



Adaptation in a University of Applied Sciences during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tiitu Honkanen

Bachelor's thesis

November 2024

Degree Programme in International Business

Honkanen Tiitu

Adaptation in a University of Applied Sciences during the COVID-19 pandemic

Jyväskylä: Jamk University of Applied Sciences, November 2024, 46 pages.

Degree Programme in International Business. Bachelor's thesis.

Language of publication: English

Permission for publication: Yes

Abstract

This research investigates how activities operated during the time of COVID-19 pandemic inside an international program in a Finnish University of Applied Sciences and how the organization adapted to the changes caused by the pandemic. Specifically, this research investigates the experiences of staff from the organization and their opinions on how the crisis was managed and addressed. One of the important groups experiencing the effects were students of the organizations and the research will be examining how this group was supported at the time of the crisis. This research addresses an identified gap in the literature where decision makers ability to communicate in a time of uncertainty to stakeholders of the organizations. Foundation is prefaced to the research by literature review and data collection was conducted in qualitative method by semi-structured interviews from staff of the organizations. Staff members were from different roles of the organization such as administration, support team and lecturers.

In practice, this research gives organizations the opportunity to see how operations could be advanced in times of crisis. Feedback from the staff is important and should be considered when developing the organization's functions. The framework of the research creates an overview of topics that are important for research, these topics are related to crisis management, innovation, crisis management in organizations, crisis management in education, online environment in work and learning, and lastly leadership.

Findings from the study indicated that the organization was following instructions given by the Finnish government in the time of crisis and the adaptation from the viewpoint of the staff was seen as mostly successful. Point of development that was brought up during the interviews with the staff members was a lack of additional communication in the times of COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Crisis Management, Crisis Management in Education, COVID-19 pandemic, Crisis Management in Organizations

Honkanen Tiitu

Sopeutuminen ammattikorkeakoulussa COVID-19-pandemian aikana

Jyväskylä: JAMK Ammattikorkeakoulu, marraskuu 2024, 46 sivua.

Liiketalouden ala. International Business. Opinnäytetyö

Verkkojulkaisulupa: Kyllä

Julkaisun kieli: Englanti

Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitetään, kuinka toiminta sujui COVID-19-pandemian aikana ammattikorkeakoulun kansainvälisessä ohjelmassa ja miten organisaatio sopeutui pandemian aiheuttamiin muutoksiin. Erityisesti organisaation henkilöstön kokemukset ja heidän mielipiteensä kriisin hallinnasta sekä sen käsittelystä. Yksi tärkeimmistä vaikutuksista kokeneista ryhmistä oli organisaation opiskelijat, tutkimuksessa selvitetään, miten tätä ryhmää tuettiin kriisin aikana. Tutkimus käsittelee kirjallisuudesta tunnistettua aukkoa, joka tutkii päättäjien kykyä kommunikoida epävarmana aikana organisaatioiden sidosryhmille. Pohja joka tutkimukseen on luotu alkaa kirjallisuuskatsauksesta ja tiedonkeruu tutkimuksessa on tehty kvalitatiivisella menetelmällä organisaatioiden henkilöstön puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla. Henkilökuntaa oli organisaation eri rooleista, kuten hallinto, tukitiimi ja luennoitsijat.

Käytännössä tämä tutkimus voisi antaa organisaatioille mahdollisuuden nähdä, miten toimintaa voitaisiin edistää kriisiaikoina. Henkilöstön palaute on tärkeää ja se tulee ottaa huomioon organisaation toimintoja kehitettäessä. Tutkimuksen viitekehys luo yleiskatsauksen tutkimuksen kannalta tärkeistä aiheista, jotka liittyvät kriisinhallintaan, innovaatioihin, organisaatioiden kriisinhallintaan, koulutuksen kriisinhallintaan, verkkoympäristöön työssä ja oppimisessa sekä johtamisesta.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että organisaatio noudatti Suomen hallituksen kriisiaikana antamia ohjeita ja sopeutumista henkilöstön näkökulmasta pidettiin pääosin onnistuneena. Henkilöstön haastatteluissa esiin noussut kehityskohta oli lisäviestinnän puute sekä sosiaalisten kanssa käymisten puute kokonaisuudessaan pandemian aikana.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)

Kriisinhallinta, Koulutuksen kriisinhallinta, COVID-19 pandemia, Kriisinhallinta organisaatioissa

Contents

1	Introduction	3
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Gap in the Literature.....	4
1.3	Motivation for the Research.....	4
1.4	Research Aim and Research Questions.....	4
2	Literature review	6
2.1	Crisis.....	6
2.2	The Role of Crisis Management	7
2.3	Crisis Management in Organizations	7
2.3.1	Strategic Leadership	8
2.3.2	Innovation: One Post-Crisis Benefit for Organizations	9
2.4	Crisis Management in Education	10
2.5	The Evolution of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	11
3	Methodology	13
3.1	Research Design.....	13
3.2	Research Method.....	14
3.3	Data Analysis.....	17
4	Results	19
4.1	Adaptation to Changes in a University of Applied Sciences Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic 20	
4.2	Staff Experiences During the Pandemic.....	22
4.3	Support for Students and their Well-Being.....	23
4.4	Summary of the Results.....	25
5	Discussion	27
5.1	The Research Questions and Research Aim of the Study Have Been to Cover the Issue of 27	
5.2	Summary of Key Findings.....	28
5.3	Interpretation of the Findings.....	29
5.4	Implications of Findings	31
5.5	Limitations of the Study.....	32
5.6	Recommendation for Future Research.....	32

6 Conclusion 33

References..... 35

Appendix 1. Interview questions for participants in English 40

Appendix 2. Interview questions for participants in Finnish 42

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

At the beginning of the year 2020 outbreak, of a virus called COVID-19 began and led to a global health crisis. The COVID-19 virus is being referred as coronavirus disease worldwide. The virus raised challenges to many organizations as the global pandemic that emerged from the virus caused fear and confusion on people. According to The World Health organization (WHO, 2024), the disease could spread from the person carrying the virus to a new host in many ways, such as through liquid expelled from the nose or mouth. According to WHO the infection rates varied from the end of 2019 into 2023, with several variants of the virus requiring health officials to instigate mediation recommendations to curb the uptick in infections in each wave.

As a result of the fast spreading of the virus, changes were indispensable, and a lockdown was presented which led to the closure of educational institutes. In practice, this lockdown referred to putting on hold classroom teaching and working. As the virus progressed and transitions were happening at a fast pace, organizations needed to make changes into their operations. Because of public health measures in 2020, it was suggested according to Valitovarinministeriö (Ministry of Finance Finland, 2021) to move into a distance working mode inside organizations where it was possible to implement. According to Valtiovarainministeriö it was easier to manage contact between people which could have advanced the spreading of COVID-19 virus. For the people working inside organizations this meant distancing and working alone for a prolonged period.

This research will be focusing on how the global health crisis affected a Finnish University of Applied Sciences and specifically how the organization adapted to the “new normal.” Changes were made to keep the organization activities running through the pandemic. For the faculty members in the University of Applied sciences these changes affected their working environment with the change fully to online mode as well as the students of the institution. This research was conducted by interviewing staff of the University of Applied sciences in addition to a literature view with topics relating to the research. Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic organizations had already utilized the possibilities of online technology to some extent but what happened when teachers and students had to work online for a prolonged period? Investigating crisis management operations inside the organization during a time of COVID-19 pandemic could bring new revelations on

how to develop the already existing protocols and management in preparation for a prospective crisis.

1.2 Gap in the Literature

According to Younis and Elbanna (2022) a gap can be found in the literature when examining the changes that the new normal brought and what would be needed to be done to improve this state as well as to examine the effects of uncertainty on the ability of decision makers to communicate updated information to stakeholders. This research addresses for example, how staff report what they perceived as efficient, how decision makers communicated information to stakeholders and where decisions came from during a crisis. When these things are understood, it is easier to grasp and understand why and how decisions are made and how the organization could work better during the pandemic, which was important for individuals for their motivation and coping.

1.3 Motivation for the Research

Interest for embarking on the research journey began from a personal lived experience during crises such as the COVID-19 starting in 2020 and Russia-Ukraine war from 2022, an interest in the activities of organizations in times of crisis as well as crisis management. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic another crisis arose, and the effects have likewise been global as well as from the Russia-Ukraine war. The effects of the war between Russia and Ukraine have also been experienced in the Finnish University of Applied Science, where staff and students are from those countries. This second crisis starting from the year 2022 is outside of the scope of this study and won't be addressed in the context of my research. During this second crisis, the institution put into practice a crisis team that has been in contact with the students of the countries to map their well-being and instructed the staff to support the students during the crisis. Study made by Limone et al. (2022) showed that anxiety and stress increased amongst students at the times of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war.

1.4 Research Aim and Research Questions

This next chapter explains the research purpose, objective and the primary research question followed by the sub-question. Furthermore, the section will provide insight to aim of the research

and the significance of the study. To clarify these key insights to the study the reader will understand the research framework.

This research focuses on activities in an international program that a Finnish University of Applied Sciences applied during the COVID-19 pandemic in years 2020-2022. The research examines the practices implemented at the institution in a time of crisis from the perspective of staff working in an international program. Additionally, the research investigates how information related to the crisis was passed on and the impact of pandemic in terms of innovation and what guidelines for students and staff were implemented. Moreover, I will discuss how the government's restrictions influenced existing practices within the organization.

The research question and sub-questions chosen for the research:

Main research question

How did an international program at a Finnish University of Applied Sciences manage changes and requirements mandated for higher education in the time of COVID-19 pandemic?

Sub-questions

How did management in the University of Applied Sciences support staff in addressing the rapid shift and changes in online teaching?

How did the University of Applied Sciences provide support for students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The aim of the research is to investigate the solutions that a Finnish University of Applied Sciences have applied during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research aims are to cover the experiences of the staff during the pandemic and assess if the practices adopted were perceived as effective. The analysis allows the organization to evaluate how effective the crisis response was and allow the organization to utilize the information whether operating methods and additional supports were

useful or require improvement. The organization can use the information collected to develop responses for future crises.

The inspiration for the thesis emerged at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its effects on students, teachers and ways of working. This thesis was based on the researcher's own interest on the topic and experiences. The research could potentially be used in the organization for developmental purposes in the future. The research broadens the researcher's view of the functions of organizations, such as the view of crisis management and innovation.

The research is prepared by qualitatively conducting interviews with the staff and through it by observing the organization's activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature review in the research paper has been conducted to support analysis and gives the reader an overview on the concepts discussed in the paper. Findings could be valuable to organizations as they provide an evaluation of COVID-19 pandemic impact on the organization's operations.

2 Literature review

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education in Finland and around the world cannot be overstated. In this thesis, I focus on the higher education segment and on bringing attention to the matters important to handling an organizational crisis. In this literature review, I explain the key concepts from the literature that are relevant regarding the topic and provide a foundation to answer my research questions.

2.1 Crisis

In starting off the literature review it is important to examine the meaning of the crisis. The word *crisis* originally has come from the Greek word "Krisis" (Glaesser, 2003). According to Rapoport (1962), *crisis* covers many different meanings but is mainly associated with an environmental event that causes a threat to people such as a disaster. Rapoport went on to suggest that the word *crisis* is commonly used in combination with the word *stress*, which could clarify the meaning of *crisis* as she separates the concepts by describing the crisis as having growth-promoting potential unlike stress. Rosenthal and Kouzmin (1993) viewed *crisis* as prolonged period that can cause stress, they suggested another version where it could be also viewed as a circular process that

would need preparation to overcome. Jabeen (2018) noted that a crisis can reflect an event where a natural disaster has taken place, or diseases created by our own environments have been developed. Brecher in 1979 referred the word *crisis* to a situation or an event that threatens the primary goals set by a decision-making unit. Additionally, the researcher suggested a *crisis* would limit the time needed for decisions to be implemented, and that a situation that surprises the members of the decision-making unit could be considered a *crisis*. In the time where crises have been affecting operations of organizations it is important to look into crisis management and what it entails.

2.2 The Role of Crisis Management

Although many crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, occur suddenly or unexpectedly, Jabeen's (2018) definition does not reflect all cases. Based on the experiences of other organizational crises, organizations can consider actions to prevent or control a crisis. Thus, the concept of crisis management can be introduced. And as the word *crisis* covers a variety of meaning and events, crisis management is a broad concept with many variations for utilization. According to Shrivastava et al. (2012) most important factors to manage a crisis or crises are to apply crisis prevention strategies where they understand consequences of the crisis, analyze the causes and finally adapt to normal. In the same paper Shrivastava et al. point out that definitions regarding crises and crisis management vary according to different disciplines, stakeholders and types of crises making crisis management a broad concept of research. The definitions serve to describe phenomena and provide potential solutions in terms of crisis management. In 2003 Glaesser portrayed the term *management* as most commonly describing the leadership of an organizational unit.

2.3 Crisis Management in Organizations

In this study I will be addressing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on a University of Applied Sciences and its staff and students. An organization is an environment where participants work to achieve a common purpose. Moore in 1954 described the organization as a social machine that promotes the bringing together of versatile dynamic activities and skills while at the same time as different parts of the social machine are coordinated to achieve the common goal. Moore further describes that for the mechanism to work at its full potential, instructions, obligations and rules must also be added into the protocol. Another description of organizations comes from Mann

(1965) where the researcher describes that organization is built to achieve something planned such as a goal or a purpose and most often the goal is to plan the division of labor so that it is possible to create task structure.

As stated by Mikušová and Horváthová (2019) when an organization is having an unexpected turn of event or events that is causing interference within, the process of crisis management steps into the picture. The sooner the crisis is identified, and precautions are taken against them the more efficiently the crisis issues can be managed in organizations. Being prepared for a crisis is important for organizations to keep their operations functioning. According to Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (Confederation of Finnish Industries, 2016) crisis management and preparedness helps an organization to anticipate and identify disruptive situations that can be mediated. Some disruptions in question can be surprising, and decision-making is required at a fast pace. Therefore, Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (Confederation of Finnish Industries) emphasizes supporting the continuity of operations in all situations. They recommend combining the crisis management plan in parallel with continuity planning, meaning the simultaneous updating of both plans. As stated by Vukajlovic et al. (2019) each area in an organization that has been affected by the crisis should be taken in consideration. Further Vukajlovic et al. found that the quality of communication and timeline were important in the process of crisis management.

Pearson and Clair (1998) emphasized that organizational crises occur with a low probability but that they are nevertheless a highly influential occurrence. Even if an organizational crisis occurs with a low probability, it is almost impossible to predict the extent of the crises. Effective crisis management according to Pearson and Clair, involves minimizing risks even before a crisis occurs. Further the researchers explain that as a consequence of the event, crisis management would therefore require that the stakeholders to communicate and improvise in order to re-create shared roles and meanings.

2.3.1 Strategic Leadership

Leadership plays a significant role in terms of the functioning of organizations and particularly in times of crisis management, there is a need for strategic leadership. The word *strategy* refers to a specific approach or a plan to reach a goal. Mitzberg, in 1987 presented *strategy* as a specific and consciously planned course of action. Moore in 1954 compared the development of strategies to

the concept of growth, because the strategy of certain companies only develops further with business expansion and growth.

Leadership refers to management aims to achieve the organization's goals and functionality. Etzioni (1965) described *leadership* as being the leader's ability to get followers to voluntarily comply with a variety of action or actions. This ability requires skills such as adaptability and self-confidence from the leader to participate in social behavior patterns. In 1965, Mann explained that leadership is a relative process, where practical combinations, of skills are needed at different levels in the same organization. In practice, the purpose of leadership is to achieve the organization's goals by influencing followers so that they act in accord with instructions and tasks.

Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta (2002) stated that leaders in higher education would benefit from better guidance in preparing for possible crises. Leaders generally benefit from enhancing their skills of adaptability, rapid reaction, and problem solving. In a study that was conducted by Longmuir (2021), it was found that leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic were faced with great challenges and a new working environment that required adaptability. They found that leaders remained optimistic during the pandemic and were able to prioritize human needs.

2.3.2 Innovation: One Post-Crisis Benefit for Organizations

Even though crises disrupt operations and are typically challenging, once a crisis has been solved it could benefit an organization by examining its strengths and weaknesses. As stated in my paper organizational crisis can open an opportunity for new possibilities and a chance for innovation. Innovation is described to be a tool which could be used to utilize change as an advantage, according to Drucker in 1985. In his view innovation creates resources, describing a resource as being dependent on innovation. Drucker believes that crises can change perspectives, as they create a new situation through which to view practices and how they could be improved. In organizations innovation is used as a tool to build new operations and changes which is why it is a vital part for development. Although the word *crisis* has a negative tone it can also offer an opportunity for development. For example, in the education sector resources and support are needed for possible development. Major (2020) emphasized the need for support from faculties and departments for innovative development and work that would lead institutions to a functioning future.

2.4 Crisis Management in Education

As a result of dramatic work-related changes during the pandemic years, various permanent changes concluded with having effects on the world's economic state and ways of working just to name a few. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; 2023a) referred to an educational crisis as they stated that the educational system was disrupted and experienced great changes from the COVID-19 influence as the historically disruptive coronavirus disease spread globally. The educators had to take under operation new ways of teaching. According to UNESCO (2023b) the recovery from the pandemic will continue as it led to many lessons and damage in various ways.

Opetushallitus (Finnish national agency for education, 2024) encouraged schools in all levels to prepare for unexpected crisis situations. According to Opetushallitus schools could prepare for these unexpected incidents by keeping an updated crisis management plan in case of emergency. Crisis management plans arrived in Finnish schools and came into practice during the early 1990s. Crisis management plans and crisis preparedness teams came to Finnish schools through Norway from the United States where new model of crisis work had been developed (Opetushallitus, 2024).

Younis and Elbanna (2022) brought attention to crisis management in online teaching. Their study stated that evaluation of online teaching in a crisis is still rare. They also concluded that without proper application of crisis management principles it would be impractical to manage higher education. In looking at the presented research on crises in education, I conclude that crisis management is necessary if an educational system is expected to function properly as a whole. According to Younis & Elbanna there is a lack in the specifics on how to examine the changes that the post-pandemic "new normal" has brought to educational institutes and what can be done to improve the institutional decisions moving forward. Additionally, this gap in the literature complicates how administrators and other education-system stakeholders can examine the effects of crisis-created uncertainty on the ability of decision makers to communicate updated information to stakeholders, both in terms of speed and accuracy. Assistance within crisis management situations such as discussion support and guidance for further information would need to be offered to the students and personnel.

The University of Applied Sciences that is the focus of this study has its own social media account on the Instagram platform where information, instructions and awareness were distributed to students during the time of the pandemic crisis. In a study about social media affects in the pandemic time Abbas et al. (2021) concluded that the usage of social media in global health crisis could benefit users from finding support and information. But excessive use of social media will add stress on mental health (Abbas et al., 2021).

2.5 The Evolution of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

As Mäkelä et al. (2020) stated the COVID-19 crisis provided educators the opportunity to enhance the remote working environment and to consider how this situation could benefit all remote workers. The virtual working environment is part of many organization working models, but what does it consist of and what are the ways to connect?

The ways people can connect through online platforms is broad as technology has been developing rapidly over the few decades. Järvenpää and Leidner (1999) stated that technological platforms provide opportunities for people to interact with each other by having videoconferences, telephone conferences, email, and many other ways to connect. Their research showed that global virtual teams can achieve the same performance as traditional teams could have. Virtual teams described by Edward and Wilson (2004) are formed from groups of people who are separated either by distance or time, or both, but are working collectively on tasks. Joint communication among members of virtual teams take place via electronic communications technologies, such as video conferencing or e-mails. According to Edward and Wilson (2004), the team members are expected to perform similarly as when in traditional operating environments.

According to the International Forum of Educational Technology & Society (2005) the definition of online learning represents learning taking place in an online environment and this online learning can be organized through any network. According to this Forum, online learning takes place through an electronic object. Online learning for example with the guidance of universities, gives the possibility to organize assignments and lectures through electronic means from home or other remote location. In their analysis they also explored the topic of how distance learning covers both non-electronic and electronic learning functions. Ultimately technology-based teaching and learning can be done through any technology which also includes non-synchronous distance learning.

A study by Gibson and Cohen (2003) suggested that working remotely highlighted the importance of virtual teams as groups formed by people working together from different parts of the world by using technology. As concluded by Martins, Gilson and Maynard (2004) the benefits of virtual teams are the opportunity to work without the limitations of co-located workplaces, thus allowing companies to enhance their competitiveness on the market. In the study conducted by Saarinen (2016), the author suggested that the future of managerial work will be implemented inside virtual teams.

Saarinen (2016) also researched how virtual teams will be changing the cross-cultural aspect of working and found that new implementations need to be considered. In this study, Saarinen (2016) found that in focus groups that were built from managers in different industries, respondents suggested that the various ways to cope and perform under the pressures in their meetings with their employees from different time zones. Saarinen found that the managers experienced difficulty in handling the various issues their employees encountered when the managers were unable to react promptly thus creating additional pressure on them.

As a result of interviews regarding pandemic effects to online education Selvaraj et al. (2020) found that their participant group, which consisted of students and teachers preferred traditional way of teaching. The participants were in favor of traditional classroom teaching although, they noted that distance learning and teaching brought its advantages (e.g. in terms of comfort). Even though the majority of respondents felt that online learning and teaching did not work as well for them as the traditional way of education it could be possible that the shock of the new education situation and the unprecedented circumstances are part of the reason. The study by Younis et al. (2022) found that, although online learning brings flexibility to students' everyday life, it still has not worked without challenges. They felt that the move to online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown provided an opportunity to explore more about how this flexibility affects students' feelings of isolation and/or equality. In the immediate post-pandemic education environment, particularly in higher education, online teaching remains part of the professional readiness although it is still not the only option (Rapanta et al., 2020). Further, Universities should direct investments to the professional development of teachers preparing them to provide effective pedagogical methods either with or without online technology (Rapanta et al., 2020).

Zhai and Du (2020) emphasized an important approach that universities could have taken during the pandemic and implementation of full-time online learning: Create a space where students could seek help if they noticed any signs of impaired functioning in their school performance or overall health. As the experience of moving to online learning for longer periodical time happened unexpectedly, it is important to evaluate members of the organizations well-being during such an unexpected event.

Alqahtan and Rajkhani (2020) in their study about e-learning and its success factors during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the most influential factors related to online teaching and learning were leadership and support, technology skills management and increasing student knowledge of online learning systems. These support skills were required from universities and provided mainly to teachers and students, to keep online learning productive and functioning.

3 Methodology

In this section, I explain in what manner the study was conducted, including which data collection materials were used to execute the research and what these concepts entail. It is essential for conducting qualitative research to choose an appropriate methodology. In this case I found the most useful way to execute data collection through semi-structured interview. The final analysis of the study was made by thematic data analysis. The methodology section will first look at the research design starting off with the research philosophy and research methods which after will the data collection be addressed.

3.1 Research Design

Chosen philosophy for the research is phenomenology. According to Gallagher & Zahavi (2020) the phenomenology philosophy's focus is on the phenomena and according to them *phenomenology* is referred as how things are experienced from a first-person perspective. In my research this means exploring the participant experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The approach suits this study as it gives an outline for understanding the perspective of the participants in how they experienced the organization adaptation to the new situation and how they perceived how they and students were supported throughout the pandemic. With qualitative research as my chosen method is interviews, I aimed to capture feelings and insights from the lived experience.

The research began by examining the literature on matters of crisis management, and purpose of crisis management with the idea to provide overview on the concept. Impacts to an organization during COVID-19 crisis at a University of Applied Sciences research idea came over time through discussions with my thesis supervisor from JAMK University of Applied Sciences. Through cooperation suitable research area was determined and themes around it were established. Eventually a defined focus point for the study was found. Information search was conducted from different literature sources.

Generally, research method is either chosen in between two research options or mixing qualitative and quantitative research. Keegan (2006) described the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in the following way: Qualitative research is used to understand relationships (why and how), while in quantitative research reflects statistical statistics and relationships (how much and when).

Choosing appropriate methods for data collection is important, as it could lead to affecting the direction of the research or the accuracy of the findings. According to Hannila and Kyngäs (2008), the interview as a research method is efficient. The different theme areas give freedom to the research regarding the order of the questions, which means that the interviewee is not limited to certain answers. It is possible to ask additional in-depth and detailed questions.

3.2 Research Method

This research has been conducted with the base of qualitative research as it tries to understand experiences of personnel and what gone through during COVID-19 epidemic in the organization. According to Williams (2007) there are different research designs that use qualitative research techniques. Williams suggests that one of the hallmarks of qualitative research is a social phenomenon, as seen from the perspective of the participant.

According to Bryman (2016) the deductive approach for research begins with either a hypothesis or a theory and is often used for quantitative research. An opposite approach is the inductive, which Bryman said starts with data collection that was done in my research without a specific hypothesis. According to Bryman the inductive approach is mainly associated with qualitative research that is examining theoretical frameworks. The clearest way to distinguish the differences

between these two approaches would be to explain that in deductive approach you are testing theory whilst in inductive approach you are generating your own theory. This was done as the purpose of the thesis was to understand experiences of the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic and to find themes that might suggest new theories.

The starting point for inductive reasoning can be built precisely with qualitative research. In such cases, the researcher tries to explain the questions that arise from the observational elements. Williams (2007) further goes on suggesting that qualitative research methods are designed to handle certain types of research questions, and they investigate different information requirements. The complexity of the phenomenon becomes understandable to the researcher with the help of a qualitative method.

For this research thematic interview and semi-structured interview were selected. The reasoning behind choosing a thematic interview was to build an understanding of the experiences of the study participants with the help of themes on the topic to then structure the interview questions. This further helped me focus on relevant key themes regarding the study. A semi-structured interview process was chosen because of its flexible nature as this was necessary for gaining the perspective of the interviewees and their experiences.

Other options for the methods were a questionnaire and an observational method. As explained by Bryman (2016) questionnaire is built from structured questions that participants would answer online. Bryman adds that questionnaires are usually the most suitable for collecting quantitative data which was not aligned with my research methods or purpose of the study. According to Bryman (2016) while using a questionnaire during the research there is no possibility to ask the participant to elaborate on their answer. Because my aim on the research was to gain insight on the experiences and changes during the time of COVID-19 pandemic, using only a questionnaire where I could not go deeper with my questions with the participants would have been a problem where I wanted specific experiences and feelings of the staff from the time of pandemic. By using interviews, it allowed me to have full conversations with the participants where I could find new topics from the area of research and discuss their responses to my questions with them.

Observational methods also can be used in qualitative research. As Bakerman and Quera (2011) explain observational methods are used as endogenous variables of correlational and experimental studies or measuring a certain outcome. According to the writers the observational methods is distinguished from other research methods that observation is conducted by trained observer that codes the behaviour over a session and is a much time-consuming process. This was not aligned with my research as a process that would have been very time consuming, and the data could have been too complex for my research to code and analyse which did not align with my research objective.

In this research I used the method of a semi-structured, thematic interview. According to Sarajärvi and Tuomi, (2018) a thematic interview refers to an interview that proceeds according to the themes chosen in advance and the detailed questions related to the themes. Stated by Sarajärvi and Tuomi with this interview method, it is possible to deepen and refine the questions based on the answers given in the interview. Wengraf, (2001) emphasized that semi-structured interviews are prepared and planned similar to other forms of research, but the script has been thought out, planned either in half or a quarter so that the questions could be partially prepared in advance. According to Wengraf semi-structured interviews also require improvisation, but with a carefully considered nature. My interview questions were planned so that I could prepare some level of questions in advance, but they remained open and flexible. As Bryman (2016) explained, the researcher remains open about what needs to be known to answer the research question. According to Bryman it is important so that theories and concepts can be prepared from the information, and this is when a semi-structured interview is usually used as a research method.

Interview participants were University of Applied Science personnel from an international program and for this research seven people were selected. For the research to be broad enough, personnel were chosen from different positions and different area of specialties with a wide age range. The personnel of University of Applied Sciences were from distinct roles: two administrators, two support staff members, and three teachers. Data was collected via interviews conducted in the period from August 2022 to November 2022. The research in question does not intend to use personal data.

The questions chosen for the interviews were simple in nature, so that the data received from the interviews would be as broad as possible and in line with the study participant personal experiences. Questions were modified in line with the participant role in the organization at the time of crisis to gain the most beneficial data for this study. In addition, the interviews were conducted in Finnish or English depending on the interviewees preference and/or skill in the Finnish language. The basis of the interview structure and questions remained similar regardless of the adaptations. The first version of interview questions can be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, which do not contain the modified questions according to the position of the study participant. The purpose was to find out perspectives of the personnel and examine the processes and activities that progressed during the crisis. The questions cover the organization's actions such as instructions, communication, period, effects during and post crises.

Each interview was carried out individually. The interviews were conducted via the Zoom online meeting tool and were recorded with the permission of each interviewee. As described by Adams (2015) it is interviewer's decision how they want to record their interviews. According to Adams digital recording, however, gives the interviewer the freedom to participate in the conversation without the pressure of writing down the answers. This means of recording also offered me the opportunity to return to the interviews at a later date or multiple times to clarify comments. This is possible only if the interviewee gives permissions for the recording.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose behind the research, after which the conversation began. The length of the interviews varied from 25 minutes to 50 minutes. Although the length of the interviews varied, each interviewee answered extensively and meaningfully. Kanste et al. (2022) stated that the most common data collection methods in studies using content analysis are thematic interviews and semi-structured interviews. As this research is mainly based on data collected from interviews a thematic analysis can be considered a suitable approach for conducting the data analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a method that makes it possible to gain insight to and to organize and systematically identify themes that comprise the meaning patterns of a data set. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to understand collective or shared

experiences and meanings from a clear perspective. As described by Braun and Clarke, researchers employ this method to identify what is common in the way in which the topic in question is spoken or written and to understand the common features. According to Braun and Clarke thematic analysis is a process that starts with getting to know the data, from which codes are made, and then themes are uncovered in data. Once established the themes are reviewed, named and defined, and the research report written.

Recorded interviews allowed for the possibility of transcribing the information afterwards; the recording also improved the ability to conduct the analysis effortlessly. After data collection, according to Müller (2006) the research proceeds with transcribing the interviews which refers to the process where spoken language, and non-verbal aspects between people are translated from video or audio recordings into a written medium. This process is time-consuming and must therefore be limited; in this study information that was not deemed useful in addressing the research question was not transcribed.

As Hammond and Wellington, (2013) pointed out, inductive analysis aims to explore and develop relationships between the data during the research. The inductive approach is flexible, as it allows the researcher to stay adaptable while working with coding frameworks. Alhojailan (2012), stated that thematic analysis allows the researcher to accurately determine the relationships between different concepts and compare them with the data. Alhojailan suggests if an inductive approach is used, most of the collected data will start with the exact content, after which it will move to generalizations and finally to theories. According to Braun and Clarke (2021) during the thematic analysis, the researcher must decide if the researcher wants to create the codes with software designed for this particular purpose. Qualitative software can help the researcher in data management, analysis and coding, although the interpretation process remains the responsibility of the researcher (Byrne, 2001). Bryman (2016) explains that the researchers pick up common themes that can be distinguished within or between transcripts.

A data analysis software was used to code the data gained from the interviews. The transcribed data was uploaded to a Delve data analysis software. Reasoning for choosing to use the Delve data analysis software was its easy usability. The Delve data analysis software helped me as a researcher to conduct qualitative coding process. According to Delve (2024) a process of qualitative

coding happens by systematically organizing the qualitative data to find patterns and themes from the data. In the software the data is organized to codes which are reflecting a certain theme regarding the research analysis. With the help of Delve tool inductive coding was conducted where according to Delve (2024) inductive coding approach allows a narrative to build from the data by deriving codes from the data uploaded to the system. After the codes were decided and data were transferred under these codes, creation of the analysis started. Themes for the results section were decided from the codes created in Delve. Final output of the analysis process addresses the research question which can be found from the results section of the thesis.

4 Results

In this section, the results from the semi-structured, thematic interviews provide the reader insight into this qualitative research. The results are sectioned into themes from the basis of the interview data in order to conduct a thematic analysis. The themes in the Results section are three themes which first one is, adaptation to changes in the case University of Applied Sciences under COVID-19 pandemic, staff experiences during the pandemic and support given to students and their well-being. The data will be presented through summaries of the comments from the interview participants, which will be supported by direct quotes from the data. The data quotes are coded by T-1 to T-7 representing each participant from the interviews. All the Finnish comments have been translated to the text in English.

The first theme gives insight to what the new instructions/changes were in the organization, where instructions came from and what the impacts were. The section will provide concrete examples of the changes that took place, and the participants personal experiences during the pandemic. The second theme presents how the change was organized, how the decision-making processes were managed. It also will give insight to personal opinions of the participants about how the situation was handled. The last theme will result to be what kind of support system was offered to students during the pandemic, what kind of feedback has been received from students, and whether international students have received any special support.

4.1 Adaptation to Changes in a University of Applied Sciences Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Participants described the biggest change resulting from the mandated lockdowns associated with the pandemic as being the switch to online mode in teaching. The participants described that the changes including adapting classroom teaching methods to online platforms. This involved not only moving from classroom to online mode but balancing the uncertainty of the new situation. The interviewees described that in the beginning of year 2020, the situation was new, and while everyone was instructed to move to online mode in short span of time the instructions regarding the pandemic working conditions changed. Six of seven people interviewed described the situation at the beginning as being confusing and uncertain. Staff members were not prepared for a pandemic that turned out as immense as it was.

The interviews revealed that instructions were given by the Finnish government, from which the organization then acted on. An interviewee told that the situation was addressed through the organization's website in addition to the information shared by the head of department and the vice-rector.

Effects on the quality of teaching varied, according to one participant. One of the challenges of online teaching was the students' activity in class because the students were not seen when they did not have the cameras on. According to a interviewee first-year students who joined classes from abroad experienced significantly more challenges in distance learning because the school's systems were not familiar to the new students. The participant also expressed that providing the student with additional support in this situation could be possible, but keeping track of each student was a challenge.

Two of the seven participants described the lack of the social aspect among the students as possibly affecting their learning motivation, then affected their performance. One of these participants expressed that getting students to spend several hours in the Zoom online meeting service, through which the classes were held, was challenging. Two of the participants said that the number of students in online classes started to decrease the further the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. Most of the interviewees expressed how remote learning changed studying and

teaching substantially. A participant said that at the time people were left without much support including staff and students.

During the interviews it was found that the organization had an already existing crisis management group. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the group transformed into a COVID-19 crisis group that comprised the University's management team. According to one participant the group was composed of the Rector, Administrative director, the Head of International Affairs, and the Director of Facility Services.

The staff had to establish offices at home due to the pandemic and lockdown conditions when classes were not held at the campus, but online. Two of the participants shared their experiences on establishing a home office due to the pandemic. These data quotes show how the participants managed the process.

Due to the pandemic for example, informant P-1 stated, *"Also, your family lives there so setting up office where proper technology, proper lightning, camera, quality of cameras, for me as a teacher was quite concerning as I wanted to achieve satisfaction level from the student point of view"*. Similarly, the process of setting up an appropriate home office wasn't only about physical space for P-3: *"I had to set up a completely advanced office and where I could use the technology, use these zoom devices, engage with students--and how to do that it was completely a learning curve"*.

The changes that took place, particularly at the start of the pandemic-forced online environment, were experienced differently by the various staff members. Main challenges for some focused on the technical aspects such as setting up an office home or having difficulties with online platform tools. One participant described the situation as follows:

Coming to this technological part was not easy. It involved a lot of resources. So, for teacher who was given 100 hour for teaching a course or even for a semester, the resources were enormous - not only in terms of resources of others but also compensating the family and environment of home as well. It became a very stressful situation at that time. (P-2)

Another experience regarding the technical aspect of remote working was described by P-1, *“Management and also teachers reacted fast for the situation and the technical part worked really good with zoom”*.

A participant P-7 expressed that the transition to distance learning felt easy from classroom to online environment. According to the interviews the management, both on the crisis management team and for the middle management who needed to implement the directives, the institution needed to wait until new regulations and instructions were given by the Finnish government. After the government informed how the organization could act, they did.

4.2 Staff Experiences During the Pandemic

Most interviewees said they were informed to follow the guidelines and to prepare for online teaching from home. Some ways how the management handled the change in the organization were for example according to the data quotes the following.

These changes according to participant P-2 were, *“Providing necessary materials and having liquid for hands available in entrances also masks available in the entrance of the campus in the pandemic. I think overall it has been done quite well”*. Atmosphere while working in the organization during the pandemic times was described by a participant P-1 in the following way, *“One of the good things that I could credit or the management that there has not been any feeling of panic or fear at any time so that is something good to mention”*.

One participant shared that during the time of the pandemic, staff members were contacted and that the organization counted on occupational health service from the University for moving on from the situation.

Each manager certainly developed different ways, called the personnel and organized regular meetings, soon as the green light was given, everyone was invited back. There is good occupational health, we tried to move forward with the support of occupational health. (P-5)

The differences of opinions on how the situation was handled was noticeable in the answers provided. Participant P-4 expressed how the support from management in the situation was mainly directed to making sure the assignments by students were being done. However participant P-7 expressed how they would have hoped that the communication during the pandemic time would have been more active on the management side.

Communication as a point of development is definitely in the direction of students and staff, would start to develop a genuine reaction. Necessarily in a crisis situation you have to be flexible, goals have to be flexible in terms of the ways of doing internal things. (P-4)

The participants were mainly satisfied with how things were handled by the management, but four of the participants did mention that there is always room for improvement in how things can be handled. One participant also expressed how they enjoyed the advantages of switching to online teaching, such as saving time when traveling.

Always room for improvement, could have been handled more efficiently not waiting for the policy makers or government to make some decisions, should have not waited for instructions but the institution should have made decisions by itself as that is leadership. (P-1)

4.3 Support for Students and their Well-Being

According to the interviews resources were added to support students with their struggles in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. These resources included additional discussion sessions with the students and adding new study psychologists to the staff for helping students cope under the stressful events. Participant P-5 explained what these resources were:

The number of study psychologists was increased. It was essential to know what the situation was for international students and what they could have done in the situation. It made it easier when [the University of Applied Sciences] promised to teach online so that the international students could get [access] to the study courses.

It wasn't just an increase in support staff that the program administrators employed to keep in touch with the students. Both finances and current teaching and support staff were key to the initial understanding that the institution need to be active in reaching out to check on students' welfare. As Participant P-4 explained, "*In the first autumn of the pandemic, an operation was carried out, which involved the previously mentioned increase in resources at the [program] level, a decision where all teachers and tutors contacted every student. A message or phone call*".

Feedback the staff gained from the students was mixed according to these interviews. Some of the students studying in Finland enjoyed benefits gained from for example not needing to commute and in studying from home. Other students from Finland and abroad according to the interviewees found the situation stressful and according to the feedback the students and staff are expected to take long time to get back to normal even after the pandemic.

A student directly said that he "cannot concentrate online". The guidance was challenging, which can be seen today. When the pandemic begins to be in a calm situation, in terms of students' and staff's ability to cope, we will continue to work for a long time. (P-4)

The interviews were gathered in the first full academic year after the lockdown was lifted. Thus, it is clear that the respondents were still unsure at that time about how the fallout of the total distance learning mandate would impact students, particularly those just starting their studies when the pandemic hit, as they were moving ahead with their studies on campus. "*Two years of isolation has left its mark on young students. Psychologists and study supervisors tell the harsh message that there is a load and stress on students. The post-treatment phase of the crisis is going on*". (P-5)

According to the interviews the institution had to assess in line with the situation if international students were accepted to the University of Applied Sciences as students in the time of a crisis. There was support given to international students coming from outside of Finland at the time of the pandemic who were not able to return to their home countries. This support included getting adding contact with students and asking about their personal situation.

According to the guidelines of the government, it was monitored whether exchange students were accepted or not. The matter was discussed, the exchange students who had already come were in a situation where they had time to go to the city, after which they have only studied online and have not met anyone.

Pop-up guidance transferred to online and there was educational guidance conducted by study counselors and speakers. The guidance included guidance on time management and online studying, "How Do You Cope Online", how to learn techniques and avoid procrastination in the spring. (P-4)

From the point of view of international students, it was essential to know what the situation was and what they could do generally. It made it easier when [University of Applied Sciences] agreed to switch to online mode so that the [international] students get to the study courses. (P-5)

4.4 Summary of the Results

The first theme focuses on the organization's adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it was experienced by the participants. In general, the COVID-19 pandemic caused uncertainty for the personnel along with bringing new challenges and changes. The organization followed instructions given by the Finnish government which in this case instructed the teaching to be changed from the traditional class teaching to online mode of teaching. The staff members needed to apply the traditional classroom teaching to online mode of teaching and come up with solutions to provide the teaching suitable for online mode. According to the observations of the staff, the students' activity as participants in classes decreased the further the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. The organization had an already existing crisis management group which was changed during the pandemic to a COVID-19 crisis group, within this group decisions were made about how to communicate the situation in the organization and how to follow the government's instructions. The comments from the participants were aligned and the participants agreed the effects on teaching were significant. However, the individual experiences were not aligned, and they differed according to the different situations of the persons, for example if lived with family or regarding the technology perspective.

The second theme focuses on the participants experience during the pandemic and their feedback from the time. The feedback from the participants focused on the organization's activities during

the COVID-19 pandemic. The way the organization operated during the pandemic was mainly perceived as good although the participant expressed that there is always room for improvement. The organization could have been more active with communication according to the interviews. Although the organization had been in contact with its employees individually, it could have emphasized communication more. One participant would have wanted to see the organization to take a more independent approach to the implementation of actions without waiting for the government's guidelines on the situation. The organization had prepared for pandemic conditions on the campus by supplying equipment emphasized in the guidelines during the pandemic, such as masks and hand sanitizers. The organization trusted that the staff would contact the occupational health service if they felt the need for additional support. The interviews revealed that despite the worldwide pandemic, the organization was able to keep the atmosphere calm without panic. In unison, the participants told about the management's actions and the support it offers.

In the last theme, results related to the support that students received during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the participants' answers, the organization had increased resources that supported the students during the pandemic. These resources referred to increasing the number of study psychologists to the organization and personal contacted students individually to evaluate their situation to offer additional discussion sessions if they felt were needed. In this situation, international students were specifically taken into consideration because they were possibly in need of greater support as they came to a new country to study without a safety net. Feedback that the participants received from students was contradictory.

Some students enjoyed the various advantages of distance learning, such as the fact that traveling did not take up extra time in the day as the studies could be done from home. The other half of the students experienced the situation as difficult because there was no opportunity for social interactions or and the situation was generally perceived as stressful. In the end, the feedback received by the participants was consistent and the differences mainly concerned feedback about distance learning and how individuals experienced it.

5 Discussion

This section will provide overview on the objective of the research to outline the summary of key findings from the research. In addition, in this section will be provided the information regarding the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

The objective of the study has been to analyse how a Finnish University of Applied Sciences adapted to changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the quality of teaching, management's role during the time and the support of students. In the time of the crisis the organisation had to manage under government set regulations and a worldwide crisis state. The data gained from the interviews was thematically analysed by using Delve tool.

5.1 The Research Questions and Research Aim of the Study Have Been to Cover the Issue of

How did an international program at a Finnish University of Applied Sciences manage changes and requirements mandated for higher education in the time of COVID-19 pandemic?

This question aims to examine how the activities in the educational sector have changed during an unexpected worldwide pandemic. In addition, how is crisis management applied in the organization. Sub-questions in the research have focused more on the experiences of the participants in the organisation such as staff and students and how they were supported by management during this time.

How did management in the University of Applied sciences support staff in addressing rapid shift and changes in online teaching?

The first sub-question of the study aims to investigate how management of the organisation provided support during the time COVID-19 crisis and pandemic to their staff. In this study I researched the operational methods, resources and management styles that were applied during that time in the University of Applied Sciences.

How did the University of Applied Sciences provide support for students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The second sub-question aims to examine how students at University of Applied Sciences in the international program were helped to adapt during a time of crisis. How were the students taken into consideration and what was done for their well-being and to add motivation during world-wide lockdown?

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

By examining the results of the research key findings indicate that, the University of Applied Sciences managed the changes and requirements at the time of COVID-19 pandemic by acting on instructions ruled by the Finnish government. When the organization was given any instructions, they were addressing the situation in the organization's website and through the head of department and an associated vice-rector. The organisation set-up a COVID-19 crisis management group which consisted of Administrative Director, the Head of International Affairs, the Rector, and the person in charge of Facility Services. This COVID-19 crisis group was meant to make the decisions and actions in the time of the COVID-19 crisis. From the feedback can be seen that people were overall satisfied with how the management handled the situation. However, participants reported that they would have hoped the management taking more lead rather than waiting for the government regulations in the time of the pandemic.

The organization supported personnel according to the interview by providing the necessary materials needed for keeping staff healthy during the COVID-19 crisis. These materials were hand sanitizer and masks on the campus. Additionally, the participants noted that the management of the international program addressed the rapid change with ease and no evidence of panic. In the times of the COVID-19 pandemic staff members were contacted by the management and hosted regular meetings with the staff members. The organization provided occupational healthcare services to support the personnel of the organization.

The interviewees collectively agreed on the point that there is always room for improvement. According to the results feedback from the staff members was mainly focused on the need for more communication under a time of crisis. Few participants reported that at the times of undertaking

new way of teaching online it was experienced as being difficult with trying to balance work and personal life. In the times of COVID-19 the management added resources to support students, who were managing the crisis in isolation. The resources added included additional discussion sessions with the students and a new study psychologist to support the well-being of the students. Study tutors supported the students by hosting different types of discussion sessions with the students to help them navigate in the new situation by providing instructions on time management. The teachers were in closer touch with the students during the first year of COVID-19 pandemic by contacting each student by email or phone to see how they were managing under the new circumstances. From the point of view of guidance, the students were contacted more frequently during the time of COVID-19 pandemic. According to the respondents, students reported to them that working from home and saving time not having to commute worked for them very well but also some struggled with technology and isolation.

5.3 Interpretation of the Findings

Mikušová and Horváthová (2019) concluded that being prepared for a crisis is important for keeping operations functioning in any organization. In alignment to this research as the University of Applied Sciences had already established a crisis management team, it demonstrates proactive approach to being prepared from their behalf before a crisis. The University of Applied Sciences did not interrupt operations during the time of the COVID-19 crisis instead adapting into online teaching which allowed the organization to keep operating. This decision demonstrated the suggestion from Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (Confederation of Finnish Industries, 2016). Disruptions in organizations require fast-paced decision making from the management. Therefore, Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (Confederation of Finnish Industries, 2016) emphasize the importance of continuing operations in every situation. As stated by Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta (2022), leaders of the higher education would benefit from better guidance from the management for possible prospective crises. According to Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta leaders would benefit from skills of adaptability, rapid reaction and problem solving. Whether or not the government is providing instructions how to move forward and adjust under a crisis the University of Applied Sciences should be able to make independent solutions for the benefit of its staff members and students.

Younis and Elbanna (2022) point out that evaluation of online teaching had been rare in crises. This study brings light to the missing research in the field. Younis and Elbanna also stated that without proper application of crisis management principles in higher education it would be impractical to manage higher education. Vukajlovic et al. concluded that quality of communication is important in the process of crisis management. Communication is a pillar of crisis management, which is also clear in this University of Applied Sciences organization. In my study it was revealed that the methods of operation under a crisis from the organization's side was to contact employees and hold additional meetings with them to provide support and instructions. Although the organization was adding communication amid the crisis according to the interview results some staff members reported needing more communication to manage their specific pandemic-created challenges.

Selvaraj et al. (2020) found in a study about the pandemic effects on online education that their target group which consisted of, students and teachers, preferred the traditional classroom teaching although distance learning/teaching brought its advantages for example in terms of comfort. According to experiences from Selvaraj et al. the respondents had mostly stated that efficiency, general understanding, and interaction improved with the traditional model. Even though the vast majority of respondents felt that online learning/teaching did not work as well for them as the traditional way of education one could conclude that the shock of the new situation and the unprecedented circumstances are part of the reason. Regarding my research, the experiences of the university's administrators, teachers, and support staff regarding online learning in teaching were similar to those of Selvaraj et al. Mostly respondents reported that missing the social aspect on their daily work lives were affecting motivation of students and teachers according to feedback they had received. This was experienced according to the feedback gained from the participants staff members, they enjoyed having an environment where working is not interrupting their personal lives.

As found in my research, the management of the university emphasized communicational support for the students. This validated that the organization operated correctly as aligned with the research from Younis and Elbanna (2022). The researchers insist that within a crisis the organizations management should offer the students and staff members discussion support and guidance. Results from my interviews showed that the staff and students were competent on technological

skills and there were no interruptions with teaching or learning because of the technological skills. The only group that the participants in this study indicated had struggled with the technology was the first-year students: They were unfamiliar with the organization's systems. Alqahtan and Rajkhani (2020) found that the most influential factors related to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic were leadership and support, technology skills management and increasing student knowledge online learning systems. According to these researchers these skills were required in universities mainly for teachers and students to keep online learning productive and functioning. Edward and Wilson (2004) state that virtual teams are expected to perform similarly to traditional operating environments. In other words, Edward and Wilson found that the performance rate is expected to be similar as working in person. However, the findings of my study contrasts with the conclusions of Edward and Wilson in that a working group offline/online is not parallel to students learning full time in class/online. The circumstances are vastly different. Specifically, the lack of social interaction, which would normally motivate members of an organization to work more efficiently, was absent in the educational lockdown. Moreover, considering the statement from Edward and Wilson was made 20 years ago, applicability at this time could be limited as technology has advanced significantly in this time.

5.4 Implications of Findings

In this research I address the gap in the literature that was noted by Younis and Elbanna (2022) for higher education. The research examined the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of personnel in Finnish University of Applied sciences what they perceived as efficient from management, how decision makers communicated information to stakeholders and where decisions came from during the crisis. Understanding these aspects help to explain why and how decisions were made in addition to giving perspective on developing the organizations operations during a pandemic. Findings of this research could be valuable to organizations as they provide an evaluation of COVID-19 pandemic impact on their organization's operations. Furthermore, organizations could implement the knowledge gained from this study by gathering information from this study and analyzing it for their usage. Additionally participant opinions on what would have been useful could provide valuable information for crisis preparation.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Every research has limitations, and this research is no exception. As the objective of my study was to focus on the experiences of international program, I also could have gathered data on another program at the University of Applied Sciences to uncover any differences between the programs. The differences would have been interesting to examine and would have added value to the results.

Moreover, to receive the most comprehensive understanding as possible for the research I could have had wider pool of interviewees. Another option to add complexity and broadness to answers would have been to interview students as well as additional members of the staff such as, more teachers or the University administrators involved in the COVID-19 crisis group.

5.6 Recommendation for Future Research

Despite the limitations the research provides information that contributes to the field and could guide future research. While conducting the theoretical framework and finalizing my research results, I found other interesting topics relating to this study which could provide value and be important to examine. One such research topics included ideas such as, how crisis adaptation was operated from the perspective of students during the pandemic and or crisis. This future research recommendation includes elements that were discussed in the Limitations subsection. Specifically, interviewing students would have brought a broader view of the pandemic's experiences at the university and perhaps could have opened new perspectives on the decision making from that time. Other topics relating isolation, mental health challenges and such could be also recommendations for the future research with the student perspective.

One key finding from my research is that additional communication from the university's management during the crisis was desired. For future research it could be valuable to examine in addition the ways to enhance communication via online services to support staff in an organization during a crisis and analyze decisions and practices based on ever-changing external situation.

6 Conclusion

The findings of the study address the research questions by emphasizing how an organization adapted during an crisis. Additionally, will be resulted how the most important participants of the organization for example the staff and students of the organization, were supported.

The research offers the higher education and for University of Applied Sciences a deeper understanding of how the staff experienced the crisis and what they would have liked more from the organization in a time of crisis. According to the research results, the organization had, for the most part, operated effectively and in accordance with the policies given out by the Finnish government. However, the results of this study showed that the organization could have increased communication during the time of the crisis to be more transparent regarding the situation and to offer additional support to those in need.

For the future it would be essential to investigate similar situations. The way support systems operate in organizations and schools during crises highlights strengths and reveal areas to improve. By identifying the areas for crisis management, it could be ensured to work efficiently and meet the needs of those who would be impacted. This would support the well-being and motivation of the organization's participants, who also support the organization's operations.

References

- Abbas, J., Wang, D., Su, Z., & Ziapour, A. (2021). The role of social media in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic: Crisis management, mental health challenges and implications. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, *14*, 1917-1932. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2147/RMHP.S284313>
- Adams, W. C. (2015). Conducting semi-structured interviews. *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*. 4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171386.ch19>
- Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. *King Saud University*. 1(1). 39-47. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:15161897>
- Alqahtani, A., & Rajkhan, A. (2020). E-learning critical success factors during the COVID-19 pandemic: A comprehensive analysis of e-learning managerial perspectives. *Education Sciences*, *10*(9), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090216>
- Anohina, A. (2005). Analysis of the terminology used in the field of virtual learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, *8*(3), 91-103. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/74943/>
- Bakeman, R., & Quera, V. (2011). *Sequential analysis and observational methods for the behavioural science*. Cambridge University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*. American Psychological Association. (pp. 57-71). <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. Yhdistynyt kuningaskunta: SAGE Publications. <http://digital.casalini.it/9781526417305>
- Brecher, M. (1979). State behaviour in international crisis: A model. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *23*(3), 446-480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200277902300304>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press. 5. <https://lcn.loc.gov/2015940141>
- Byrne, M. (2001). Sampling for qualitative research. *AORN Journal*. 73(2). 1-494. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-2092\(06\)61990-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-2092(06)61990-X)
- Delve. (2024). *The Essential Guide to Coding Qualitative Data*. <https://delvetool.com/guide>
- Drews, A. (2013) Brief History of Quarantine. *The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review*, *2*, 59-70. <http://doi.org/10.21061/vtuhr.v2i0.16>
- Drucker, P. (1985). *Innovation and Entrepreneurship Practice and Principles*. Harper & Row. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315747453>

- Edwards, A., & Wilson, J. (2004). *Implementing Virtual Teams: A Guide to Organizational and Human Factors*. Gower Publishing Company.
- Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto. 2016. Elinkeinoelämän yritysturvallisuusmalli. (Confederation of Finnish Industries: Business security model for the corporate sector). Report from YTNK (Yhteisneuvottelukunta). https://ek.fi/wp-content/uploads/yritysturvallisuus_2016.pdf
- Etzioni, A. (1965). Dual Leadership in Complex Organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 30(5), 688-698. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2091137>
- Gallagher, S., & Zahavi, D. (2020). *The Phenomenological Mind* (3rd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319792>
- Gibson, C. B., & Cohen, S. G. (2003). *Creating conditions for virtual team effectiveness: Virtual teams that work*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Giubilini, A., Douglas, T., Maslen, H., & Savulescu, J. (2018). Quarantine, Isolation and the duty of easy rescue in Public Health. *Developing World Biotech*, 18(2), 182-189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dewb.12165>
- Glaesser, D. (2003). *Crisis Management in the Tourism Industry* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780080454801>
- Hammond, M., & Wellington, J. J. (2012). *Research Methods: The Key Concepts*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203097625>
- Hannila, P., & Kyngäs, P. (2008). Teemahaastattelu laadullisessa tutkimuksessa. (Thematic interview in qualitative research) [Bachelor Thesis, Stadia Helsingin ammattikorkeakoulu, Finland]. <https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/38214/stadia-1210852529-2.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Hermann, C. F. (1963). Some Consequences of Crisis Which Limit the Viability of Organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 8(1), 61-82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2390887>
- International Forum of educational technology & society. (2005). *Journal of educational technology & society*, 1-236.
- Jabeen R. (2018). Organizational crisis management. Conceptual framework for public sector organizations. [Master's thesis, University of Vaasa, Finland]. 1-87.
- Järvenpää, S., & Leidner, D. (1999). Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 791-815. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.10.6.791>
- Kanste, O., Kääriäinen, M., Mikkonen, K., Elo, S., Kaakinen, P., Oikarinen, A., Siira, H. & Pölkki, T. (2022). Sisällönanalyysin käyttö suomalaisessa hoitotieteellisessä tutkimuksessa: dokumentti-analyysi Hoitotiede-lehdessä julkaistuista artikkeleista vuosilta 2010–2021. (The use of content

analysis in Finnish nursing research: document analysis of articles published in *Hoitotiede* magazine from 2010–2021). *Hoitotiede*, 34 (4). 241–255. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe202301203960>

Keegan, S. (2009). *Qualitative Research: Good Decision Making Through Understanding People, Cultures and Markets*. Kogan Page.

Knobler, S., Mahmoud, A., Lemon, S., Mack, A., Sivitz, L., & Oberholtzer, K. (2004). *Learning from Sars: Preparing for the next Disease outbreak*. Institute of Medicine of the National Academies.

Limone, P., Toto, G., & Messina, G. (2022). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war on stress and anxiety in students: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1081013>

Longmuir F. (2021). Leading in Lockdown: Community, Communication and Compassion in response to the COVID-19 crisis. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 51(5), 1014-1030. <https://doi.org/10.1177/>

Makela, T., Mehtala, S., Clements, K., & Seppa J. (2020). Schools Went Online Over One Weekend: Opportunities and Challenges for Online Education Related to the COVID-19 Crisis. In T. Bastiaens (Ed.), *Proceedings of EdMedia + Innovate Learning 2020* (pp. 77–85). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE). <https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/217288/>

Mann, F. (1965). *Towards an Understanding of the Leadership role in Formal Organization*. https://cdn.isr.umich.edu/pubFiles/historicPublications/Towardanunderstanding_2039_.PDF

Martins, L., Gilson, L., & Maynard M. (2004). Virtual Teams: What do we know and where do we go from here? *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 805-835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.05.002>

Mikušová, M., & Horváthová, P. (2019). Prepared for a Crisis? Basic Elements of Crisis Management in an Organisation. *Economic Research-Ekonomska Istrazivanja*, 32(1), 1844-1868. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1331677X.2019.1640625>

Mitzberg, H. (1987). The Strategy Concept I: Five Ps for Strategy. *General Strategic Theory*. *California Management Review*. 30(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165263>

Müller, N. (2006). *Multi-layered Transcription*. Plural Publishing.

Moore, D. (1954). *Managerial Strategies and Organization Dynamics in Sears Retailing*. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Chicago] <https://www.proquest.com/openview/0496ffb38c80965f6dff9d15622f11d9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Opetushallitus. (2024). *Kriiseihin Varautuminen*. (Preparation for crises) <https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/kriiseihin-varautuminen>

Parpala, A., & Niinistö-Sivuranta, S. (2022). Leading Teaching during a Pandemic in Higher Education—A Case Study in a Finnish University. *Education Sciences*, 12(3). 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030147>

Pearson, C. M., & Clair, J. A. (1998). Reframing Crisis Management. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(1), 59-76. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1998.192960>

Rapanta, C., Botturi, L., Goodyear, P., Guàrdia, L., & Koole, M. (2020). Online University Teaching During and After the Covid-19 Crisis: Refocusing Teacher Presence and Learning Activity. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2, 923-945. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00155-y>

Rapoport, L. (1962). The State of Crisis: Some Theoretical Considerations. *Social Service Review* 36(2), 211-217. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/641243>

Rosenthal U., & Kouzmin A. (1993). Crises and crisis management: Towards comprehensive government decision making.

Saarinen J. (2016). Managing Global Virtual Teams [Doctoral dissertation, Aalto University]. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-60-7013-1>

Sarajärvi, A., & Tuomi, J. (2018). Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi: Uudistettu laitos. (Qualitative research and content analysis: A renewed institution). Tammi.

Selvaraja, A., Vishnub, R., N., Benson, N., & Mathew, A. (2021). Effect of Pandemic Based Online Education on Teaching and Learning System. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 85, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102444>.

Shrivastava, P., Mitroff, I., & Alpaslan, C. (2012). Imagining an Education in Crisis Management. *Journal of Management Education*, 37(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105256291245541>

UNESCO. (2023a). Education: From Disruption to Recovery. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-disruption-recovery>

UNESCO. (2023b). UNESCO's Education Response to COVID-19. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.unesco.org/en/covid-19/education-response/initiatives?hub=800>

Valtiovarainministeriö. (2021). Etätyöstä lisääntyvään etä- ja läsnätyön yhdistämiseen. (From remote work to the increasing combination of remote and present work). Ministry of Finance Finland. https://vm.fi/documents/10623/1121917/Etätyöstä+lisääntyvään+etä-+ja+läsnätyön+yhdistämiseen+09_2021.pdf/82d64649-ccd3-b1b0-bb63-bfb5e2edaf5d?t=1632474684713

Vukajlovic, V., Simeunovic, I., Beraha, I., & Brzakovic, M. (2019). Importance of Information in Crisis Management Statistical Analysis. *Industrija*, 47(3), 37-53. <https://doi.org/10.5937/industrija47-23274>

Wengraf, T. (2001). Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods. SAGE Publications. 1-424. <http://digital.casalini.it/9781446205846>

Williams, C. (2007). Research Methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, 5(3). 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.19030/jber.v5i3.2532>

World Health Organization. (2020). Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

Younis, H., & Elbanna, S. (2022). Teaching in Times of Crisis: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Higher Education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 60(4), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2022.2060850>

Zhai, Y., & Du, X. (2020). Addressing collegiate mental health amid COVID-19 pandemic [Letter to the editor]. *Psychiatry Research*, 288, 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113003>

Appendix 1. Interview questions for participants in English

1. What experiences do you have of teaching during a pandemic?
2. How did online teaching affect your teaching and students learning?
3. Was your work at school or completely remote?
4. How has the well-being of the personnel been taken into account in crises?
5. What kind of instructions have you received during the Ukraine-Russia war? Has the situation affected the students in these countries and their guidance particularly?
6. How did communication work at the University of Applied Sciences during the pandemic as the situation had to be managed remotely?
7. How clear were the instructions during the crisis?
8. How have you adapted to teaching during crises and what has your own coping been like under these circumstances?
9. How was the crisis period reflected in the organization?
10. Has the University of Applied Science used a crisis management plan?
11. Was there a visible development in crisis management at University of Applied Sciences as the crisis situations progressed?
12. Do you feel that the crisis is already over or is it still impacting you? If so, how?
13. What are your thoughts on how the situations were administered? Have there been any aspects of development that you would particularly like to highlight?

14. Can you think of a question that didn't come up in the interview that you think would have been important to examine?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for participants in Finnish

1. Millaisia kokemuksia sinulla on pandemia aikana opettamisesta?
2. Kuinka etäopetus vaikutti opettamiseen sekä oppilaiden oppimiseen?
3. Oliko työnne edelleen koululla vai täysin etänä?
4. Kuinka henkilökunnan hyvinvointi on otettu huomioon kyseisissä tilanteissa?
5. Millaisia ohjeistuksia olette saaneet Ukraina-Venäjä sodan aikana? Onko tilanne vaikuttanut erityisellä tavalla näiden maiden oppilaisiin sekä heidän ohjaukseensa?
6. Millä tavalla viestintä toimi ammattikorkeakoulussa korona-aikana koska tilanne jouduttiin hoitamaan etänä?
7. Kuinka selkeitä ohjeistukset olivat kriisi aikoina?
8. Miten olet sopeutunut kriisitilanteiden aikana opettamiseen sekä millaista oma jaksamisen on ollut kriisien aikoina?
9. Kuinka kriisit näkyivät organisaatiossa?
10. Oliko ammattikorkeakoulussa ollut käytössään kriisinhallintasuunnitelmaa?
11. Oliko näkyvää kehitystä kriisinhallinnassa ammattikorkeakoulussa kriisitilanteiden edetessä?
12. Koetko että kriisi on jo ohi vaikuttaako se edelleen? Jos kyllä, niin kuinka?
13. Millaisia mielipiteitä sinulla on siitä, kuinka tilanteet hoidettiin? Onko ollut kehityskohtia, joita haluaisi erityisesti nostaa esille?

14. Tuleeko mieleesi kysymys, joka ei noussut haastattelussa esille, joka olisi ollut mielestäsi tärkeää käsitellä?