomy and the need for clear guidelines. Indeed, as academic freedom remains necessary for daily tasks and activities, a need for centralization was expressed to set the foundation to unify the decision-making process.

Second, communication within the faculties was reconsidered. Undoubtedly, communication is vital to establish an effective delivery of messages and information (Massey & Larsen, 2006). Nevertheless, for it to be impactful, crisis communication should be regular and active especially during the crisis phase (Coombs, 2019; Piucus & Acharya, 1988). Analyzing the communication during the pandemic within the faculties emphasized its role which goes beyond information flow, but in fact acting as the stepping-stone for the actions taken and decisions made in the short time frame provided. This increased the need for constant follow-up communication throughout the various communication channels used by the faculties (Coombs, 2019). The frustration discussed by Coombs (2019) created by the need for immediate answers to questions, coupled with the overflow of information from different sources was indeed experienced by the faculties, especially at the initial stages of COVID-19.

Importantly, Schoenfeld (2021) stressed the importance of communicating even when sufficient information is not available, which was voiced within both faculties as necessary as it allowed for clarity and direction for potential decisions. The role of communication was especially prominent in coordinating and connecting the different actors within both faculties; thus, unifying not only each faculty but also the university as whole. The need of the Faculty of Medicine for more centralization was met by an increased focus on the quality and availability of communication. Having a main source of communication was also essential in supporting the relevance of the message shared and minimizing the possibility for various interpretations of guidelines and instructions to surface. The Faculty of Medicine, with its unique education programs and requirements, saw a need for an active communication through direct instructions to be followed,

as opposed to the passive communication that was experienced at the beginning stages of the pandemic. This links to the need for the shift from formal communication to a practical one, as it allows for communication to be carried in a timely manner throughout the crisis phase (Parpala & Niinistö-Sivuranta, 2022). Nevertheless, with its uncertainties and continuous changes, the management of the crisis phase was made possible due to the willingness from people within both faculties to take responsibility and comply to follow guidelines. Agreeably, the role of solidarity and sense of community to face the turbulent times of the pandemic eased the way for a smoother handling of the crisis.

### **5.3 Post-Crisis Stage**

It is still an open question whether the COVID-19 crisis is over. This is especially the case within LUSEM where some academics still have concerns regarding the situation, which emphasizes an inconsistency in the definition of the crisis between managers and some academics. Such an inconsistency could lead to the situation where the organization is unaware of the involvement in a crisis (Kamer, 1996 cited in Coombs, 2019) as the definition is highly subjective (Coombs, 2019). Thus, research has argued that the key stakeholders should determine whether the organization is in a crisis or not (Snoeijers & Poels, 2018). This inconsistency could further support the arguments regarding post-crisis communication (Coombs, 2007) as that is a factor amplifying the inconsistency. However, it should be mentioned that, due to this study's qualitative nature, no weight can be placed on the argument regarding whether the organization may have a continuing crisis linked to the consequences of COVID-19, as no conclusion can be drawn from only four academics at each faculty were interviewed.

Further, several follow up problems that are linked directly and indirectly to the pandemic have appeared. This follows Finks (2002) notion that when one crisis is over, usually the next one comes. However, when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting the whole world, these effects become amplified as not only the organization itself is affected but everything around as well. This is especially the case for the Faculty of Medicine which, due to its unique offerings, is highly integrated in the Swedish healthcare system. Therefore, depending on what is defined as and included in the definition of the COVID-19 crisis, the length and effects is significantly different between the two faculties. Within LUSEM, the focus has shifted towards a new crisis

connected to Russia's invasion of Ukraine while the Faculty of Medicine is still severely affected by problems caused by the pandemic. Even though both faculties are part of Lund University, the time frame of the phases of the three stages model (Coombs, 2007) cannot be considered the same within the university. In fact, the Faculty of Medicine is still considered to be in the crisis stage caused by the pandemic and its follow up problems compared to LUSEM. This can be seen as new events happening in Europe have severely affected the Faculty of Medicines ability to recover (Fink, 2002; Mitroff, 1988) which is a step connected to the crisis stage (Coombs, 2019).

The recovery should, according to research, start when the initial crisis is over (Fink, 2002; Mitroff, 1988). However, due to the complexity of a pandemic, especially for the Faculty of Medicine, the initial crisis has been affected and amplified due to the close connection to the surrounding environment. Thus, further increases the importance of the argument that one size does not fit all when it comes to crisis management within universities (Smits & Ally, 2003; Somers, 2009). The importance of the concept of one size does not fit all becomes even more prominent when looking at the main lessons learned regarding crisis management from each faculty. Within LUSEM, flexibility and generic planning was mostly stressed as the key to cope with the pandemic and as something to bring to future crisis events. This was also mentioned within the Faculty of Medicine, however, in connection to certain aspects of the faculty, more detailed planning became highly emphasized.

On the one hand, these differences can be seen as arguments contradicting research that emphasize the implementation of proactive activities such as a crisis management team and crisis management plans (Coombs, 2019; Crandall, Parnell & Spillan, 2010; Parnell, 2017; Schneid & Collins, 2001; Mitroff & Gus, 2001, cited in Booker, 2014). On the other hand, the differences between lessons learned could also unlock the question mentioned by one academic, putting forward the dilemma between structure and improvisation. As argued by research, there exist an infinite amount of possible crisis events (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993) which need to be handled differently depending on its characteristics (Coombs, 2019). Thus, plans should be formulated in a flexible manner to ease the adoption to each unique crisis (Coombs, 2019) which has been important when managing a pandemic as that implies a dynamic process (Dunkel, Zdziarski & Rollo, 2021). Coombs' (2019) argument aligned with the findings regarding the suggestions of more generic planning that could be easily adapted to other types of crises and not only a pandemic.

This type of planning becomes more relevant as most crisis situations within higher education are unexpected (Zdziarski (2006 cited in Rollo & Zdziarski, 2021). Thus, a planning that is fast and adaptable to the characteristics of the crisis is required. Examples here are both a crisis management group, flow of decision-making and prepared leadership. Hence, it would be wrong to argue that the findings in this research contradicts what have previously been done, rather it is showing the spectrum that exists within proactive crisis management. This argument is further supported by the arguments made within the Faculty of Medicine where certain aspects should be planned in a more step-by-step manner such as electricity shortage which could destroy samples for research and hamper both research within the faculty itself and scientific development in the society at large.

In the end, it can be concluded that the university at large has learned and started to plan more for possible scenarios which supports the arguments that crises are often neglected by universities until they have affected them (Booker, 2014). In this case, the pandemic opened the eyes for several possible crises that were neglected before. Hence, the experience from the pandemic has contributed to several lessons learned within both faculties.



## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to increase understanding of the scope and dimensions to be considered by universities when preparing and planning for a potential crisis, by exploring the handling of COVID-19 pandemic in the Swedish context. To fulfill this purpose, the following question has been examined:

*How did a Swedish university implement crisis management to navigate COVID-19 pandemic?*

To achieve this, a qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted, investigating two faculties within Lund University, namely LUSEM and the Faculty of Medicine. This thesis used the theoretical framework as a foundation to cover the full spectrum of the crisis. The results conducted from this study revealed some similarities and differences when it comes to the handling of the crisis throughout the different stages. In the pre-crisis stage it is visible that both faculties adopted a reactive approach towards crisis management with little to no prior experience regarding crisis and crisis management. This could partly be explained by the context of the state in which they operate which paves the way to their interconnectedness with the Swedish system. Therefore, it is essential to shed light on the impact of the Swedish context, which is arguably different from other countries, as the emphasis was put on individual responsibility rather than regulatory force when handling the pandemic (Bylund & Packard, 2021). This extended to universities, as it dictated to a great extent the direction and the approaches used to navigate COVID-19, which was observed within both faculties.

Accordingly, the lack of experience and preparedness for crisis management mentioned in the pre-crisis stage could be linked to the minimal exposure to crises within Sweden. The unexpectedness of the pandemic resulted in a fast move to the crisis stage, in which most of the decisions had been made and actions had been taken. With this sudden change, each faculty, with its unique structure and educational program, was exposed to challenges that had to be faced. Decision-making within both faculties increased the need for clear guidelines and instructions to act. This was amplified by the Swedish model, as the use of recommendations by the government gave rise to differences

in interpretation of the information communicated. Although autonomy was still relevant considering the requirements of each faculty, centralization was nevertheless argued for as a suitable approach to follow. This was mainly manifested through two main decisions. First, the creation of crisis teams, allowing for a clear allocation of responsibilities and coordination within each faculty. Second, communication was reconsidered, relying on various channels to ensure a quicker flow of communication, and thus effective decision-making and interactions. All these elements were essential to unify the university, an aspect that was needed in the constantly changing environment.

Finally, within the post-crisis stage, the lessons learned are different between the two faculties. On the one hand, within LUSEM a more flexible approach with generic planning was argued for. On the other hand, the Faculty of Medicine emphasizes a combination of flexibility with generic planning and step-by-step planning, which could be traced back to the uniqueness of the faculty when it comes to research and education. Therefore, the degree of planning is highly dependent on the unique characteristics of each faculty implying that a unified strategy is hard to adopt.

## **6.1 Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical implication of this research is twofold. Firstly, this thesis has contributed to an increased understanding of crisis management within higher education, a research field that can be considered relatively scarce. More precisely, by investigating two faculties with different educational offerings and research areas, the underlying meaning of the argument that *one size does not fit all* comes through. These findings therefore add to the understanding of the importance of adopting the crisis management strategy depending on the unique characteristics of each faculty. Additionally, the results in this thesis emphasize the importance of having easily transferable preparation as crisis situations are often unique and unexpected. In fact, although the results from this study show that flexibility is important when dealing with a crisis, some form of planning is essential to mitigate and control the spreading of the crisis. Noticeably, the aspects to be considered when planning for a crisis, in the context of higher education, have not been sufficiently discussed in previous research. Therefore, this study aimed to emphasize not only the importance of individualized and unique crisis management for each faculty, but also the importance of generic planning which can facilitate the handling of unexpected crisis events, highlighting the main

aspects to be prioritized when establishing a plan. Yet the engine of an effective crisis management is the stakeholders involved in the process. Therefore, having employees that can navigate changes will ease the way for an efficient handling of the crisis.

Secondly, by exploring the Swedish context, the results from this thesis have further increased the understanding of the interconnectedness between the university and the state in which it operates. This aspect becomes especially interesting due to the uniqueness of the Swedish strategy when handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, this thesis also contributed to previous literature by investigating the management of the pandemic within two faculties, addressing the implications of the Swedish approach in the handling of COVID-19.

## **6.2 Practical Implications**

In addition to the theoretical implication, this thesis has also contributed to several practical implications that could be useful for managers within higher educational institutions. Firstly, it is important to mention that the success of the reactive approach when handling a larger crisis is dependent on various factors, including internal stakeholders' willingness and ability to cope, as well as the resources available to adapt accordingly. Therefore, prioritizing internal stakeholders by taking care of their well-being and facilitating the transition process during a crisis is essential if a reactive approach is adopted. Secondly, our findings highlight the importance of adjusting the chosen crisis management strategy to fit the unique characteristics of the faculty. More specifically, depending on the offerings in terms of education and research, different types and amounts of planning will be required. This implies the managerial dilemma to find the right balance between step-by-step planning and more generic planning where flexibility is promoted. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the adoption of crisis management strategy is realistic and achievable within the specific organization. Hence, the ideal crisis management strategy presented in most literature may not be the most suitable strategy for all types of organizations. Thirdly, depending on the type and scope of the crisis, focus should be extended beyond the organization as external factors can affect the management and the chosen approach. This could be exemplified by the national approach taken by Sweden to some extent complicated the handling of the crisis which called for a more centralized approach to increase the need for clear directions and minimize the risk of interpretation issues.

## 6.3 Limitations & Further Research

The methodological approach used in this thesis comes with some limitations which could have concealed various dimensions of the results aimed for. The multiple-case study conducted on two faculties within one university will affect the possibility to generalize the results, and thus limiting the scope and possibly the relevance of the findings when interpreted within a different context. Nevertheless, future research could extend the value of the findings of this study by adopting a comparative approach and covering crisis management on a broader scope. Although other universities follow the Swedish model, it could be argued that they have experienced the pandemic in a different way, with diverse strategies focusing on centralization, decentralization, or a combination of both. Exploring these differences could lead to a greater understanding of the degree of implication of the role of the government on crisis management within universities. The time frame assigned for this thesis was also a factor in the choice of the methodological approach as well as the subjects selected. Hence, students, who are considered essential stakeholders of a university, were excluded from the research; an aspect that could be considered for potential research.

Another limitation could be linked to the time frame during which this thesis has been conducted. With the announcement of COVID-19 as a non-threat to public health, most activities within the faculties resumed in the usual in-person setting, hinting to the “ending” of the risky and uncertain period of the pandemic. Evidently, this does not signify the end of the pandemic. Taking into consideration the context and the type of activities exercised by the faculties, this thesis saw potential for several elements to be covered within the post-crisis stage. However, other crucial aspects within this stage could not be adequately studied. On the one hand, the reflective nature of this phase requires a follow-up that is ideally done on a long-time frame. This will allow for the evaluation of the quality and accuracy of the applicability of the lessons learned not only through internal changes and integrations within the university generally and the faculty specifically, but also through the handling of potential crises. On the other hand, as of today, it is still argued for the fine line that exists between the crisis and post-crisis phase, considering the repercussions of the pandemic which faculties are still dealing with. For this reason, there are great opportunities

for future research to address this with a reflective lens and report on the practical changes within the faculties.

# References

- Argyris, C., (1977). Double loop learning in organizations. *Harvard business review*, 55(5), pp.115-125.
- Arpan, L.M., (2002). When in Rome? The effects of spokesperson ethnicity on audience evaluation of crisis communication. *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973), 39(3), pp.314-339.
- Augustine, N. R. (1995) 'Managing the Crisis You Tried to Prevent', *Harvard Business Review*, 73(6), pp. 147–158.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559
- Bell, E., Bryman, A. & Harley, B. (2019). *Business Research Methods*, 5th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bhaduri, R. M. (2019) 'Leveraging Culture and Leadership in Crisis Management', *European Journal of Training and Development*, 43(5–6), pp. 554–569.
- Billings, R.S., Milburn, T.W. & Schaalman, M.L., (1980). A model of crisis perception: A theoretical and empirical analysis. *Administrative science quarterly*, pp.300-316.
- Birch, J. (1994) 'New Factors in Crisis Planning and Response', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 39(1), pp. 31–34.
- Birnbaum, R. (2004). The end of shared governance: Looking ahead or looking back. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 127, pp.5-22.
- Boin, A., Lodge, M., & Luesink, M. (2020). Learning from the COVID-19 crisis: an initial analysis of national responses. *Policy Design and Practice*, 3(3), pp. 189-204.
- Booker Jr., L. (2014) 'Crisis Management: Changing Times for Colleges', *Journal of College Admission*, (222), pp. 16–23.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Företagsekonomiska forskningsmetoder*, Translated by B. Nilsson, 2017, Stockholm: Liber AB

- Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M. D., Short, C. E., & Coombs, W. T. (2017). "Crises and Crisis Management: Integration, Interpretation, and Research Development". *Journal of Management*, 43 (6): 1661–1692.
- Bylund, P.L. & Packard, M.D., (2021). Separation of power and expertise: evidence of the tyranny of experts in Sweden's COVID-19 responses. *Southern Economic Journal*, 87(4), pp.1300-1319.
- Cavanaugh, J. C. (2006). Effectively managing major disasters. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, 9(1), 3-11.
- Caywood, C., & Stocker, K. P. (1993). The ultimate crisis plan. In J. Gottschalk (Ed.), *Crisis response: Inside stories on managing image under siege* (pp. 409 – 428). Washington, DC: Gale Research
- Christianson, M.K., Farkas, M.T., Sutcliffe, K.M. & Weick, K.E., (2009). Learning through rare events: Significant interruptions at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum. *Organization science*, 20(5), pp.846-860.
- Claus, L (2015) ‘Strategies and Tactics for Managing Duty of Care in a University Setting’, in M Munoz & N King (eds.) *Strategies for University Management*, *Business Expert Press*, pp. 129-142.
- Claus, L. & Giordano, E. (2013) ‘Global employer duty of care: protecting the health, safety, security and well-being of employees crossing borders’, in Claus, L. (Ed.): *Global HR Practitioner Handbook*, Vol. 1, *Global Immersion Press*, Silverton, OR, pp.279–299
- Claus, L. & Yost R. (2010). ‘A Global View of the University’s Duty of Care Obligations’. *URMIA Journal*, pp. 29-36.
- Coombs, W.T., (2007). Crisis management and communications. *Institute for public relations*, 4(5), p.6.
- Coombs, W.T., (2010). Parameters for crisis communication. In Coombs, W.T. and Holladay, S.J. eds., *The handbook of crisis communication*. John Wiley & Sons. pp.17-53.
- Coombs, W.T., (2019). *Ongoing Crisis Communication: planning, managing, and responding*. 5th edn. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Crandall, W., Parnell, J. A., & Spillan, J. E. (2010). *Crisis Management in the New Strategy Landscape*, London: SAGE Publications

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. London: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dodgson, M., (1993). Organizational learning: a review of some literatures. *Organization studies*, 14(3), pp.375-394.
- Drysdale, D.A., Modzeleski, W., & Simons, A. (2010). *Campus attacks: Targeted violence affecting institutions of higher education*. Collingdale: DIANE Publishing.
- Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.E., (2002). Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of business research*, 55(7), pp.553-560.
- Duncan, A., Jennings, K., Modzeleski, W. (2010). *Action Guide for Emergency Management at Institutions of Higher Education*. U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools.
- Dunkel, N. W., Zdziarski, E.L., & Rollo, J.M. (2021). Infections and contagious Diseases. In E. L. Zdziarski, N. W. Dunkel & J. M. Rollo (Eds.), *Campus Crisis Management: A Comprehensive Guide for Practitioners*, 2nd edn (pp. 298- 311). San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Dyer, S. C. (1995) ‘Getting People into the Crisis Communication Plan’, *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40(3), pp. 38–41.
- Eisenhardt, K.M., & Graebner, M.E. (2007). Theory Building from Cases: Opportunities and challenges, *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), pp.25–32
- Fink, S. (2002). *Crisis Management: Planning for the Inevitable*. Bloomington: iUniverse Inc
- Fink, S., Beak, J., & Taddeo, K. (1971). Organizational crisis and change. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 7, 15-37.
- Finkelstein, S., (2004). *Why smart executives fail: And what you can learn from their mistakes*. New York: Penguin.
- Foster, E., & Smith, C. (2015). Integrating resilience planning into university campus planning: Measuring risks and leveraging opportunities. *Planning for Higher Education Journal*, 44(1), 10–19.



- García-Morales, V. J., Garrido-Moreno, A., & Martín-Rojas, R. (2021). The transformation of higher education after the COVID disruption: Emerging challenges in an online learning scenario. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 196.
- González-Herrero, A. & Pratt, C. B. (1995) 'How to Manage a Crisis Before -- or Whenever -- It Hits', *Public Relations Quarterly*, 40(1), pp. 25–29.
- Government Offices of Sweden (2020). The Government's work in the area of education in response to the coronavirus. Available online: <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/03/the-governments-work-in-the-area-of-education-in-response-to-the-coronavirus/> [Accessed: 2022-04-15]
- Government Offices of Sweden (2022). Sweden to lift ban on entry from all countries. Available online: <https://www.government.se/press-releases> [Accessed: 2022-04-03]
- Gustafsson, J. (2017). Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: A comparative study.
- Guttry, A. ,& Capone, F. (2017). Do Universities Have a Duty of Care Towards Their Employees and Students when They Travel Abroad on University Business? A Critical Analysis of the State-of-the-Art and the Relevant Practice. *IdPS, Issue 3*(1). P. 11-39
- Helsloot, I. & Jong, W. (2006) 'Risk Management in Higher Education and Research in the Netherlands', *Journal of Contingencies & Crisis Management*, 14(3), pp. 142–159
- Hou, A.Y.C., Hill, C., Ince, M., Lin, F.Y., & Chen, E., (2021). A preliminary exploration of crisis management approach on higher education and quality assurance in Taiwan Under COVID-19 pandemic:relevance to other contexts?. *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 1–20.
- Janahi, Y. (2021). Crisis Management Practices and Emergency Preparedness of Private Universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain: Basis for Framework Development. *Crisis*, 15(10).
- Johansen, W., Aggerholm, H.K. & Frandsen, F., (2012). Entering new territory: A study of internal crisis management and crisis communication in organizations. *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), pp.270-279.
- Karimian, Z., Farrokhi, M.R., Moghadami, M., Zarifsanaiey, N., Mehrabi, M., Khojasteh, L & Salehi, N. (2022). Medical education and COVID-19 pandemic: a crisis management model towards an evolutionary pathway. *Educ Inf Technol* 27, pp 3299–3320.

- Kezar, A., (2005). Consequences of radical change in governance: A grounded theory approach. *The journal of higher education*, 76(6), pp.634-668.
- Kovoor-Misra, S., Zammuto, R.F. & Mitroff, I.I., (2000). Crisis preparation in organizations: prescription versus reality. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 63(1), pp.43-62.
- Lund University (2022). Faculties, departments and centres. Available online: <https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/about-university/faculties-departments-and-centres> [Accessed: 2022-03-31]
- Marinoni, G., Van't Land, H., & Jensen, T., (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World, IAU Global Survey Report.
- Massey, J.E. & Larsen, J.P., (2006). Crisis management in real time: How to successfully plan for and respond to a crisis. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 12(3-4), pp.63-97.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). The importance of qualitative research for causal explanation in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(8), 655-661.
- Mikušová, M., & Horváthová, P. (2019). Prepared for a Crisis? Basic Elements of Crisis Management in an Organisation. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja*, 32(1), pp. 1844-1868.
- Mitroff, I.I., (1988). Crisis management: Cutting through the confusion. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 29(2), p.15.
- Mitroff, I. I. (1994) 'Crisis Management and Environmentalism: A Natural Fit', *California Management Review*, 36(2), pp. 101–113.
- Mitroff, I. I., Diamond, M. A. & Alpaslan, C. M. (2006) 'HOW PREPARED Are America's Colleges and Universities for Major Crises?', *Change*, 38(1), pp. 60–67.
- Mitroff, I.I., Pauchant, C., & Shrivastava, P. (1988). The Structure of Man-made Organizational Crises Conceptual and Empirical Issues in the Development of a General Theory of Crisis Management. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 33(2), pp. 83-107.
- Mitroff, I. I., Pauchant, T., Finney, M., & Pearson, C. (1989) 'Do (some) organizations cause their own crises? The cultural profiles of crisis-prone vs. crisis-prepared organizations', *Industrial Crisis Quarterly*, 3(4), pp. 269–283.

- Moerschell, L. & Novak, S.S., (2020). Managing crisis in a university setting: The challenge of alignment. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 28(1), pp.30-40.
- Morales, V.J., Moreno, A., & Rojas, R., (2021). The Transformation of Higher Education After the COVID Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario. *Front. Psychol.* 12:616059.
- Muffet-Willett, S.L. (2010). Waiting for a Crisis: Case Studies of Crisis Leaders in Higher Education. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Akron)
- Murphy, P., (1996). Chaos theory as a model for managing issues and crises. *Public relations review*, 22(2), pp.95-113.
- Neuman, L. W. (2011). Social Research Method: qualitative and quantitative approaches. 7. Ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Parnell, J. A. (2017) Strategic management : theory and practice. 4 Ed. New York: SAGE Publications.
- Parpala, A., Niinistö-Sivuranta, S. (2022). Leading Teaching during a Pandemic in Higher Education – A Case Study in a Finnish University. *Education Sciences* 12, 147.
- Pauchant, T. C., & Mitroff, I. I. (1992). Transforming the crisis-prone organization: Preventing individual, organizational, and environmental tragedies. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pearson, D. R., & Beckham, J. C. (2005). Negligent liability issues involving colleges and students: Balancing the risks and benefits of expanded programs and heightened supervision. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 42(4), 460–477.
- Pearson, C., & Clair, J. (1998). Reframing crisis management. *The Academy of Management Review*, 23(1), 59-76
- Pearson, C. M. & Mitroff, I. I. (1993) 'From Crisis Prone to Crisis Prepared: A Framework for Crisis Management', *The Executive*, 7(1), pp. 48–59.
- Pincus, J.D. & Acharya, L., (1988). Employee communication strategies for organizational crises. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1(3), pp.181-199.

- Portmann, M. & Pirzada, A.A., (2008). Wireless mesh networks for public safety and crisis management applications. *IEEE Internet computing*, 12(1), pp.18-25.
- Preble, J. F. (1997) 'Integrating the Crisis Management Perspective into the Strategic Management Process', *Journal of Management Studies (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 34(5), pp. 769–791.
- Rahman, M. S. (2020). The advantages and disadvantages of using qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods in language “testing and assessment” research: A literature review.
- Regester, M., (1989). Crisis Management, in P. Bowman, *Handbook of Financial Public Relations*. London: Heinemann Professional Publishing, pp. 99-109
- Richardson, B. (1994) 'Socio-technical Disasters: Profile and Prevalence', *Disaster Prevention & Management*, 3(4), pp. 41–69.
- Rollo, J. M., & Zdziarski, E. L., (2021). The Impact of a Crisis. In E. L. Zdziarski, N. W. Dunkel & J. M. Rollo (Eds.), *Campus Crisis Management: A Comprehensive Guide for Practitioners*, 2nd edn (pp. 3-31). San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Sahin, S., Ulubeyli, S. & Kazaza, A., (2015). Innovative crisis management in construction: Approaches and the process. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 195, pp.2298-2305.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., (2009). Research methods for business students. London: Pearson education.
- Schneid, T. & Collins, L. (2001). Disaster Management and Preparedness. Boca Raton: Lewis Publishers/CRC Press LLC
- Schoenfeld, M. J (2021). Crisis Communication. In E. L. Zdziarski, N. W. Dunkel & J. M. Rollo (Eds.), *Campus Crisis Management: A Comprehensive Guide for Practitioners*, 2nd edn (pp. 86-102). San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Seeger, M. W. Sellnow, T. L. & Ulmer, R. R. (1998). "Communication, Organization, and Crisis". *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 21 (1), 231-276
- Seeger, M. W., & Ulmer, R. R. (2001). Virtuous responses to organizational crisis: Aaron Feuerstein and Milt Colt. *Journal of business ethics*, 31(4), 369-376.

- Simola, S. K. (2005). Organizational crisis management: Overview and opportunities. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 57(3), 180.
- Smith, D., (2002). Not by error, but by design—Harold Shipman and the regulatory crisis for health care. *Public Policy and Administration*, 17(4), pp.55-74.
- Smits, S.J. & Ally, N.E. (2003) "Thinking the unthinkable"—Leadership's role in creating behavioral readiness for crisis management." *Competitiveness Review: An International Business Journal*, 13(1), pp. 1-23.
- Smith, D. & Elliott, D., (2007). Exploring the barriers to learning from crisis: Organizational learning and crisis. *Management Learning*, 38(5), pp.519-538.
- Snoeiijers, E.M. & Poels, K., (2018). Factors that influence organisational crisis perception from an internal stakeholder's point of view. *Public Relations Review*, 44(1), pp.65-74
- Somers, S (2009). "Measuring resilience potential: An adaptive strategy for organizational crisis planning." *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 17(1), pp. 12-23.
- Spillan, J.E., (2000). Strategies for successful crisis management. University of North Carolina. Available online:  
<http://www.conferencemgt.com/presseinforms/SEINFORMS%202008%20-%20Proceedings/proc/p080429001.pdf> [Accessed: 2022-04-06]
- Spillan, J. E., & Crandall, W. (2002). Crisis planning in the nonprofit sector: Should we plan for something bad if it may not occur? *Southern Business Review*, 27(2), 18-29.
- Strielkowski, W., & Wang, J.,(2020). An introduction: COVID-19 pandemic and academic leadership. In the 6th *International Conference on Social, economic, and academic leadership*. pp. 1-4. Atlantis Press.
- Tight, M., (1994). Crisis, what crisis? Rhetoric and reality in higher education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(4), pp.363-374.
- Toma, J. D. (2007). Expanding peripheral activities, increasing accountability demands and reconsidering governance in US higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 26, pp. 57–72.

- Ulmer, R. R., Sellnow, T. L., & Seeger, M. W. (2017). *Effective crisis communication: Moving from crisis to opportunity*, 4th ed. (p. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Van Maanen, J. (1979). Reclaiming Qualitative Methods for Organizational Research: A Preface. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 520–526.
- Wang, J., (2008). Developing organizational learning capacity in crisis management. *Advances in developing human resources*, 10(3), pp.425-445.
- Wang, J., & Hutchins, H. M. (2010). Crisis management in higher education: what have we learned from Virginia tech?. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 12(5), 552-572.
- Whitt, M. C. (2014). ‘Building a Campus’ proactive crisis communications program. *University Business*, 17(11), 22.
- Williams, D. E., & Olaniran, B. A. (1994). Exxon’s decision-making flaws: The hypervigilant response to the Valdez Grounding. *Public Relations Review*, 20, 5-18.
- Wilson, B. G. (1992). Crisis management: A case study of three American universities (*Doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh*).
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and methods*, 4th edn, Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Zdziarski, E. L., Rollo, J. M., & Dunkel, N. W. (2021). The Crisis Matrix. In E. L. Zdziarski, N. W. Dunkel & J. M. Rollo (Eds.), *Campus Crisis Management: A Comprehensive Guide for Practitioners*, 2nd edn (pp. 32-46). San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- Zhen, Y., & Bian, S. (2015). Study on Crisis Management Strategy for Universities. In *International Conference on Education, Management, Commerce and Society (EMCS 15)* (pp. 265-268). Atlantis Press.

# Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Management

## **Theme 1: Introduction:**

- Introduction of interviewers and the main topic of the thesis.
  - Ask for permission to record.
1. Short description of interviewee and a brief presentation of the journey in the university.

## **Theme 2: Pre-COVID-19 Stage (Focus: Preparation)**

2. What are your thoughts on crises within universities?
  - a. What are your thoughts on management of crises within universities?
3. What do you think are essential elements to be included when designing a plan to prepare for a crisis?
4. How did the strategy to manage a crisis look like before the pandemic started?
  - a. e.g. crisis management plan, a document
    - i. Why/Why not?
    - ii. How?
    - iii. Was it sufficient or not?
5. What unfolded before you and your faculty decided to go online?
6. When did your faculty perceive the COVID-19 as an actual crisis?
  - a. What were the first warning signs? How would you describe the handling of these early signs?

## **Theme 3: COVID-19 Crisis (Focus: Crisis Management)**

7. How did the pandemic impact you in your profession?
8. What effects did the pandemic have on your faculty?
9. How was the faculty dealing with the crisis?
  - a. What information was considered?
  - b. How did the response change throughout the pandemic?
  - c. How was communication taking place?
10. What did the faculty do to support its internal stakeholders?
  - a. What communication tools were used to distribute information to everyone?
  - b. Did the faculty provide support for internal members to cope with the transition/pandemic?
11. What has facilitated (not facilitated) the management of the crisis?

## **Theme 4: Post-COVID-19 Stage (Focus: Learning Outcome)**

12. How has the pandemic changed your view of crisis and management of crisis within your faculty?
  - a. What has been learned from the pandemic?
  - b. How will you deal with the crisis afterwards?
    - i. Evaluation of the crisis etc.?
13. Think back on the process, what went well?
  - a. What would you have changed?

**Theme 5: Outro**

14. Anything that you want to add regarding your perception of the management of a crisis in your faculty?



# Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Academics

## **Theme 1: Introduction:**

- Introduction of interviewers and the main topic of the thesis
  - Ask for permission to record
1. Short description of interviewee and a brief presentation of the journey in the university.

## **Theme 2: Pre-COVID-19 Stage (Focus: Preparation)**

2. What are your thoughts on crises within universities?
3. What are your thoughts on a faculty preparing for a potential crisis?
4. What do you think are essential elements to be discussed when designing a plan to prepare for a crisis?
5. What unfolded before you and your faculty decided to go online?

## **Theme 3: COVID-19 Crisis (Focus: Crisis Management)**

6. How did the pandemic impact you in your profession?
7. How did you in your profession deal with the crisis?
  - a. What could have been done differently?
8. How did the faculty deal with the crisis? Did it change during the crisis?
  - a. What worked well and facilitated the transition and adaptability?
  - b. What could have been done differently?
9. How was the communication taking place?
  - a. Where did you receive most information from the faculty?
    - i. Type of communication
  - b. Enough communication?

## **Theme 4: Post-COVID-19 Stage (Focus: Learning Outcomes)**

10. Thinking back, is there anything you would like to change about the management of the crisis? Both for yourself and for the faculty.
11. How has the pandemic impacted your view of the future of higher education and your profession in general?
12. What have you learned from the experience?
  - a. Both positive and negative

## **Theme 5: Outro**

13. Anything that you want to add regarding your perception of the management of the crisis on your faculty?

## Appendix 3: Coding Template

<b>Pre-Decided Codings Based on Theoretical Framework</b>		<b>Code Based on Patterns</b>
Pre-Crisis Stage	Proactive	Signals Detection
		Planning & Preparing
	Reactive	(...)
Crisis Stage	Impact of COVID-19	Education (Teaching)
		- Examination
		Research
	Mitigation (Challenges & decision-making)	Pre-Crisis Activities
		University Structure
		Swedish Context
	Communication	Issues
		Facilitators
		Communication Channels
	Post-Crisis Stage	Current Status
Perception Gap		
Main Lessons Learned		Generic Planning
		Detailed Planning