



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# Never Let a Crisis go to Waste

A study examining the organizational learning drivers and barriers  
that have a substantial influence during crisis management

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# Abstract

This report investigates how organizations deal with organizational learning during times of crisis. The aim was to contribute with a framework visualizing the most profound drivers and barriers to organizational learning during crisis management, using the covid-pandemic as a case example. A preliminary framework was developed with the literature review as a foundation to do this. An interview guide was further composed based on this framework to collect empirical data from various organizations of different sizes working in different industries. The empirical data highlighted the most prevalent organizational learning influences during crisis management and how businesses utilize them. Consequently, the preliminary framework could be modified to contain the most recurrent drivers and barriers to organizational learning during crisis management. Adaptability, both in operational and technical terms, was concluded to be the most influential driver for the creation, transferring, and retention of knowledge, i.e., organizational learning. Lastly, the data indicated that having a highly adaptable, flexible, and dynamic approach when managing a crisis encouraged all of the drivers and simultaneously limited the identified barriers.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 3, 2020 that the world had entered a worldwide pandemic, namely the covid-pandemic, which profound change that would affect the way millions of people lived and worked.

Consequently, worldwide connection and globalization have made organizations increasingly consider the VUCA environment in which they operate. VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. It has become a widely accepted term to describe the increasing scale and speed of global change and the increasing complexity that comes with it (Baran & Woznyj, 2020). Boin (2009) explains this well: *“A fishing boat in the Mediterranean can pull a cable that paralyzes Internet communications in the Far East for days. A Dutch kid can create a computer virus that attacks millions of PCs. Hackers can paralyze a nation’s defense organization. Globalization has made the world “flat” in a wide variety of ways”* (p. 369). In business terms, this implies that today's organizations face more complex challenges than before. This may further increase the importance of managing them appropriately since these circumstances are also difficult to characterize, have several causes, and are commonly referred to as wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Due to the recent global issues, such as the Covid-19 outbreak along with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the notion of crises and crisis management has gained widespread attention, particularly in a business context. Suddenly, we have become aware that a crisis can strike out of nowhere and profoundly alter our way of life, and in business, our way of working (PWC, 2021).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The conventional approach to crisis management has been reactive, with evaluation focusing on the output, i.e. the outcome of the reaction (Bryce, Ring, Ashby & Wardman, 2020; Kovoormisra, 2020). This has created a common approach to crisis management where the focus has emphasized planning to handle and avoid crises. Although, in a volatile, uncertain, complex,

and ambiguous world, relying only on hindsight and retrospect is insufficient, since we cannot predict what will happen in the future (Kovoor-Misra, 2020). On top of this, today's scholars are referring to "modern" crises as much more complex and often act as cross-borders, making them harder to anticipate. Therefore, VUCA-circumstances urge businesses and organizations to put a higher emphasis on crisis management and become more proactive in order to deal with unexpected external occurrences (Deverell & Olsson, 2010; PWC, 2021).

Furthermore, it was discovered that many researchers emphasize the relevance of organizational learning, i.e., the creating, retaining and transferring of knowledge (Argote, 2012), as a facilitator for crisis management (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short & Coombs, 2017; Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Schwandt, & Marquardt, 2000).

However, Broekema, Van Kleef and Steen (2017), summarized that many studies indicate that organizations struggle to learn from crises. Several studies have been done on organizational learning in general as well as various influencing factors that impact this kind of learning. This includes factors both acting as drivers as well as barriers, i.e., influencing factors that can either increase or impede the creation, retention and transition of knowledge within an organization. However, little or none research has been conducted regarding how much influence these factors, i.e., drivers and barriers, have during times of global crises. Consequently, this research aims to further reduce the gap between organizational learning and crisis management.

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose is to develop a framework of the most profound drivers and barriers to organizational learning during crises. Therefore, a preliminary framework must be developed highlighting the most recurrent drivers and barriers to organizational learning based on the literature review. The preliminary framework can then be analyzed in relation to the empirical data gathered through interviews regarding how organizations managed these influencing factors during the covid-crisis, allowing for the framework to be modified.

## 1.4 Research Question

With the purpose in mind, the following research questions are aimed to be answered:

1. What influencing factors act as profound drivers for organizational learning in crisis management and how could organizations work to encourage them?
2. What influencing factors act as profound barriers for organizational learning in crisis management and how could organizations work to limit them?

## 1.5 Disposition

This paper will begin with a literature review discussing crisis management going from a traditional to a modern setting and explain how organizational learning has come to play a significant role in it. The literature review will provide theories on recurrent drivers and barriers to organizational learning, which will result in a preliminary framework. The methodology chapter will discuss the research design, data collection, data analysis approach, and limitations and reflections of the study. Next, the empirical data will be analyzed to find patterns, as well as similarities and differences to the literature review, followed by a discussion to modify the framework. Finally, an outline of the significant findings regarding which influencing factors impact organizational learning during crisis management and how organizations could work with them will be presented, followed by suggestions for further research.

## 2 Literature Review

The literature review will begin by going over the definition of crisis, what it is and how it is connected to an organizational setting. Next, there will be a review of theories and literature on crisis management. We will dive further into how the concept has developed throughout the past century as well as describe the distinct phases of crisis management in greater depth, i.e. the stages prior to, during and after a crisis have occurred. This will provide the reader with a good grip of how crisis management has developed, and clearly illustrate why learning in crisis management has become much more crucial in today's complex environment.

Additionally, the report will address the concept of organizational learning and provide a summary of theories on factors that have a substantial influence on organizational learning, both as drivers and barriers.

Lastly, a preliminary framework will be presented containing the most recurrent drivers and barriers found in the literature. Thus, the literature review as a whole will provide the reader with a solid knowledge frame to better grasp our upcoming discussion regarding which learning drivers and barriers are the most distinctive during crisis management as well as how managers could work with them.

### 2.1 What is a Crisis?

According to Seeger and Sellnow (1998) the concept of organizational crisis has become increasingly known due to businesses dependence on major and complex technological and organizational structures. Furthermore, the media is seen as a big reason why people are becoming increasingly aware of crises (Seeger & Sellnow, 1998), and Perrow (2011) states in his book *Normal Accidents*, that the world's increased complexity contributes to the cause of crises.

There are a lot of different descriptions on how to define an organizational crisis, though they are very similar. A good and concise description is to define an organizational crisis as “*a specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high-priority goals*” (Seeger & Sellnow, 1998, p. 233). Though, Quarantelli (1988) argues the importance of

distinguishing between organizational crises and disasters. While organizational crisis is more referred to as crisis happening within the organization (Seeger & Sellnow, 1998), disasters are natural crises from the outside, for example floods or pandemics (Quarantelli, 1988). Nevertheless, it is clear that there are researches emphasizing disasters as a category within the family tree of crisis, explaining them as crises appearing from outside the organization (Seeger & Sellnow, 1988; Mitroff, Pauchant & Shrivastava, 1988).

To conclude, crises can occur in many instances, and a lot of research on the categorization of them has been done. However, as mentioned in the introduction, external crises are becoming increasingly common due to for example globalization, digitalization and advanced connectivity, and for organizations to evolve from these situations, they have to deeply emphasize how to learn from them.

## 2.2 Crisis Management

The concept of crisis management is very broad and can involve many different approaches depending on the setting and what type of crisis it regards. On one hand we have external crises that, as examples, can be initiated due to worldly economical factors, as during the financial crisis of 2008; we have crises evolving from societal disruptions and power misuse, as in the example of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022; and crises due to natural disaster, as when the pandemic of COVID-19 washed over the world. On the other hand, we have crises that can be initiated by internal factors, i.e., something that has been inflicted without any outside or foreign interference. From an organizational perspective, crisis management therefore can involve many different things depending on the circumstances surrounding the crisis event (Parsons, 1996), and different settings can require different approaches. However, in order to define the concept into a single sentence, crisis management can be described as an organization's response to a disruptive and unexpected occurrence that in some way threatens to damage the business (Bundy et al., 2017). In other words, crisis management involves decision-making that in a timely manner responds to a surprising threat (Seeger and Sellnow, 1998) in order to prevent or minimize the damage it otherwise would expose the organization and its stakeholders for.

### 2.2.1 Crisis Management Lifecycle

The process of managing a crisis can be highly complex and thus, does not solely involve composing a strategic crisis management plan that can be put into action when suited (Coombs, 2007). Instead, the entire notion can be divided into several phases, which all require different approaches depending on where in the crisis lifecycle you are. Some researchers, e.g., Fink (1986), Pearson & Mitroff (1993), and Kooor-Misra (2020), have created their own frameworks of the process of crisis management with additional perspectives and comprehensive descriptions to explain further paradigms of the phases and how they should be managed. However, in general terms, the lifecycle of crisis management can chronologically be described as before, during and after a crisis has occurred, i.e., pre-crisis-, crisis-response- and post-crisis-management.

Firstly, we have the pre-crisis stage, i.e., the time before a crisis has emerged, which involves the process of crisis preparation. This includes identifying as well as mitigating risks and liabilities that in some way could lead up to a crisis (Coombs, 2007). Put differently, pre-crisis management can be referred to as risk management since it involves assessing certain potential risk factors (Skomra, 2017). It can for example be signal detection, scenario planning, response preparations, and/or other measures that go under the spectrum of crisis preparation (Coombs, 2007; Fink, 1986; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). Kooor-Misra (2020) refers to crisis preparedness as an ongoing process of building capabilities and resources within the organization to prevent crises if possible. With building capacity and resources, Kooor-Misra (2020) means that the organization should be prepared for crisis events by having an organizational foundation consisting of great leaders and individuals, a solid and transformative organizational culture, positive stakeholder relationships and an adaptable crisis infrastructure. She argues that this kind of foundational preparedness, i.e., having a proactive approach, within the organization will overall facilitate in the different phases of crisis management. Furthermore, the traditional main focus of crisis management has been on preventing and limiting known risks (Coombs, 2007), but as Kooor-Misra (2020) discusses, as the world is becoming increasingly complex, the more important it becomes to also anticipate unknown and potential risk factors. Smith & Elliot (2007) argues that learning before a crisis can be done through experimental learning, such as simulations, and is vital for an organization's survival. Though, they further argue that it's hard to find motivation and drive to learn when there is no urge to do so (Smith & Elliot, 2007).

Secondly, we have the crisis-response stage which regards the strategic and practical actions called for by the organization to respond to the occurring crisis, or a triggering event to the crisis (Coombs, 2007). This stage entails the actual response to the crisis, i.e., crisis containment (Kovoor-Misra, 2020), which in other words can be described as putting the response plans and preparations into action to reduce the damage and communicating the crisis management efforts in an appropriate way to all stakeholders involved (Coombs, 2007). According to Kovoor-Misra (2020), complex situations like crises require high capabilities in terms of making sense of and contextualizing the uncertain, threatening and urgent situations to efficiently be able to contain the escalation and mitigate making mistakes that can worsen the situation further. Therefore, having built a solid and effective foundation of resources and capacity can play a crucial role in the managing and resolution of crises (Kovoor-Misra, 2020). Smith and Elliot (2007) acknowledges that since crises can be highly ambiguous and uncertain, it further challenges established rules, beliefs, and expectations, which in turn also challenges organizational learning.

Lastly, the post-crisis stage can be described as the period when the severity of the crisis has decreased to a level where it can no longer be considered as an ongoing crisis. However, even though the crisis might have been contained and reduced in severity, there can still be damage that needs to be addressed and recovered from (Kovoor-Misra, 2020). Depending on the type of crisis, for example if the crisis emerged due to internal reasons or if it appeared externally (Seeger & Sellnow, 1988; Mitroff, Pauchant & Shrivastava, 1988), the damage recovery efforts must be adjusted accordingly, with the ultimate goal of attaining positive outcomes, such as new information acquisition and enhanced behaviours (Kovoor-Misra, 2020). To increase the chances of reaching positive outcomes during the recovery efforts, Kovoor-Misra (2020) argues about several impacting behavioral parameters, including leveraging trustworthy relationships, innovation, and non-stop learning. Furthermore, it is not about recovering from a crisis to then return back to normal. Instead, organizations, along with its employees and stakeholders, should enter a new type of normal, where take-aways such as experiences, learnings, revelations and resolutions become embedded into the organization (Kovoor Misra, 2020; Coombs, 2007). Additionally, Koovor-Misra (2020) explains the post-crisis growth phase as where individuals can change their core knowledge and beliefs and in turn aid organizational learning. This new knowledge can then be used to improve future crisis management strategies (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Smith & Elliot, 2007). Though, Smith and Elliot

(2007) argues that the learnings often are insufficient due to organizations often having too rigid core beliefs that are difficult to alter. Therefore, it is highly important to leverage the post-crisis phase as a reflective process to grow from.

To summarize, the traditional approach to crisis management has been separated into distinct phases, with pre-structured planning and the prevention and mitigation of known risks being critical components. However, as the level of VUCA has increased over the years, the concept of crisis management as a life cycle composed of distinct phases has shifted, and many scholars argue that it is now one of a continuous process where continuous learning plays a significant role.

## 2.2.2 The Evolution of Crisis Management

Another important aspect to take into consideration is how crisis management has developed over the last decades. Gilpin and Murphy (2008) explains the evolution crisis management has gone through since the late 1970s in their book "*Crisis Management in a Complex World*".

### Tactical Approach

The tactical approach, or "how-to" methods, to crisis planning started to emerge in the literature in the late 1970s, and expanded in acceptance during the 1980s when scholars frequently stressed the necessity for adequate planning. This focus on precise preparation fostered a rather mechanical way of crisis management, with instructions on establishing for example, checklists and step-by-step contingency plans. This approach to crisis management is often based on the concept of three phases: pre-crisis, crisis, and post crisis (Gilpin and Murphy, 2008).

### Strategic Approach

During the tactical approach of crisis management, the definitions of the crisis phases tended to regard the postcrisis stage as the resolution of crisis management. After a few years, however, the tendency shifted toward a continuous, more cyclical view of crisis management. Authors, particularly in the 1990s, started to see the crisis plan as inadequate to protect the organization. Therefore, they moved their attention to a more preventative approach of crisis management. In other words, scholars started to pay an increasing amount of interest in the various stages of crisis management, and emphasized that the crisis management life cycle is more of a circular than a linear process which requires a more strategic approach of planning and prevention (Gilpin and Murphy, 2008).

## Adaptive Approach

The adaptive approach to crisis management is said to be an altered strategic approach (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). More recent scholars put an increased emphasis on adaptiveness as essential in crisis management (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). More specifically, recent scholars argue that due to complexity, crisis management needs to let go of designed plans for crisis and instead implement adaptive responses (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). Furthermore, Gilpin & Murphy (2004) also highlights the importance of “modern” crisis management to emphasize learning during the whole crisis management life cycle.

To conclude the evolution of crisis management, it is evident that researchers have shifted from a step-by-step approach to a cyclical and adaptive strategy in terms of crisis management, which was also highlighted in chapter 2.2.1: *Crisis management life cycle*.

### 2.2.3 Transformative Crisis Management

As the previous chapter indicates, the concept and practice of crisis management has evolved during the last three centuries. Due to the increased complexity, crisis management is no longer about control and crisis plans, but instead about being adaptive and learning from crises in order to be proactive and to better cope with future sudden occurrences.

Kovoor-Misra (2020) developed a concept called transformative crisis management (TCM), where she put together two well known concepts, transformative and crisis management. Transformative is explained in the Cambridge dictionary (2022) as “causing a major change to something or someone, especially in a way that makes it or them better”.

Kovoor-Misra (2020) differentiate between organizations that use a nontransformative and reactive approach to crisis preparation. These tend to prioritize crisis infrastructure development, such as plans and teams (Kovoor-Misra, 2020) which goes in line with how Gilpin & Murphy (2008) describes the more obsolete understanding of crisis management. On the other hand, an organization that adopts a TCM makes a far more substantial and comprehensive effort to be ready and adaptive for an external crisis, which also ties back to what Gilpin & Murphy (2008) indicates as more modern crisis management. Having leaders with transformative mindsets and building leadership bench strength at all levels of the

company is the first step towards TCM, followed by a prioritization of investing in resilient and transformative personnel (Kovoor-Misra, 2020).

Moreover, Kovoor-Misra (2020) underlines the importance of learning in TCM. It is critical for avoiding minor occurrences from escalating into major crises, developing the resources necessary to react to crises, and for containing, recovering from, and progressing from a crisis (Kovoor-Misra, 2020).

To conclude, Kovoor-Misra (2020) discusses that it is more critical to be transformative, i.e., strategically proactive and adaptive, than being tactically reactive, in order to be better prepared for as well as be able to recover from crisis events.

## 2.3 Organizational Learning

Organizational learning is a concept that can differ depending on who you ask and within what context it is. Although, a common and general description of the concept is that it involves the three related sub processes of creating, retaining and transferring knowledge within an organization (Argote, 2012). Broekema, Kleef and Steen (2017) further generalize the concept and summarize it as *“the acquisition of new knowledge and the translation of this knowledge into more effective organizational action”* (p. 327).

Furthermore, as shown throughout chapter 2.2, several scholars emphasize the importance of learning from crises and that the requirement for organizational learning during crisis management is increasing due to, among other things, the rising complexity in our society (Baran & Woznyj, 2020; Boin, 2009). Therefore, in the upcoming chapters, a review will be made regarding what several scholars and researchers within the field often underline as highly influencing factors to organizational learning. These influencing factors were shown to derive from four primary perspectives that have a major impact on organizations; technology, organizational culture, organizational structure, and leadership.

### 2.3.1 Technology

Technology is an increasing underlined topic as a facilitator for learning, where multiple scholars are arguing for its pros. Ellinger (2005), for example, argues that technology plays a major role in an organization’s learning. Technological resources, computers, the internet,

software, and telephones support employees' informal learning (Ellinger, 2005). Further, Ellinger (2005) states that thanks to using technological resources, organizations can find new ways of learning. On the other hand, all these new technologies can also cause interruption to learning due to, for example, decreased communication between personnel (Ellinger, 2005) or struggling user-friendliness.

Sambrook (2005) also emphasizes the increasing role technological information and communication tools have on organizational learning. First and foremost, Sambrook (2005) underlines how technology can facilitate information sharing across both teams and geographical barriers. Further, he talks about how it creates opportunities for the organizations to create new ways of learning, similar to what Ellinger (2005) concludes. Long and Smith (2004) goes into more details on this subject and argues that technology allows for organizations to give computer-based training which gives the employee the opportunity to learn where and when they want.

On the subject of learning where and when you want, Brandenburg and Ellinger (2003) discusses the concept of just in time learning (JIT) as a consequence of the pros that technology brings to organizational learning. The Internet, business intelligence systems and other tools for virtual collaboration are all examples of technological resources that enable JIT learning (Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003). Some of the key characteristics of JIT learning is that it is real time and problems based, anticipatory (instead of reactive) to needs, and it is personalized to learners (Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003).

To conclude, technology can be seen as a major influencing factor to organizational learning. Through the use of technology, businesses can, for example, adopt software solutions that offer just-in-time learning, allowing them to have a more proactive approach to organizational learning, for example JIT-learning. Furthermore, technology facilitates collaboration in various ways as well as knowledge sharing.

### 2.3.2 Organizational Culture

Culture is a fundamental building block to organizational learning (Rijal, 2010). Sambrook and Stewart (2000) identified that a poor learning culture is one of the main inhibitors to organizational learning. Also, Rijal (2010) underlines that a culture that does not encourage

innovation is proven på disatvangable, causing stagnation instead. Furthermore, Sambrook and Stewart (2000) found that a culture that emphasizes learning as a part of the job is essential to improve learning. More specifically, the culture should encourage knowledge- and information sharing, learning through coaching and mentoring, remove the blame culture and eliminate the fear of change (Sambrook & Stewart, 2000).

Several scholars outline the best organizational culture as the one being adaptive and flexible to change (e.g., Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Bass & Avolio, 1993). Bass and Avolio (1993) differentiate organizational cultures between being transformational and transactional. Transformational cultures are outlined by being innovative, transformational and adaptive. On the other hand, transactional cultures want to maintain the status quo, are rule- and control focused, and have low levels of motivation and commitment (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Furthermore, Tharp (2009) argues that there are four types of organizational culture; control-, compete-, collaborative-, and adhocracy-culture. Even though he acknowledges that there is no 'best' culture, they may be suitable for different occasions (Tharp, 2009).

The control culture places a high priority on standardization, control, and clearly established frameworks for delegating responsibilities and making decisions. Efficient managers in similar cultures manage, coordinate, and supervise the activities of their subordinates. Moreover, big and bureaucratic corporations often have many characteristics in common with control culture, for example, stability and control, as well as internal focus and integration (Tharp, 2009). This type of culture is contradicting the culture Sambrook & Stewart (2000) explains as a learning culture. In other words, organizational learning does not thrive as well in this strict environment because of the resistance to change, tendency to look backwards rather than ahead, and the risk-averseness that takes place.

Regarding variables like stability and control, Tharp (2009) argues that the competitive culture is very similar to the control culture. Though, due to the competitive culture being more outgoing and externally focused, it also differs a lot from the control culture (Tharp, 2009). I.e. The competitive culture focuses more on relationships with customers, clients, suppliers, etc. Nevertheless, since it still focuses a lot on stability and control it may be inhibiting learning (Sambrook & Stewart, 2000).

In their book *“Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture”*, Quinn and Cameron (2005) underlines characteristics such as mentoring, developing and collaboration in a collaborative culture. This culture differs immensely from control- and compete culture since it is less focused on stability and control, and instead acknowledges adaptability and flexibility (Tharp, 2009). Tharp (2009) explains further how a collaborative organization culture brings with *“a safe and fulfilling environment and an opportunity to grow and learn”* (p. 4).

Lastly, Tharp (2009) discusses the adhocracy culture. Quinn and Cameron (2005) summarizes the concept as being characterized by dynamic, entrepreneurship, creativeness, risk-taking, etc.. Further, the leadership in this type of culture is seen to be risk-oriented and innovative (Quinn & Cameron, 2005). They also put great emphasis on how important readiness for change and new challenges is in this type of culture (Quinn & Cameron, 2005). Tharp (2009), argues that adhocracy culture is similar to collaborative culture since both values flexibility and adaptability. Though, the adhocracy culture thrives in what earlier would have been described as an unmanageable chaos.

To conclude, organizational culture contains multiple influencing factors that drive or impede organizational learning. The culture should, among other things, encourage knowledge- and information sharing, learning through coaching and mentoring, remove the blame culture and eliminate the fear of change. Furthermore, a culture’s adaptiveness and flexibility contributes a lot to organizational learning while a culture encouraging control and standardization may paralyze it.

### 2.3.3 Organizational Structure

Another factor that according to many researchers has a compelling influence on the level of organizational learning is how the overall business is structured. One way of defining the concept of organizational structure is to refer to it as the combination of ways work tasks can be distributed within an organization to achieve coordination and organization (Mintzberg, 1993). Another description is that the organizational structure demonstrates how the authorization of decision-making is assigned, how rules and procedures are standardized and how the participants are integrated with each other internally (Chen, Huang & Hsiao, 2010). Put differently, the organizational structure works as the framework for information flow, and therefore, the interaction between processes and employees, i.e., the transferring of knowledge,

information and materials, are governed by the structure of the organization. Consequently, it becomes evident that the organizational structure either promotes or hinders the company's ability to adapt to and learn from changing circumstances (Martinez-Leon & Martinez-Garcia, 2011). It also underlines the importance of having an appropriate organizational structure that improves information flow and the transfer of knowledge (Mintzberg, 1993).

There are several different ways of structuring an organization, all of which have a different influence on organizational learning. Burns & Stalker (1961) discusses the differences between two fundamental ways of viewing an organizational structure: mechanistic and organic. They argue that a mechanistic organization is structured by levels of hierarchy (Burns & Stalker, 1961), i.e., with clearly defined separations of responsibilities and authorities vertically through different roles within the organization. These types of organizations are bureaucratic in their sense, and often characterized by having specific roles with fixed and specified responsibilities and obligations, a high degree of formalization and departmentalization due to strict regulations, as well as a high level of centralization due to the hierarchical differences (Martinez-Leon & Martinez-Garcia, 2011; Burns & Stalker, 1961). Furthermore, they are designed for routine problems and as a result, are less appropriate for dealing with complexity and adapting to change (Lam & Lundevall, 2006). Also, explicit rules and standardized procedures risk impeding creativity, spontaneity and flexibility, which in turn lessens innovation, development and learning (Bidault and Cummings, 1994). For stable businesses operating in non volatile industries, for example in mass production, this kind of organizational structure can be beneficial due to its easy maintenance and consistency (Lam & Lundevall, 2006). However, in more complex and uncertain settings, as during the event of crises, a mechanistic structure can hinder knowledge formation and transferring which in turn impedes organizational learning (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Nicolini & Mezner, 1995).

Opposed to the hierarchical signs of a mechanistic structure, an organic organizational composition is more decentralized and characterized by having a flatter, i.e., less vertical and hierarchical, reporting and decision-making flow (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Martinez-Leon & Martinez-Garcia, 2011). In an organic structure, the formalization and departmentalization is much less extensive, and there is a higher focus on individual knowledge, experience and expertise on the common tasks (Burns & Stalker, 1961). The main idea is that instead of isolating processes of decision-making and strategy to the management team or a selected few in the higher hierarchical lines, it is of higher value to assign the most competent people

according to the requirements of the particular situation. As Burns & Stalker (1961) discuss, in an organic organization, authority should be located based on consensus to the most informed and capable person, something they refer to as 'best authority'.

Even though many scholars argue about the differences between organization's with opposing structures, the reality is that most organizations possess more than one. The type of structure can differ depending on different factors such as the department, the country location and so forth. Furthermore, depending on what type of business segment you are operating in, a certain organizational structure can be more or less appropriate. For a highly technology and software focused company, for example, one could argue that an organic structure would be more appropriate since there is often a high focus on innovation (Aiken & Hage, 1971). Oppositely, for a more mature organization operating in stable environments, i.e., less developing, a mechanistic structure can be seen as more favorable. Especially since tasks and processes often have been highly specialized, i.e., broken down into its most elementary components (Worthy, 1950). While these kinds of specializations and standardizations can be advantageous in some senses, for example since it requires less skilled personnel as well as leads to shorter training-times, they are also repetitive and have very little challenge, which in turn lessens motivation and organizational learning (Worthy, 1950).

To conclude, the organizational structure contains multiple influencing factors that either facilitates or impedes the company's capacity to adapt to and learn from changing conditions. Too many explicit rules and standardized procedures have the potential to stifle originality, spontaneity, and adaptability, hence hindering innovation, development, and organizational learning. In a more organic structure, formalization and departmentalization are less widespread, and there is a greater emphasis on individual- and organizational learning. Therefore, adaptability and flexibility on one hand, and standardization and control on the other, can be viewed as highly influencing factors on organizational learning.

#### 2.3.4 Leadership

Managers and the management also have a significant impact on organizational learning. Obsolete management styles that insist on rules and control is inhibiting organization learning (Rijal, 2010). Instead, to make organizational learning prosper, management needs to be more flexible and adaptive (Rijal, 2010). Senge (2006) identified three manager roles that

acknowledge organizational learning; “leaders as designers”, “leaders as teachers”, and “leaders as stewards”. With this, Senge (2006) indicates that the leader plays many roles in facilitating organizational learning. Leaders as designers indicate leaders that cultivate structures, methods and practices that create a learning context. They focus on integrating organizational learning into the organization's strategies and practices. The leader as a teacher also emphasizes leaders to be learners themselves. Leaders as teachers aim to create practices where they improve team learning and performance, as well as acknowledge communication. They want to move away from problem solving as the only way of learning. Lastly, leaders as stewards, are focusing on the dynamic between leaders and followers and demonstrating leaders commitment to learning (Senge, 2006).

Furthermore, Rijal (2010) argues that transformational leadership is crucial in the increasingly uncertain and complex environment organizations need to survive and prosper in. Since uncertainty is known to be stressful to navigate in, it is of utter importance that leaders enable organizations to cope with rapid changes (Tichy & Ullrich, 1984). These leaders need to master several personal traits, among these; create a shared vision, get the organization to accept and work towards these visions, and institutionalize the changes (Rijal, 2010). This is what Rijal (2010) refers to as transformational leaders. Furthermore, there is a significant focus on learning among these leaders, since they see continuous learning and learning-oriented behaviors as the key to prosper in a volatile and uncertain setting (Rijal, 2010).

To conclude, the role of leadership contains multiple influencing factors to organizational learning. It implies the importance of coaching and mentoring within management, as well as the need for a manager to encourage adaptability and flexibility in order for the learning to thrive.

## 2.4 Preliminary Theoretical Framework

Following the literature review that went through crisis management and organizational learning in more complex settings, it can be concluded that many scholars argue that modern crisis management is more about being adaptable, flexible and open for continuous learning (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Coombs, 2007; Gilpin and Murphy, 2008). Further, in-depth research has been conducted regarding what academics and researchers have discovered to be influencing factors to learning from the four primary perspectives: technology, organizational

culture, organizational structure, and leadership. From these four perspectives, the most recurrent influencing factors to organizational learning could be distinguished.

Consequently, the upcoming section will explore these influencing factors and provide a framework dividing them into independent drivers and barriers to organizational learning. This contribution will serve as a preliminary framework for examining empirical data and will allow discussion on which of these influencing factors, i.e., drivers and barriers have a substantial impact on organizational learning during crisis management as well as their potential interrelations and correlations.

### 2.4.1 Influences on Organizational Learning

In tables 2.1 and 2.2, the most frequently mentioned influencing factors found in the literature have been narrowed down to five learning drivers and three learning barriers.

#### Learning Drivers

*Table 2.1 Preliminary Framework for Organizational Learning Drivers*

<b>Identified Learning Drivers</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Technology	Sambrook (2005), Ellinger (2005), Brandenburg & Ellinger (2003), Long & Smith (2004)
Coaching and mentoring	Sambrook & Stewart, (2000), Tharp (2009), Quinn & Cameron (2005), Senge (2006)
Adaptability and flexibility	Bass & Avolio (1993), Tharp (2009), Quinn & Cameron (2005), Tichy & Ullrich (1984), Kotter & Heskett (1992), Santos-Vijande, López-Sánchez, & Trespalcios (2012)
Innovation	Bass & Avolio (1993), Sambrook (2005), Ellinger (2005), Brandenburg & Ellinger (2003), Long & Smith (2004), Tharp (2009), Quinn & Cameron (2005)
Collaboration	Tharp (2009), Quinn & Cameron (2005), Sambrook (2005), Ellinger (2005), Brandenburg & Ellinger (2003), Long & Smith (2004), Dasgupta & Gupta (2009)

## Technology

As mentioned earlier, technology facilitates organizational learning in a number of ways. Technology can provide tools and software that can personalize learning, enable for the employee to be more flexible in their learning, i.e., learn where and when they want, as well as enable for JIT-learning, which is great to learn in real time and learning proactively, instead of reactive (Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004).

## Coaching and Mentoring

A leadership consisting of coaching and mentoring also acts as a driver for organizational learning. Basten and Haamann (2018) explains that coaching and mentoring can speed up the learning process, as well as improve knowledge sharing and transferring within the organization. Furthermore, it guides employees towards personal development in relation with the organization's norms and values (Basten & Haamann, 2018).

## Adaptability and Flexibility

Santos-Vijande, López-Sánchez, and Trespalacios (2012) discusses the effect flexibility has on organizational learning. They argue that flexibility and being adaptive leads to employees anticipating future skill requirements, as well as showing an eagerness to learn new approaches to perform their jobs. Furthermore, Santos-Vijande et al. (2012) states that flexibility also encourages employees to let go of focusing on their existing knowledge and competences and instead focusing on finding new ways and detecting new requirements.

Additionally, given the increasing complexity, crisis management must abandon pre-designed strategies for crises in favor of adaptive responses (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008).

## Innovation

Dasgupta and Gupta (2009) describes innovation as a “*successful introduction of something new and useful, for example, introducing new methods, techniques, practices, or new or altered products and services.*” (p. 205). Dasgupta and Gupta (2009) further argues that innovation is a process of learning where new ideas become valuable for the organizations itself as well as the stakeholders. By encouraging innovation, one is also encouraging risk taking, which enables one to not only learn from one's success stories, but also one's failures (Dasgupta and

Gupta, 2009). In other words, it broadens the learning spectrum, and increases the opportunities for learning.

### Collaboration

Collaboration and collaborative knowledge sharing is also a key driver to learn in a constantly changing environment (Kumaraswamy & Chitale, 2012). According to Kumaraswamy and Chitale (2012) learning increases with, for example, more communication, sharing of ideas, discussions, and face-to-face communication. Senge (2006) describes that organizational learning takes place first after individuals learn. I.e., collaboration contributes to the individual learning becoming organizational learning.

### Learning Barriers

*Table 2.2 Preliminary Framework for Organizational Learning Barriers*

Identified Learning Barriers	Sources
Control	Burns & Stalker (1961), Nicolini & Meznar (1995), Bidault and Cummings (1994), Lam & Lundvall (2006), Martinez-Leon & Martinez-Garcia (2011), Bass & Avolio (1993)
Blame culture	Sambrook & Stewart (2000), Schilling & Kluge (2009)
Fear of taking risks	Rijal (2010), Sambrook & Stewart (2000), Tharp, (2009)

#### Control

Control is a rather broad concept including such as bureaucracy, standardization, strict regulations, low flexibility etc. As proven in previous chapters, today's scholars are emphasizing a move from control (e.g., Kooor-Misra, 2020; Rijal 2010) since it may impede creativity, spontaneity and flexibility, which in turn lessens innovation and learning (Bidault and Cummings, 1994; Bass & Avolio, 1993).

#### Blame Culture

Schilling and Kluge (2009) identified blame and fear as a significant barrier when learning. It decreases the psychological safety among the people within the organization, which leads to fewer mistakes and a focus on finding a scapegoat when a mistake or problem occurs. This

both disconnects the learning opportunity from mistakes and failures as well as redirect the focus from learning to blame (Schilling & Kluge, 2009).

### Fear of Taking Risks

This barrier can be seen as the opposite to many of the drivers identified above. As chapter 2.4.2 shows, many scholars emphasize taking risks, experimenting and innovating in order to contribute to organizational learning. If there is a fear of taking risks within the company, often caused by control or blame culture, this will consequently impede the learning.

## 3 Methodology

In the following chapter, the chosen methodology will be explained. First, a description and justification for the required literature will be established, followed by the actual procedure for gathering it. Second, an argument will be made for the empirical data required, followed by an in-depth explanation of the individuals and organizations who participated in the interviews and a description of the methodological choices made. Thirdly, the data analysis will be described, followed by a discussion of the methodological decisions.

### 3.1 Research Design

An explorative study was made to fulfill the purpose and address the research questions stated in the introduction chapter. This required an open and flexible approach to deductively develop a literature-based framework consisting of the most recurrent drivers and barriers to organizational learning in crisis management. With the literature review as a base, a qualitative study was most appropriate since it allows for drawing valid conclusions when analyzing overwhelming amounts of empirical data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In addition, to evaluate the preliminary framework, a flexible and open interviewing approach was required to avoid overlooking potential influential factors not found in the literature. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were concluded to be adequate, which subsequently enabled the framework to be modified through iteratively finding interrelationships and differences between the literature and the empirical data.

The interviews had to be held with individuals who were experts in and responsible for managing crises in their organizations to increase the validity of the empirical data. To further make it generalizable, a crisis affecting organizations similarly was appropriate to find comparable results. Therefore, the covid-19 crisis was utilized as an empirical case study for collecting data. The covid-crisis is a textbook example of an unexpected external global crisis that put organizations' crisis management systems and approaches to the test. Due to the increased uncertainty and complexity of the covid-crisis, it provides an excellent opportunity to investigate what type of crisis management approach organizations adopted in relation to the theories, emphasizing organizational learning.

## 3.2 Collection of Literature

Literature on crisis and crisis management was required to acquire a comprehension of what crisis and crisis management are and how both have evolved over the past decades. Thus, literature on the development of crisis management needed to be explored, emphasizing its more contemporary approach.

In addition, the material on organizational learning influences was required to create a preliminary framework illustrating the most recurrent organizational learning drivers and barriers. After conducting research on organizational learning influences in general, it was determined to locate literature on these factors from four key perspectives: technology, organization culture, organizational structure, and leadership.

Consequently, there has been extensive research on existing literature regarding organizational learning, organizational learning influences, and crisis management. All of the literature was either obtained through Google Scholar or Lub-Search. To find adequate literature for the research purpose, keywords such as organizational learning, influences on organizational learning, and crisis management were used in order to dig deeper into more specific subjects, for example, crisis management in complexity or how innovation or collaboration affects organizational learning.

When deciding if the source was sufficient in terms of validity and reliability, the authors used Google Scholar to see who the author was, how many times the author had been cited as well as to see if the article or report was not obsolete in the context of the particular subject.

## 3.3 Collection of Empirical Data

In order to investigate how organizations learn from managing crises, it was necessary to collect data on the topic, with an emphasis on the covid crisis. Moreover, to test the preliminary framework established based on the literature review, it was necessary to understand how organizations recognize and approach organizational learning. It was imperative to validate the numerous learning drivers and barriers outlined in the preliminary framework, how organizations interpret them, and the tendency to promote or minimize these influences in crisis management. Having collected this information would enable the modification of the

framework to highlight the most significant drivers and barriers to organizational learning during crisis management.

### 3.3.1 Semi-structured Interview

As the research topic is of a deductive character and demands a deeper understanding of how the interviewees engage with learning during crisis management, the decision was to use a qualitative technique to gather empirical data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Consequently, qualitative research, according to Bryman & Bell (2012), gives a more detailed and in-depth data collection. It was essential to have the opportunity both to speak with the responders verbally and in real time. In semi-structured interviews, which was conducted, a more dynamic interview that promotes follow-up opportunities to ask related questions to get a more nuanced insight on the answers is allowed (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Bryman & Bell, 2012). Zoom and Microsoft teams, two video conferencing and digital meeting softwares, were used to conduct the interviews. As a result, interviews that would otherwise have been impossible to conduct owing to their geographical location have been made possible by the use of digital means.

Moreover, Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) argue that an interview guide is made, not to be followed strictly, but to provide the respondents with guidance on what to discuss. Kallio et al (2016) further argues that an interview guide allows for the researcher to explore the research area and still collect similar types of information from various respondents. Thus, based on this paper's literature review, an interview-guide was constructed (see appendix 8.1). The guide is based on three major parts in accordance with the literature review: crisis management; organizational learning; and the preliminary framework.

### 3.3.2 Selection of Organizations and Respondents

When selecting which organizations to collect the empirical data from, there were three criteria they had to fulfill to achieve validity and generalizability in the empirical data. Firstly, the organization had to in one way or another be affected by the covid-crisis. Secondly, to make the data more generalizable, all companies had to have made a considerable response to the crisis, e.g., changed their way of working. Thirdly, to increase the validity of the respondents, they had to be directly involved in managing the crisis, i.e., have some kind of managing position within the organization. Table 3.1 displays the respondents names, their role, the organizations and the industry.

The empirical data comes from six different organizations from the following sectors; the higher education-, the adult education-, the insurance-, the finance-, the IT- and the newspaper sector. Consequently, thanks to the wide diversity of sectors, the patterns distinguished in the empirical data can be seen as more generalizable. After conducting the interviews, clear patterns of the drivers and barriers to organizational learning during crisis management were distinguished, increasing reliability.

Table 3.1 Respondents & Organizations

Name	Role	Organization	Sector
Anonymous (recalled as Luke)	Head of the IT-department	Anonymous	Adult education
Tilde Jensen	Operational Responsible for the Proactive Sales Channel	Trygg-Hansa	Insurance
Per Matsson	Head of Nordics	Morningstar	Finance
Suzanne Jacobsson	Vice University Director at Malmö University and Acting HR-Manager	Malmö University	Higher Education
Jonas Kanje	Managing Director and Responsible Publisher	Sydsvenskan	Newspaper publishing
Stefan Widén	CEO	Rexor	IT

### 3.4 Data Analysis

When analyzing the empirical data acquired, we followed a three-step procedure outlined in Sekaran and Bougie's (2016) book "*Research Methods for Business.*" According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the procedures involved in qualitative data analysis are as follows: (1) data reduction; (2) data display; and (3) conclusion drawing.

Sekaran and Bougie (2016) define data reduction as a critical technique for developing theory from the massive amounts of data generated by qualitative research. This can be accomplished by analytical coding, in which acquired data is reduced and reorganized (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Following that, Sekaran and Bougie (2016) define data display as the process of visualizing reduced and reorganized data using, for example, quotations (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Consequently, the interview guide was used to categorize the empirical data acquired from the interviews. By analyzing the recordings immediately after the interview and

categorizing the responses in relation to the interview guide's questions, it was possible to find patterns and distinctions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Finally, Sekaran and Bougie (2016) discuss how conclusions are drawn. To reach findings, the paper's literature review was used to discuss and analyze the parallels and differences in the empirical data with the preliminary theoretical framework established in chapter 2.4.

### 3.5 Methodology Reflections and Limitations

It is also important to think of the methodology choices from a critical perspective. Thus, the following chapter aims to reflect on the consequences on these choices.

Since both writers are Swedish and this research report was intended for a Swedish university, it fell naturally to collect empirical data from Swedish respondents. Consequently, this may have affected the patterns identified in the empirical data. The respondents lacked cultural diversity, and thus one could not guarantee that the developed framework would appear the same in a culturally different country. Nonetheless, to make the empirical conclusions as generalizable as possible, a broader range of sectors and company sizes was utilized to counteract this. In addition, respondents addressed their collaboration with other departments or companies within their company-group operating in different countries, which may have resulted in even more generalizable and reliable findings.

Moreover, since we structured the interview following the interview guide, there was a risk of missing out on, for example, additional drivers or barriers that can occur within the organizations but were not found in the literature. In other words, a risk of missing learning influences that were not contained in the preliminary framework. To mitigate this risk, the semi-structured interview approach allowed for follow-up questions which in turn increased the openness of the interviews. However, it was critical to keep the interviews decently organized in order to acquire relevant and useful data rather than an abundance of difficult-to-understand material or data unrelated to the purpose of this report.

Lastly, when asking about the different learning influences, i.e., drivers and barriers to organizational learning, there was also a risk of receiving subjective answers, especially in regard to the more negative factors that impede learning, such as blame culture and fear of

taking risks. Although, what could be seen was that various respondents shared both positive and negative experiences, for example that blame culture had been present in the past and how they had worked to remove it, which showed a tendency of sensible and valid answers.

Regarding the ethical responsibility, the participant must be given enough information about the study to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. Therefore, prior to the interviews, a template containing the intended topics and questions was provided to the respondents (Raune, 2006).

In addition, it is vital that researchers respect the requested privacy of their respondents. Thus, prior to each interview, each respondent had the option to request anonymity i.e, only displaying the job title (Raune, 2006).

## 4 Empirical Analysis

The following analysis chapter will be outlined in accordance with the author's preliminary theoretical framework. The influences identified in the framework will be discussed in accordance with the gathered empirical data to distinguish which of the identified influencing factors was found to have a significant impact on organizational learning during crisis management, as well as how the organizations tended to work with them. Table 4.1 shows a summary of the empirical findings in relation to the identified drivers and barriers to organizational learning.

Table 4.1 Summary of Empirical Findings

Identified Learning Drivers	Summary
Technology	During their crisis management of the covid-crises, all respondents indicated that technology was one of the most important aspects in facilitating their learning.
Coaching and mentoring	The majority of respondents indicated that coaching and mentoring contributed to organizational learning and that the need for it increased throughout the handling of the covid-crisis. Furthermore, an emphasis on an adaptable approach to coaching and mentoring was underlined.
Adaptability and flexibility	Adaptability, as well as learning consistently from successes and failures, was cited by all respondents as one of the most significant variables impacting organizational learning, especially during the management of the covid crisis. The majority of respondents also emphasized that an adaptive approach supported the majority of the other organizational learning drivers. Additionally, it was also considered to play an important role in the preparations for future crises.
Innovation	The majority of respondents reported that innovation fostered organizational learning. Specifically, creativity was strongly connected with adaptability, and innovation during the covid-crisis increased chances to learn from successes and failures.
Collaboration	During the management of the covid-crises, all participants agreed that collaboration drove organizational learning. In contrast to the literature, respondents often referenced external collaboration, i.e., working with other organizations to drive organizational learning.
Control	Three of the respondents stated that they had created standardized crisis contingency plans. These, however, were considered useless in the case of the covid-crisis. In addition, as opposed to the theoretical findings, numerous respondents, especially those who managed larger organizations, identified control as an essential aspect of crisis management. Particularly in the sense of centralizing strategic decision-making to a competent group in accordance with the specific situation.
Blame Culture	None of the respondents reported having a blaming culture. Many, however, discussed how they sought to mitigate such a culture and how, by doing so, it may foster innovation and other identified organizational learning drivers.
Fear of Taking Risks	No responder expressed concerns about taking risks within their organization. They discussed how they promoted risk-taking to develop a culture that allows them to make mistakes and learn from them.

## 4.1 Developed Theoretical Framework

### 4.1.1 Technology

The literature review indicated that technology plays a significant role in facilitating learning in modern society (Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004). Accordingly, the empirical data indicated that respondents had already implemented software programs for collaboration and learning before the covid-crisis. Luke used network platforms to share tutorials and articles on their intranet to spread knowledge and educate his subordinates and co-workers. Moreover, Tilde used digital tools such as Growlab and Microsoft teams to host internal education, spread instructions, and be available for consultation. What both of these respondents indicated was, among other things, that they use these tools to be able to follow their co-workers' learning process and allow for easy access to learning materials. This is in accordance with what Brandenburg & Ellinger (2003) indicate is the upsides with JIT-learning, for example, adapting and personalizing learning.

The empirical data showed a clear pattern that when the covid-crisis struck, the ones who already used software to facilitate learning increased its use, and those who did not use software to a vast extent started implementing it. Multiple respondents expressed the vitality various technologies, such as digital collaboration and learning tools, had during the crisis in terms of communication, collaboration, and organizational learning. They also emphasized the increased urge covid brought to implement these kinds of digital means continuously.

Furthermore, from the interviews, it became evident that it was not only essential to be prepared concerning software during the covid-crisis, but also hardware. In the interview with Per Mattson, head of Nordics at Morningstar, he explained how by the end of 2019, i.e., in the very early days of the crisis, Morningstar had started to see tendencies of the covid-outbreak from their operations in China. This type of signal detection facilitated their crisis management since they could proactively and strategically search for vulnerabilities in relation to the signals and, thus, plan and act accordingly. For example, Per explained that the awareness brought by the signals made them realize that their operations in India were vulnerable in the sense that they did not possess sufficient technological resources in terms of hardware to collaborate and learn in the transition to remote work efficiently. They had no laptops for their employees, nor was the access to the internet sufficiently widespread to operate fluently. Therefore, by seeing these

signals, they could quickly adapt and allocate resources to invest in that kind of required technology, which later proved to be even more effective because of the supply chain issues that the covid-crisis brought.

From the interview with Tilde, it was found that Trygg-Hansa had similar hardware struggles as Morningstar, both in terms of computers and phones. For example, when the covid-crisis hit and everyone was about to be sent home, they realized the complication of moving the stationary computers and telephones from the office to the employees' homes. Especially since her unit is a proactive sales unit having telephones as their primary work tool to communicate with customers. However, they had not anticipated the crisis in the same way as Morningstar and therefore were not as prepared in terms of hardware resources, making the impact of moving home hit harder. This is because not having the appropriate hardware will likely complicate communication and efficient working, which can complicate collaboration, which in turn complicates learning.

#### 4.1.2 Coaching & Mentoring

A further indication influencing learning is the overall culture and leadership within the organization. Within these two areas, it was found through the literature that coaching and mentoring was a fundamental driver for organizational learning (Sambrook & Stewart, 2000; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Senge, 2006; Tharp, 2009). It facilitates both in terms of speeding up and improving the learning process, but also because it works as a guide regarding employee engagement and development in relation to the internal norms and values (Basten & Haamann, 2018).

Through the data collection, it could be seen that all of the organizations had various signs of coaching and mentoring as a part of their learning process and that it had a profound effect on the managing of the crisis. Since employees had to work from home, it became more challenging for managers, in general, to acknowledge and understand employee needs from a distance. For example, Per stated: *“It was more difficult to detect signals at a distance, for example, to see if someone had difficulty with a task. So in general, it placed much higher demands on those who lead as well as on accessibility and how to communicate their accessibility“*. Per further argued that how the coaching and mentoring was conducted had to be flexible and adjusted in accordance with the situation: *“Among other things, I have an*

*example with a new employee who started just when corona broke out. To facilitate the onboarding and avoid having the person initially work alone, we chose to have the person and the related manager in the office to facilitate mentoring right at the beginning of the employment”.*

Furthermore, Tilde discussed similar experiences regarding coaching and mentoring during the crisis and stated: *“An interesting thing that emerged during the crisis was that many employees experienced their boss as even more present when the business was run remotely, which was a result of us quite early on understanding the importance of coaching and mentorship when circumstances were so uncertain”.*

Both the cases of Per and Tilde underline the vitality of coaching and mentoring during crisis events. They are also excellent examples of the importance of having adaptive and flexible approaches to be efficient in a particular setting.

Moreover, Jonas also argued about the point of adapting the mentoring in accordance with the setting, where he stated: *“What I can see is that mentorship should differ depending on who the employee is. If, for example, it is an older employee, it most often does not need the same attention as if it were a younger employee, and so on”.* In other words, the concept has to be adjusted in relation to the specific situation at hand, in this case to the covid-crisis and remote work.

#### 4.1.3 Adaptability and Flexibility

Throughout this paper, the majority of scholars emphasize the importance of adaptability and flexibility, both in terms of crisis management (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008) and to drive organizational learning in general (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Tharp, 2009; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Tichy & Ullrich, 1984; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Santos-Vijande et al., 2012). More precisely, Santos-Vijande et al. (2012) argue that an adaptable culture encourages employees to anticipate future skill requirements and demonstrate an eagerness to learn new ways to perform their jobs. This was a recurrent result in the empirical data obtained.

Furthermore, all respondents emphasized adaptability as a necessary component of successfully managing a crisis and continuous learning from both failures and successes.

Suzanne Jacobsson and Malmö University display textbook examples of this. Despite the fact that they were unprepared for the covid crisis, Suzanne emphasizes that post-crisis surveys revealed that Malmö University's personnel and students were satisfied with how the situation was handled. To summarize the empirical data, Suzanne and Malmö University experienced a radical shift because of not having previous experience with working remotely. Nevertheless, it was interesting that even though Malmö University did not have any premade crisis plans, the empirical data showed that they quickly adapted to the crisis thanks to implementing a strategic crisis team consisting of people with complementary competencies. Burns and Stalker (1961) refer to this as "best authority". This team held daily meetings up to three times a day where they made decisions, discussed the ongoing situation, and evaluated already made decisions, all to be as adaptable and flexible as possible concerning the situation. In other words, Suzanne and her crisis group successfully managed the crisis by holding continuous meetings and discussing surveys they distributed to students and employees to "*measure the temperature*". Thus, this crisis group altered what did not work, observed what did, and applied the lessons learned to adjust to the changing environment brought about by the covid-crisis. Consequently, it became evident that the complexity of the crisis event required a much more adaptive approach, where flexible and adaptive responses were much more viable than pre-designed plans, which also is being argued by the multiple scholars (e.g. Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; Kooor-Misra, 2020). Similar to Suzanne, Tilde mentioned learning and adaptiveness as essential when dealing with the covid-crisis: "*That we were so quick-footed also made it easier for us to make more decisions to adapt to the situation and in turn learn from what works and what does not work*". Being adaptable was further stressed by Per in his example of noticing tendencies of the covid-outbreak very early on. This type of signal detection facilitated their crisis preparations (Coombs, 2007; Fink, 1986; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993), not only ahead of the crisis, but during the entire lifecycle of the crisis. Similar to Malmö University, they quickly implemented a dedicated crisis team working across borders to facilitate cross-global collaboration and crisis management. Also, because of their continuously ongoing signal detection throughout the crisis, they could strategically adapt their operations and search for technological and operational vulnerabilities. As a result, they were able to envision various scenarios involving these vulnerabilities and plan accordingly, for example, by increasing resources and capabilities in terms of hardware, which is consistent with the theoretical evaluation of how crisis management should be handled (Coombs, 2007; Fink, 1986; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Kooor-Misra, 2020).

On another note, Luke, Stefan, and Jonas organizations also emphasized adaptability as essential to managing the covid-crisis. Though, they differentiate a bit from Suzanne and Malmö University. They all considered their organizations as adaptable to this crisis. Luke acknowledged his organization's early adoption of digital communication tools as simplifying their crisis management: *"As I said, since we were prepared in the form of having already worked for a long time with teams, the change took place relatively seamlessly. We already have an established culture where employees sometimes work from home due to illness or something else, and therefore they already had relative control over how they would connect to work from home"*. Nevertheless, they still had to adapt to the covid-crisis: *"[...] so we understood the importance of being adaptable, and thus we also tried to draw as many lessons as possible, such as current vulnerabilities that turned out"*, indicating that continuously finding weak spots when adapting led to organizational learning.

Similarly, Jonas at Sydsvenskan argued that they managed the crisis well without putting in any specific crisis response team. He explained that Sydsvenskan, and its industry in general, have undergone profound strategic and operational change during the past 15 years. Jonas further stated several issues that have been brought up over the years, such as if they were to stick with traditional newspapers or move solely to digital articles; or if they were to expand to also focus on podcasting and/or motion pictures. This constant change and profound development of the industry has put very high demands on the newspapers to constantly learn to develop, which he further explained was something that they initially had a hard time coping with. However, over the years, they learned to cope with it and manage it effectively, which ultimately has resulted in an overall learning culture within their organization (Sambrook & Stewart, 2010; Rijal, 2010).

Lastly, the literature review also indicates that modern crisis management should not be seen as a linear process. Instead, it should be seen as a continuous cycle where the post-crisis accumulates in learnings to prepare for future crises, i.e., the pre-and post-crisis phase intertwines (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). It can further be found similarities in the empirical data regarding how all of the respondents, in one way or another, put an increased emphasis on crisis management and adaptiveness after the crisis. Luke said: *"[...] we realized how important it was to be adaptable to be able to easily switch, and we gained a greater understanding in IT to prepare, for example, our security and move the infrastructure to the cloud. That's why we have now started that move"*. Moreover, when Luke was asked if

they had altered their way of working with organizational learning, he stated: *"Yes, much in the same way as we work before. Of course, we disseminated more information about the covid crisis and the work environment on our intranet. And as I said before, we understood the importance of being adaptable, and thus we also tried to draw as many lessons as possible, such as current vulnerabilities that turned out"*. This is yet again proof of how the covid-crisis made organizations move towards an adaptive and learning approach to crisis management (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008). However, it also indicates how they tried to get out as many learnings as possible in accordance with what Kovoov-Misra (2020) refers to as transformative (= "causing a major change to something or someone, especially in a way that makes it or them better") crisis management.

Similarly, Tilde also acknowledges the importance of technology to increase the ability to be adaptable as a preparation for future crises: *"[...] we have placed great emphasis on what has gone well and less well in our crisis management. During this year, we have also decided that we will get a new "hardware" refresh in the form of laptops, digital mobile phones, etc"*. The empirical data also showed that Jonas's organization evaluated its crisis response similarly to Luke's and Tilde's. Consequently, they now see themselves as much better prepared for a crisis that would alter their way of work: *"[...] for example, what would happen if we were exposed to cyber attacks, or power outages or other such things that make us have to work from elsewhere. So yes, then we know we have the structures to do it and we know it works. So in that way we have definitely become more aware of it"*.

Suzanne's organization has taken a more drastic change since going from no crisis preparedness to understanding the importance of readiness in case of a sudden crisis. For example, Malmö University has implemented scenario planning to be prepared for future crises: *"It is as we have done in accordance with Ukraine, etc., that you need to develop plans on how to proceed based on different scenarios. You, therefore, need to plan for how you can keep the business running in the best way even if conditions change drastically"*.

#### 4.1.4 Innovation

Innovation is also regarded as a prime driver for organizational learning (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004; Tharp, 2009; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Dasgupta and Gupta, 2009). Innovation, according to Dasgupta and Gupta (2009), is the *"successful introduction of something new and useful, for example, introducing new methods, techniques, practices, or new or altered products and services."* (p. 205). By fostering innovation and risk-taking, one can learn from one's successes and failures (Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009). In other words, it broadens the spectrum of learning and improves learning opportunities. Many of these examples correspond to the information presented in chapter 2.4.1, *Adaptability and Flexibility*. As demonstrated in this chapter, the empirical evidence suggested that one of the best strategies to deal with the covid-crisis and continue to learn was to emphasize adaptability and learn from failures and success to enhance a quick-footed, dynamic and agile approach. For example, in the case of Malmö University, they adapted a continuous innovative approach within their crisis-response group in order to constantly come up with improved methods, techniques, and practices to deal with the crisis. This was similar to how the crisis team at Morningstar worked to facilitate cross-global collaboration and enhance innovation.

Additionally, to boost innovation, Per described how Morningstar supported creativity by recognizing novel ideas and rewarded creativity with, for example, monetary incentives. Per continued by stating that he believed this innovative environment encouraged employees to speak up if they found something wrong, which provided more opportunities for learning to improve throughout the covid-crisis. Luke also mentioned that fostering a culture that values innovation contributed to the success of managing the covid-crisis, both during the crisis and in creating a "crisis" prepared workplace. When asked how he viewed the creativity within his firm, he responded, *"We want to encourage ideas and views regarding efficiency enhancements and positive changes in general. I would like to highlight that it is largely due to the fact that we push creative ideas that we were able to adapt to the corona crisis, such as when we were already prepared to work online"*.

#### 4.1.5 Collaboration

As implied within the other influencing factors to organizational learning, collaboration is a common recurring factor for knowledge creation and transferring, and flows horizontally through all the different learning influences. It can be viewed as Per explained: *"fundamental for the machinery to work and in practice, essential to share knowledge"*. This was further conveyed by all the respondents and was especially stressed concerning the circumstances of the covid-pandemic. Accordingly, many of the organizations, i.e., Trygg Hansa, Morningstar, and Malmö University, organized dedicated crisis teams internally where employees with the appropriate competencies, i.e., best authority (Burn & Stalker, 1961). These had the chance to meet both online and in-person to share ideas and experiences, which aligns with the literature (e.g., Kumaraswamy & Chitale, 2012; Senge, 2006). However, what became evident with the empirical data was how some of the organizations had collaborated, not only internally within the organization but also with external organizations and stakeholders. For example, Suzanne explained that they had ongoing conversations and collaborations with other universities and governmental entities to further facilitate and accommodate learning during the crisis. These collaborations could include anything from locating a vaccination bus outside of the university entrance, to sharing experiences of success and failure with other universities to learn from each other, which aligns with what the scholars argue (e.g., Kumaraswamy & Chitale, 2012; Senge, 2006;).

This was additionally expressed by both Jonas and Stefan, who both also had experiences from external collaborations for learning purposes. First off, Jonas explained that Sydsvenskan collaborated with other entities within the same group, i.e., with organizations owned by the same parent company. They had, for example, exchanged experiences on how to reduce the spread of the infection, how to close down the workplace, how long they were to have it closed, and so on. In other words, they exchanged experiences of success and failure in a similar way as in the example from Suzanne and Malmö University. Secondly, Stefan also explained how they continuously collaborate with other organizations to be as dynamic and receptive to learning as possible. From Stefan's experience of building companies within the IT industry, he has learned that many software developers and companies *"[...] try to invent the wheel over and over again"*, which he regards as inefficient and inhibitory for development. Instead, Stefan suggests that it is much more viable to collaborate with other companies, in their case, within the software industry. It can even be with competitors because it, as he explains: *"can bring a*

*lot of learnings as well as additional customer value".* He refers to this as co-marketing, which he further explains as facilitating learning during crisis management and enhancing branding in general.

#### 4.1.6 Control

Control is a wide concept that encompasses a variety of elements, including bureaucracy, standardization, stringent regulations, and little flexibility. As seen in earlier chapters, contemporary scholars are highlighting a shift away from control (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Rijal, 2010) because it can stifle creativity, spontaneity, and adaptability, which in turn diminishes innovation and learning (Bidault & Cummings, 1994; Bass & Avolio, 1993).

In accordance with the literature, the empirical data revealed a pattern in which premade contingency plans for dealing with particular events had to be abandoned when the covid-crisis occurred. Tilde explained in the interview that despite having strategic contingency plans and a crisis group dedicated to crisis events, neither the plans nor the crisis group could predict the consequences of the crisis. An illustration of this is how, during the crisis, Trygg-Hansa developed detailed plans for relocating its whole personnel to work from home. However, they were unable to foresee that the vast majority of Tilde's employees were not equipped to work from home. She explained that many of the unit's employees are in the early stages of their professions and are relatively young. It is typical to desire to work at that unit because of its social culture, including sales competitions and after-work events. As a result, the move to remote work, in which many employees were stripped of the social interaction for which they had been hired, led to a dramatic decline in productivity and output. Therefore, Trygg-Hansa was required to adopt a more adaptable strategy for this portion of the business to provide a functional and suitable working environment for these employees, resulting in an approach where this particular unit could work hybrid while other units worked from home.

Similarly to Trygg-Hansa, it was found in the interview with Jonas Kanje, managing director and responsible publisher for Sydsvenskan, that they too had a dedicated crisis management team and pre-assumed contingency plans based on scenarios. When asked about it, he said: *"Yes we had it but it's more about for example if we would not have any internet, then there were structures on IT of how we wanted to handle it, or if the distribution of the paper newspaper gets messed up we knew when and where to release newspapers so that they still*

would get fairly distributed. We have those kinds of standardized plans, but that we would make such an extremely large change as in the case of corona, there was no premade plan that we could follow." It indicates that Jonas's organization's scenario plans were shown to be fairly different from what the covid-crisis implicated, which made them less appropriate in this particular case. According to the literature, having too standardized plans, no matter how well the scenarios can be, will lead to inadaptability and low flexibility (Bidault & Cummings, 1994; Rijal, 2010; Kovoov-Misra, 2020). In other words, the fact that the premade contingency plans had to be abandoned in the case of the covid-crisis is more evidence that the empirical data verifies what the literature study suggests, namely that adaptability is necessary to cope with and learn from the crisis.

Contrary to what the literature suggests, the empirical data reveal that a higher degree of control in certain forms may, in some situations, be beneficial for managing crises, particularly in larger organizations. All of the respondents working in larger organizations, i.e., Suzanne at Malmö University, Per at Morningstar, and Tilde at Trygg-Hansa, centralized the control to a crisis group to be agile in terms of decision-making and adaptability. This was articulated eloquently by Suzanne when she stated, "[...] we centralized control to where the crisis management expertise was, and as a result, we were able to make quicker decisions and learn from them, as is required in such situations (referring to the covid-crisis)".

#### 4.1.7 Blame Culture

All of the respondents found this particular barrier to organizational learning as highly important to mitigate to have a psychologically safe and progressive environment. In other words, they all agreed that having a culture of blame, where finding scapegoats regarding the mistake is more important than the learnings that the failure brings, is highly destructive for organizational development. This aligns with the arguments found from the literature review, that the redirection from learning to blame disconnects the learning opportunity that may have otherwise been acquired from the mistakes or failures (Schilling & Kluge, 2009). As discussed, all respondents explicitly stated that they work to counteract this type of culture. For example, Luke stated that when they encounter a problem or if a mistake is made: *"It is not about pointing out someone who should be held accountable, but instead it is about going through the situation and coming up with suitable solutions."*, while Tilde stated: *"If there is a person who is to be*

*blamed when making a single mistake, no one will dare to take risks and be innovative as we talked about before is something you must always strive for".*

However, reading between the lines from the data collection, it can be found that valuable insights can still be gained from finding the source of the problem. For example, if a person makes a mistake, it is of high importance to find that person in order to be able to go through the problem and thus, educate the person not to make the same mistake again. Put differently, to be able to learn from the mistakes made, the source of the problem must be found and be made aware of how and why the problem occurred so that it does not happen again, as Tilde stated: *"Then, of course, if an employee makes a mistake that affects a client, it is critical for the learning development that he or she is informed so that he or she does not repeat the error"*. This is further something the respondents argue must be done practically with care. For example, Suzanne mentioned that *"You should talk to people rather than about them, you should demonstrate that it is alright to be questioned, that you do not simply hang out with "yes-sayers", all while remaining highly respectful"*. Jonas added: *"The most important thing to promote efficiency is social and physiological security. People who feel good perform well. It is about how you behave towards each other, that everyone is allowed to speak, that you are allowed to be vulnerable, that you are allowed to make mistakes, that you are allowed to say ill-considered things without being laughed at"*. Both of them further added that this way of promoting a culture where blame is excluded helped them a lot when managing the covid crisis. Without this type of psychological safety, Suzanne, for example, added that students and teachers would not, to the same extent, dare to share honest opinions in the surveys that they continuously sent out.

Furthermore, Per and Jonas added that it is about mitigating a blame culture within the organization and building a culture where mistakes are welcomed as a stepping stone for learning. Per, for example, stated that *"It should be okay to make mistakes and at the same time you should not only learn from the mistake but share it with everyone else so that we can avoid others making the same mistake again."* This is further something Jonas agreed with and explained that Sydsvenskan had to learn the hard way. He added that 20-30 years ago, the newspaper business was rather harsh and had a punishing culture, which has taken a long time to overcome. However, it has also made them aware of the significance of accepting mistakes, especially in complex and more uncertain times, as during the covid crisis.

#### 4.1.8 Fear of taking risks

Scholars argue that the fear of taking risks can be interpreted as the counterpart of several drivers outlined in the preliminary framework (sources). As seen throughout the literature review, numerous experts advocate taking risks, experimenting, and innovating to contribute to organizational learning. If there is a fear of taking risks within the organization, which is commonly a consequence of too much control or blame culture, this will hinder the learning.

The empirical data highlighted a clear trend in which all respondents were relatively pleased with how they managed the covid-crisis and swiftly developed an adaptable strategy. As an example, Tilde stated, *"I would say that we are good at taking risks, or rather testing things to discover what works and what doesn't. If it works, we will continue, but if it does not, we will continue to test new things and "take chances" in this manner."* Furthermore, several respondents stated they did not have any specific ways of limiting the fear of taking risks since it is already a part of their culture. Suzanne stated: *"No, I do not believe there is any fear of taking risks. We are transparent about how we deal with things, so individuals are willing to take risks, share their thoughts, and provide constructive criticism. Culture contributes a lot to this."* Similarly, Per remarked, *"I believe in a more forgiving culture, which requires high ceilings and transparency so that individuals have the courage to speak out if something is incorrect or could have been changed."* and *"[...] we advocate making a decision rather than not making a decision, since not making a decision is still making a decision. It is preferable to make a decision and then apologize and learn from it if it turns out to be incorrect."* All express support for a culture that Smith and Elliot (2007) describe as encouraging experimental learning, which is closely related to an adhocracy culture (Tharp, 2009)

In addition, Luke underlined the significance of risk-taking while emphasizing the need to manage it effectively, for instance, by building an environment in which risk-taking is reasonably safe. He explained that the main purpose of this is to avoid a new crisis and stated: *"It is clear that we are careful so that we do not create a new crisis just so that everyone takes risks. It goes a bit with encouraging innovation. We encourage risks, but then it is important that we not only run them out in the entire organization at once, but that we first test in safer environments, and then run them in full scale"*.

In other words, the empirical data revealed a trend in which respondents countered their fear of taking risks by fostering a culture in which it is encouraged to ask questions, make questionable decisions (as long as they do not significantly impact the business), and learn from mistakes.

## 5 Discussion

The following chapter discusses the differences discovered between the literature review and the empirical data, resulting in a modified and updated framework presented in tables 5.1 and 5.2.

According to the preliminary framework, technology was viewed as a significant driver of organizational learning due to its ability to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, personalized learning, and just-in-time (JIT) learning (Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004). Similarly, the empirical data highlighted the significance of technology in managing and learning from the crisis. In addition to using technology to enable remote work, respondents also utilized intranets to share information and knowledge, they used online learning platforms to facilitate just-in-time (JIT) learning, and they used digital communication tools to facilitate other learning drivers such as coaching and mentoring. Thus, technology should still be considered a major driver for organizational learning during crisis management.

Moreover, just as the preliminary framework illustrated, coaching and mentoring were found to be highly influential drivers for organizational learning (Sambrook & Stewart, 2000; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Senge, 2006; Tharp, 2009). What the empirical data showed, however, was that during times of crisis, coaching and mentoring becomes even more significant because of the surroundings that can be implicated. When circumstances change drastically, such as having to work remotely during the covid outbreaks, the conduction of coaching and mentoring must therefore be highly flexible and adjusted according to the setting. This is because these crisis periods, often signified by a high level of uncertainty and ambiguity, require increased support and security, which is something coaching and mentoring facilitate. Consequently, coaching and mentoring are vital for organizational learning in times of crisis.

The empirical data further showed a clear pattern that allowing adaptiveness and flexibility was essential to deal with and learn from the covid-crisis. Many respondents discussed how to quick-footed continuously and evaluate decisions to adapt to the ongoing change the covid-crisis brought. Accordingly, the preliminary framework indicated that being adaptable will increase organizational learning. Furthermore, the empirical data indicated that encouraging innovativeness improves organizational learning, just as the preliminary framework indicated.

Moreover, the collected data indicated a strong correlation between encouraging innovativeness and improving adaptiveness. Both concepts imply finding new ideas and solutions to continuously acclimate to the surrounding circumstances. Thus, both adaptiveness and flexibility, as well as innovation, should be considered significant drivers of organizational learning. Additionally, adaptability was proved to have a significant encouraging correlation with many of the other drivers identified in the preliminary framework. For example, the collaboration led to new insights and learnings that contributed to better adaptation to the crisis, and technology acted as a foundation to allow for adaptability in a remote work environment.

Furthermore, collaboration was regarded as a great way to communicate and share knowledge, hence fostering organizational learning (Tharpe, 2009; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004). Similarly, the empirical data indicated that collaboration is a factor that stimulates learning during crisis management. Scholars often discussed collaboration in an internal setting, for example, within units and teams (Tharpe, 2009; Quinn & Cameron, 2005; Sambrook, 2005; Ellinger, 2005; Brandenburg & Ellinger, 2003; Long & Smith, 2004; Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009). However, what scholars did not discuss and what was discovered to be a recurring pattern in the empirical data was that external collaboration also became a driver of organizational learning during the crisis. It was observed that organizations collaborated with other organizations, such as within their corporate group (Jonas at Sydsvenskan and Stefan at Rexor) and with universities (Suzanne at Malmö University), to share knowledge and learnings. Consequently, collaboration should still be viewed as a driver of organizational learning during crisis management, but with an additional classification as either internal or external.

From both the literature review and the empirical data, it was found that organizations that put too much emphasis on control as a part of their organizational structure can lead to too much bureaucracy, a high extent of standardization, as well as very little flexibility (Kovoor-Misra, 2020; Rijal, 2010). In other words, control can be seen as a tendency that, in accordance with the literature, can be related to a mechanistic organizational structure (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Some scholars argue that this is inadequate in complex and unpredictable environments while also inhibiting organizational learning (Lam & Lundevall, 2006; Bidault & Cummings, 1994). However, by further reviewing the empirical data, it could be found that this was not always the case, especially not in terms of organizational learning during crisis management within larger organizations. For example, all of the interviewees working in larger organizations

shared experiences of having established dedicated crisis teams to focus on crisis containment. Whether they established these teams prior to or as a reaction to the crisis, it can still be concluded that centralizing the responsibility to a group consisting of relevant competencies and sufficiently authorial stakeholders can be beneficial in times of crisis. Thus, this research implies that in times of crisis, control may not only work as a barrier to learning, as indicated by the literature review, but also as a significant driver to organizational learning, especially in terms of being adaptable during crisis events. On the other hand, it must still be considered that the control must be adequately delegated in accordance with the situation at hand and must still be highly flexible and dynamic. Put differently, it should not be standardized or fixed to strict regulations and instead consistently and proactively adjusted concerning the specific crisis event.

The empirical data did not reveal any present blame culture in any of the organizations. Nevertheless, a pattern emerged in which several respondents discussed measures to combat this sort of culture, such as fostering an environment in which it is acceptable to make mistakes and where feedback is given constructively and respectfully. Accordingly, scholars underlined that a culture that encourages seeking blame and scapegoats reduces the opportunities for learning due to the absence of psychological safety, contributing to the fear of taking risks among the employees. An association between overcoming risk aversion and adaptability was also supported by empirical data. Consequently, one can argue that organizations with a blame culture and a fear of taking risks will consequently struggle to encourage other learning drivers such as innovativeness, collaboration, and adaptability, which in turn may impede organizational learning and thus they act as profound learning barriers..

## 5.1 Modified Framework

With the discussion of the correlation between the literature review and the empirical data, the frameworks established in chapter 2.4 can now be modified and enhanced in terms of organizational learning drivers and barriers in crisis management.

Table 5.1 Modified Framework for Organizational Learning Drivers

<b>Identified Organizational Learning Drivers During Crisis Management</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Adaptability & Flexibility	Still constituting the framework
Technology	Still constituting the framework
Innovativeness	Still constituting the framework with a significant correlation to adaptability and flexibility
Coaching & Mentoring	Still constituting the framework
<b>Internal Collaboration</b> (new)	Still constituting the framework but empirical data indicated a differentiation between internal and external collaboration
<b>External Collaboration</b> (new)	Still constituting the framework but empirical data indicated a differentiation between internal and external collaboration
<b>Control</b> (new)	The empirical data indicated that an increased centralisation of control allowed for a more adaptable approach to crisis management and in turn stimulated organizational learning.

Table 5.2 Modified Framework for Organizational Learning Barriers

<b>Identified Organizational Learning Barriers During Crisis Management</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Control	The empirical results showed that standardized plans and strict rules, which are seen as a kind of control, had a counteracting impact against organizational learning.
Blame Culture	Still constituting the framework since the empirical data indicated it as a risk to impede multiple learning drivers.
Fear of taking risks	Still constituting the framework since the empirical data indicated it as a risk to impede multiple learning drivers.

As shown by the bolded text in the modified framework, internal and external collaboration and control were introduced as drivers of organizational learning in a crisis context. In addition to these three modifications, it was discovered that the defined learning barriers impede organizational learning, primarily because they make it more challenging to promote the identified learning drivers.

## 6 Conclusion

This report investigates how organizations managed the covid-crisis to review the most profound and influential drivers and barriers to organizational learning. Since crises are becoming even more complex in today's globalized and highly connected world, organizations must be more prepared to manage these crises. However, it has been found that organizations struggle to learn from crises. Consequently, this study aims to create a framework displaying the most profound learning drivers and barriers during crisis management to increase the understanding of how to stimulate learning during crises.

By developing a preliminary framework based on the findings from the literature, an interview guide could be composed to collect empirical data from various organizations of different sizes working in different industries. The empirical data highlighted the most prevalent organizational learning influences during crisis management and how businesses utilize them.

The paper discovered that the empirical data confirmed all of the drivers and barriers identified in the literature review to act as influences during the covid-crisis, however, with slight modifications. Firstly, in the literature review, collaboration was identified as a learning driver but emphasized internal collaboration. The empirical data confirmed this but also implied that external collaboration was of substantial importance to learn from other organizations during a crisis. Therefore, collaboration was divided into internal collaboration and external collaboration. Furthermore, one more driver was added to the framework, namely control. According to the literature review, control is seen to act as a barrier to organizational learning. However, according to the empirical data, a centralization of control can facilitate adaptiveness during crises, which in turn drives organizational learning.

Following the drivers for organizational learning, the various barriers found in the literature could be confirmed by the empirical data. However, not as profoundly as the drivers. For example, the empirical data indicated that neither blame culture nor fear of taking risks was particularly embedded in any respondent organizations. A reflection of this can be that modern organizations are already, to a reasonably high extent, aware of the complications these types of cultures and settings can lead to. Instead, as the research indicates, the most profound barriers to organizational learning during crisis management are the ones that do not promote the stated drivers. For example, not promoting collaboration can lead to decreased innovativeness, which

complicates adaptability and flexibility. In other words, even though blame culture and fear of taking risks are barriers to organizational learning, they are not the most profound barriers as suggested by the literature. Instead, as the research suggests, the actions, restrictions, and structures that impede the stated drivers are the most profound barriers to organizational learning, especially during crisis management.

Regarding how organizations work with these influences, it was found that technology played an overarching role in encouraging all of the other drivers. Thanks to the Internet, intranets, learning platforms, digital communication- and hardware tools, organizations could still emphasize collaboration during the covid-crisis, encouraging adaptiveness, innovativeness, as well as coaching and mentoring. A further insight was that the empirical data indicated a pattern of the respondents trusting the culture and leadership to encourage drivers and limit barriers. For example, they pointed to a culture where mistakes were welcomed, and change and innovativeness are considered key elements when handling the identified learning influences. However, the most profound pattern in the empirical data was that having a highly adaptable, flexible, and dynamic approach when managing a crisis encouraged all of the drivers and simultaneously limited the identified barriers. As a result, in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times, such as during the covid crisis, adaptability, both in operational and technical terms, was concluded to be the most influential driver for the creation, transferring, and retention of knowledge, i.e., organizational learning.

In conclusion, this study has identified various barriers and drivers to organizational learning during crisis management, as shown in tables 5.1 and 5.2. Furthermore, businesses should employ an adaptive strategy for crisis management to work with these influences. Consequently, the research questions (1) *What influencing factors act as profound drivers for organizational learning in crisis management, and how do managers tend to encourage them?* and (2) *What influencing factors act as profound barriers for organizational learning in crisis management and how do managers tend to limit them?* have been answered, and the intended purpose has been achieved.

As a result this research has contributed to decrease the gap between two major research areas; crisis management and organizational learning. A framework has been provided that can be put in use by organizations to better recognize which influencing factors to organizational learning to encourage and mitigate during times of managing crises. Hopefully, this will direct

organizations focus towards a more learning approach and in accordance with the title of this report, *never let a crisis go to waste*.

## 6.1 Future research

This research has provided valuable knowledge for managers to understand the factors that influence organizational learning during crisis management and how to encourage or inhibit these. One of the primary conclusions that contradicted the literature review was that control might be viewed as a driver of learning because, among other things, it promoted adaptability during times of crisis. Consequently, given that this study was conducted in a Swedish setting, a suggestion for future research is to validate this paper's modified framework in an international setting to improve it further.

Furthermore, since this research surrounds a global external crisis, another interesting topic for future research is to investigate how this framework functions when an organization is faced with an internal crisis. For example, would there be similar drivers and barriers identified to enhance or impede organizational learning, or would other influences be highlighted.

Another suggestion for future research that could complement this research, would be to investigate organizations who engaged in improper crisis management during the covid-crisis. The empirical evidence included organizations that successfully managed the covid-crisis. Thus, by doing additional research into unsuccessful case studies, additional influences to organizational learning during crisis management may be highlighted.

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# 8 Appendix

## 8.1 Interview Guide

	Questions
Introduction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction of authors</li> <li>2. Introduction of thesis topic</li> <li>3. Practical information (recording, anonymity, when and where the respondent can access the finished report etc.)</li> </ol>
Get to know the respondent	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What is your name? [Only when anonymity have not been required]</li> <li>5. What is your role in the company?</li> </ol>
Crisis & crisis management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. How were your business affected by the covid-19 crisis?</li> <li>7. What was your role in managing the covid-19 crisis?</li> <li>8. Do you feel that your organization was well prepared for it?</li> <li>9. Can you tell me how your organization managed the covid crisis?</li> <li>10. After the covid-crisis, how would you assess your overall crisis management?</li> <li>11. Have encountering the covid-crises made your organization acknowledge the importance of crisis management more?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If yes: How?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Organizational learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. Do you see yourselves as a learning organization?</li> <li>13. Can you give us some examples of how you work with organizational learning?</li> <li>14. Did your organization acknowledge organizational learning when managing the covid-crisis?</li> <li>15. Has the experience of managing the covid-crisis in any way affected the way you view or work with organizational learning?</li> </ol>
Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Does your organization use any kind of technology (hardware, internet, software-tools etc.) to influence learning?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. If yes: How?</li> <li>c. Would you say that the use of technology impacted learning when managing the covid-crisis?                   <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. If yes: how?</li> </ol> </li> <li>d. If no: Has the experience of managing the covid crisis changed your view on the use of technology to influence organizational learning?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
Coaching and mentoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Does your organization encourage coaching and mentoring?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. If yes: How?</li> <li>f. Would you say that coaching and mentoring impacted learning when managing the covid-crisis?                   <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. If yes: how?</li> </ol> </li> <li>g. If no: Has the experience of managing the covid crisis changed your view on</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

	coaching and mentoring as an influence on organizational learning?
Adaptability and flexibility	<p>18. Would you say that your organization encourages an adaptive and flexible working environment?</p> <p>h. If yes: How?</p> <p>i. Would you say that adaptiveness and flexibility impacted learning when managing the covid crisis?</p> <p>i. If yes: how?</p> <p>j. If no: Has the experience of managing the covid crisis changed your view on flexibility and adaptiveness as an influence on organizational learning?</p>
Innovation	<p>19. Would you say that you encourage an innovative working environment?</p> <p>k. If yes: How?</p> <p>l. Would you say that innovation impacted learning when managing the covid crisis?</p> <p>i. If yes: how?</p> <p>m. If no: Has the experience of managing the covid crisis changed your view on innovation as an influence on organizational learning?</p>
Collaboration	<p>20. Would you say that you encourage a collaborative working environment?</p> <p>n. If yes: How?</p> <p>o. Would you say that collaboration impacted learning when managing the covid crisis?</p> <p>i. If yes: How?</p> <p>p. If no: Has the experience of managing the covid crisis changed your view on collaboration as an influence on organizational learning?</p>
Control	<p>21. How is the authorial control distributed through your organization?</p> <p>q. For example, would you say that you have strict regulations regarding the decision-making flow as well as the delegation of responsibilities? I.e., is it strictly the management team who are responsible for making decisions or can this type of authority and responsibility be relocated to other levels?</p> <p>r. How did this type of distribution of control impact your organizational learning during the management of the covid-crisis?</p> <p>22. Does your organization have standardized plans and procedures regarding how to approach various occurrences or incidents?</p> <p>s. If yes: How would you say that this impacted your organizational learning when managing the covid-crisis?</p> <p>t. If no: How do you then approach various occurrences or incidents?</p>
Fear of taking risks	<p>23. Would you say that your organization encourages risk-taking, or oppositely, is there a fear of taking risks within your organization?</p> <p>u. Can you elaborate?</p> <p>v. How did this impact your organizational learning when managing the covid-crisis?</p> <p>w. Do you work to counteract this fear?</p>

Blame culture	<p>24. Have you ever witnessed a type of blame culture within your organization? I.e., is it important to find scapegoats for occurring failures/mistakes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>x. If yes: Can you elaborate?</li><li>y. If no: How do you work to counteract this type of event of seeking responsables?</li></ul> <p>25. How do you believe your approach to blame impacted the organizational learning when managing the covid-crisis?</p>
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