Marc C. Perkins, Taina Saarinen, Taru Siekkinen,
Elias Pekkola, Kati Laine & Laura Minkkinen

Good Leadership Practices as a Basis for Crisis Resilience

Raportteja ja työpapereita
Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos (KTL)

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
KOULUTUKSEN TUTKIMUSLAITOS

Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos
Raportteja ja työpapereita 12

Marc C. Perkins, Taina Saarinen, Taru Siekkinen,
Elias Pekkola, Kati Laine & Laura Minkkinen

GOOD LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AS A BASIS FOR CRISIS RESILIENCE

How Finnish higher education can work better in crisis

Työsuojelurahasto
Arbetarskyddsfonden
The Finnish Work Environment Fund

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FINNISH INSTITUTE FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

FINNISH INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The Finnish Institute for Educational Research (FIER) is a multidisciplinary center for educational research, assessment, and development, based at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Its vast research experience, wide-ranging fields of study, and multidisciplinary approach—together with a significant body of researchers and publication volume—make the FIER a nationally unique and an internationally significant unit of educational research.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PUBLICATION

This publication is the final report of a Finnish Work Environment Fund funded project on crisis leadership in Finnish higher education. The publication is based on a review of previous research, expert panel discussions, and a survey administered to 10 universities and 11 universities of applied sciences in Finland. The work was conducted in the Higher Education Studies group of the Finnish Institute of Educational Research, with expert contribution from the Tampere University Higher Education Group.

ISSN 2954-1344
ISBN 978-952-86-0271-2 (PDF)
Permanent link to this publication: http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-86-0271-2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17011/ktl-rt/12

Cover: Martti Minkkinen
Jyväskylä 2024

CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been funded by Työsuojelurahasto (The Finnish Work Environment Fund), project number 220419, and the Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä. We thank all the panel participants and survey respondents for sharing their perspectives and, in many ways, parts of their lives with us; without their thoughtful, personal, and time-consuming work, none of this would have been possible. We especially thank all those of our panel participants who took the time to comment on the draft version of this report during a hot June week in the summer of 2024. Our warmest thanks to Michelle Fay for copious discussions and reflections.

In Jyväskylä and online, July 30, 2024

Authors

ABSTRACT

Higher education organizations in Finland have recently navigated multiple crises, both potential and realized, and face an ever-changing environment that contains a multitude of imaginable crises. In this study, we investigated how Finnish higher education organizations have functioned in past crises, and can function better in future crises, by conducting panel discussions and a nationwide survey with higher education workers across Finland. Our project's goal is to facilitate the development of crisis leadership, including preparation for, management of, and recovery from crises at universities, universities of applied sciences, and other similar workplaces.

We held two rounds of panel discussions from March to November of 2023 with a total of 25 participants from 14 separate Finnish higher education organizations in Finland. A total of ten discussions explored the participants' conception of crisis, past crisis experiences, perceptions of the current crisis leadership situation at their organization, and their thoughts on development areas for higher education crisis leadership. Our survey was distributed to leaders—from department chairs and heads of administration to section directors and rectors—at 10 universities and 11 universities of applied sciences in Finland in February and March 2024, and we received 126 responses. The survey requested leaders to reflect on their prior experiences of crises, the ongoing preparation for crises occurring at their organization, and how to improve their own and their organization's ability to cope with future crises. Due to the ever-changing crisis environment, both the panel discussions and the survey encouraged the participants to reflect on more general themes of crisis leadership, and thus, in this research we do not explore any particular crisis or type of crisis in detail.

In addition to the panels and the survey, we re-examined multiple datasets we had collected as parts of our previous studies and conducted a literature review of peer-reviewed studies on crisis leadership published since 2020. This review identified three major themes in crisis leadership research in the COVID-19 era: well-being

impacts of crisis, the importance of communication, and organizational and leadership characteristics.

The current study's findings span four major areas: the participant's conception of crisis, crisis practices, crisis communication, and well-being. The participants' perceptions of crisis in higher education were multi-faceted: based on them, a crisis conceptualization which emphasized the variable, context-dependent, and fuzzy nature of crisis was created. Additionally, the participants identified individuals or groups who were at risk of being affected by crises more than others (based on, for instance, language, ethnicity, or disability). The diversity of possible crises presents significant challenges for higher education organizations and their leaders, staff, and students, as they prepare for, experience, and recover from crisis.

The participants recognized several crises practices that were relevant to higher education organizations. These practices included individual, organizational, and leadership needs, along with broader themes of resilience and community. The participants in this study identified multiple elements of crisis communication which could help facilitate successful crisis outcomes. These crisis communication elements included bidirectional, inclusive, multichannel, resilient communication that is trustworthy, rumor- and misinformation-aware, useful, and thoughtful. The participants also expressed concern for the well-being of the organizational community and highlighted the importance of inclusion, support, and a sense of community for promoting well-being before, during, and after crisis.

During our data analysis, three cross-cutting motifs emerged: first, the idea that everyday leadership is crisis leadership and/or crisis leadership is everyday leadership, i.e., crisis leadership skills are important skills to have and practice not just during crisis, but in the everyday. Second, diversity, or variation, appeared in nearly every area of the analysis and was recognized in practically countless ways (e.g., crisis types, linguistic, cultural, relationship to the organization, organizational culture, employment groups, student groups, physical location, disability, caregiver status, family status, experience of crisis). Finally, context was repeatedly discussed, as the particulars of any crisis or situation mattered greatly in determining their outcome and appropriate leadership response.

After discussing our findings, the report concludes with recommendations for higher education organizations in five major areas: preparation, organization, communication, well-being, and future research directions.

SUOMENKIELINEN ABSTRAKTI

Hyvät johtamiskäytänteet kriisinkestävyyden perustana: Miten suomalainen korkeakoulutus voi toimia paremmin kriiseissä

Suomalaiset korkeakoulut ovat kohdanneet viime vuosina monenlaisia kriisejä. Niiden toimintaympäristö on muuttunut, ja samaan aikaan kriisien todennäköisyys on kasvanut. Tässä hankkeessa tutkimme, kuinka suomalaiset korkeakoulut ovat toimineet aiemmissa kriiseissä ja kuinka ne voisivat toimia paremmin tulevissa. Tavoitteemme on kehittää yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen kriisijohtamista kaikissa kriisin eri vaiheissa: kriiseihin valmistautumisessa, meneillään olevan kriisin hallinnassa, ja kriiseistä toipumisessa.

Keräsimme aineistoa suomalaisten korkeakoulujen henkilöstöltä paneeli-keskustelujen ja valtakunnallisen kyselyn avulla. Lisäksi analysoimme uudelleen useita aiemmin keräämiämme aineistoja. Järjestimme maalis-marraskuussa 2023 kaksi paneelikeskustelukierrosta, joiden yhteensä kymmeneen paneelikeskusteluun osallistui yhteensä 25 henkilöä 14 suomalaisesta korkeakoulusta. Näissä keskusteluissa tarkasteltiin osallistujien kriisikäsityksiä, aiempia kriisikokemuksia, käsityksiä nykyisestä kriisijohtamisen tilanteesta panelistien korkeakouluissa, ja ajatuksia korkeakoulujen kriisijohtamisen kehittämisestä.

Kyselymme toimitettiin helmi-maaliskuussa 2024 yhteensä 10 yliopistossa ja 11 ammattikorkeakoulussa johtotehtävissä toimiville henkilöille aina laitosjohtajista ja osastopäälliköistä johtajiin ja rehtoreihin. Saimme kaikkiaan 126 vastausta. Kyselyssä johtajia pyydettiin pohtimaan aiempia kriisikokemuksiaan, meneillään olevaa valmistautumista kriiseihin ja sitä, miten he voisivat parantaa omaa ja organisaationsa kykyä selviytyä tulevista kriiseistä. Sekä paneelikeskusteluissa että kyselyssä osallistujia kannustettiin pohtimaan yleisempiä kriisijohtamiseen liittyviä teemoja, joten tässä työssä ei tarkastella yksityiskohtaisesti mitään tiettyä kriisiä tai kriisityyppiä.

Tutkimuksemme kirjallisuuskatsaus kohdistui vuoden 2020 jälkeen ilmestyneisiin vertaisarvioituihin julkaisuihin, jotka käsittelivät kriisijohtamista. Kirjallisuus-katsauksessa tunnistettiin kolme pääteemaa COVID-19-aikakauden kriisijohtamisen tutkimuksessa: kriisin hyvinvointivaikutukset, viestinnän merkitys sekä organisaation ja johtajuuden ominaisuudet.

Tutkimustuloksemme kattavat neljä pääaluetta: osallistujien käsitykset kriisistä, kriisikäytänteet, kriisiviestintä ja hyvinvointi. Osallistujat tarkastelivat korkea-koulutuksen kriisejä laaja-alaisesti ja nostivat esiin erilaisia ja eritasoisia kriisejä. Näistä lähtökohdista käsitteellistimme kriisin vaihtelevaksi, kontekstisidonnaiseksi ja sumeaksi. Lisäksi osallistujat tunnistivat useita yksilöitä tai ryhmiä (esimerkiksi kielen, etnisyyden tai vamman perusteella), joihin kriisit saattavat vaikuttaa epätasa-arvoistavasti. Mahdollisten kriisien moninaisuus asettaa haasteita korkeakouluille ja niiden johtajille, henkilöstölle ja opiskelijoille sekä kriiseihin valmistautuessa, niitä kokiessa, että niistä palautuessa.

Osallistujat nostivat esiin monia korkeakouluille merkittäviä kriisikäytänteitä, joissa toistuivat yksilölliset, organisatoriset ja johtajuudelliset näkökulmat sekä laajemmat kriisinkestävyyden ja yhteisöllisyyden teemat. Osallistujat tunnistivat lisäksi useita kriisiviestinnällisesti merkittäviä elementtejä, ja niiden perusteella kaksisuuntainen, osallistava, monikanavainen ja joustava viestintä, joka on myös luotettavaa, hyödyllistä ja harkittua, helpottaisi kriisitilanteessa johtamista. Osallistujat ilmaisivat huolensa organisaatioyhteisön hyvinvoinnista ja korostivat yhteisön, osallisuuden ja tuen merkitystä hyvinvoinnin edistämisessä paitsi kriisin aikana, myös sitä ennen ja sen jälkeen.

Aineiston analyysissa esiin nousi kolme läpileikkaavaa teemaa: 1) arjen johtaminen on kriisijohtamista ja/tai kriisijohtaminen on arjen johtamista, eli ajatus siitä, että kriisijohtamistaidot ovat tärkeitä taitoja, joita on tärkeää hankkia ja harjoittaa paitsi kriisin aikana, myös arjessa; 2) moninaisuus, joka nousi esiin lähes jokaisella analyysin osa-alueella, ja joka tunnistettiin erilaisilla tavoilla; ja 3) konteksti, eli kuinka kunkin kriisin tai tilanteen erityispiirteillä on suuri merkitys lopputuloksen ja asianmukaisen johtamistavan määrittämisessä.

Raportin lopussa esitetään suosituksia korkeakouluorganisaatioille viidellä keskeisellä alalla: valmistautuminen, organisatoriset näkökohdat, viestintä, hyvinvointi ja esille nousseet uudet tutkimuskohteet.

1 INTRODUCTION

Crisis has gained urgency as a policy topic since the turn of the 21st century, as various ecological, economic, and social turmoil has overlapped, coincided, and ultimately challenged societies and risked human existence. A brief search of "crisis" in daily papers from recent decades produces examples such as environmental, climate, refugee, economic, social, housing, or safety crises—and the list continues. This co-existence of various crises, regardless of their origin, has been termed **polycrisis** or **multicrisis** (Georgi, 2019). Multicrises eventually cause pressure on democratic systems and risk an emergence of more controlling and repressive political and societal elements. Thus, the conceptualization of crises often focuses on an uncertain future (Stråth & Wodak, 2009) and makes the complexities of our societies visible (Facer et al., 2022). Kaukko et al. (2021) emphasize the intertwined and complex nature of these crises in their conceptualization of **nested crisis** in discussing the origins of global eco-crisis, and thus distinguish it from the simultaneously occurring polycrisis or multicrisis.

Recent local and global developments have highlighted the need for organizations to prepare for different types of crises, and higher education as a policy sector is no exception. While earlier higher education crises have been related to internal factors, such as the intellectual state of universities (Collins, 2011), their financial turmoil, or their structural developments (e.g., Scott, 2018), the current external crises such as various and overlapping wars, pandemics, and natural disasters are also challenging the Western higher education organizations.

This project investigates crisis leadership in Finnish higher education organizations, providing knowledge for the sector to proactively respond to and learn from previous, current, and future crises. The themes of this report have emerged from our previous research (Pekkola et al., 2021; Pekkola et al., 2023; Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022; Nokkala et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023), suggesting that action is needed at many different levels of higher education to develop crisis leadership and prepare to meet future challenges.

The conclusions of this report are largely based on ten panel discussions with 25 staff members, representing a broad array of Finnish higher education organizations, and 126 survey responses from higher education leaders in Finland. The panel discussions were conducted between May and November of 2023, and the survey was conducted in February and March of 2024. This timing may explain some of the topics brought up in the panel discussions and survey responses, emphasizing the socio-politically changing nature of crises. Due to the continually evolving crisis landscape, we wanted to focus this project on the more general, cross-cutting leadership issues that (we hope) are applicable to multiple circumstances; nonetheless, our participants did bring up more specific examples from past or current crisis situations.

2 CRISIS LEADERSHIP

The changing crisis environment

Our previous and ongoing research that this study builds on (Pekkola et al., 2021; Pekkola et al., 2023; Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022; Nokkala et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023) has highlighted the various challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented to the management and work of higher education organizations. However, COVID-19 is not the only crisis that Finnish higher education organizations have faced in the past few years, and while new pandemics remain a global risk, other real and potential crises such as war, hybrid geopolitical activities, power loss, protests, school violence, and natural disasters have become prevalent concerns.

The terms polycrisis and multicrisis have been used to describe a state of events where multiple crises overlap and integrate to create a constantly changing, complex environment (see Henig & Knight, 2023, for an anthropological take on the concept). While it is debatable whether being in a state of polycrisis is a new phenomenon, the conceptualization of polycrisis may help characterize the environment organizations currently operate in an environment where crises of different scope, origin, duration, and effect are commonplace.

In this literature review, we discuss recent literature on higher education crisis leadership and management, focusing first on what crises are and how crises have been conceptualized in the research literature. Next, we review higher education crisis leadership research literature published since 2020, summarizing the broad trends of findings. Finally, we conclude with a summary of the Finnish higher education context.

What is a crisis?

The conceptualizations of crises have been primarily developed by researchers working in the business field or in the business context. The historical development of the definition of a crisis, and what types of events are considered crises, is well-summarized by Riggio and Newstead (2023): in brief, crisis leadership research has progressively expanded the conceptualization of crisis to include a broader variety of phenomena, with researchers frequently recognizing the precise definition of (what constitutes a) crisis as challenging.

Riggio and Newstead use Wu et al. (2021, p. 2) for a comprehensive definition of organizational crises, stating that "crises are 'events that are perceived by leaders and organizational stakeholders as unexpected, highly salient, and potentially disruptive.'" In this definition, salience refers to the perceived magnitude of the event's impact as well as the perceived need for rapid responses. Relevant potential disruptions include physical, emotional, operational, and reputational consequences relating to both the organization itself and its community—Wu (2021, p. 3) defines a community as "employees, customers, investors, and the general public". Recent literature in the educational sphere (e.g., Striepe & Cunningham, 2021) uses a similar business-focused conceptualizations of crisis. To our knowledge, no work has specifically investigated higher education workers' perceptions of crisis and how they align with these business-focused conceptualizations.

Multiple categorizations of crises have been developed historically, as reviewed by Riggio and Newstead (2023). Historical conceptualizations of crisis have often either included relatively limited broad categories ("accidents, scandals, and product safety and health incidents", p. 205) or divided crises by cause ("oil spills, air disasters, crowd disasters, …", p. 206). No one typology appears to be prevalent in the literature, with Riggio and Newstead (2023) suggesting that a modification of Wooten and James's (2008) categorization of crises provides "a reasonably robust typology of crises" (p. 206):

- Accidents
- Scandals
- Product safety and health incidents
- Employee-centered crises
- Natural disasters

However, even in this typology, there is overlap between the categories: for example, scandals are defined as "events or communications that compromise the organization's

reputation" (Riggio & Newstead, 2023, p. 356). Yet, all the listed crisis types could potentially damage organization reputation, and multiple crises relevant to educational organizations have no clear location (e.g., student activities, protests, discriminatory behavior, violence, data breaches, war, or hybrid activities such as communications disruptions).

In addition to content-related typologies, crises have been categorized in relation to the timespan of their emergence and termination ('t Hart & Boin, 2001). 't Hart & Boin's (2001) typology divides crises into (a) fast-burning crises, emerging and terminating quickly, such as a hostage situation or a road accident; (b) slow-burning or creeping crises, emerging and terminating slowly, for example environmental crises or tensions in the global security environment; (c) long-shadowing crises, emerging quickly and terminating slowly, for instance, major natural disasters or mismanaged societal, financial, or health-related crises; and (d) cathartic crises, emerging slowly and terminating quickly, such as an extremist attack. These temporal dimensions of crises have an impact on organizational responses, as well as on leadership and its everyday practices.

Crisis leadership and crisis phases

Crisis leadership research studies frequently focus on leadership during crises (Wu et al., 2021), but the process of crisis leadership entails more than just leading during crisis. For example, Wu et al. (2021) define crisis leadership as "a process in which leaders act to prepare for the occurrence of unexpected crises, deal with the salient implications of crises, and grow from the disruptive experience of crises" (p. 3). The idea of crisis leadership as occurring not just during a crisis but also before and after crises aligns with frequently used typologies that divide crises into multiple phases (e.g., Buama, 2019; Bundy et al., 2017; Pedraza, 2010; Pursiainen, 2018; Smith, 2022; Wu et al., 2021). While specific divisions and terms vary, broadly speaking an individual crisis can be thought of as consisting of three separate phases:

- **Pre-crisis**: The time before a crisis becomes highly salient to the organization. This period is sometimes divided into multiple subphases, for example by separating the time when a problem has occurred (and thus, can be sensed by those in the organization and potentially be prevented from becoming a crisis) from the time before the problem has occurred (and when generalized planning and preparation can take place).
- **In-crisis**: The time when the crisis is highly salient to the organization, when significant operational, organizational, and personal impacts are highly likely, and when rapid responses are frequently required. This phase is also

sometimes divided into multiple subphases, such as to an acute or early phase and chronic or later phase.

- **Post-crisis**: The period after the crisis has concluded or is no longer highly salient to the organization.

While these types of temporal distinctions are useful for broadening leaders' perspectives on what crisis leadership entails, it must be noted that in practice, distinguishing them may be difficult, especially when multiple crises occur simultaneously, and when crises fail to follow simple linear timelines (e.g., discussion of COVID-19 in Perkins, 2023).

Crisis leadership vs. crisis management: overlapping concepts

Despite the clarity with which many organizational and popular sources discuss the concepts of leadership and management, there is no consensus on their relationship to each other in the research literature. For example, Simonet and Tett (2012) detail five widely divergent conceptualizations of management[1] and leadership found in literature: the concepts range from management and leadership being two completely separate domains, to one or the other being an all-encompassing concept that subsumes the other.

Organizational and leadership literature most often uses a "bidimensional" conceptualization of leadership versus management, where the two are seen as "distinct, often complementary, processes [...] parts of a larger whole, each being essential to organizational maintenance and growth" (Simonet & Tett, 2012, p. 201). In these classic definitions, management often pertains to the provision of order and alignment through planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, as well as appraisal and problem-solving, whereas leadership involves the creation of vision and strategy, setting shared goals and commitments, and motivating and inspiring (Virtanen, 2020, cf. Kotter, 1990). In the Finnish higher education context, Virtanen (2020) has made the distinction between academic leadership ("akateeminen johtaminen"), often focusing on academic contents of research and teaching, and being conducted by leaders elected for a fixed time from among peers; and administrative leadership

[1] Potentially complicating the issue, the word "management" has multiple meanings in English. For instance, "management" can be used both to refer to the process of handling a situation and directing actions (e.g., "They performed competent management of the crisis.") and to the group of people in an organization working in a supervisory or controlling capacity (e.g., "Management has to decide how many pastries to buy to avert the crisis"). (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023).

(“hallinnollinen johtaminen”), focusing on preparation of decisions and leadership of support services, and being conducted by professionals of these services.

The lack of clarity between the terms leadership and management extends into the crisis research domain. In their recent review of crisis leadership, Riggio and Newstead (2023) consider crisis management and leadership as distinct and separable though potentially intersecting domains, whereas Wu and colleagues (2021) view crisis management in their review as a “broader concept” (p. 3) that appears to encompass crisis leadership. In the educational sphere, Striepe and Cunningham (2021) barely mention the term “management,” although under “leadership” they discuss functions which could be attributed to “management” in many bidimensional definitions. The political aspect of leadership is often highlighted in crisis leadership literature regarding the public sector (Boin & ‘t Hart, 2003; Stark et al., 2013). Riggio and Newstead (2023) state that research into crisis leadership is relatively underdeveloped and go on to create a set of core competencies for crisis leadership: these competencies include sensemaking of the crisis, decision-making on actions, coordination of teamwork, facilitating learning, and communicating.

Distinctions drawn in the literature can be roughly summarized by stating that crisis leadership focuses more on motivational and communication aspects, whereas crisis management often emphasizes planning and preparedness (e.g., Boin et al., 2013; Helsloot & Groenendaal, 2017). See Table 1 for an example of potential managerial and leadership roles and tasks in the different phases of a crisis (based on a roughly bidimensional conceptualization of leadership and management). Furthermore, Table 1 illustrates the interconnected nature of leadership and management.

The concepts of management and leadership may be useful heuristic tools to help those in leadership (or management, or supervisorial) positions to realize the complex and multifaceted nature of their roles (for example, Bass & Bass, 2008). However, from a practical perspective, the roles blend during crisis in such a way that they cannot be readily separated, and any one person may be carrying out both the managerial and leadership functions (Virtanen, 2020).

While crisis management is frequently used in organizational studies as a broad term to refer to the practices involved in responding to crises (e.g., Riggio & Newstead, 2022), in this report we follow the tradition of educational studies (such as Striepe & Cunningham, 2021) and use the concept of crisis leadership to refer to an extensive conception of all the elements involved in organizational crisis response. We also use a broad-reaching conceptualization of “leadership” as influencing others and focus on, but do not restrict, our study to those with formal leadership positions (see Bass & Bass, 2008).

Due to the lack of major distinctions made by our participants along this axis, combined with the historical baggage of management frequently being "viewed in mundane and stereotypically negative terms" (Simonet & Tett, 2012, p. 199), we will not make further distinctions between crisis leadership and management in this report, unless our participants or the research literature we are referring to do so.

Table 1. Crisis management and leadership tasks for successful crisis response during different phases of a crisis. Table created by Elias Pekkola. (see Pursiainen, 2018; Boin et al., 2013; Helsloot & Groenendaal, 2017)

		Crisis Management	Crisis Leadership
Pre-crisis	Risk assessment	Risk mapping	Security and safety culture
	Prevention	Standardizing	Capacity building
	Preparedness	Contingency planning	Communication/awareness
		Redundancy	
In-crisis	Response	Activating contingency plans	Sensemaking
		Decision-making	Showing direction/commitment
		Internal communication	Motivating, taking care of well-being
		External communication	Reassuring the public
Post-crisis	Recovery	Activating recovery plan	Maintaining values & social resilience
	Learning	Rebuild infrastructure	Supporting psychological resilience
		Collecting and analyzing data	Supporting individual and collective
		Commissioning evaluation	learning, use of data analysis

3 CRISIS LEADERSHIP RESEARCH AT EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COVID-19 ERA

Before COVID-19, crisis leadership research at educational organizations largely focused on acute crises such as natural disasters, sudden violence or death, and employee misconduct (reviewed in Striepe & Cunningham, 2021; see also Perkins, 2023). Previous frameworks for crisis leadership in an educational context have been developed based on, for example, research on school violence (Cornell & Sheras, 1998) or the sudden death of a student (Liou, 2015). Cornell and Sheras's (1998) framework emphasized leadership, teamwork, and responsibility as core elements of crisis response, while Liou's (2015) incorporated complexity theory into crisis leadership, concluding that "flexibility, collaboration, and self-correcting mechanisms" (p. 275) were essential, since crises could be non-linear events that alternate unpredictably between crisis phases.

Striepe and Cunningham's 2021 review of educational crisis leadership research (nearly all of which was published before COVID-19) identified six dimensions of educational crisis leadership:

1. Well-being ("providing crisis care")
2. Flexibility ("adapting roles and responsibility")
3. Collaboration ("within and outside the school community")
4. Communication ("multidimensional communication")
5. Decision making ("complex decision making")
6. Context ("contextual influences")

These dimensions have formed the base of some of our own analyses (Perkins, 2023), in which they were found to be largely supported as core elements of crisis leadership at a Finnish university during COVID-19 with some extensions (e.g., including the element of time).

The emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in 2019 and the resulting COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for broadening the views of crisis at educational organizations beyond those of the acute, relatively limited set of crises typically focused on before COVID-19 (Striepe & Cunningham, 2021). Copious work has been published on crisis leadership at educational organizations since 2020, and in the next section, we will briefly summarize some of the major findings from literature searches for peer-reviewed research on higher education crisis leadership.

Frameworks and major themes identified

The majority of the higher education crisis leadership literature we examined in our literature review focused on analyses of leadership practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the work was based on interview-focused qualitative single-campus case studies, though larger multi-organization qualitative and quantitative studies also existed. Some literature (especially in the US context) explored leadership during the combination of multiple crises, such as COVID-19 and social justice protests (e.g., Coaxum et al., 2022; O'Shea et al., 2022; Turner & Zepeda, 2023). Most studies made relatively limited recommendations based on the particulars of their context, with few general models or frameworks for crisis leadership being constructed (though see, for example, Virella (2023) for an equity-oriented crisis leadership framework in education).

One framework of potential relevance to this report focused on the creation of organizational resilience at higher education organizations. Shaya et al. (2023) defined organizational resilience as "a process that enables organizations to respond appropriately to adversity and capitalize on unexpected disruptions in order to develop and thrive" (p. 546). Their framework divided resilience building into three stages: anticipation, coping, and adaptation (akin to the pre-, in-, and post-crisis phases introduced earlier). During all three stages, the organization's resilience was influenced by the knowledge, resource availability, social resources, power relationships, and innovative culture of the organization. Organizational resilience itself developed from the organization's actions in each stage, moderated by the crisis leadership traits and resilience of those in the organization. For full details on the framework, see Shaya et al. (2023).

Among the findings of prior research, we identified three major themes: well-being impacts of crisis, organizational and leadership characteristics, and communication. Next, we will summarize the literature relating to each of these.

Well-being impacts of crisis

Leaders at educational organizations faced many and varied challenges during COVID-19. These leadership challenges frequently resulted in overwork, loss of **well-being**, and stress of leaders, which Marchant and colleagues (2024) documented particularly thoroughly in primary and secondary school leaders in Wales and North Ireland. Pandemic-related well-being impacts were not limited to just leadership, as Kassem and Mitsakis (2024) documented the negative well-being impacts of the pandemic on higher education staff in the UK, concluding that the effects were both significant and unequally distributed: "the most affected groups by the pandemic were females, younger staff, full-timers, and those with disabilities or caring responsibilities" (p. 26).

Multiple other studies indicated that well-being was a central element to higher education crisis leadership, such as Örücü & Kutlugün (2022) finding that Turkish faculty desired leaders who were more emotionally aware and attendant to well-being, and Strayhorn (2021) identifying that a sense of belonging among both staff and students at American community colleges was central to crisis success. In the Finnish context, Antikainen et al. (2021) observed that well-being issues should be incorporated into crisis preparations and that poor communication can negatively impact staff well-being. In addition, Merjonen et al. (2022) found that caring for staff's well-being was associated with a sense of belonging, and Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta (2022) identified a need for more crisis well-being support for degree program directors and members of staff they supervise at one Finnish university. Ruostetsaari (2023) highlighted the importance of leadership's attention to collective stress levels during crisis, and Sjöblom et al. (2022) found that mutual trust, normalizing making mistakes, and attention to well-being supported staff in distance work during crisis.

While the well-being impacts discussed in the reviewed crisis leadership literature focused largely on staff well-being, impacts on students and other people in the organizational community have been discussed in other research (e.g., Striepe and Cunningham, 2021).

Leadership and organizational characteristics

Recent studies of crisis leadership have, perhaps unsurprisingly, highlighted many leadership elements that were especially relevant for organizational crisis response during COVID-19. As some of these leadership characteristics interact strongly with organizational policies and procedures, this theme also includes some organizational characteristics.

The first leadership element we will discuss is **preparation and planning**. Smith (2022) highlighted the lack of pre-existing emergency plans at a Canadian university, concluding that carrying out more planning work in the pre-crisis period would have helped to reduce the "disciplined chaos" observed at the beginning of COVID-19, though they also noted that prior experiences of crisis at the organization facilitated the COVID-19 response.

In their work with five higher education organizations in the Philippines, Dayagbil (2023) found that planning in all phases of crisis was essential for organizational resilience. Furthermore, while their studied organizations had crisis plans for incidents for which the government had provided funding (primarily, natural disaster response), the organizations had not planned sufficiently for a crisis like COVID-19. Leaders in Dayagbil's work on the Philippines pointed out that reviewing their organizational crisis plans in the time between when COVID-19 emerged in 2019 and became dominant would have been particularly helpful to reduce the stress of early COVID-19 response in March of 2020.

Strayhorn (2021) highlighted the challenges United States community college leaders faced while making plans during the crisis. In Finland, Kihlström (2021) concluded that intra-organizational planning during COVID-19 was not as good as it could have been, and that personal networks of staff and leaders within Finnish organizations were key to facilitating inter-organizational collaborations.

Organizational and leadership flexibility during crisis was seen as necessary for successful crisis leadership. Flexible leadership structures and practices were core for the successful navigation of COVID-19 by two South African universities (Kele & Mzilen, 2021) and eight United States community colleges (Strayhorn, 2021). Multiple studies (positively) evaluated leadership concepts that included flexibility, such as mindful leadership in the UK (McNamara, 2021) and agile leadership in Australia, the UK, as well as South Africa (Menon & Motala, 2021; Varga-Atkins et al., 2021). The need for flexibility was also discussed by Abbas et al. (2021) in the context of a need to adjust work schedules and practices during crisis in Israeli universities. Sjöblom (2022) also found that flexibility of working arrangements in Finland (especially distance work) was key for successful crisis response.

The optimal, or preferred, **leadership style seemed to vary with time** during COVID-19. While top-down and/or directive leadership was common at the start of COVID-19, a shift (back) to shared, participatory, or distributed leadership was typically viewed in many studies as positive or integral to success. In both Canada and South Africa, studies observed this shift directly (Menon & Motala, 2021; Smith, 2022). The importance of collaborative leadership for building resilience was discussed in the Philippines and UAE (Dayagbil, 2023; Shaya, 2023), with the importance of directive leadership early in a crisis being mentioned despite a strong desire for collaborative leadership later (Dayagbil, 2023).

While not introduced in a temporal manner, the desire for distributed leadership and trust building was also observed in Turkish faculty (Örücü & Kutlugün, 2022). In United States higher education, a survey of senate leadership (Miller, 2021) showed that US universities did not engage in collaborative or distributive leadership early in the pandemic. In the Finnish school context, Merjonen et al. (2022) compared decisive and inclusive leadership styles, finding that shared responsibility and servant leadership were associated with enhanced well-being and a sense of belonging at work, even early in the crisis; a finding that potentially highlighted the challenges of purely directive leadership in the early stages of a crisis.

A few other less thoroughly documented leadership-related themes were also identified in the literature. First, **trust** was believed to be a core element of crisis response by Turkish faculty (Örücü & Kutlugün, 2022) and a key component of mindful leadership during crisis (McNamara, 2021), and it was viewed as supporting Finnish higher education staff members during distance work (Sjöblom et al. 2022; with emphasizing the naturalness of making mistakes). Second, incorporating the principles of **equity** into crisis response was considered important for the success of crisis responses in multiple South African studies (Kele & Mzilen, 2021; Menon & Motala, 2021) and in American community colleges (Strayhorn, 2021). Finally, from an analytical perspective, multiple studies carried out their work by evaluating the organizational and individual characteristics of leadership separately (e.g., Abbas et al., 2021; Örücü & Kutlugün, 2022; Strayhorn, 2021)—a contrast that we also (independently) identified as relevant while coding panelist discussions in this project.

Communication

Communication was a core theme of many COVID-19-era crisis leadership studies. Örücü and Kutlugün (2022) found that the Turkish faculty desired robust communications by leadership, while McNamara (2021) observed that communication was key to mindful leadership that supported successful crisis outcomes. Menon and

Motala (2021) recognized that communicative leadership, including multi-channel communication, was important for successful crisis outcomes in South Africa. Furthermore, O'Shea et al. (2022), in their multinational study of university crisis communication, identified that emotional communication was frequently used by leadership in COVID-19 communications, and that centralized communication distribution facilitated the quick spreading of information and likely reduced stress. O'Shea and colleagues (2022) also found that while the existing Situational Crisis Communication Theory was useful for evaluating university communications in Canada, China, and the United States, the theory needed development to be applicable to longer-term crises in the higher education context.

In Finland, Sjöblom et al. (2022) reported that meaningful use of multichannel communication increased well-being during implementation of distance work, while Antikainen et al. (2021) observed that bad communication negatively impacted the well-being of staff, and that communication should be factored into crisis planning. Similarly, Parpala and Niinistö-Sivuranta (2022) suggested that educational program directors at Finnish universities would benefit from training on communication skills that promote teambuilding and trust.

Research into higher education work during COVID-19

Transboundary crises refer to threats and crises that cross geographical, judicial, and administrative borders, challenging organizational management and pushing for collaboration between different actors. These types of crises highlight the interconnectedness of different societal subsystems, such as administrative and technological systems. Thus, in addition to daily practices, organizations must be ready for collaboration to respond successfully to crises. (Bravo-Laguna, 2021; Boin et al., 2014.) As a transboundary pandemic, COVID-19 emphasized the similar transboundary nature of higher education and its leadership, as universities and academic work are international and boundless by nature, operating in a networked, permeable environment (Siekkinen et al., 2022).

Literature on higher education tends to treat higher education organizations as unique entities that on one hand, have different characteristics than other public sector and private sector organizations, and on the other, as typical knowledge or expert organizations (Kuoppala, 2014). Consequently, crisis leadership in higher education must consider the nature of higher education work when addressing the multifaceted crisis landscape, while also paying attention to the broader aspects of crisis leadership in different kinds of knowledge and expert organizations.

The pandemic has shown that there are different ways of doing higher education work, but simultaneously, it has treated higher education employees differently (Blackmore, 2020; Carr et al., 2021; Le, 2021). The global crisis offered an opportunity to rethink and reorganize higher education work (Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022; Pekkola et al., 2023): during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities have, for example, extended the timeframe for doctoral degrees (Le, 2021); stopped the timeframe for tenure tracks (Shillington et al., 2020); and supported the transition to online teaching (Sumer et al., 2021). However, these are only immediate crisis solutions that do not necessarily address the larger structural challenges, such as the lack of a "culture of care" and the adoption of more sustainable academic working practices (Corbera et al., 2020). Equitable and systematic crisis practices also support the equal treatment and well-being of staff and thus, better organizational performance (Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022).

In their interview study, Nokkala et al. (2023) researched how academic staff, who were in different career stages and continents, experienced their relationship with their university during the first 18 months of COVID-19 lockdowns. From the viewpoint of administration and leadership, Nokkala & al. concluded that

1. leadership needs to understand how different staff groups can best be supported
2. leadership needs to facilitate re-building trust in the organization
3. leadership needs to support particularly early career researchers, who may not have the solid networks and support structures the more established staff has.

Summary

Higher education crisis leadership research in the COVID-19 era has, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on the experiences of leadership during the pandemic. In comparison to prior crises, the extended duration and different nature of COVID-19 were frequently highlighted. While models or frameworks of crisis leadership in higher education are still largely lacking, the framework of Shaya et al. (2023) for higher education organizational resilience deserves a mention, as does Riggio and Newstead's (2023) broad-reaching review of (business-oriented) crisis leadership literature.

Major themes observed in the COVID-19-era crisis leadership literature included well-being impacts, planning and preparation, organizational and leader flexibility, leadership style, trust, equity, and communication, with explorations on the nature of academic work also being carried out. Of particular relevance to this report were the

importance of leadership attending to well-being at not just the individual level, but also at the structural level; the potential power of non-directive styles of leadership (e.g., distributed, collaborative leadership); the importance of thoughtfully planned, multichannel communication; and the exploration of different ways of doing academic work that may be brought to light by crisis.

4 FINNISH HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

To provide context for this project, we will now briefly summarize the higher education context and some recent crisis experiences. We will first introduce the Finnish higher education system, and then discuss major recent crises in the higher education sector in Finland.

Based on the OECD definition, all higher education organizations in Finland are public due to their public funding. Additionally, one could argue that they are also public by their missions: as a Nordic welfare state, Finland constitutionally guarantees equal opportunity for all to receive educational services according to their abilities and special needs, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves without incurring economic hardship (Constitution of Finland, 1999, § 16). Although the constitution does not mandate higher education to be free of charge, it has traditionally been a part of the country's welfare services, meaning tuition fees for degree studies are not charged for Finnish citizens or citizens of other European Union and European Economic Area countries. Moreover, all Finnish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), including universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (UASes), have official public duties regarding, for instance, their educational role. Therefore, they are subject to several regulations guiding the use of public authority and the work of civil servants (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019a).

Organizationally and legally, the picture is more nuanced. From a legal perspective, higher education institutions (HEIs) are no longer public bureaus: universities, as stipulated in the Universities Act (2009), are foundations (pursuant to the Foundations Act) and corporations under public law. UASes, as stipulated in the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (2014), are limited liability companies as legal entities. Unlike universities, UASes are required to have a government-granted operating license—this is a result of legal reforms in the higher education sector which became effective in

2010 for universities and 2015 for UASes. In these reforms, the main issues have been the autonomy, performance, responsiveness, and internationalization of HEIs.

The new Universities Act (2009) legally separated universities from the central state government and re-established them as autonomous financial and legal entities, simultaneously abolishing the academic staff's civil servant status. The UAS reform of 2015 similarly turned UASes into independent legal entities and shifted the responsibility for their core funding from the state and municipalities to the state only. In the case of universities, the legislative reform also introduced new university boards with external members and a university-external chair. These changes aimed to create more autonomous, better managed, and more strongly profiled universities (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019a), in which the managerial practices were added on top of the collegial and bureaucratic traditions of Finnish universities (Välimaa, 2019).

Universities and UASes are required to be prepared for crisis situations through contingency plans. As The Universities Act (2009, § 90) stipulates:

> *universities must ensure that in emergency conditions and abnormal or exceptional situations the disruption caused to the university's operations remain as minimal as possible, and shall do so by use of contingency plans, proactive preparation of operations and by other means.*

The Universities of Applied Sciences Act (2014, § 66) respectively stipulates:

> *by means of contingency plans, by proactive preparation of activities and by other means, the universities of applied sciences shall ensure that in emergency conditions and during disturbances and other special situations, the disruption caused to the universities of applied sciences are kept to a minimum. Contingency plans and situation awareness reports produced on emergency conditions and during disturbances and other special situations shall be submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture upon request.*

Both institutions are accountable for their contingency planning to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Traditionally, the overall aims of governance and management reforms in Finnish universities have been aligned with the principles of new public management, especially with the performance-driven management ideology (Yliaska, 2015). Similarly, the management in UASes has been aligned with municipal structures. The internal governance model of universities and universities of applied sciences has been developed as a part of higher education reforms that have increased the autonomy of universities and thus, enabled a stronger managerial approach in internal governance. This has led to the professionalization of middle-management (deans) at universities and a reduced role for collegial bodies in operational (financial, HR, etc.) managerial issues. Overall, there has also been a trend of centralizing support services. In UASes,

the management structures are partly organized based on corporate governance principles. (Pekkola & Kivistö, 2019b; Kohtamäki, 2024).

Kuoppala (2014) described the structures of Finnish HEIs as matrix organizations in Clark's (1983) sense. This means that administration is responsible for organizing support services at all levels of the organization, while the academic units (departments, faculties) are responsible for the basic functions of HEIs, namely research, teaching, and societal service. As in other expert organizations, the organizational units in HEIs are based on areas of expertise (disciplines or educational fields) and are typically rather independent in conducting their basic duties. The support services are more tightly connected and standardized than the basic functions, and universities are often more loosely coupled (Weick, 1976) than UASes.

The differences between UASes and universities can also be explained by the difference in academic research work and teaching activities. Universities are expected, by law, to have a more research-oriented role and to "promote independent academic research as well as academic and artistic education, to provide research-based higher education and to educate students to serve their country and humanity at large" (The Universities Act, 2009, § 2). UASes, in turn, have a more professional profile in providing "higher education for professional expert tasks and duties based on the requirements of the world of work and its development and on the premises of academic research and academic and artistic education and to support the professional growth of students" (Universities of Applied Sciences Act, 2014, § 4.) The research conducted at UASes should be more applied or working life related than at universities. In both universities and UASes, research is often organized with external stakeholders and international colleagues and does not strictly follow institutional policies and procedures. On the other hand, teaching work is more tightly connected to organizational administration and is more strictly regulated.

There are no recent comparative studies on the differences in academic work between UASes and universities. Since UASes have taken a more active role in research, and universities have become more managerial, it can be assumed that the differences in academic work have partly diminished. However, it is also known that working culture changes slowly, and the division of labor is often strongly path dependent. Thus, it can be presumed that these main differences observed by Aarrevaara et al. (2011) and Pekkola (2011) in the early 2000s are still at least partially valid:

- Management and control in UASes are much more centralized than in universities
- Faculties and departments are more autonomous in universities than in UASes
- Organizational managers have a greater role to play in decision-making

- Academics from UASes perceive themselves as more influential than their counterparts in universities
- In universities, staff occupying junior posts are employed under short-term contracts or working with grants

It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss Finnish higher education organizations' responses to COVID-19, especially as our goal is to explore crisis leadership broadly with an eye to the full diversity of crises Finnish HEIs have faced and will face. For those looking for information on COVID-19 and Finland, a starting point could be Stenvall et. al (2022), who evaluated Finland's management of the COVID-19 pandemic from autumn 2020 to autumn 2021. Stenvall et. al (2022) conducted over 100 interviews with representatives from various levels of government and sectors, supplemented by documents and surveys. Their findings suggest that Finland managed the crisis relatively well in the first year and a half despite occasional confusion, with less stringent restrictions and lower mortality compared to other countries. However, it seems that there might have been room for improvement in crisis management structures, cross-administrative leadership, and clearer communication with citizens and stakeholders. Additionally, Aarnikoivu and Saarinen (2022) and Kivistö and Kohtamäki (2022) note that Finnish universities, while not being formally centrally coordinated, still responded to the pandemic by coordinating their individual activities systematically within national umbrella organizations and working groups.

5 METHODS AND DATA

Overview of methods

We used multiple methods to evaluate the status of and the developmental needs for higher education crisis leadership in Finland. We held panel discussions with participants from a variety of higher education roles in Finland, carried out a nationwide survey targeted to higher education leadership in Finland, reviewed published crisis leadership literature, and re-analyzed existing datasets in the light of the findings from this work. A draft of this report was shared with panelists to enable integration of participant feedback. AI-based analysis tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) were not used, however, AI-assisted software was used for translation and proofreading (secure DeepL for panel data, and ChatGPT, Google Translate, and SanaKirja.fi for other translations). The Scopus AI software was used for limited, preparatory literature searching by one author. All automated translations and proofreading were verified by the researchers.

Literature review

Higher education crisis leadership research in the COVID-19 era (2020 and beyond) was reviewed by two researchers specifically for this project. Peer-reviewed higher education crisis leadership research in Finnish was searched by using both Google Scholar and the University of Jyväskylä's JYKDOK-database. In English, peer-reviewed higher education crisis leadership research was searched by using the ERIC database. The literature searches were carried out in March 2024; the Finnish search strings used were "johtaminen", "korkeakoulu", and "kriisi", and "kriisi" and "johtaminen", while the English strings were "crisis" and ("higher education" or "university" or "college") and "leadership." These searches resulted in hundreds of references being identified as possibly relevant, of which more than 75 references were manually reviewed for this

project. Artificial intelligence tools were not used by the authors in the systematic review.

Panel discussions

Expert panels are part of a participatory research approach (Haklay, 2013) that focuses on the whole process rather than a particular data collection phase. The participatory method allows the perspectives of participants and stakeholders (in this case, university management, employees, and national partners and interest groups) to be considered from the very beginning of the study, both in the design and analysis, and in the use of the results. In complex topics, panel methods leave room for a diversity of perceptions and opinions.

Panel discussions were employed as a part of the current study to obtain rich reflections and interactive dialogues on crisis leadership from a range of higher education participants. Thirty participants were recruited in February and March 2023 from universities, universities of applied sciences, and national higher-education-related organizations in Finland. Recruitment was carried out bilingually (in Finnish and English) by selecting members from professional networks of the research team with a goal of obtaining diversity along multiple axes: organization (university, university of applied sciences, and national actors), professional role (management, teaching and research staff, expert and professional staff, and national actors), and international status (international origin or not). 25 of the original 30 participants attended at least one of the panel discussions; characteristics of these final 25 participants can be seen in Tables 2 and 3.

Two rounds of panel discussions were conducted. For each round, panelists were emailed a bilingual (Finnish/English) scheduling poll providing 12 possible meeting times; final schedules were built based on participant responses, attempting to maximize the diversity of attendees in each panel. Finally, a total of ten panel discussions were held. Two discussions in each round had participants of international origin and were held primarily in English, the remainder being held in Finnish. At least two researchers (Pekkola, Perkins, Saarinen, or Siekkinen) attended each panel discussion, with one researcher typically designated as the discussion leader and the other carrying out supporting duties.

Panel discussions were semi-structured in nature, meaning that the researchers had a list of topics they wanted to cover during the meeting, but the order of the topics and their inclusion in any one panel were flexibly determined by the researcher to reflect the interests of the attendees at that particular panel (Tracy, 2020). All discussions occurred in Zoom and were recorded; voluntary consent was obtained from all participants. All materials created for the panel discussions, including the call

for participation, materials distributed to panelists before the panels, and slides used during the panels, will be available in an upcoming publication (Perkins et al., forthcoming).

The first panel discussion round included six separate discussions that occurred between May 22 and June 15, 2023. Discussions in this round typically focused on participants' conception of crisis, past crisis experiences, perceptions of the current crisis-leadership situation at their organization, and their thoughts on development areas for higher education crisis leadership. Participants were sent a pre-panel electronic survey approximately a week before the panel, asking them to reflect on these topics and submit short responses via Webropol.

The second panel discussion round included four separate discussions between November 6 and 13, 2023. Participants were sent a summary of the results from the first round of panel discussions (including a draft conception of crisis and major themes on crisis leadership and crisis preparation). Discussions in this round focused on obtaining participant reflections on this material, along with suggestions for survey content.

Panel discussions were analyzed both descriptively and thematically. Transcripts of all panel discussions were manually coded in Atlas.ti (v. 23 and 24) both descriptively (e.g., to determine the types of crises participants discussed) as well as thematically (for example, to evaluate the core elements of participants' crisis conceptualizations). Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of panel discussions was carried out by two researchers (Perkins and Saarinen) reading over the transcripts multiple times and labeling relevant quotations with codes relating to crisis conceptualization, crisis examples, crisis preparation, in-crisis needs, crisis communication, and crisis-related well-being. Initial codes were created based on prior literature (deductively) with new codes freely created during the coding process (inductive coding).

Coding of the panel discussions and survey short answer sections occurred iteratively over multiple months; researchers typically coded particular topics independently (with Perkins focusing on panels held in English, Saarinen focusing on panels held in Finnish, and Laine on survey responses) and then regularly met to discuss in-progress findings on each topic (e.g., crisis conceptualization, crisis preparedness, in-crisis leadership needs). Codes used and draft themes observed were revised in these researcher discussions, after which additional coding occurred before further discussions, with the goal of eventually finding a set of core themes for each topic which also reflected the views shared by the panelists and survey respondents. At the end of the data analysis period, 23,75 hours of panel discussion audio had been transcribed and analyzed by identifying more than 1000 separate text sections that had been tagged with at least one of more than 180 separate codes.

Survey

The goal of the survey was to elucidate the current state of crisis leadership at HEIs in Finland. The survey was distributed to all leadership (academic and administrative) from department chairs to rectors at 21 universities and universities of applied sciences across Finland (roughly 60 % of all universities and universities of applied sciences in the country).

The survey employed both multiple choice and short-answer questions that asked leaders to reflect on their prior experiences of crisis, the ongoing preparation for crises occurring at their organization, and how to improve both their own and their organization's ability to cope with future crises. The survey was developed by combining existing crisis leadership literature and prior crisis surveys (see Pekkola & al., 2021 and Pekkola et al., 2023) with the results obtained from the panel discussions. To expand the scope of the survey, we looked for themes in published crisis leadership literature (Pekkola et al., 2021; Pekkola et al., 2023; Perkins, 2023; Striepe & Cunningham, 2021; Wu et al., 2021) as well as our own extant datasets we had collected regarding the experiences of higher education workers in crisis. Furthermore, the panelists were asked to reflect on a broad array of topics relating to crisis leadership, and input from these discussions was essential for developing the survey. Three panelists, representing the three different organization types, provided feedback on a draft of the survey. The survey was bilingual (Finnish and English), with the option to create a translation to Swedish if desired. No organizations or participants requested a Swedish version.

The survey was administered anonymously via the University of Jyväskylä's Webropol service; all organizations and participants were provided an identical link to the survey's webpage. Survey distribution materials specified that the survey should be "distributed to all leadership at your organization, from department chairs up through the rector," with the following levels specifically listed: rector, vice-rectors, deans or equivalent, vice deans or equivalent (if present), and department chairs (if present). The survey was distributed primarily via a single contact person within each organization, who shared the survey to leaders either via direct emails or through intranet postings. When requested by an organization, leadership email lists were obtained (either from the organization itself or via the organization's webpage) and leaders were directly emailed by the research team; this occurred at five organizations.

The survey was released on February 26, 2024, and closed on March 18, 2024. A total of 150 responses were obtained: however, one of those responses rejected consent, 15 responses failed to answer any questions (other than the consent question), and eight responses solely answered the background questions (with no crisis-leadership-related questions answered). Thus, a total of 126 responses were included

in the final analysis; organizational characteristics of the respondents can be seen in Table 4.

The survey was conducted in full compliance with the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity's guidelines. Research permissions were obtained from all organizations prior to the distribution of the survey. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with the research notification, privacy notice, and consent form being provided bilingually (Finnish and English) in the survey itself, on the project's webpage, and in all advertising material (e-mails and fliers). The survey was distributed solely via a single universal web link (to prevent identification of people or organizations via unique web links), and the survey did not ask for any directly identifying personal information (e.g., names, emails, and specific position titles were not collected). Organization names were collected to allow demographic reporting (i.e., the number of organizations that participated, see Table 4), but to prevent indirect identification of respondents and to allow for honest responses without concern for individual or organization reputation, the organization name collection field specified that the organization name would be discarded and compressed to "university" and "university of applied science" before analysis began. The full bilingual survey text, along with prompts and emails, will be available in an upcoming publication (Perkins et al., 2024).

Analysis of the survey occurred both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis was carried out in IBM SPSS v. 28.0. To determine if the responses from leaders at universities and universities of applied sciences were statistically significantly different, Mann-Whitney U tests were run in SPSS with a threshold of 0,05. The descriptive analysis of short-answer survey responses was conducted using crosstabulation. Answers given to the open-ended questions of the survey (including question numbers 14, 18, 31, 35, 43, 44, and 45) were analyzed qualitatively, both descriptively and thematically. Each open-ended question was worked on individually. All answers to a question were thoroughly read through by a researcher and focal points in each answer were identified, after which the focal points were pooled under common themes and the frequency of each theme was counted. The spreadsheet program Excel was used in this process. Furthermore, based on the thematic analyses, short descriptions of the results (of each question) were written to enhance the overall picture elicited from each open-ended question; this process occurred simultaneously with the panel discussion analysis.

Prior datasets methods

Before the start of this project, several of the authors (Perkins, Saarinen, Siekkinen, and Pekkola) had been involved in studies focusing on crisis leadership. Perkins conducted

a case study of HEI leadership during COVID-19 by interviewing nine leaders at a Finnish university in 2022 and 2023 (full details in Perkins, 2023). As provisional themes were being developed during the analysis of the current project's panel discussions and survey, Perkins reviewed the 13 interviews and 880 minutes of audio collected during his case study to evaluate the alignment of the current report's provisional themes with the previous study's data, i.e., the discussions with the university's leadership. Results from this work were shared with the research team and incorporated into the final themes developed in this report.

Aarnikoivu and Saarinen (2022) collected interview data on European universities in pandemic times as a part of a larger project carried out in eight European countries (Veiga & Seidenschnur 2022a). All countries loosely followed the same sampling and interview frame, while simultaneously allowing national and contextual modifications. The interview guideline included questions on a) national and institutional changes in policy and funding, internationalization, differences within the sector and inequalities in the sector; b) science, education, labor market, and relations with the society; c) distance and online education; and d) work of academics and support staff, the duty of care, and governance and decision making (Veiga & Seidenschnur, 2022b). The Finnish data consisted of interviews and media data (Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022). National system-wide actors represented one academic union and the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as altogether five representatives of one multidisciplinary university and of one University of Applied Sciences, in both sectors from different staff levels and tasks. Other data included selected pieces of news and other media texts to report or complement the interviewees' views and to provide examples of the ongoing research and pandemic-related discussion in Finland. Data was analyzed thematically. Results from this work were shared with the research team and incorporated into the final themes developed in this report.

Nokkala et al. (2023) conducted longitudinal online group interviews (apart from two research team meetings at the beginning and end of the data generation period). The data consisted of semi-structured group interviews with a total of ten interviewees in three purposively selected groups of academics representing different career stages and geographical locations. The first round of interviews took place in April 2020, the second in May 2020, and the third in June 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic had not subsided by autumn 2020, the researchers decided to continue the interviews and strengthen the longitudinal nature of their data, the final interviews taking place in early 2021. The coding scheme of the study was based on the concepts of responsive and adaptive pandemic practices (Werron & Ringel, 2020) to explore the short-term and potential longer-term changes in university practices, as described by the interviewed academics. In addition, the concept of the academic psychological contract (Shen, 2010;

Sewpersad et al., 2019) was drawn from. Results from this work were shared with the research team and incorporated into the final themes developed in this report.

Pekkola et al. (2021; 2023) conducted a survey for deans in Finnish universities over three consecutive years (2020, 2021, and 2022). The survey included both structured and open-ended questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and different themes of management. The surveys received 24 to 34 responses. The open-ended answers were analyzed utilizing conventional content analysis, and the closed-ended questions via descriptive statistics. The questions used in these surveys and the results obtained from them were used during the development of this project's survey and panel discussion prompts.

Panelist review of the report

To obtain participant reflections and help ensure that the report reflects the realities of higher education workers in Finland, a first draft of this report was shared with all 25 panelists in mid-June 2024. Panelists were able to submit feedback by anonymously commenting on an online version of the document and by emailing the researchers directly. Across the week-long review period, the panelists provided several comments that were reviewed by the researchers and integrated into the final report before publication.

Overview of the participants

In this section, we will summarize the characteristics of the participants of this research project. We will first describe the panelists, and then the survey respondents. To maintain participant confidentiality, we are not publishing information that could lead to direct or indirect participant identification, and thus are not including details such as specific participating organizations or specific position titles.

Panel participants

A total of 25 people participated in at least one panel discussion. Table 2 presents an overview of the panelists' occupational characteristics, and Table 3 presents an overview of the panelists' organizational characteristics. International origin participants were sought in all categories listed in Table 2, but the research team was only able to recruit them from the teaching and research staff.

Table 2. Occupational characteristics of the panel participants.

	Number of panelists (N)	**Number of the panelists who were of international origin**
Higher education management	5	0
Teaching and research staff	10	4
Professional and expert staff	6	0
National actors	4	0
Total	25	4

Table 3. Organizational characteristics of the panel participants.

	Universities	**Universities of Applied Sciences**	**Other**	**Total**
Number of panelists (N)	17	4	4	25
Number of organizations	6	4	4	14
Average number of panelists per organization	2,8	1	1	1,8
Range of number of panelists per organization (min–max)	1–7	–	–	1–7

Survey participants

A total of 126 responses were included in the final analysis of the survey results. Table 4 presents a summary of the organizational characteristics of survey respondents, Table 5 presents a summary of the managerial role of the respondents, and Table 6 presents a summary of the self-reported personal disciplinary background of the respondents.

Sixty-one percent of respondents (72 % UAS, 56 % university) reported being in management for more than five years, with 8 % (at both UASes and universities) being in management for less than a year (e.g., rector, dean, or head of unit). Eighty-three percent of respondents (90 % UAS, 79 % university) were in a management position at their organization for at least some time while COVID-19-related restrictions were in place at their organization. Fifty-three percent of respondents (54 % UAS, 53 % university) reported being female, while 43 % (41 % UAS, 44 % university) reported being male and 4 % preferred to not answer the question.

Table 4. Organizational characteristics of the survey respondents.

	Universities	**UAS**	**Total**
Number of responses (N)	87	39	126
Number of organizations	10	11	21
Average number of responses per organization	8,7	3,5	6,0
Standard deviation for responses per organization	6,8	4,2	6,0
Range of responses per organization (min–max)	2–24	1–15	1–24

Table 5. Managerial role of the survey respondents.

The managerial role of the respondent		**University**	**UAS**	**Total**
Top leadership (rector, vice rector, or similar)	N	8	10	18
	%	9,2 %	25,6 %	14,3 %
Unit heads (deans, vice deans, or similar; management of a unit that has several sub-units)	N	36	12	48
	%	41,4 %	30,8 %	38,1 %
Department/sub-unit heads (management of a basic unit of the organization)	N	35	12	47
	%	40,2 %	30,8 %	37,3 %
Other	N	8	5	13
	%	9,2 %	12,8 %	10,3 %
	Total N	87	39	126
	Total %	100 %	100 %	100 %

Table 6. Personal disciplinary background (scientific field) of the survey respondents, using the Statistics Finland Fields of science classification.

Scientific field	**HE organization**		**Total**
	University	**UAS**	
Natural sciences	14	4	18
	16,1 %	10,3 %	14,3 %
Technology and engineering	10	5	15
	11,5 %	12,8 %	11,9 %
Medical and health sciences	5	1	6
	5,7 %	2,6 %	4,8 %
Agriculture and forestry	1	3	4
	1,1 %	7,7 %	3,2 %
Social sciences	34	16	50
	39,1 %	41,0 %	39,7 %
Humanities	15	5	20
	17,2 %	12,8 %	15,9 %
Other	5	1	6
	5,7 %	2,6 %	4,8 %
Multiple	3	4	7
	3,4 %	10,3 %	5,6 %
Total	87	39	126
	100 %	100 %	100 %

6 FINDINGS

> *And crisis is something where actually everything that is good and everything that's not good emerges. So, I think discussing crisis and its management is extremely important at the organizational level. –Panelist, round 1*[2]

In this section we will discuss our analysis' main findings: they are grouped around the themes of crisis conceptualization, crises practices, crisis communication, well-being in crisis, and the cross-cutting theme of crisis leadership.

Crisis conceptualization

> *I also think that it's quite hard to define what is crisis because it can be something small or a huge thing that happens, and something that affects our sense of security or safety, even if it's emotional or something that really actually happens …. And I think it is also important to think that people react differently in crisis. Sometimes even smaller things can have a big effect to someone, but not to everyone. –Panelist, round 1*

As crises are often subjectively perceived and discursively brought into being (Hier & Greenberg, 2002), different kinds of phenomena may be labelled as crises. This also became apparent in the panels, as the various participants discussed what crisis meant for them. The panel discussions showed that developing a conceptualization of crisis relevant to higher education in Finland is not trivial: what we perceive as a **crisis** will have an impact on how we tackle it.

[2] We will attribute quotes to participants according to whether they were panel participants or survey respondents and present all quotes in English regardless of the original language. For panel participants, we include the round of panel the quote is from, but nothing else, to prevent individual identification. For survey respondents, we do not identify them individually to prevent identification and/or linking the answers to individual survey responses.

While discussions of crisis frequently started with large-scale crises, such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, most panels proceeded to include an exceptionally wide array of phenomena as crises (see section “Examples of crises discussed by participants”, p. Examples of crises discussed by participants42). Integrating discussions from the first panel (where inquiring about participant conceptions of crisis was central), the second panel (where panelists were given a draft conception of crisis to reflect on), and the survey (where a draft conception of crisis was presented), we identified six central elements of crises as perceived by those working in Finnish HEIs (Figure 1). Not one of these items on their own defines a crisis, but together they form a conceptualization of crisis that could be of use to Finnish higher education leaders. Each of these elements will be discussed in their own sections below.

Figure 1. A conceptualization of the main characteristics of crises, based on panel discussions and survey. Illustration by Marc Perkins.

Crises affect daily activities and organizational basic functions

I would say that crisis relates to anything that would interfere in your usual routines or practices, and that needs adaptation somehow, whether it is at an individual level, whether at institutional level. –Panelist, round 1

And you asked like what makes it a crisis. I think that it might be something that you don't know how to do your work, you don't know the rules anymore, you don't know what to do, with whom, what you should do, and what are the expectations that you have for your tasks. So, you kind of lose all the tools that you have been working with. –Panelist, round 1

Crisis leadership literature (reviewed above) has explored the challenge of differentiating problems and everyday predicaments from crises. Panelists contemplated on these same issues, and often summarized crises as events that change or threat the daily routines and activities of staff and students, as well as pose challenges to the basic functions of the organization. These challenges to the individuals and organization can be quite variable, as there can be significant variation in the scale, temporality, safety implications, and other elements of a crisis. While discussing the challenges of variability in crisis presentations, metaphors such as "when the whistle needs to be blown" or "they change the hardhat on their head, and the operational models change" were used by panelists to express this.

Summary: Crises are events that pose a (real or perceived) risk of affecting the basic functions of the organization, while challenging or changing the daily activities of students and/or staff.

Crises are a threat to safety

And then it was always something that caused insecurity. –Panelist, round 1

In addition to affecting the daily activities of staff and students and presenting challenges to organizational functioning, participants recognized crises by the threats (real or perceived) they caused to the safety of those in the educational community. Safety was viewed in a multidimensional and complex manner, as it was, for example, used to refer to both individual safety (e.g., harm coming to a staff member) and collective safety (such as harm coming to the group, through either organizational damage or failure, or reputational damage). "Safety" was also used in the direct physical sense (physical health) as well as in the emotional sense (such as referring to mental well-being, worries about security, worries about the future). Additionally, safety was recognized to be applicable at various scales, ranging from extremely local and sudden

(for example, an accident in a science lab) to global and long-lasting situations (such as the climate crisis).

Summary: Crises are events that pose a real or perceived threat to the safety of those in the educational community along a variety of axes: individual/collective, physical/emotional, and local/global.

Crises are highly variable

Panelists identified multiple axes along which educational crises could vary, and conversations frequently included comments on how this variation affected nearly all aspects of crisis leadership (preparation, response, recovery, etc.). The most frequently mentioned type of variation by panelists was **crisis scope**, i.e., the size of the crisis. According to the panelists' discussions, organizational planning efforts often focused on large-scale crises:

> *I think that for instance if we discuss at the university level, then I think that we tend to think crisis as a huge crisis, like something that touches only the management boards or something like that. –Panelist, round 1*

In contrast, crises were also described as "quite common, sometimes bigger, sometimes smaller." The more overarching discussions focused on crises that affected entire regions, nations, or the world, such as wars, pandemics, and natural disasters. However, panelists also recognized that individual units in the organizations could experience localized crises that did not affect the rest of the organization, for example due to employment issues (e.g., core staff suddenly leaving), financial issues (a faculty losing core funding), organizational issues (such as changes in leadership), discrimination or accusations of discrimination, negative (social) media attention, and more.

> *[…] that is, it can come suddenly or it can develop little by little, that both are options. – Panelist, round 1*

Crises' **temporality** was the second most discussed source of crisis variation. Crises were recognized as having different durations, from long-term, such as war and pandemics, to short-term, such as sudden violence, accidents, or natural disasters. Onset speed was another temporal axis that varied, with some crises appearing suddenly with little advance warning, but others building slowly—some so slowly that they were titled "creeping crises." Panelists shared that in many cases there had been an advance warning of an impending crisis, allowing leadership time to potentially prevent the crisis, or at least mitigate its impact.

> *For me, the time span of a crisis is such that you can prepare for years, and then it might be a span from days to a week when there is some advance warning, some kind of prediction, some kind of indication. –Panelist, round 1*

One implication of this is that while crises are frequently defined as being "sudden" or "unexpected," this is not always the case, and suddenness should not be used as a deciding factor when defining a crisis, as was recognized by a panelist in our very first panel: "I think that we can also consider that crisis can actually not be something that happens suddenly."

The topic of whether the source and primary effects of a crisis were **external or internal to the organization** was also discussed as an important source of variation. Internal crises, such as discriminatory behavior or malfeasance, were considered particularly challenging for leadership, as they could easily become divisive, the leaders felt less prepared to deal with them, and issues of personal reputation and blame frequently came to the fore (potentially slowing or restricting leadership responses). In external crises, issues of "blame" were much less commonly considered (as described by a panelist, "when the threat is coming outside of everyone, so it's common for everyone, it's not anybody's fault") and panelists often felt their organization would be likely get guidance and/or assistance from external organizations (e.g., health organizations in case of a future pandemic). External vs. internal crises were also recognized as altering many of the dynamics of the crisis response as, for example, communication channels used, mechanisms for gaining information about the status of the crisis, and potential responses all varied depending on the crisis source or effect location.

Other axes of variation were also mentioned, though less frequently. As discussed in the literature review, panelists also recognized that crises could vary on whether they were **personal or organizational**:

> *Yes, I see two different kinds of crisis, one is a personal crisis and the other is then an organizational crisis, where the organization must act to solve or prevent the crisis. – Panelist, round 1*

However, it was also recognized that crises that appeared personal on the surface could become organizational crises depending on the circumstance (e.g., if the person experiencing the crisis was in an essential position or if the personal crisis would begin to affect the person's co-workers or unit). Thus, even crises that appear personal and are not directly relevant to the organization on the surface should be considered as potentially important events for leaders to attend to. The variability of crises emphasizes the nature of crises as nested.

Summary: Crises can be highly variable, with participants particularly focusing on variability within crisis scope (global to a few individuals in a single organizational unit), temporality (sudden onset to slow onset, short-term to long-term), and source and/or effect location (external vs. internal).

Crises interact with context

> *Yeah, I think one of the things is also that there is only so much room for the, in public discussion actually, for the, all the things at once. When you have some acute crisis going on, like for example COVID or Russian attack, then that kind of longer-term issues tend to fall in the background basically in the discussions. –Panelist, round 1*

Crises do not happen in isolation. Crises occur in a specific time and place, and the present-day and historical particulars of the organization(s), people, culture(s), and structures involved all influence the manner those impacted by the crisis perceive it and are affected by it. Thus, any crisis needs to be viewed in the context of its present and historical environment, and the preparation for and responses to crises need to be cognizant of this context. It also needs to be recognized that this context can be highly variable both at the organizational and personal level, and that it is regularly changing as the environment (geopolitical, natural, etc.) changes around the organization. As a result, crisis and its impacts can be seen as a nested phenomenon (Pekkola et al., 2021), occurring on many levels: on the societal level, on the policy level, and on the level of the organization, extending to the level of individual employees and their work.

> *And there are multiple leveled crises which are quite often connected to each other. In that kind of way that you have to think about those smaller issues that might be important for a certain person. –Panelist, round 1*

The panelists repeatedly discussed how the experiences of the same crisis can vary between individuals, and that this individual variation ideally should be taken into account by leadership as they lead. It was also recognized that crises are frequently comprehended and operationalized as separate phenomena that occur one at a time but in reality, there are quite often multiple crises occurring simultaneously, or the crises may be nested in various destructive structures and practices in our societies, resulting in complex intertwined crises (Kaukko et al. 2021).

> *So, it's kind of like, then we could go on and on forever. Like it doesn't necessarily matter if it's a crisis that is on a macro, global level, like climate and security, or if it's a very context dependent specific crisis, like for example precarity in this very specific place. They are all somehow happening all the time. And this is something that made me think, like if you have constantly multiple crises in different levels of emergency, because that's also something that's important. –Panelist, round 1*

> *I'm thinking about multiple [events] happening at the same time which complicated the whole process and required negotiation and adaptations at different levels of the organization. –Panelist, round 1*

This view echoes the concepts of polycrisis, multicrisis and nested crisis discussed in the literature review section.

Summary: Crises are not isolated events, but instead occur in particular contexts along with other simultaneously occurring events, all of which influence the leadership needs for any crisis or set of crises.

Crises are fuzzy

All the previous viewpoints contributed to the participants' frequent expressions that it was exceptionally difficult to form a single cohesive definition of a crisis which encompassed all elements of all potential crises (see the lead quote for the Crisis conceptualization section, p. **35**). Even identifying when crises begin and end may be challenging, as was often mentioned by the panelists in relation to COVID-19 (especially how the lack of a distinct ending to the crisis hindered discussions of lessons learned). As such, it is likely more useful to think of "crisis" as a fuzzy or diffuse concept that does not have any one particular definition or set of characteristics, but rather as having a range of potential meanings and characteristics that are context and event dependent.

Summary: Creating an all-inclusive definition of crisis is difficult if not impossible. The scope, temporality, cause, impact, organizational context, personal context, prior events, and other ongoing events all interact to form the reality of any particular problem and must be taken together as a whole when determining whether that particular problem could or should be elevated to the level of "crisis."

Crises present possibilities

> *The compulsion caused by the crisis also offers an opportunity to reform the organization and to quickly change the direction of operations, when the so-called normal is not the prevailing state of being. –Survey respondent*

A minor but recurring theme, which was brought up by both some panelists and some survey respondents, was that while crises are often viewed in a negative light, they can also entail positive possibilities to those (organizations and people) who are experiencing them. The interviewees of Aarnikoivu and Saarinen (2022) mentioned

finalizing the "digital leap" in teaching and research as a positive outcome of COVID-19; however, the negative side of the experience was that it made the deficiencies in digital pedagogies visible. Crises were discussed as presenting opportunities for community building and strengthening (especially in external crises), and multiple individuals presented the view that crises can present opportunities for those experiencing them to have a "permission to do new things," such as reconsidering previous practices and norms (both individually and organizationally). Examples of these in an earlier study by Aarnikoivu and Saarinen (2022) were the "socially distanced walks" and creating spaces for informal interaction.

Furthermore, crises can bring existing organizational challenges to light, such as inequalities or a lack of preparation for certain situations, thus facilitating work towards resolution of these previously less-visible issues. This also aligns with prior crisis leadership research that emphasizes the benefits of charismatic leadership during crisis (see literature review section, p. **17**). However, consideration of the potential positive outcomes of crises needs to be discussed and implemented delicately by leaders, as crises can and frequently do have very real negative impacts such as the destruction of life, property, careers, well-being, and more, and those experiencing these negative impacts may not appreciate a non-thoughtful attempt to focus on potential positive outcomes.

Summary: While crises have many negative impacts and outcomes, they can also present possibilities for positive outcomes, such as promoting organizational and individual self-assessment and change.

Examples of crises discussed by participants

> *Suppose you have different types of crises. Maybe the first type that springs to mind is sudden crisis. Building is on fire or whatever. That's one type of crisis. And then there are bigger, longer-term crises. And you can think of those in different ways. You can think of ones that are internal to the organization, like not having access ramps or not having hearing loops or whatever. Then external ones, like funding environment or the climate crisis. Different responses needed for all of them. –Panelist, round 1*

A wide array of phenomena was discussed as crises by panelists and survey respondents. While COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine were the two most common crises mentioned by the panelists, and sudden illnesses or death and cyber-attacks were most frequently listed by the survey respondents, in total, more than two dozen different types of crises were discussed in the panels or mentioned in the surveys.

Attempting to categorize all listed crises into an existing crisis typology was not possible; the organization we created (Table 7) is based roughly on Riggio and

Newstead's (2023) modification of Wooten and James's (2008) typology. For ease of presentation and due to a lack of a scale on which to sort the list, the crisis categories and examples within the categories are sorted alphabetically in Table 7.

Table 7. Examples of crises that have the potential to affect higher education organizations, as discussed by participants in the panel discussions. Categories, and examples within each category, are listed alphabetically.

Employee- and student-centered crises
Discrimination/harassment/hate speech
Employment-related (e.g., firing, downsizing, precarity)
Mental health/well-being
Misconduct/malfeasance
Personal crises that expand to become organizational crises
Sudden illness or death
Infrastructure / technical crises
Cyber/electronic attacks
Fire
Flood
Indoor air problems
Power loss
Theft
Injuries and accidents
Meta-crises/umbrella crises
Climate change
Natural disasters
Fire, flood, etc.
Pandemic
Organizational crises
Financial (funding cuts, misuse of funds)
Organizational changes (e.g., mergers)
Under-resourced organization/unit
(Social) media and the social environment
Hate speech
Polarization
Public accusations of misconduct, etc.
Violence and social upheaval
Displacement of people (refugees, etc.)
Protests and political activism
Violence or threats of violence (on campus, in the region, etc.)
War
Warfare, hybrid

In addition to these different categories of crises, our panel participants pointed out that not all members of the university community meet these crises in a similar way. Characteristics such as language, disability, or ethnicity, among other things, influence **an individual's or group's material and perceived experience of crisis**. In other words, structural or individual circumstances have the potential to interact with a crisis and affect how severely that crisis impacts a particular person or a group of people (Table 8). In both our own previous research (Aarnikoivu & Saarinen, 2022; Nokkala et al., 2023) and that of others (for instance, Filippou & Jokila, 2024; Carr et al., 2021; Le,

2021; Corbera et al., 2020) on COVID-19, the ones particularly affected in HEIs were caregivers, early career researchers, and international and other minoritized scholars. When discussing the different categories of crises (Table 7), it is good to bear in mind these embedded inequities.

Table 8. Examples of factors listed by participants that may affect individuals' or groups' experience of crisis, listed alphabetically.

Cultural background
Disability (noting especially the lack of support for many disabled individuals during crisis)
Immigrant and/or international status
Language use

While many of the listed crisis examples (Table 7) can be problems or challenges that do not rise to the level of a crisis, all of them also have the potential to become crises with a suitable set of circumstances. Some of them may also emerge suddenly as crises and then reduce in severity and become "normal" over time or may, conversely, start as something apparently "normal" that slowly (or suddenly) builds into a crisis. It is also noteworthy that the listing is based solely on crises mentioned by participants of this study and thus, is almost certainly not exhaustive; higher education organizations and leaders would likely benefit from regularly reviewing the potential crises relevant to them in their current environment.

It does not escape our attention that the crises included in the list are extremely broad and varied, with a wide variation in crises being found even within single categories, or single category examples. For example, the "violence and social upheaval" category contains everything from nation-state armies invading another country, and violence happening in an organizational community, to an individual student threatening to pull out a knife in a classroom; all three crises would require extremely different responses. One conclusion we draw from this varied list of possible crises is the potentially paradoxical finding that despite it being critical to prepare for crises, actually attempting to prepare for every single possible crisis that an organization, or part of an organization, may face is essentially impossible (although identifying a few highly likely crises and preparing for those specifically is certainly possible). One potentially successful approach to preparing for this wide variety of crises is to ensure that leadership practices are functioning well at a general level outside of crises and that training, practice, and self-reflection are regularly taking place.

Summary: Participants listed dozens of example crises that were divided into eight categories of crises that could affect higher education organizations. Additionally, participants identified multiple characteristics of individuals or groups that had the potential to modify their personal experience of crisis. This diversity of possible crises and diversity of experiences of crisis presents significant challenges for higher education organizations and their leaders, staff, and students as they prepare for, experience, and recover from crisis.

Crisis conceptualization: a summary

> *It has occurred to me that there are very different management consequences for different types of crises. –Panelist, round 1*

In this section, we summarize the conceptualizations of crisis by our participants by synthesizing the feedback of panelists and survey respondents into a broad definition of crisis, fully recognizing that attempting a single specific definition of crisis is likely not possible (see Crises are fuzzy, p. **41**). While there is no single threshold or criteria by which an organizational crisis can be defined, a crisis is broadly speaking something that blocks or otherwise interferes with an organization's primary functions in such a way that usual routines and practices are no longer effective, and major negative outcomes may result if the crisis is not dealt with appropriately. A crisis may affect an entire organization or just a portion of the organization, and crises can vary along many different axes, such as scale, predictability, onset speed, duration, and cause. The impacts of any given crisis depend greatly on context, with the potential for wide variation in the needs of different organizations, organizational units, leaders, and individuals, even simultaneously.

The broad conceptualization of crisis expressed by participants and survey respondents aligns with our crisis leadership literature review (e.g., Riggio & Newstead, 2023; Striepe & Cunningham, 2021). However, existing crisis leadership literature in the educational sector has focused largely on sudden violence, natural disasters, and, more recently, pandemics (see literature review, p. **19**). Thus, one recommendation of this report is that crisis leadership research at educational organizations should be carried out by exploring the full diversity of potential crises.

The broad conceptualization of crisis identified by the panelists and survey respondents has implications for HEI leadership in Finland, as leaders should ensure that organizational crisis preparation and crisis leadership work is carried out with an understanding of the full diversity of potential crises that the organization may face. We will continue discussing this task in the next section on Crisis practices.

Crisis practices

In this section we will discuss panelist and survey respondent views on crisis practices at higher education organizations. We use the term "crisis practices" here broadly, referring to the wide array of organizational and individual traits, behaviors, procedures, policies, structures, and other items that are involved in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises.

We initially developed our coding scheme, and based our data analysis, on the literature-supported thematization of crisis leadership into temporal phases: pre-crisis (i.e., preparation), in-crisis, and post-crisis (i.e., recovery). However, after the first few rounds of coding the panel discussions and survey short-answer responses, it emerged that the broad themes of leadership requirements in these different temporal periods overlapped greatly: leadership before, during, and after crisis entailed, at a broad level, nearly the same set of concepts. Thus, what we include in this section as "crisis practices" are almost all universal elements of (crisis) leadership that apply to all crisis phases, with just their application details varying depending on which phase of a crisis the organization is currently in. And, as was pointed out in the Crisis conceptualization section, given the fuzzy nature of crisis and the poly-/multi-crisis nature of the world, even determining what "phase" of a crisis one is currently in may be an impossible task.

Themes such as good communication, community building, trust building, transparent policies and procedures, collaborative mission and vision determination, and priority setting by leadership, were all repeatedly discussed in the context of being crucial for crisis leadership. Moreover, panelists repeatedly recognized that these themes were also essential in the everyday, not just during crisis, especially as many crises do not allow sufficient time for organizations or leaders to begin work on these topics if they have been ignored before a crisis emerges:

> *I would like to start by saying that I think it's clear that if everyday management doesn't work, crisis management certainly won't work either. –Panelist, round 2*

Crisis practices that were discussed by panelists were divided into the five major categories shown in Figure 2, each of which will be further explored next:

Figure 2. Identified crisis practice themes. Illustration by Marc Perkins and Laura Minkkinen.

We will first discuss the two themes that cut across all the other crisis practices: resilience and community, collaboration, trust, and belonging. Next, we will examine the expressed needs of individuals before finishing with the organizational needs, which were by far the most discussed theme in the panels. Leadership-specific issues will be covered in the Crises and leadership section at the end of the Findings chapter.

It should be noted that due to their importance to the participants, both well-being and communication have been separated out into their own sections, below. Thus, despite their clear relevance to nearly all areas of crisis practices highlighted here, topics related to well-being and communication will be discussed in their own separate sections.

Crisis practices: Community, collaboration, trust, and belonging

Community, collaboration, trust, and belonging were frequently emphasized as key elements of crisis leadership by both panelists and survey respondents. These elements were discussed as being important at all times, not restricted to preparing for crisis, during crisis, or recovering from crisis. In fact, participants regularly expressed that the actions carried out by leadership and the organization in one timeframe were

inextricably linked to the other timeframes. For example, a failure to build community or trust before crisis could lead to heightened organizational challenges during a crisis. Next, we will briefly discuss each individual element of this theme.

Community and belonging

> *For example, in my small group of [a handful of] people, we always had morning coffee [in an online meeting] on Fridays. Together we push through this phase. Just like [another participant] described. That kind of small community is really necessary at that time and the feeling that we've survived another week or that we're going to the next meeting. –Panelist, round 1*

Community building was viewed as central to crisis practices, and a strong community was seen as supportive of the well-being of staff and students along with leading to improved overall organizational outcomes. Building a sense of community at the entire organizational level, as well as at smaller levels, was considered important, with some participants highlighting small group inclusion as crucial. Discussions of a desire for "pöhinä" (a creative group buzz or brainstorming) were used when talking about wanting to return to campus after COVID-19. Including students in this conception of community during crisis was seen as significant, with participants discussing potential student feelings of exclusion or loneliness during COVID-19 as one example. Still, identifying how to build a community was found challenging, with few practical suggestions outside of the small group discussions highlighted above. Discussions of community building will be continued in the Crises and well-being section.

Trust

> *Trust is the core issue in crisis. Trust must be built every day. –Panelist, round 2*

Trust in the organization and its leadership was viewed as crucial to both successful crisis outcomes and feelings of support and preparedness. Panelists generally reported that individuals in Finland have strong trust towards governmental organizations which facilitated the crisis response during COVID-19. Building trust was viewed as a challenging task that needed to be carried out well before a crisis occurred:

> *I think that's something, definitely needs to be considered, and it needs time to build that trust, that if you want people to do what you ask them to do, they need to trust you first, and we shouldn't take that too granted. –Panelist, round 2*

> *I think it is almost impossible to build trust in a crisis situation if there is no trust before that. So, I think that the one main aspect of everyday leadership is to create trust. And then sort of, it is easier to sort of lead in the conflict situation as well. –Panelist, round 2*

Trust was also considered to be a potentially negative factor, if it led to a lack of understanding of the actual (preparedness) state of the organization:

> *Going back to the question of trust. I see this as a good things and as a problematic thing at the same time. And I see that a lot. And this goes beyond of, okay, I trust somebody will do this for me, but I never looked around to see if there is. And oftentimes, there isn't, but we didn't know because we didn't look to see if there was. –Panelist, round 1*

The challenges of building trust in a community that includes broad cultural diversity and a wide range of feeling towards organizations was brought up as an issue facing leaders and organizations in Finland. In the survey, leaders generally expressed high or very high levels of trust in all the members of their own organization (Figure 3). However, the lowest level of trust both the leaders of universities and UASes expressed within their own unit was towards their staff, which is a finding that warrants further exploration and potentially speaks to the need for organization-wide crisis response training and communications. When asked about other organizations (Figure 4), leaders expressed extremely high confidence in the police, strong confidence in the central authorities and well-being counties, and relatively lower confidence in local authorities, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and rectors' associations ARENE (The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences) and UNIFI (The Council of Rectors of Finnish Universities).

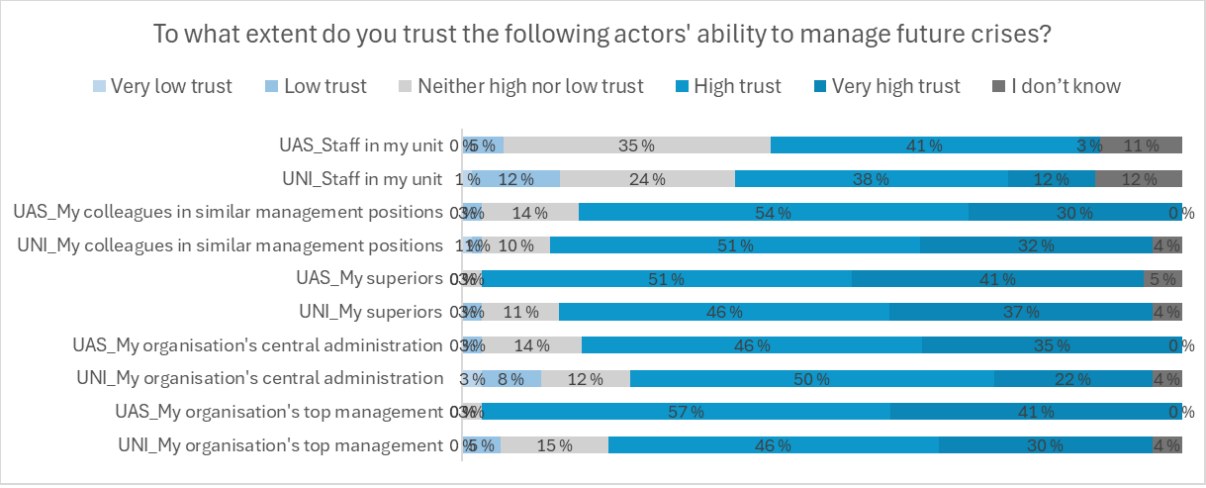

Figure 3. Intra-organizational trust. No significant differences were observed between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these items. (N=111)

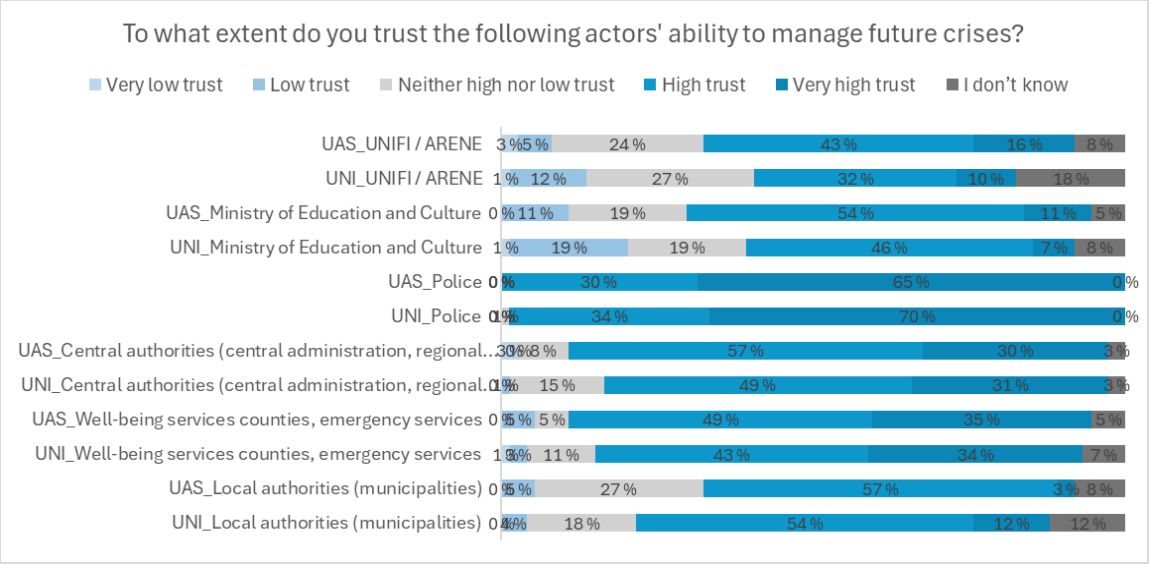

Figure 4. Inter-organizational trust. No significant differences were observed between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these items. (N=111)

Collaboration

While collaboration was not discussed as much as community and trust, the need for different individuals and groups to work together during crisis was mentioned. Some survey respondents highlighted the importance of collaboration and collective decision-making during crisis, though many respondents also reported on the need for leaders to have the "courage" to make (and reevaluate) decisions with incomplete information during crisis.

Interorganizational collaboration at the national level, at the Ministry of Education and rectors' associations (ARENE and UNIFI), were highlighted as being useful during COVID:

> *And I think it helps our university leaders to plan together what to do and how to react. And it was very effective, that. And also that universities, there were not so much, of course there were variations how universities reacted, but there were much similarities as well. –Panelist, round 1*

Collaboration with external agencies, especially those related to health and safety operations, was viewed as important as well. Collaboration extended to even crisis planning, which was often reflected on as being carried out in silos without collaboration with other units in the organization:

> *But what is important, that it seems that security is somehow a silo and expert work inside the universities. And perhaps leaders do not know their responsibilities well. And there's also, there's much space and room how to improve these things. –Panelist, round 1*

Survey results indicated that collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Culture and other ministries was viewed disparately between leaders at universities and UASes, with UASes showing significantly higher agreement with the statement that guidance and collaboration with these organizations supported their leadership during COVID-19 (Figure 5; Mann-Whitney U, N=108, P=0,012). Leaders at both types of organizations were generally in agreement that formal cooperation between higher education organizations within ARENE and UNIFI supported their crisis preparedness, with somewhat lower agreement with the statement that the Ministry of Education and Culture provided sufficient guidance and direction during crisis situations (Figure 6). Both university and UAS respondents were generally less in agreement with the statement that HEIs have a clear role in local, regional, and national crisis preparedness and response, with at least 30 % of the respondents either partially or strongly disagreeing with the statement (Figure 5).

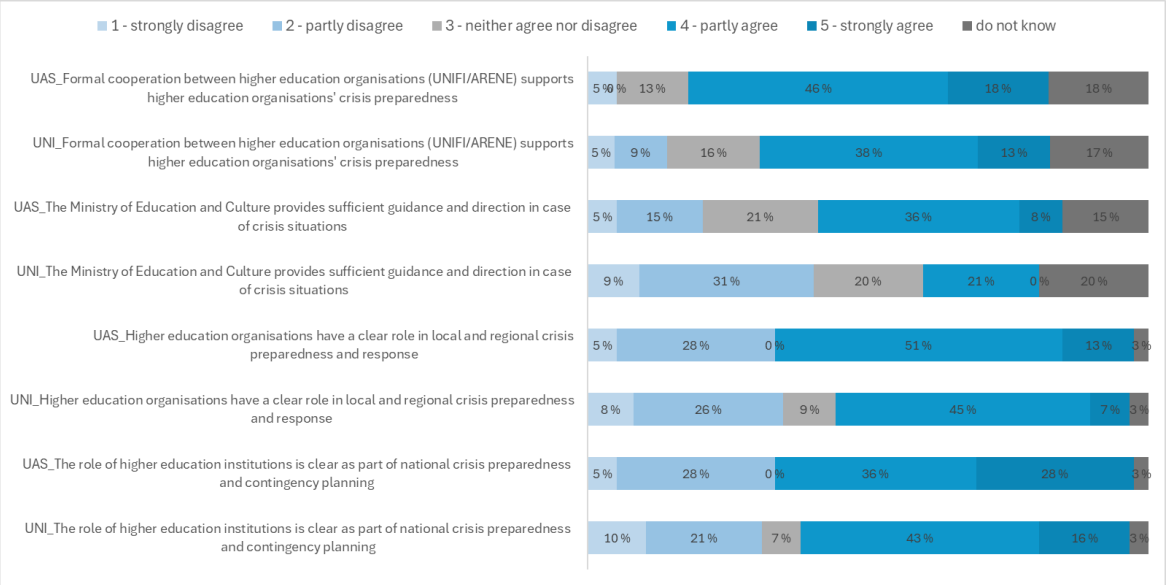

Figure 5. The role of higher education organizations in local, regional, and national crisis response, as well as how inter-organizational cooperation supports higher education organizations. No significant differences were observed between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these items. (N=126)

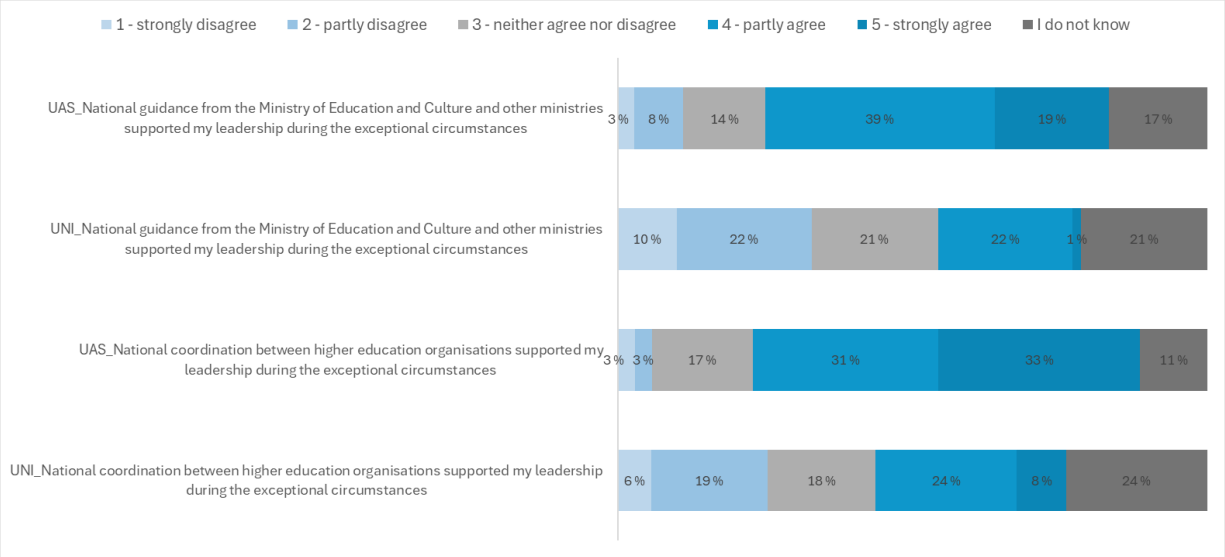

Figure 6. National guidance and coordination supporting respondents' leadership during exceptional circumstances. The responses of leaders at UASes and universities regarding the Ministry of Education and Culture were significantly different (Mann-Whitney U, N=108, P=0,012) but the "between higher education organizations" difference was not significant.

Crisis practices: Resilience

The need to foster resilience was viewed as a core crisis practice, and discussion of it extended into many other categories: creating resilient communication systems was by far the most frequent resilience topic that emerged, but resilient organizational practices, resilient leadership structures, and building resilience among individuals in the organization were all discussed as well.

Planning and preparation were seen as essential for resilience, especially when creating redundant structures and identifying backups for systems that may fail during crisis. This need for resiliency included not just communication systems, but any process or procedure that is key to carrying out the organization's mission. The panelists spent some time discussing whether the organizations they were part of had a clear understanding of what these priority activities, which needed to be secured in a crisis, were:

> *I have a feeling that at the beginning of the corona, we identified these functions, that is, what is necessary, for example, to come to the campus and make sure that certain things work and certain things are taken care of. Probably not, I would think that the number one value is that of a living being, life and health. Whether it's a human being or an animal. – Panelist, round 1*

It was repeatedly emphasized that knowing who (or what groups) are responsible for certain actions during a crisis was key:

> *So if we think of a crisis organization where there is no clear chain of command or division of tasks, where one person carries the ladder and the other carries the fire hose, but everyone has to carry them under their arms at the same time, then the resilience of such an organization is poor. –Panelist, round 1*

Creating the capabilities for groups to become self-organizing during crisis was seen as a component of resilience. While it was acknowledged that crisis leadership frequently entails centralized, top-down decision-making, multiple participants suggested that during many crises there may not be time, or the possibility, for central leadership to direct a response, and thus training for and empowering lower-level groups to self-direct in a crisis (rather than waiting for instructions) would likely lead to improved crisis outcomes.

Taking the time to learn from prior crises was also considered a core part of resilience. Furthermore, resilience was also seen as a feature of the buildings and other physical infrastructure that the organizations use. For example, providing resilient infrastructure during a crisis to support those who are disabled was highlighted as an important goal:

> *So, it is not really just about communication, it's about what I was saying earlier, infrastructure. And the deeply unglamorous business of making, physically making buildings that in an emergency, will kind of funnel people regardless of their abilities or disabilities out to safety in an equal way. And that's not really about communication with staff and students, it's about the building and the messages that are visible to you in an emergency. – Panelist, round 1*

Crisis practices: Individual

Discussions of crisis practices frequently included a focus on individuals. These discussions included a wide array of topics, including individual skills and abilities, needs, responsibilities, and differences. The participants, especially leaders, reflected on the extensive set of skills needed for crisis leadership. Leaders also discussed the challenges in obtaining enough information to form a situational picture and maintaining a respectful, emotionally aware tone during delicate internal crisis situations. Skills in communication were especially highlighted (and will be discussed later in the Crises and communications section). Identifying areas where individuals lack necessary skills, for example first aid or other core disaster recovery skills, was also seen as important.

The variability between individuals was emphasized, recognizing that different leaders will have different skillsets and different staff members and students will have different experiences of crisis and different needs before, during, and after crisis (see

section Crises and leadership, p. **91**). Participants considered respecting and adjusting practices to account for these differences as important.

While the focus on this report, and on most organizational crisis leadership literature, is on organizational crises, participants reflected that individual crises among staff or students were important to be aware of and potentially attend to, both simply to assist those in personal crisis as well as because if left unattended, these crises could possibly expand to become organizationally relevant.

> *One thing is really important that it's somebody's responsibility, you have decided whose responsibility is to take care of these actions. But actually, that is not really nearly enough. Because if you don't let everybody know whose responsibility, whether it's a person, whether it's a unit or something like that who handles those. It's also part of the communication that entire community should know about certain issues that what are the processes, where you can actually take these issues up and what kind of issues are you handling in different functions. –Panelist, round 1*

Individual workloads during crisis were discussed, with multiple leaders and other staff members discussing burnout or near burnout experiences during prior crises (especially COVID-19). As one way to address overwork, participants considered the possibility of leadership working to help those around them to prioritize actions during crisis and identifying what is essential and what is optional. Small-group leaders discussed that for certain types of crises, such as employees becoming ill suddenly, it will often be up to an individual leader alone to deal with the crisis. Thus, facilitating crisis leadership training or providing crisis leadership resources to all leaders in the organization, regardless of level, was considered beneficial.

There were frequent discussions of the need for individuals to know who in the organization is responsible for tasks relating to crisis leadership. This awareness of crisis leadership includes the individuals knowing who is responsible for preparing for and responding to crises, and what the organizational crisis practices entail, such as knowing what to do and who to contact during crises. These discussions blended the individual and the organizational themes of crisis practices.

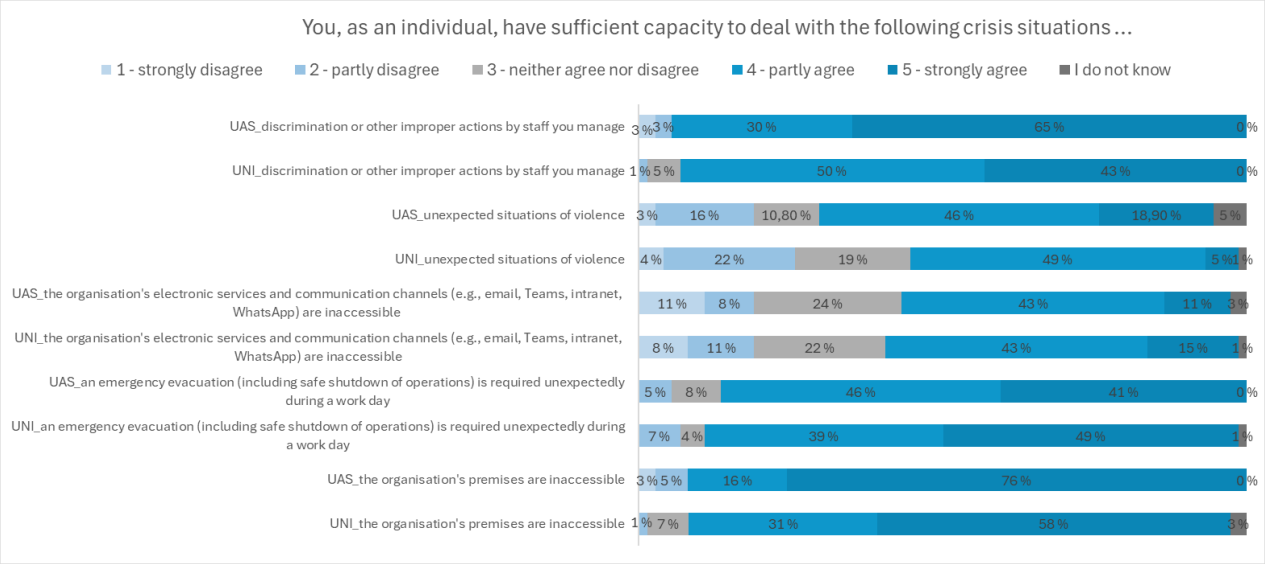

Figure 7. Leaders' individual capacity to handle a variety of crisis situations. The responses of leaders at UASes and universities regarding discrimination or other improper actions and unexpected situations of violence were significantly different (Mann-Whitney U, N=111, P=0,047 and 0,036, respectively), with the remainder of differences not rising to the level of statistical significance.

Individual leaders reported varying levels of personal capacity to deal with various crisis situations (Figure 7). Leaders reported a high degree of confidence that they could deal with some crisis situations, such as inaccessible organizational premises (92 % and 89 % reporting positively for UAS and universities, respectively), the need for an emergency evacuation (87 % and 88 % reporting positively for UAS and universities, respectively) and discrimination or improper actions by staff they manage (95 % and 93 % reporting positively for UAS and universities, respectively). University of applied sciences leaders reported significantly higher agreement with the statements that they had the individual capacity to manage crises of unexpected situations of violence and discrimination or improper behavior by staff (see Figure 7). However, and potentially worrisomely, leaders of both types of organizations reflected lower degrees of confidence in their ability to handle disruptions to communication channels and unexpected situations of violence. For example, 19 % of both university and university of applied sciences leaders reported partially or strongly disagreeing with the statement that they had sufficient capacity to manage communication disruptions, with an additional 27 % and 23 % responding either neutrally or not answering the question. It is suboptimal that 30–40 % of leaders do not feel confident that they can handle probable or potential crises such as communication disruptions or unexpected situations of violence.

University of applied science leadership reported personally participating in crisis preparedness exercises at significantly higher levels (84 % "yes") than university

participants (61 % “yes”; Figure 8; Mann-Whitney U, P=0,024). Roughly similar numbers of leaders at both types of organizations reported being personally involved in crisis planning for their unit. However, given that the survey was only distributed to leaders between the department chair and rector level, only 51 and 54 % of leaders responding “yes” to being involved in crisis preparedness planning in their unit may indicate that this is a potential target for organizational development. Another area for potential development is that roughly 10 % of leaders at both organization types were unaware of their own responsibilities regarding crisis situations related to their own management role, and another 30 % (UAS) to 49 % (university) of leaders were only aware of their responsibilities “to some extent”.

In summary, crisis practices were frequently discussed by panelists and survey participants in the context of needs, capabilities, or desires of individuals: leaders, and all members of the organization, need a wide array of skills and information to successfully prepare for, lead during, and recover from crisis. The variability between individuals also needs to be accounted for in crisis leadership work. Furthermore, the presented survey data revealed variation in the types of crises the leaders feel prepared for and in the preparedness levels among individual leaders in the organizations.

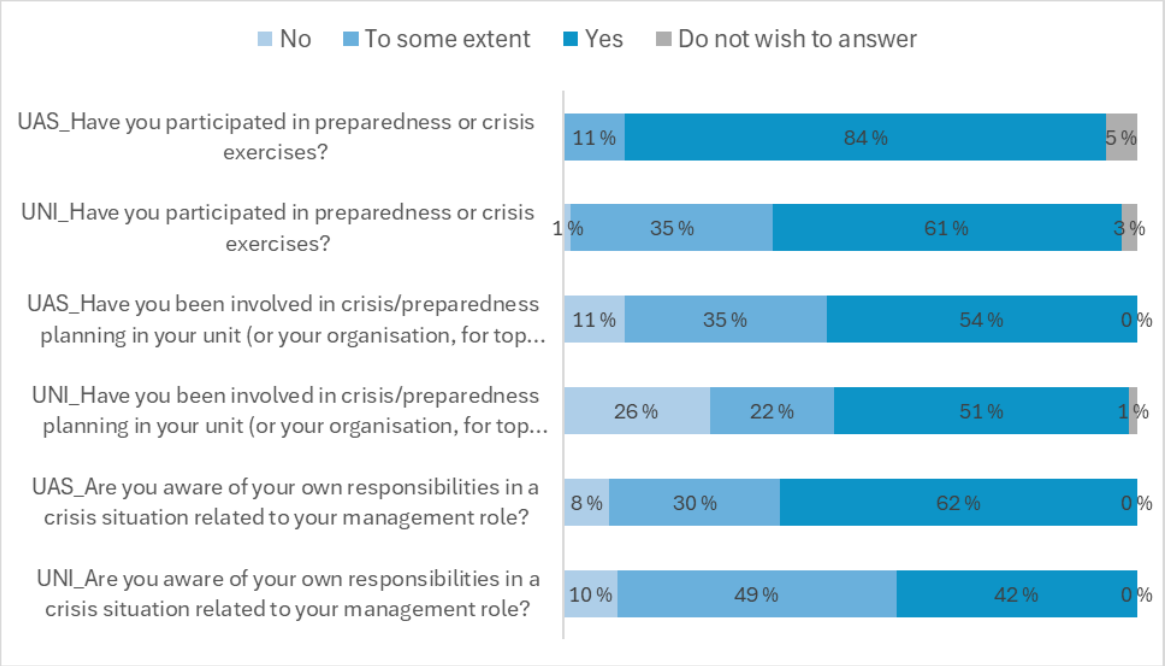

Figure 8. Individual involvement in crisis exercises and crisis planning, as well as awareness of leaders’ own responsibilities in a crisis situation. Only the responses of leaders at UASes and universities regarding “Have you participated in preparedness or crisis exercises” were significantly different (Mann-Whitney U, N= 111, P=0,024).

Crisis practices: Organizational

[Researcher: What do you expect most from crisis leadership at this moment?] Update the preparedness and contingency plans, do it together with staff, do it together with students, target groups. There have been many crises here from which we have learned a lot. Somehow they should now take it upon themselves to put things in order. –Panelist, round 1

Discussions of organizational policies, practices, structures, and built facilities were extremely common among panelists. These comments were often based on the panelists' personal experiences in higher education during prior crises (most often COVID-19, but many other as well, including the Ukraine war, accidents, deaths, organizational mergers, and events of discrimination). Discussions of relevant crisis practices at the organizational level highlighted the core areas listed below, each of which will be further discussed in this section. The list starts from pre-crisis and ends at post-crisis, but since these activities often overlap and intertwine, the list should not be read as temporal or hierarchical.

- Having a plan: identifying core actors and developing crisis plans
- Providing opportunities for leaders to practice crisis leadership skills
- Quickening and streamlining decision-making processes even with incomplete information
- The importance of organizational culture and organizational values
- Streamlining operations during crisis and identifying essential functions
- Determining how the organization will collect information during crisis
- Determining when directive vs. distributed leadership is needed
- Preparing for crisis at all levels of the organization, not just the top
- Providing budgets for crisis leadership activities
- Continuing crisis leadership through the post-crisis phase

As discussed in the previous section, some areas of discussion blended the individual and the organizational crisis practices and aspects. In particular, **participants raised many questions regarding who the actors involved in crisis preparation and response are, as well as what the crisis response plans of the organization are**. All of these "who" questions, and many policy and procedure choices, need to be decided on at an organizational level **before** crises emerge. Organization's members need to be informed of the people involved in crisis response (and other general) procedures before crises

emerge, as during developing crises there may not be time to make such critical decisions or share information about them:

> *[…] it's important that if there is, let's say, some kind of crisis that needs immediate actions, so there is no time to create a group who is involved. Those people need to be defined beforehand … So, if there is a situation, everybody knows who is in charge and how to get in touch with this group. –Panelist, round 1*

> *So I've just tried to wake up people a bit so that when we really have a crisis in our hands, we should be prepared in advance to act properly, and not just at the level of thought. –Panelist, round 1*

Survey respondents repeatedly mentioned the need for crisis response plans at the organization. Panelists suggested that particularly crises such as accusations or acts of discrimination and harassment, as well as unexpected media attention, would require transparent and public policies (see also Figure 10 and 11). Additionally, as a way to collegially work on this area, it was suggested to collectively build crisis plans over time, as the organizational community experiences crises:

> *This is how we dealt last time, use this as a starting point to deal with this now, and then we build something new as we go through this one. I think this kind of sense of collective building of guidelines is something that could be useful to against that sense of helplessness that people tend to feel about situations that are out of their control. –Panelist, round 2*

To facilitate preparation for crisis, panelists and survey respondents discussed the need to **provide opportunities to practice crisis leadership and establish budgets to fund crisis leadership activities**:

> *I would like to see a constant awareness of different kinds of crisis in strategic planning and related decisions. For example, in budget we must have a line for crisis management or preparation. –Panelist, round 2*

The need for **streamlined, rapid decision-making processes even with incomplete information** during crisis was repeatedly emphasized by both panelists and survey respondents, especially in the context of quickly developing situations. Along with the need for rapid decision-making was the willingness to swiftly change decisions as new information or circumstances arose. This thinking is illustrated by the metaphor of "putting on the hard hat" in the following excerpt. This rapid decision-making and decision reevaluation without complete information of the situation was recognized as likely requiring major changes from normal operating procedures in higher education organizations and thus, was something that required planning and preparation.

In fact, solving a crisis would often require a completely different way of thinking. Crisis organizations, when they put on the hard hat, their operational logic is streamlined a lot. – Panelist, round 1

Survey respondents at both UASes and universities expressed agreement with the statement that their organization's management and reporting structures enabled it to respond effectively and adapt to crisis situations (Figure 9), with 41 % (UAS) and 30 % (university) of leaders strongly agreeing with the statement. However, as 49 % (UAS) and 45 % (university) of leaders only partly agreed with the statement, and 10 % (UAS) and 25 % (university) of leaders partly disagreed, were neutral, or did not know, these structures may be a potential area for development.

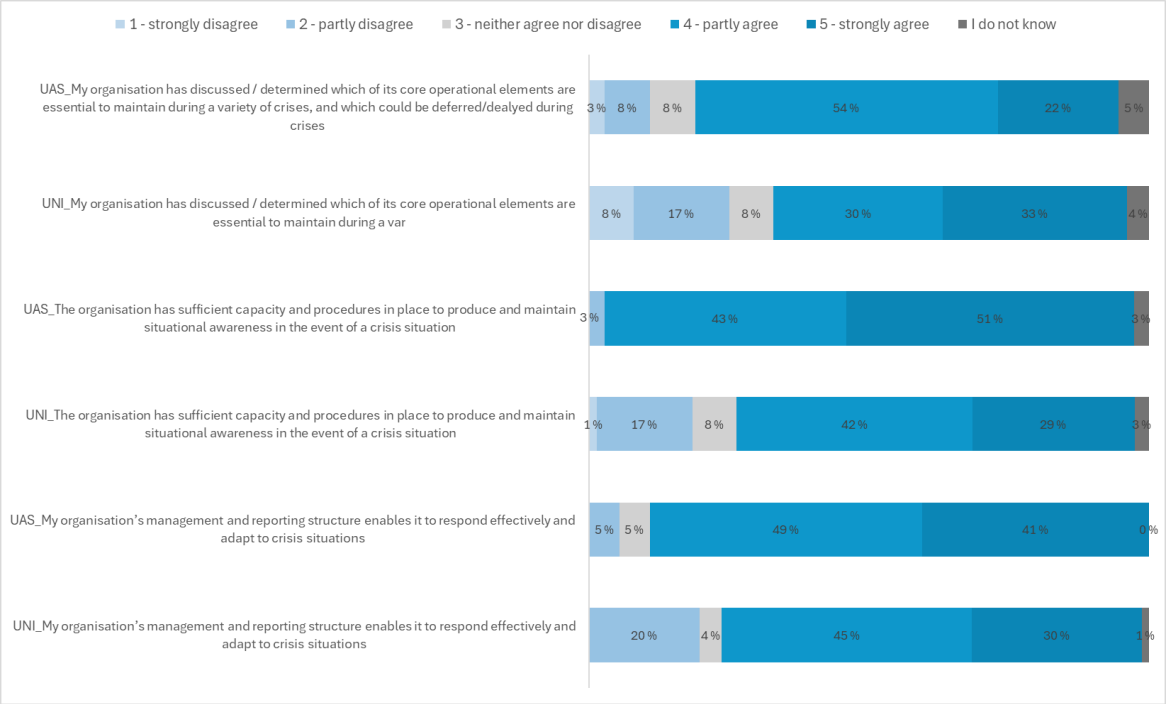

Figure 9. Organizational crisis capabilities. Only the responses of leaders at UASes and universities regarding the question "The organization has sufficient capacity and procedures in place to produce and maintain situational awareness in the event of a crisis situations" were significantly different (Mann-Whitney U, N= 113, P=0,003).

The importance of the **organizational culture and organizational values**, and how leadership has worked to build and sustain this culture and its values over time, was emphasized by multiple panelists.

[…] the idea that this is not just about organizational practices but organizational values. – Panelist, round 2

Panelist and survey respondent thoughts on **streamlining operations during crisis and identifying what tasks of the organization are essential in the current environment** related to both streamlined decision-making and organizational values discussed above.

> *[…] we put all in the same mess and the greatest wisdom would be to be able to figure out what is essential here, what are the, especially in a crisis, what are the few things we need to take care of in order to deal with this? –Panelist, round 1*

Survey respondents were somewhat mixed regarding whether their organization had discussed or determined its core operational elements, as 76 % (UAS) and 66 % (university) of respondents either partially or strongly agreed that their organization had done this, yet 11 % (USA) and 25 % (university) of respondents either partially or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 9).

Determining **how the organization will collect information about developing and ongoing crises** was identified as a key organizational need by both panelists and survey respondents. As with decision-making structures, these information gathering structures were recognized as likely needing to be both different from those used for the organization's routine practices, and widely communicated (so those in the organization know how information gathering is functioning).

> *We need to know how the information is going through the system during the crisis. And that is one of the flaws of the current system, that it's not so open as it might be. And it makes things even harder. –Panelist, round 1*

Survey respondents from UASes expressed significantly greater agreement with the statement that their organization has sufficient capacity and procedures in place to maintain situational awareness during the crisis, with 94 % of respondents either partially or strongly agreeing with the statement, whereas only 71 % of university respondents partially or strongly agreed with the statement (and 18 % either strongly or partially disagreed with the statement at universities) (Figure 9; Mann-Whitney U, N=113, P=0,003).

There was some debate surrounding whether **crisis leadership needed to be top-down and authoritarian or distributed and flexible**, with participants frequently identifying the need for, and power of, directive leadership during crisis. However, other participants suggested that there was also a need for leadership's structural flexibility and dynamism, especially in rapidly developing crises where centralized leadership structures may not be able to be quickly engaged (e.g., highly localized crises or crises involving communication disruption). The following two quotes illustrate this balance:

> *Yes, and somehow we also need to think about or recognize that there are crisis situations or sudden parts of a crisis that require very strong crisis management. This authoritarian leadership, so that someone says that now you are doing this so that we can empty this house, because this house is burning down. –Panelist, round 1*

> *And perhaps as a continuation of that, I was left thinking that we need to dismantle the traditional crisis management perspective, that it is very top-down and very authoritarian in a way. –Panelist, round 1*

Multiple sources of data indicated that perceptions of **crisis preparedness and understanding of organizational crisis procedures and policies may be stratified in Finnish higher education organizations**. Preparation for crises and discussions of crisis procedures appeared to be occurring actively at organizations' upper levels (e.g., panel discussions with participants in upper management frequently included discussions of crisis procedures and plans). However, individuals and groups at lower levels of the organization may not have been cognizant of this preparation (and not involved in crisis practice sessions), possibly due to, for example, the preparation work not having been communicated out to the rest of the campus:

> *I'm probably one of the very few people who actually reads the [intranet] at our organization, and I'm usually trying to because I have it open all the time … but I haven't seen any notion of crisis preparedness in that sense. –Panelist, round 2*

There was also concern in the panels that university-wide crisis preparations may not be sufficient, as rapidly developing and/or more localized (e.g., happening in only one organizational unit or subunit) crises may require responses at lower organizational levels. This led to discussions of whether faculties and departments should have their own crisis procedures in place before crises occur, and observations that at least some organizations were not holding these types of discussions:

> *[…] about the departments and those smaller units that what I'm thinking is that whether it is enough kind of like [for the departments to] wait for the university level to give different like departments and faculties instructions on how to do [the crisis response], or whether they [the departments and faculties] should actually have their own, like more like localized plans on what to do in these kind of situations. I think, at least like my limited knowledge, I don't think that there is that much these kinds of discussions. –Panelist, round 2*

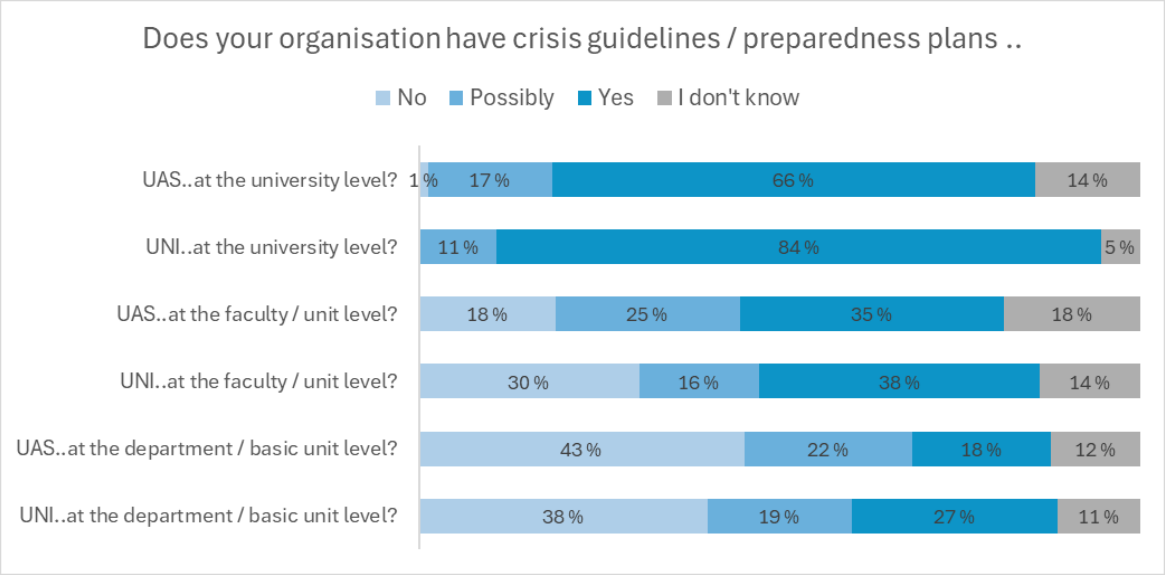

Figure 10. Responses to whether organizations have crisis guidelines or preparedness plans at different levels of the organization. No significant differences were identified between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these items. (N=114)

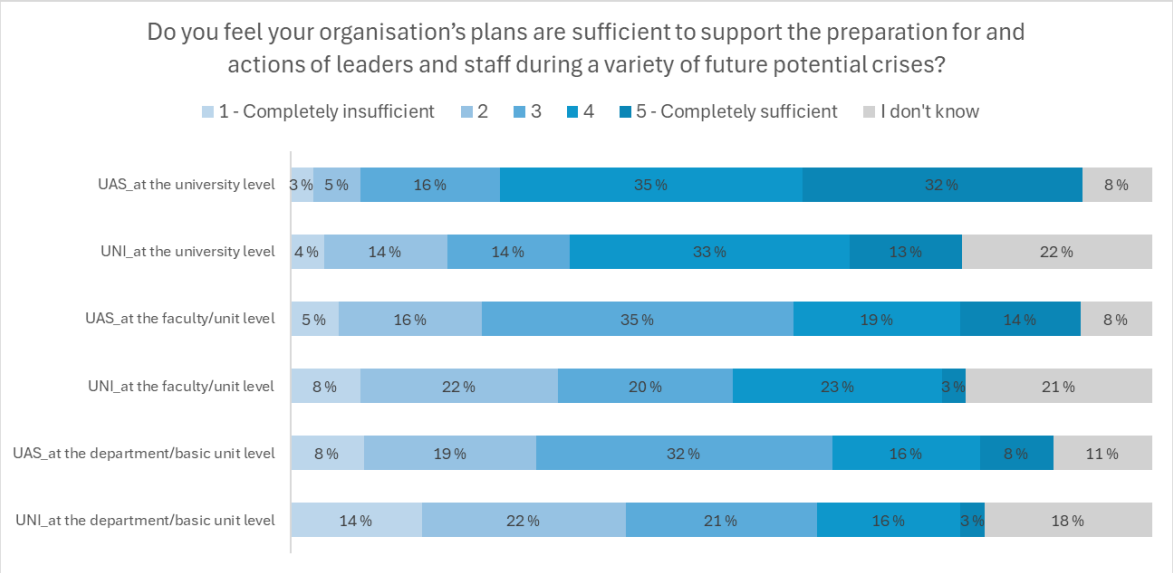

Figure 11. Responses to whether organizational plans are sufficient. No significant differences were identified between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these items. (N=114)

Survey data supported the panel findings, according to which the perceived level of preparation for crisis is stratified at HEIs in Finland (Figures 10 and 11). While 66 % (UAS) and 84 % (university) of leaders agreed that their organization had crisis response plans at the university levels, only 18 % (UAS) and 27 % (university) of leaders agreed that their organizations had crisis plans at the department or basic unit level, with 55 % (UAS) and 49 % (university) responding either “no” or “I don’t know” at the

department or basic unit level (Figure 10). Similarly, 67 % (UAS) and 46 % (university) of the leaders reported feeling that their university-level crisis plans were sufficient to support leaders and staff in a variety of future potential crises, whereas only 33 % (UAS) and 26 % (university) reported similar levels with their faculty or unit level plans' sufficiency, and only 24 % (UAS) and 19 % (university) felt similar levels of confidence in their department or basic unit plans. These low levels of perceived preparedness at the faculty and department levels of Finnish HEIs are concerning and a clear potential target for development.

Panel discussions echoed these generally low levels of perceived preparedness for crisis, with expressions of general concern often discussed in the context of those in the organization either being too busy to prepare for crisis or experiencing crisis fatigue, and thus not wanting to openly address the issue.

> *Of course these are the questions that need to be thought today. But because we are so busy with running around so many things, I think that they are, we consider them, "oh, it will be okay." But I don't know how to, you know, it could be done, broken down, as I said, but I think it is really hard to mobilize people's interest in that. –Panelist, round 2*

Nevertheless, there was some confidence expressed that crises similar to the recently experienced ones would be more manageable now:

> *But I believe that if a similar crisis were to happen, which of course we don't want to happen, but I do believe that we can now make the right decisions very quickly if something like that happens. –Panelist, round 1*

Survey responses reinforced the panel discussion findings regarding staff and supervisors' ability to prepare for crisis (Figure 12). Responses indicated that 37 % (UAS) and 55 % (university) of leaders either strongly or partially disagreed with the statement that their staff had sufficient time to plan and prepare for crisis situations, while only 30 % (UAS) and 21 % (university) either agreed or partially agreed with the statement. Similarly, 38 % (UAS) and 52 % (university) of leadership either strongly or partially disagreed with the statement that supervisors at their organization have sufficient time to plan and prepare for crisis situations, with only 35 % (UAS) and 27 % (university) either partially or strongly agreeing. It is concerning that so few leaders in Finnish HEIs believe that supervisors and staff at their organizations have sufficient time to prepare for crisis, and it is almost certainly an area of development for the system.

Crisis exercises were reported to be carried out by many organizations, with 79 % (UAS) and 50 % (university) of leaders reporting that their organization carried out crisis readiness exercises or other types of practice (Figure 12).

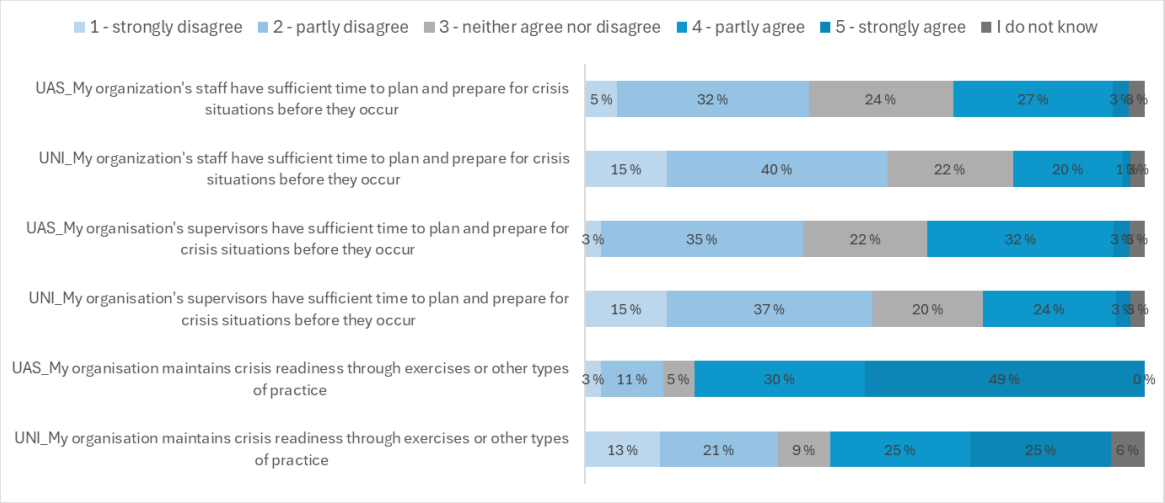

Figure 12. Responses to whether staff and supervisors have time to prepare for crisis and whether organizations conduct crisis exercises. There are no significant differences between the responses of leaders at UASes and universities for these questions. (N=113)

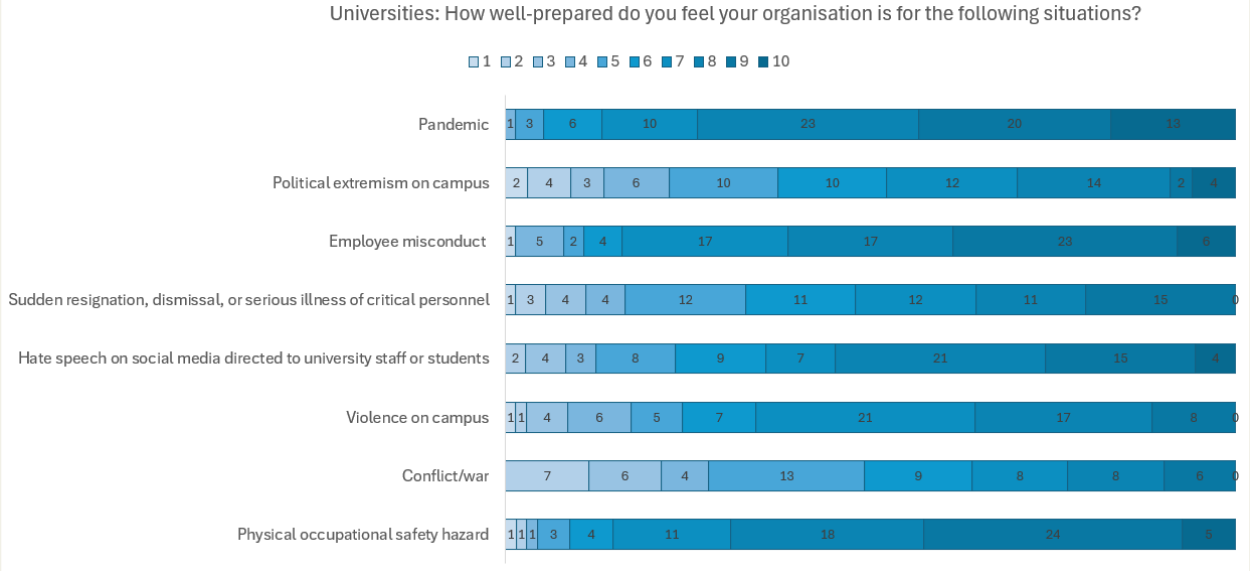

Figure 13. Perceived organizational preparedness for potential crisis situations at universities. The response scale ranged from 1 (“not at all prepared”) to 10 (“fully prepared). For averages and sample sizes, see Table 9.

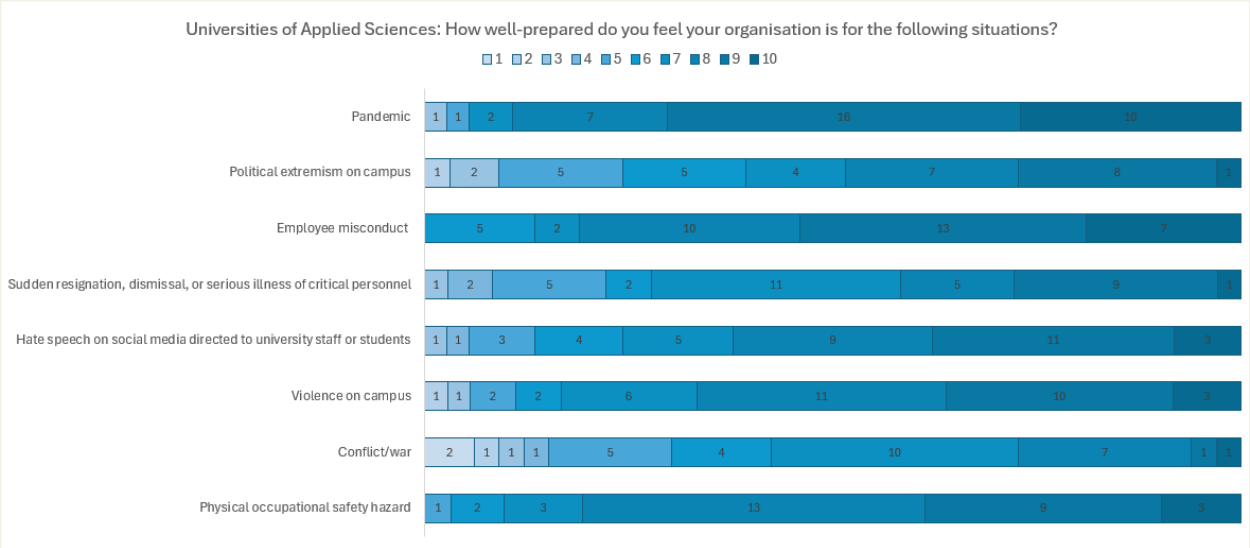

Figure 14. Perceived organizational preparedness for potential crisis situations at universities of applied sciences. The response scale ranged from 1 ("not at all prepared") to 10 ("fully prepared). For averages and sample sizes, see Table 9.

Table 9. Averages and standard deviations of perceived organizational preparation for potential crises at both universities and universities of applied sciences (scale of 1–10; 1 was "not at all prepared" and 10 was "fully prepared"). Statistical comparisons between UASes and Universities: * indicates a significant difference at a 0,05 level, and ** a difference at a 0,01 level, using a Mann-Whitney U test.

Type of crisis	UAS avg.	University avg.	UAS St. Dev.	Uni. St. Dev.	N	P
Pandemic *	8,9	8,4	1,4	1,4	113	0,014
Employee misconduct *	8,4	7,9	1,3	1,4	112	0,036
Physical occupational safety hazard	8,2	7,9	1,2	1,7	99	0,647
Violence on campus **	7,8	6,8	1,8	1,6	106	0,001
Hate speech on social media directed to university staff or students	7,6	7,3	1,8	1,8	110	0,167
Sudden resignation, dismissal, or serious illness of critical personnel	7,1	6,5	1,9	2,1	109	0,121
Political extremism on campus *	6,9	6,3	2,0	2,1	100	0,048
Conflict/war	6,3	5,8	2,3	2,1	94	0,142

Survey data revealed wide variation in perceived preparedness by crisis type (Figures 13 and 14, Table 9). University of applied sciences and university leaders appeared to feel most prepared for pandemics, employee misconduct, and physical occupational safety hazards, and least prepared for conflict or war, political extremism on campus, and the sudden resignation, dismissal, or illness of critical personnel.

A fitting final topic in our organization crisis practices section is that organizations need to **continue crisis leadership throughout the post-crisis phase, facilitating recovery and identifying lessons to be learned for future crises**. Panelists repeatedly discussed that crises will continue to happen, and that it is thus essential to learn lessons from prior crises, including formalizing and sharing best practices while simultaneously determining what could have been improved, resulting in increased crisis resilience. Yet, multiple panelists indicated that these discussions were not happening at their organizations regarding COVID-19:

> *[...] but how much time was spent on unpacking and gathering the lessons and experiences that we had. Now this study is actually the only form I've experienced from the university that would have gathered lessons and perhaps wisdom on how to act. –Panelist, round 1*

> *I cannot really recognize that we have done, in the larger scale, any lessons learned or lessons identified, with the whole staff and students. Why not? Because that would be really useful and good thing. –Panelist, round 2*

> *I don't recognize that we would have, on [an organization] level, very clear discussions about the lessons learned from post-pandemic. –Panelist, round 2*

While participants seemed somewhat critical about the incorporation of lessons learned from prior crises by their organizations, survey respondents presented a more positive picture. Survey results indicated that leaders at UASes reported significantly higher levels of agreement with the statement that "lessons learned about crisis leadership during the exceptional circumstances were discussed and integrated into organizational operations after the exceptional circumstances ended" in comparison to university leaders (Figure 15; Mann-Whitney U, N=109, P=0,004). 70 % of leaders at UASes reported partly or strongly agreeing with the statement that lessons learned were integrated into operations, whereas only 50 % of university leaders did so, and 22 % of university leaders reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement (Figure 15). Differences in the composition of the survey respondents and panelists may partially explain the difference in perspectives on this topic.

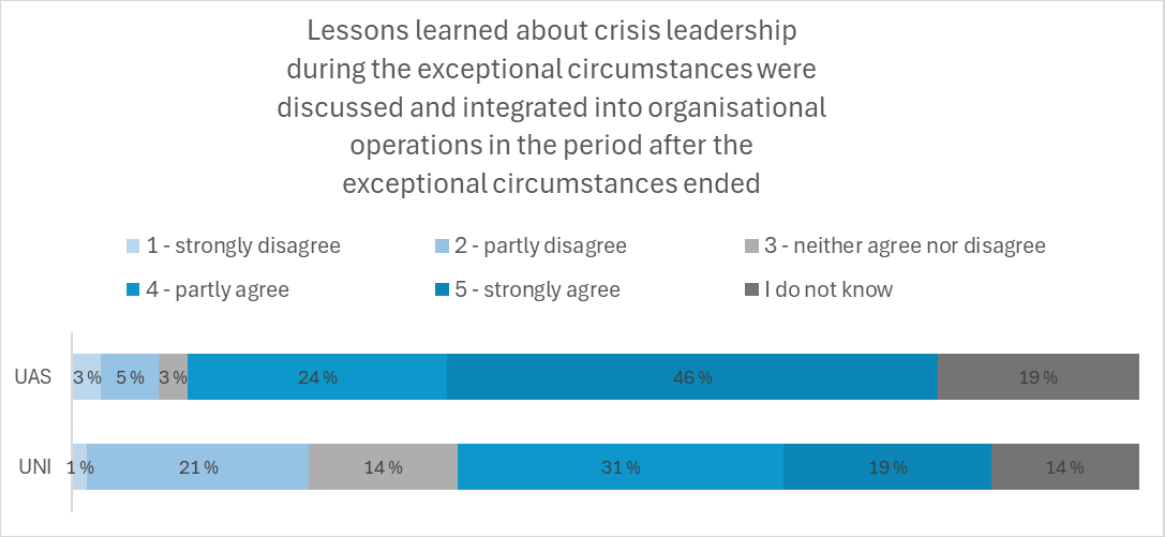

Figure 15. Responses to whether lessons learned about crisis leadership during the exceptional circumstances were discussed and integrated into organizational operations. The responses of leaders at UASes and universities were significantly different for this question (Mann-Whitney U, N=109, P=0,004).

Crisis practices: summary

A wide variety of crisis practices were discussed by panelists and survey respondents. Building community and trust within the organization was seen as promoting positive crisis outcomes. Facilitating collaboration within and between organizations, faculties, and departments was seen as valuable as well. Fostering resilience applied to many areas, but it was highlighted regarding physical and digital infrastructure, organizational processes, and promoting the ability for groups to be self-organizing and self-reliant during crisis. The respondents also saw attending to the needs of individuals—and recognizing that those needs may vary widely by both the individual and the type of crisis—as a crucial crisis practice.

In addition, as can be expected, a wide array of practices was highlighted at the organizational level: especially relevant organizational needs were the development and distribution of crisis plans, identification of core crisis leadership personnel, the need for revised decision-making and information gathering structures during crisis, and the need to prepare for crisis and practice crisis leadership at all organizational levels. It does not escape our attention that all these practices require human and/or physical capital expenditures and thus, it is essential to ensure that crisis leadership development is well-funded.

Crises and communication

> *[…] along with the trust, I think that communication. It is all about communication. So, you cannot emphasize it too much. –Panelist, round 2*

Crisis communication has been the subject of multiple books, and it is central to one of the modern theories of crisis leadership (situational crisis communication theory, e.g., Coombs & Tachkova, 2022). Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the importance of communication for crisis leadership was repeatedly emphasized in the panel discussions and survey responses. Unlike many areas of crisis practices, it is of potential relevance to note that many references to communication by panelists were akin to "communication is very important" without further details. Therefore, while we were able to identify many themes within communication that panelists and survey respondents felt were significant, the first and largest conclusion that can be drawn from our data is simply that communication during crisis was viewed as being extremely important.

Multiple layers and concepts intertwine when discussing crisis communication. For instance, communication is relevant to nearly all the other thematic areas we have included in this report: organizationally, communication is key—it is also highly relevant to leadership (potentially even defining who emerges as a leader in a particular crisis); crucial for individuals in crisis; central to forming community, trust, and belonging; required for collaboration; a main element of resilience; and certainly relevant to issues of well-being. Many portions of the conception of crisis also become relevant when discussing communication, such as the importance of time, the effect of the crisis type on communication needs, and the overarching impact of context. Additionally, a lack of communication or poorly executed communication have the potential to cause a crisis, or to elevate a problem to a crisis.

We identified eight separate themes among participants' discussions of crisis communication, summarized in Figure 16. We will now expand on what the panelists and survey respondents reported regarding each of these core themes.

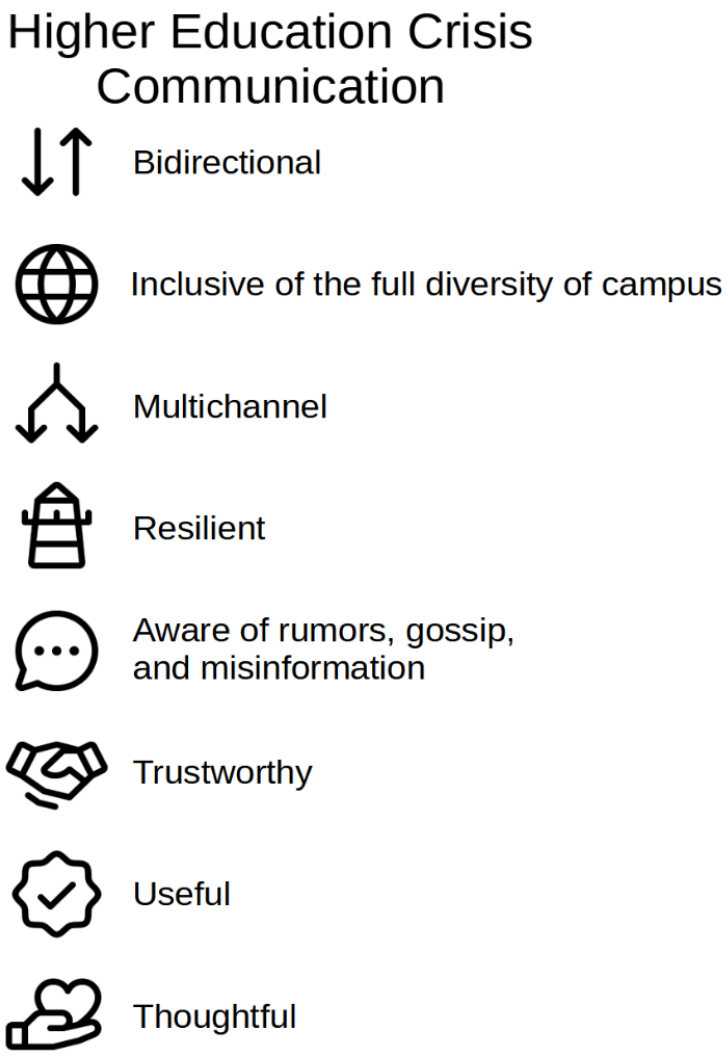

Figure 16. Identified crisis communication themes. Illustration by Marc Perkins.

Bidirectional communication

> *This crisis communication. One important thing is that it's two-way communication. – Panelist, round 1*

Bidirectional communication refers to crisis-related messages and information flowing not just **from** leadership, but also **to** leadership. While communication from leadership at the organization was viewed as central to crisis success (with many panelists praising the outward communication of their organizations during COVID-19), panelists repeatedly emphasized the importance of members of the organizational community being able to ask questions and share information, including their concerns, with leadership. Panelists recognized that there are times during crises when decisions need

to be made rapidly without community input, but also expressed that when there is time, staff and other community members need to be able to get clarification on issues being communicated, determine how new policies and procedures apply to their situations, report about challenges they are facing, and share what is happening in their particular areas of the organization.

> *In certain situations, yes, it needs to be that way, but in many situations it is really multi-level and it can be participatory and it is like multi-directional, that the information goes in many directions. And not just that something is poured down official channels from above. –Panelist, round 1*

Multiple mechanisms were discussed regarding how to accomplish bidirectional communication, including monitored online question and answer forums, specific email addresses, suggestion boxes, feedback forms, and holding small-group live meetings instead of (or in addition to) large-group (live or asynchronous) formats. As an example of this, after evaluating that the large-scale communication of COVID-19 policies at their organizations generally went well, a panelist shared a desire for smaller spaces, where questions could be asked, and discussions could happen more freely:

> *If I think like a big crisis, I think that there should be also small groups, places that people can talk. Because, like if you imagine you are in a big auditorium and somebody tells you, how many people will ask questions in those places? But they would rather be talking in smaller groups and when they have someone to open the situation –Panelist, round 1*

Discussion boards open to students and staff were also appreciated:

> *I think the good thing in [my organization] was [our internal message board system], which was open to staff members and to students, same platform, and I think it was working about 24/7, and some people answering, and they were people who know the official alignments of [the organization]. They were very tired and so, and I can understand, and because they were also moderating the questions, but I think it was very good because you could find the answer and follow the conversations, it was good but very, very stressful, also. –Panelist, round 2*

As referenced in the quote above, this type of accessible communication can be resource intensive, but was viewed as extremely valuable. In justifying the need for smaller groups and bidirectional communication, participants reflected that during times of crises, people are often stressed, distracted, and unable to focus, and therefore, having mechanisms for asking questions and smaller spaces for discussion and/or clarification are valuable, despite many of the questions potentially already having been answered by the organization's centralized communications.

Bidirectional communication was also discussed in the context of leadership needing to be able to gather information from the organizational community to

maintain situational awareness, which in turn requires that the community's members are able to communicate information to the leadership. While this type of communication is intuitively necessary in an intra-organizational context, it was also examined in an inter-organizational sense, for example with regard to national coordinating organizations needing to obtain information about what is going on within the various higher education organizations:

> *But I think it's important to know also that this kind of dialogue is important to work in both ways. Because it comes from the field to us what are the present issues in the institutions. [...] you need to have places where you can have that kind of dialogue between [organizations]. –Panelist, round 1*

The theme of bidirectional communication being important was also salient in our other datasets, such as in Perkins's (2023) interviews with leaders at a Finnish university.

Summary: Communication during crisis should be bidirectional, with leadership providing opportunities for all campus community members (staff, students, external stakeholders, etc.) to ask questions, get clarifications, and share information with leadership. This bidirectional communication is relevant on multiple scales: within individual units of an organization, at the whole organizational level, and at the inter-organizational level with national coordinating bodies such as the Ministry of Education, EDUFI, and ARENE.

Inclusive of the full diversity of campus

Panelists emphasized that crisis communication practices need to be inclusive of the full diversity of the campus. Inclusive crisis communication ended up being the most discussed element of communication besides the very broad themes of "useful" and "thoughtful." While our own code for inclusive communication, and most panel conversations on this topic, started off with a language-centric focus (e.g., panelist on round 1: "also using English language. So, we cannot, here in Finland for example, just communicate in Finnish…"), the discussions frequently proceeded to recognize that diversity meant more than just language:

> […] It's important that all university community members, and also external stakeholders, get to know what is going on. So, we need to keep in mind all groups, and also those short-time and long-term visit also. It's very challenging to target communication to people in the university community because we have so many kind of members here part of the community, and we need to think also external members. *–Panelist, round 1*

While considering individuals' personal needs for specific kinds of communication in an organizational context, participants identified many different categories in which people could be classified in. While creating a comprehensive list of potential axes of diversity is beyond the scope of this report, categories that participants mentioned included:

- Language background (e.g., Finnish, Swedish, English, and others)
- Cultural background (e.g., that there could be widely varying levels of trust in government organizations, or different groups might be treated unequally)
- Staff groups (e.g., time at organization, employee categorization, engagement with the campus community, precarity status)
- Student groups (e.g., new vs. experienced students, program enrolled in, country of origin, exchange status, family status)
- Different campuses, locations or units (e.g., remote campuses, units with particular operational needs)
- Disabled individuals (of which there is a broad diversity, including both mental and physical disabilities)
- Caregivers
- Visitors to the campus
- How informed or "plugged in" people are to the organization

The diversity relevant to crisis communication even extended down to people's individual preferences for type of communication, as the following panelist expressed:

> *Some [people] need more emotional information and some need more factual information. Some need illustrated information. We would just have to do everything and differently to have any hope of reaching a wider audience. –Panelist, round 1*

Inclusive communication was a topic that multiple panelists reported issues with during COVID-19. For example, participants identified that inclusive communication needs to happen in a timely fashion, and that communications in English were sometimes delayed at their organization.

> *And also we have quite many members who are not Finnish or not Finnish speaking members, so it's important us to always remember that we have to tell them also in English right away, not next day. –Panelist, round 1*

Delays in multi-lingual inclusive communication included not just delays in formal communications, but also informal communications and communication planning: as one participant highlighted, as an English speaker during COVID-19, they were sometimes entirely unaware of upcoming changes that they felt their Finnish-speaking colleagues had been aware of. In one panel, the participants discussed where the responsibility for communication to international students should be at, and one of the panelists made a wish for coordination on a national level:

> *And it seems to me partly as if the Ministry of Education and Culture, for example, would rather throw the ball around a bit, that the universities will take care of [communication to international students]. But then again, for example, this pandemic is such a matter that I don't think that universities alone can take care of it, even if it means, for example, providing information. The information would have to be available in English, for example, and it would have to be easy so that you know how to act. –Panelist, round 1*

The theme of diversity overlapped with many of the other communication themes, especially with the need for multichannel communication (to be discussed next). For instance, participants discussed how inclusive communications meant that blanket, one-size-fits-all communications are likely not possible in many crises due to some individuals needing more or different information than others.

The issues inclusive communication presented for leadership were also discussed, such as the challenges brought on by the diversity of the study body, and the predicaments of how to get information to external stakeholders, who are not regularly following university communication channels. Some leaders pointed out that the need for translations sometimes slowed down communications.

> *Our corona management group met [mid-week], then it could be that on Friday afternoon there will be a press release on how to act next week, because it required us to think about what is written in the press release and it will be translated into English. –Panelist, round 1*

These challenges of inclusive communication highlight the importance of organizations' need to plan for and allocate resources to facilitate inclusive crisis communications at multiple levels within the organization (e.g., not just at the campus-wide level, but also within units and subunits).

> *I guess you can think that maintaining the connection is the thing we are trying to maintain. It would be a good idea to maintain the connection with every member of the higher education community. So communication and outreach. –Panelist, round 1*

Summary: Crisis communication should be done with the full diversity of the campus community (including both internal and external as well as permanent and transient members) in mind. To accomplish this, organizations should be aware of the various axes of diversity that are found within or are relevant to their organization. Additionally, organizations must incorporate this diversity into their crisis communication planning and should allocate resources to facilitate this inclusive communication in a timely manner during crisis.

Multichannel communication

> *Perhaps the biggest lesson I learned from [COVID-19] was that one channel is not enough, because not everyone uses just one channel. One way of communicating is not enough. It can't just be an official PDF file, but you need different channels, different materials, different things. –Panelist, round 1*

Multi-channel communication uses multiple different modalities to attempt to get the same information distributed to the whole community. Examples of different modalities that can be used for multi-channel communication in an organizational context include e-mail, internal or external website notices, press releases, pre-recorded videos, live meetings (in-person, online, or hybrid), social media posts, mail, and notices posted in or on buildings. While multichannel communication is an integral element of resilient communication (to be discussed next), the need for multichannel communications extends beyond simply providing redundancy.

Participants discussed that different channels were needed not just to reach different kinds of people (such as those who do vs. do not use social media) or address different communication needs (e.g., policy distribution via official webpages vs. discussion or collecting feedback in live meetings or online forums), but also that different types of crises or challenging situations require different communication channels (for instance, internal vs. external communication channels for internally vs. externally relevant crises). Multichannel communication was also often viewed as essential for reaching the full diversity of the campus community (staff, students, and others), as discussed above in the inclusive communication section. Moreover, survey respondents highlighted the importance of including non-electronic methods of communication in multi-channel communication plans.

Participants also brought up difficulties arising from the need to use multiple channels, as, for example, multi-channel communication could result in confusion as to where information was being distributed to, and ensuring that relevant, equivalent information was distributed to all the used channels could prove to be challenging.

> *I've now come across it several times in my workplace, and it's also a crisis of sorts when information doesn't get through, which is the result of multichannel communication. People no longer know what channel they should use to communicate with each other, or assume that if they put something somewhere that others will know about it. –Panelist, round 1*

One area where multichannel communication was reported to cause issues during COVID-19 was between different organizational units, as different units within the organization potentially sent out (apparently) conflicting information within their separate communication channels. In some panelists' perspectives, this highlighted the need for communication coordination, often with suggestion for organization-wide crisis groups on the campus taking on this role. Participants also suggested that activities such as regular (e.g., during COVID-19, weekly) summaries could help to address some of the challenges of information fragmentation across different channels. Yet, it was still reflected on that multichannel communication was important:

> *We will never get to a situation where everyone is looking for information from the same place. –Panelist, round 1*

Participants discussed that organizational planning should take the multichannel nature of communication into consideration, realizing that any one channel of communication will likely exclude or leave out at least some people. For instance, one participant commented on how even email is not universal:

> *And how, on the other hand, the diversity of this group has been taken into account and how communication channels have been mapped out, for example. As [another panelist] said, we may know that e-mail does not reach everyone, but we still send e-mail. Has the preparedness and readiness work considered what other channels are available and whether it is known who the potential "victims" are who are left out? –Panelist, round 1*

Despite the viewpoint of possible exclusion, participants reflected on the power of centralized communication during crisis. For instance, multiple participants highlighted the importance of their organization's COVID-19 webpage and how central communication locations could be used as primary nodes in a multi-channel communication network.

> *So, for example, you can use the institutional page of the website to have a more elaborate text or video or something like that. And then you sort of disseminate that video through different platforms. Kind of like spreading the word as much as possible to different position in different places, in different contexts. –Panelist, round 1*

Finally, it was also discussed that recognizing the relevance of both formal and informal channels of communication was useful.

Summary: The fragmented nature of today's communication environment, the widely varying nature of possible crises the organization may face, and the diversity of the organizational community that needs to obtain information about crises, all illustrate the importance of incorporating multichannel communication in crisis practices.

Resilient communication

What to do if digital communication doesn't work –Survey respondent

Resilient communication systems can maintain their information transfer capability despite perturbations or disruptions. The participants primarily discussed the need for resilient communications systems in the context of crises such as power outages, which had the potential to directly impact the functionality of commonly used and relied-upon communication systems like team collaboration applications (e.g., Microsoft Teams), email, websites, and messaging apps. Panelists also recognized that disruptions in communications could in and of themselves be crises, given the importance of timely communications for organizational operations. Thus, given the panelist- and survey-respondent-recognized importance of communication in crisis response, developing and maintaining resilient communication systems was viewed as critical for crisis preparedness and response.

Panelists expressed concern, however, that they were personally unaware of what they should do, or how the organization would communicate, in the event of a major disruption to common channels such as email and Teams:

> *[If] I lose all the Internet connections and all my emails and so on, I wouldn't know what to do. So, I don't have any tools to contact other workers in my team. And for instance, my team is located in different cities, so we don't have the option to go to our working site and see there, so I don't know what to do. I might try to phone them, but yeah. –Panelist, round 1*

Panelists were also concerned that the organization itself might not be doing sufficient planning or preparation work for these types of scenarios:

> *So, I don't know that if there is any contingency plan being drawn for these, if there is discussions on this. I honestly hope so. I think this is extremely important, and all organizations and all society leadership of all these different levels should be reflecting very carefully on alternatives because this is gonna happen one day or another. –Panelist, round 1*

Furthermore, leaders who were in positions to be aware of such backup plans, recognized that even those backups were not necessarily being kept up to date.

Panel participants did not generally discuss how to create resilient communication systems, other than bringing up that multichannel communication systems have some innate resilience, and that crises such as electricity failure (mentioned seven times in the survey short answers) presented extreme challenges to the organizational communication systems.

Respondents to the survey were generally positive about their staff's ability to use alternative communication mechanisms (Figure 17). It is noteworthy, though, that while roughly a third (32 % at UASes and 34 % at universities) of leaders reported strongly agreeing with the statement that the staff at their organization are ready to use alternative means of communication during crisis, a roughly similar number (27 % at UASes and 37 % at universities) reported either partly disagreeing, strongly disagreeing, neutrality, or not knowing the answer to the same statement.

Figure 17. Staff's readiness to use alternative means of communication in case of communication disruption. No significant differences were identified between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for this question. (N=113)

Summary: Resilient communication systems were highlighted as core for organizational crisis response and were an area where both panelists and survey respondents expressed concern regarding the capabilities and preparedness of their organizations.

Rumors, gossip, and misinformation

In crisis communication, speed is important. When the management thinks for a long time about the perfect design, rumors and misinformation are already spreading. Supervisors should get quick help when a difficult situation needs to be communicated. Basic message examples for some situations could be distributed in advance. –Survey respondent

While many of the other communication-related themes we identified are relatively broad, one narrow topic that repeatedly arose in multiple panels was the need for leadership to communicate in a way that addressed (and ideally prevented) rumors, gossip, and misinformation. While participants acknowledged that working to prevent the spread of misinformation was often a Sisyphean task, it was nevertheless considered important, and good communication practices were estimated to at least reduce their prevalence. Ideas such as having a rapid, open, and regular flow of information were discussed as mechanisms that could help with the handling of rumors, gossip, and misinformation.

> *I think this, good flow of information reduces possibilities for what she was talking before, gossip and misunderstandings. Because if you know what's happening transparently, complexity is reduced and I do not have to imagine something else. And people then have less space to talk about it in a more creative way, let's say. –Panelist, round 1*

Following these good communication practices was also highlighted as an example of how addressing problems when they are small (a particular rumor starting) could prevent them from growing into crises (the rumor spreading and media picking up on it). Crises such as internal cases of discrimination were highlighted as particularly challenging in this regard, since leaders were perceived as being more hesitant regarding rapid, open communication.

Explicitly working to counter misinformation was highlighted as challenging, but potentially beneficial:

> *This is also a big communication challenge in terms of crisis management, so that when the dis- and misinformation starts to spread, how to react and what is the right way to act. We also encountered a lot of them, that when we encounter them, it would be nice to make posts of the same kind, for example, about misinformation and why it is not true. –Panelist, round 1*

Highlighting the interaction of our communications themes, bidirectional communication was also considered important by the participants in the current context, as it allowed leadership to learn when rumors, gossip, and/or misinformation were spreading. One participant explained how after the sudden death of a student, the lack of campus communication about the death led to the spread of rumors:

So, these are the sort of fragments of different narratives that I heard since the [death] that I'm kind of trying to put together, but I have no idea for example if, to an extent, any of these fragments is true and how true they are in terms of, they might be true, but I don't know exactly how they relate to each other. –Panelist, round 2

Summary: Crisis communication practices need to be aware of rumors, gossip, and misinformation, and enacted in such a way as to prevent their spreading. Following the other identified themes of crisis communication, such as having multichannel, trustworthy, useful communication to the full diversity of the campus, will likely assist leadership in achieving this goal.

Trustworthy communication

And trust in the organization doing the communicating plays a very big role. –Panelist, round 1

Trustworthy communication was discussed in three primary contexts: first, communication needs to come from someone the recipient trusts; second, the communication itself needs to be able to be trusted; and third, the organization and its leaders need to work to build trust regarding communications. In participants' views, failure on any of these primary axes of trustworthy communication had the potential to lead to problems in organizational crisis response.

It was considered challenging to identify who in an organization will be trusted. The panelists discussed this especially in the context of finding sources who would be trusted among different groups of the population, and they emphasized the importance of using a variety of sources to distribute the same message:

Doing cooperation with the... let's say that someone from THL [Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare], like Hanna Nohynek who kinda everyone knew in the time of then, then having an imam from the mosque with her to talk about the COVID for certain communities, that worked really well because they didn't know Hanna, but then they knew the local imam, or the doctor from that community who spoke the language and that kind of things, so it worked really well and I would assume it works in this context, as well, having different people giving the same message. –Panelist, round 2

One observation was that the upper leadership of a higher education organization, such as the rector, may not always be the best person to lead crisis communication as they may not be viewed as trustworthy by the community.

The other two components of trustworthy communication interact closely: the communication needs to be trustworthy, and this requires that the organization has worked to build trust in its communications. Having open, honest communication was cited as a good way to generate trust, as there were multiple examples provided by

panelists of trust-losing incidents, in which leadership had attempted to deny events that were widely known to have happened. The post-crisis phase was discussed as a core time for building trust:

> *Communicating to people that we have learned our lesson. Even if it's a bit individualized, about what. Creating a sense of security in the entire university community, so that we are better prepared when something happens. –Panelist, round 1*

Summary: Ensuring that crisis communication comes from a source that is trustworthy, that the communications themselves are trustworthy, and that the organization works to build trust in its communications, were all seen as important elements by panelists and survey respondents.

Useful communication

> *The most important thing in crisis management is to inform everyone what is happening, why it is happening, how it is happening, when it is happening and then who is doing what and when it is doing what. –Panelist, round 1*

Useful communication is informative, timely, accurate, and open about uncertainty. It is not surprising that both panelists and survey respondents highlighted these elements as important in crisis communications, and many panelists emphasized that their organization's communications during COVID-19 were indeed useful.

> *I work remotely. But [my organization's] ultra clear communication made it easier to work. It took the guesswork out of it, so I could put my own resources into doing my own work as well as possible. –Panelist, round 1*

However, panelists did identify that they had faced multiple challenges regarding useful communications in prior crises. Thus, while clearly necessary and widely recognized as important, providing useful communications in practice is neither simple nor trivial: it requires organizational and individual planning and preparation work.

Rapidity, or timeliness, of communications was emphasized by survey respondents and many panelists, both in the context of countering rumors as well as the importance of providing timely communications to the entire campus, acknowledging its diversity (e.g., having translations immediately available and using multiple channels).

> *We saw it's also with the Covid, but also with the Russian attack crisis in that sense that we need, quite soon we need answers, and many of those answers need to be also in English because education sector, there are quite many people who need the information in English also what we get. –Panelist, round 1*

Panelists brought up that useful communication applied to not just in intra-organizational, but in inter-organizational context as well. For example, ARENE and UNIFI's facilitation of rapid information sharing between different campuses was described as particularly useful for organizational crisis response during COVID-19. Furthermore, providing information when the situation was still uncertain, or when a decision was soon to be made, was viewed as important by panelists:

> *You should communicate that you don't have anything to communicate, if there is such a situation. Because it's sometimes, when, in a crisis situation, where people have a lot of questions in their mind, a lot of insecurity, and you don't have the answers to all the questions yet, but then you should say it. –Panelist, round 2*

This lack of information before decisions had been made was highlighted as a challenge the participants had faced during prior crises. For instance, during one phase of COVID-19, a participant had expressed frustration towards the lack of communication from leadership, regarding whether a resurgence in the community's viral levels would cause another shutdown:

> *[…] now that we have gotten the [...] kind of the re-emergence of COVID, at least to some extent, a lot of us have been discussing here on campus that, like what's the likelihood of another lockdown. […] I haven't gotten any email from the rector or anybody from the corona group, crisis group, or what was it called, but everybody's still kind of waiting on, okay, will this be another [...] I very much doubt it, but it's still [...] –Panelist, round 2*

Clarity of communications was cited as important by survey respondents, and panelists discussed the need for frank (open and honest) communication that did not attempt to hide behind clichés or embellished language:

> *In conclusion, when you talk diplomatically enough, in the end nobody understands what was discussed. –Panelist, round 1*

Providing rapid, open, an honest information was considered challenging especially in the context of internally generated crises, such as accusations of discrimination, as leadership or those involved appeared concerned about blame or reputation. Another challenge regarding useful communication was that contradictory information could lead to confusion and loss of utility. Multiple panelists discussed organizational practices, which worked towards centralizing communications, as a possible way to help prevent contradictory information.

Summary: Providing informative, timely, accurate, and open (i.e., useful) communication during crisis was viewed as important for crisis response by participants.

Thoughtful communication

Not only communication per se, but the way that communication is done. –Panelist, round 1

Thoughtful crisis communication prevents information overload, includes meaningful content, and is conducted in an emotionally aware manner. While this and the previously discussed thematic category of useful communication clearly overlap, the two were at least somewhat distinct in participant conversations, as participants discussed both the basic information contained in the communications (which we have termed "useful"), as well as the importance of attending to the emotional impact of the messages (which we have termed "thoughtful").

Concerns about information overload were the most frequent topic related to thoughtful communication. Participants shared that during COVID-19, they sometimes stopped reading communications altogether due to their frequency:

> *We had so many emails about information that essentially, I just stopped reading them because I was tired, I couldn't deal with so many meetings online and then so many requirements, so many surveys, and so on. –Panelist, round 2*

Leaders expressed the need to consider information overload when creating communications, and it was viewed as a particularly challenging task:

> *It's really difficult to draw the line that information is clear enough, simple enough, simple enough and easy enough to assimilate. –Panelist, round 1*

Part of ensuring that recipients are not overloaded with information is confirming that messages are meaningful (relevant) to the recipients. Asking questions such as "who needs to know" and "when do they need to know" can help to ensure that communications are both meaningful and preventing information overload.

For example, to facilitate useful communication and counter misinformation, participants reported that leaders at their organizations frequently posted weekly summaries of all relevant news. These summaries were also briefly discussed in the multichannel communication section. Mid-level leaders often reported that the summaries contained far more information than staff in their units needed to know, so to ensure that their staff got meaningful communications, the leaders in question created their own summaries from the weekly campus-wide bulletins, which only contained the information that was relevant to their own staff.

> *At the university there is now a weekly message of this kind. It's quite long. And we developed our own weekly message, which contained the main highlights of the university, but also our own content. –Panelist, round 2*

Additionally, explaining why actions were taken could help ensure that the messages were relevant to (and useful, and trust-building with) the participants:

> *That is why we are now introducing these exceptional measures or whatever it is that we want to use to communicate in the most neutral way possible. –Panelist, round 1*

According to the participants, emotional awareness includes a broad array of characteristics, such as confirming that crisis communication is aware of people's personal situations and contexts. Another element of emotionally aware communication is ensuring that communication is done in such a way that recipients feel respected:

> *I just get the idea that students and staff both feel that okay, they have been communicated to, they have been communicated as they are, and being treated as adults, so not treat them as kids, even though some of them are kids, and some of them behave like kids, but you shouldn't treat them as such. –Panelist, round 2*

Emotionally aware communication also recognizes that the way communications are carried out shapes the community's view of what leadership, or the organization, is paying attention to in a crisis. Furthermore, emotionally aware communication attempts to help facilitate well-being among the campus community. For instance, one organization had focused on building and strengthening community spirit, and making sure that no-one felt left alone:

> *That we make any kind of model, I told you about the open models here, so perhaps the essential thing was that the person was not left alone with the issue, if it was, but had the opportunity to immediately contact and ask how to act in this situation. And it was perhaps in the communication process I think was a good thing. And it was a good thing that you did during the corona era, because in that way it created a sense of security. It was a good thing. –Panelist, round 2*

Survey respondents generally reported having stronger interpersonal communication skills in comparison to technical communication skills (Figure 18). Nearly all leaders at both UASes (98 %) and universities (85 %) reported agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that they have sufficient interpersonal communication skills for crisis, yet 24 % of UAS leaders and 30 % of university leaders reported either partly disagreeing or neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement that their technical skills were sufficient. Providing ongoing training for both technical and interpersonal communication skills could be a warranted activity for organizations, as most of the responses to both questions at both organization types were at the "partly agree" level, indicating room for skill development.

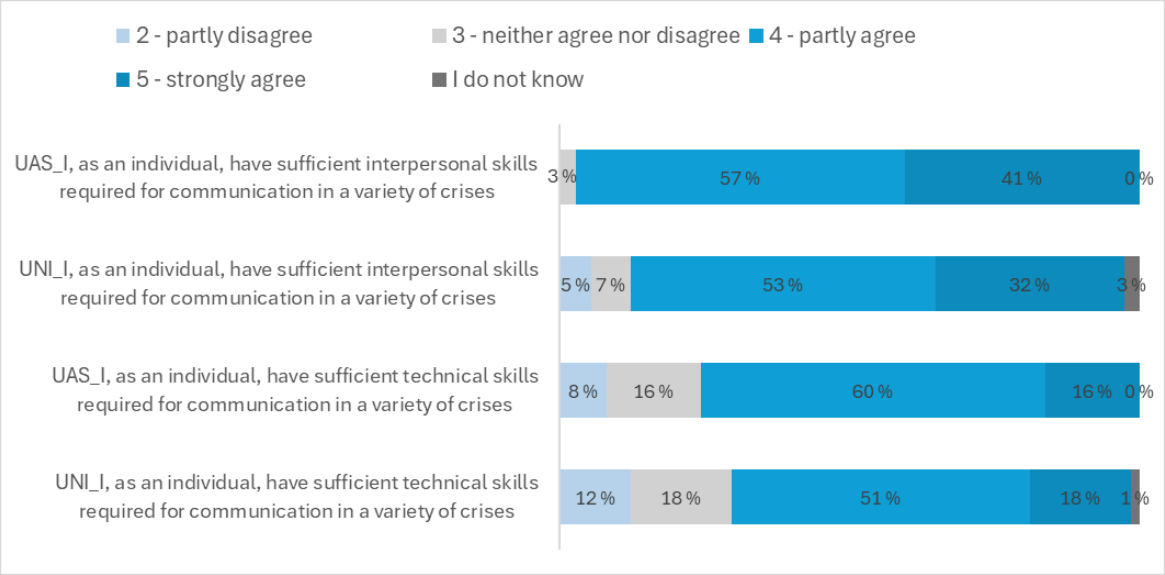

Figure 18. Leader communication skills divided into interpersonal and technical categories. No significant differences were identified between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for any of these questions.

Summary: Crisis communication benefits from leadership providing thoughtful communication that is relevant to recipients, considering the emotional context of recipients, and done in a manner that reduces information overload.

Communication: summary

It should not come as a surprise that communication is important to crisis leadership: communication is vital for maintaining situational awareness, coordinating organizational response, keeping people informed, and shaping the organizational community's collective perspectives on the crisis and how it is being handled. Participants in this study identified that bidirectional, inclusive, multichannel, resilient communication, which is also trustworthy, rumor- and misinformation-aware, useful, and thoughtful, should help facilitate successful crisis outcomes in HEIs. Conducting communication campaigns that address all these goals during a crisis is not trivial, and thus organizations need to allocate sufficient human and capital resources to this topic. Survey respondents, in their short-answer responses, especially emphasized that crisis communication skills should be developed and maintained through training, with clear instructions and plans provided for leaders at all levels.

Given the frequent focus on communication in crisis leadership, we felt it particularly relevant to close this section with this participant's message, highlighting that while communication is important to crisis leadership, it does not equal crisis leadership:

Communication plays a very important role both internally and externally. Of course, the basic principles are to meet the information needs, the time dimension comes up very quickly, for example, the information needs of the media, they have to be met very quickly. You have to connect operations, management. However, the main focus should be on managing the situation and not on communication. The focus of the most important people should not be on communication, but on managing the situation as a whole. –Panelist, round 1

Crises and well-being

The need to attend to the well-being of all community members during crisis at higher education organizations is well-supported by literature (e.g., Striepe & Cunningham, 2021; see also literature review, p. **16**). The interviews conducted by Aarnikoivu and Saarinen (2022) suggested that concern for staff well-being increased in the first years of COVID-19. During panel discussions, well-being was frequently interpreted broadly, with references to physical health, mental health, work satisfaction, and personal life situations all being included. Core themes of well-being, as discussed by participants, included:

- Concern for well-being
- Feeling of community, inclusion, and support
- Other elements of well-being

Concern for well-being

However, it has to be said that good organizations take it into account right from the start, how people are doing. Especially in times of such massive change. –Panelist, round 1

During the panels, the most frequently discussed element of well-being was the participants concern towards the well-being of higher education community members during and after crises. As our study focused particularly on staff perceptions, it is understandable that these concerns were most frequently voiced in the context of staff members, though student well-being (especially during COVID-19) and the well-being of leadership during crises was also discussed.

And then our students, our student unions and the student unions of universities of applied sciences have done the well-being surveys, and they showed really worrying results at the end of the corona. There was a huge increase in loneliness and mental health problems. –Panelist, round 2

At this point, I also raised the question of whether the well-being of those at the heart of the crisis was taken care of, for example in management teams or crisis groups. Was this taken into account in the discussions? –Panelist, round 1

Participants' concern about well-being was expressed across multiple timescales. First, and most common, were the discussions about the well-being challenges faced by leaders, staff, or students during crises, with most references being to the experiences during COVID-19. The second timescale discussed was concerns about well-being after crisis, such as the lingering well-being effects of crises (especially COVID-19), including observations that well-being had not recovered as expected after the return to campus.

> *And it shows certain results in terms of the fact that in the early stages of the Corona, well-being at work remained in line with the studies and then it has started to decline. And it has not risen, even though we have returned to the hybrid, or this new normal. –Panelist, round 2*

Some participants commented on the repeated surveys carried out at their organizations, expressing concern that the surveys were being used to show superficial caring about well-being without implementing actual, meaningful changes.

> *I think that it was at many points, this well-being survey was kind of doing the work of well-being instead of really being concerned. So, a lot of time I was very skeptical because I felt that this is the management's way of showing that they are concerned, but it led nowhere. – Panelist, round 1*

These concerns somewhat resonate with the features of panelists' own discussions surrounding well-being in our study. While there was frequent discussion about the importance of well-being, and references to HEIs collecting survey data on well-being, there was far less discussion of what participants (or others) were doing in their organizations to facilitate the enhancement of well-being. For instance, this mention of survey data did not extend to an explanation of how the data was used, or examples of changes made as a result:

> *And on the other hand, how it affects, for example, staff well-being at work, so now we have recently received the results of the work well-being survey and university the work well-being survey has been carried out. –Panelist, round 2*

Thus, there is a possibility that well-being is somewhat of an empty signifier: something that organizational leaders feel they must attend to, and therefore, it may become a topic of instrumental attention. Along these lines, some participants discussed well-being as a topic for health authorities or medical personnel to deal with, excluding it from the category of something leadership could attend to:

> *But for instance, I don't know, we don't have access for instance of the healthcare system or anything, so we don't know how to support the well-being or the mental well-being or*

> *whatever, and I don't want to have, I don't know how to, I don't want that kind of things in my duties. –Panelist, round 1*

> *I have a feeling that for us, the emotional activity was somehow outsourced to occupational health. I think that this kind of feeling of well-being was somehow taken over by the social services. –Panelist, round 1*

This view also aligned with a theme found in the survey responses, which was that well-being was seen as an individual's responsibility, and not something that could be dealt with organizationally:

> *A lot is done to support well-being. An individual's own responsibility for their own well-being cannot be ignored. –Survey respondent*

> *Well-being is really a multifactorial thing. However, I would emphasize individual responsibility more strongly. Each of us can do a lot of things related to well-being. If you take a proactive approach to managing your own work, you will get very far. –Survey respondent*

While there were signs that well-being was instrumentally paid attention to and that its care was being outsourced, there were also discussions by participants who were hoping for improved well-being among community members and examined how to try to help bring about well-being improvements for staff and students in crisis. Multiple methods were mentioned, such as using research-based approaches or creating spaces conducive to open dialogue.

> *Perhaps this is what I would hope for, if we are thinking about how we can increase well-being at work, that we actually take the latest studies and the most up-to-date information when we talk about human management, well-being at work management or work ability management. Then you take them into management and start training people. –Panelist, round 1*

> *And I think that one of the ways that we can help members to, that they have place to say what, how they are coping, how they are feeling, what are the issues at the working place. And we can use the information to influence the organizations' leaders or politicians, so whoever it's needed to be to influence. –Panelist, round 1*

To summarize, there were many expressions of concern for the well-being of members of the university community before and after crisis. There were some indications, however, that the panel participants felt well-being was only being attended to superficially in some organizations (e.g., by surveys; see also Aarnikoivu & Saarinen 2022), and that some survey respondents believed that well-being was largely an individual characteristic that could not be addressed by leadership. However, participants also expressed desire for organizational support for well-being, along with discussions of how that organizational support could be brought about. We will now

continue to elaborate on the elements surrounding well-being support, which were discussed by the participants.

Feelings of community, inclusion, and support

> *Like in schools, they have this, the best colleague or the best, you know, person who helps everybody. Why don't we talk about that? –Panelist, round 1*

There was repeated discussion by both panelists and survey respondents about the well-being benefits of feeling a sense of community, inclusion, and support at the organization. In relation to community and inclusion, participants frequently examined the challenges faced in maintaining a sense of community during COVID-19. The discussions regularly continued to how the panelists' workplaces attempted to mitigate isolation during COVID-19, such as by having online coffee breaks, small group outdoor meetings, or other efforts. Participants also deliberated this in the context of communication, especially that communication should be inclusive of all, pointing out that non-inclusive communications could easily lead to a loss of sense of community. Building community was viewed by some as an activity that could be facilitated by leadership, but that its succession requires everyone's collective efforts.

Providing support for individuals during crisis was widely discussed, and the ability to get support when needed during crisis was viewed as essential: survey responses again highlighted the power of communication in this area. However, besides mentions that communication could help, discussions of how to concretely provide support were rare: there were also concerns expressed about the support that was available to leaders, and whether organizations were preparing enough to provide support during crises. Some participants discussed feeling that smaller teams and lower-level leaders did not have as much organizational support or training for crisis.

> *So, we don't have that often this kind of management support if something goes wrong and we are getting hate emails or something like that. So, I haven't felt that we are supported enough for this kind of [activity] –Panelist, round 1*

Support for students was also included in the discussions, mentioning that students feeling a lack of support could cause significant well-being impacts, which could become personal crises. The need to plan for providing emotional and other kind of support during sudden crises, such as the death of a student or staff member, was also examined.

Building support structures and a sense of community was acknowledged as challenging, and as work that needed to happen not just during crisis, but before as well:

It is important to improve the community spirit of the management, and it is also important to get the management together to a good level even before crises. In my own organization, special attention has been paid to this for years. –Survey respondent

Surveyed leaders generally reported agreement with the statement that they had adequate skills or capabilities to support the well-being of those they manage, and to maintain a sense of community during crisis (Figure 19). Leaders at UASes reported significantly higher agreement with the statement that they had the skills and capabilities to support the well-being of those they manage during crisis, with 92 % of UAS leaders either partly or strongly agreeing with the statement versus 74 % of university leaders (Mann-Whitney U, N=111, P=0,004). Similar numbers of leaders at both UASes (82 %) and universities (83 %) reported partly or strongly agreeing with the statement that they had the skills and capabilities to maintain a sense of community during crisis. Given that only 12 to 27 % of leaders responded "strongly agree" with both questions' statements, there is likely still room for improvement in well-being support and community building skills among leadership.

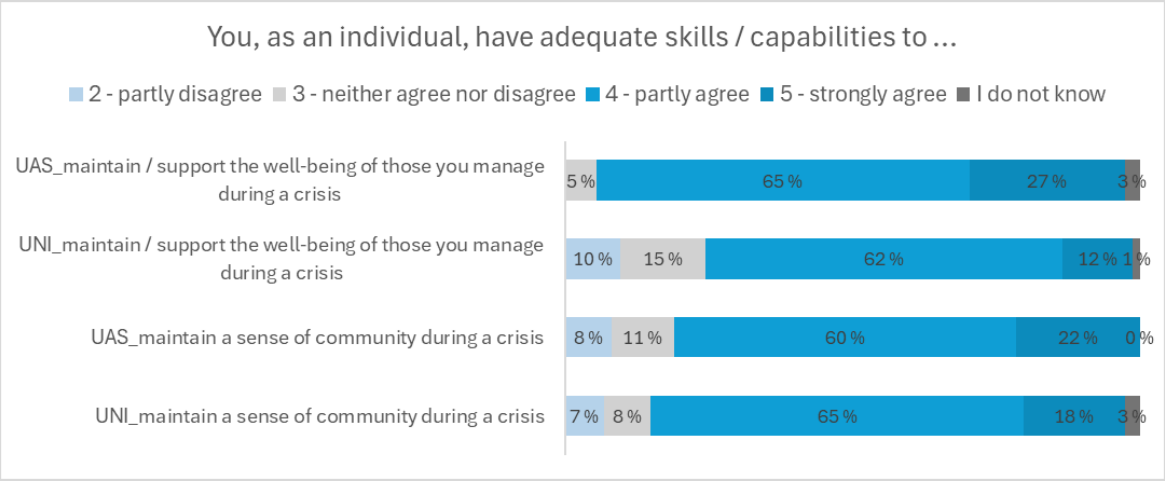

Figure 19. Well-being and community building skills among leaders. Only the responses of leaders at UASes and universities regarding maintaining the well-being of those they manage during crisis were significantly different (Mann-Whitney U, N=111, P=0,004).

In summary, ensuring that the organization works towards building a community where all are included and supported should result in well-being (and many other) benefits, especially during crisis.

Other aspects of well-being

Other topics relevant to well-being were discussed relatively rarely. However, it is worthy of a mention that the feelings of agency, safety, and fair distribution of tasks, as well as tolerance of uncertainty, could all have significant effects on well-being during crises. Multiple panel participants and survey respondents highlighted that the severity of a crisis can be different for different people in the organization, and organizations and leaders should therefore recognize that the needs of individuals in their community during crisis will potentially be highly variable (echoing points made in the Crisis conceptualization section). Panelists viewed flexible working arrangements, for example the ability to work from home some days, as contributing to the well-being of staff, although the possibility of them leading to challenges of community building were also acknowledged. Well-being working groups were discussed positively by a few panelists:

> *One good practice that we saw was that one of the working groups that we have organized here is the well-being at work group, and that group excelled during the corona in such a way that they did a fantastic job for the whole community, just in the way that they created the structures to ensure that the contact is maintained. –Panelist, round 1*

However, it was also expressed that these groups can face challenges in their work, as they may be viewed as groups focusing on superficial fun rather than meaningful tasks, which is an issue that likely needs to be addressed to facilitate further meaningful work on well-being in organizations. Identifying that crises are over and dismantling the crisis focus from the organization was also discussed as a potentially important element of crisis leadership that can facilitate well-being.

> *Mutual cooperation between managers is important. Sharing experiences and good practices during a crisis is important, and then, on the other hand, dismantling the crisis mode. – Survey respondent*

Well-being: summary

Participants expressed a considerable amount of concern for the well-being of the organizational community, but it seemed less clear which concrete steps were taken to ensure it. This leads to a question whether expressions of concern for well-being during crisis are being concretely and meaningfully followed up on at higher education organizations. We observed many discussions of well-being-related data collection and expressions for the need for organizational support and community in crisis, but relatively fewer discussions on how organizations were concretely working towards achieving these goals. We also observed potentially concerning considerations that

indicated a desire or preference to offload or outsource organizational well-being work onto healthcare organizations or individuals.

Concerns about well-being of staff and students during crisis were frequent in the data. To support well-being, participants primarily emphasized a need for organizational community building, insurance that all members of the organization felt included, and organizational support for those who need it. These core well-being-related tasks were identified as being important not just during crisis, but also before and after crisis.

Crises and leadership: a focus on leaders

> *And I think also it's really important that those who are supervisors, that they have the idea, I don't know how to say it, they also feel that they have the responsibility also to talk about these issues, that's it not somebody else somewhere else, but those issues are, have to be dealt in this, if you are a supervisor, that's part of the deal somehow. That you are not able to say that it's not my problem, that go somewhere else. –Panelist, round 1*

We will conclude our report's results with a discussion of panelist and survey respondent observations about leaders and what is needed by, of, and from them regarding crisis leadership. Discussions of leadership permeated the panel discussions, and many of the observations made in the prior sections (e.g., Crises and communication, and Crisis practices) are of course highly relevant to leadership, but in this section, we will highlight issues that were particularly relevant to those who are leaders in organizations.

In general, participants had **a broad view of the concept of leadership** and included lower-level managers and small team leaders in the context of leaders especially during crisis. Thus, the recommendations in this section do not apply solely to those in upper leadership, but anyone who is a supervisor and/or in a position to influence others in the organization. Of relevance to this broad conception is that according to the panelists, leadership during a crisis should not necessarily be determined by position or title, but rather by competences and abilities:

> *I think also it's very important to delegate leadership perhaps in times of crisis when the nominated leaders feel inadequate in dealing with some situation. So, it could be that crisis make leaders, right? And then not just leaders are used for crisis. So, who are those people, who have the capacity, who have the trust of the people, who can step up as leaders and who, we know, are trusted by our colleagues, right? So, I could see that this also is a flexible thing. –Panelist, round 2*

A repeated theme in panelist discussions was leaders **recognizing that each of the people they lead is different** with potentially different needs before, during, and after crises. The experiences of those with small children during COVID-19 were brought up

repeatedly as an example of individual needs, but the variation between individuals goes beyond that.

> *I think one of the best things that the leader can have is develop a capacity to see individually each of the people that they work with. Because each case, it's a case and each person it's different things, right? So, and this happens almost in every level when you are leading a group. –Panelist, round 1*

As previously mentioned, **attending to the practical needs of those in their teams** was a core request of leaders during crisis, including helping individuals to prioritize their tasks and recognize what is essential to maintain and what could be deferred.

> *So, I think these kinds of practicalities in a situation of a crisis would be where the leadership should be focusing on. So, what do these people need in order to continue teaching, what do the students need in order to continue learning, what does the researcher need in order to work home. –Panelist, round 1*

Part of the request to leaders to attend to the practical needs of those they lead includes **listening and actively sharing why the leaders are making the choices** they are making:

> *Listening is extremely important, it is extremely important to listen. And not only hearing, but really listening and trying to understand the different perspectives for the issue, even though the leader has to make a decision that it might be a compromise. But if the leader is reasoning the decisions, explaining why some things need to be decided this way, so I think it's more understood, more accepted [than] if the leader is only making decisions and not explaining why. –Panelist, round 2*

The ability of leadership to shape the perspectives of those around them about how the crisis is proceeding—to do **sensemaking**—was also highlighted as an important part of leadership, and as one that involved frequent communication.

> *I think that communication is without a doubt the most important tool, we can say, in crisis management. And I think it impacts greatly how the crisis is solved or how we see that crisis, if we think about the big event that affects the institution, but not only communication per se, but the way that communication is done. –Panelist, round 1*

Survey respondents also agreed that **supporting the well-being of leaders themselves during crisis** was important. Survey respondents suggested that peer-support, support from their superiors, regular discussions with colleagues and superiors, and sharing good practices between leaders would all help support leader well-being during crisis. Additionally, training for crisis leadership, organizational crisis plans and crisis guidelines, well-functioning information gathering and distribution structures, and clear roles and responsibilities for leaders during crisis would all contribute to the well-being

of leaders. Support for, and the ability to, prioritize during crisis was also seen as essential.

In the survey, leaders of both universities and universities of applied sciences generally reported agreement with the statement that they individually had adequate skills and capabilities to maintain situational awareness during a crisis (Figure 20). As with prior questions, a majority of the responses from both types of organizations being "partly agree", and 8 % (UAS) and 11 % (university) of leaders reporting either partly disagreeing or not knowing, indicated that there could be room for development of these skills at Finnish higher education organizations.

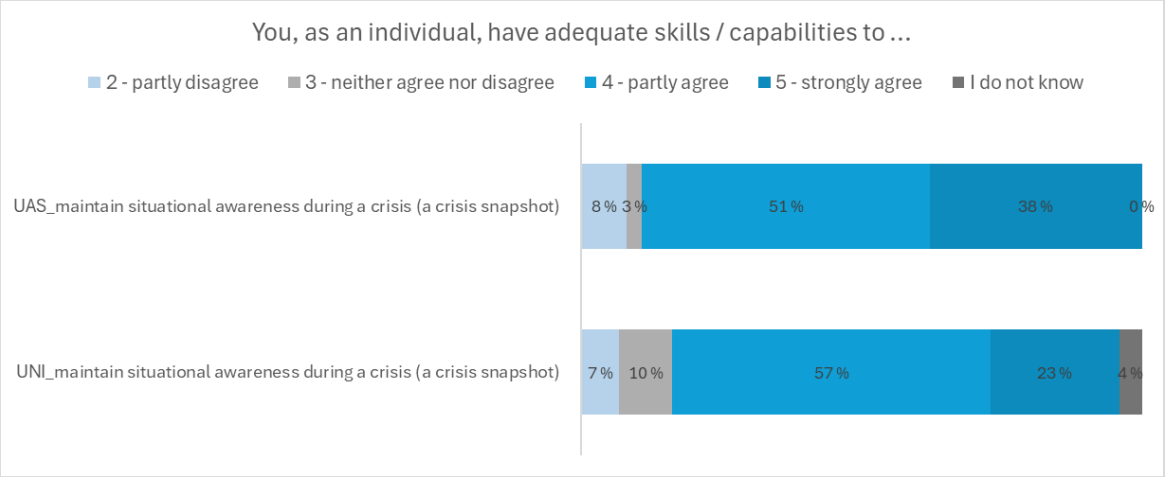

Figure 20. Leadership's skills and capabilities to maintain situational awareness during a crisis. No significant differences were identified between responses from leaders at UASes and universities for this question.

Sharing the challenges of leadership openly was suggested as a way for leaders to build trust and community:

> *Just having the leader explaining like okay, so as a leader, these are the roles that I have and these are the things that I found difficult to pursue. And the, so just putting that out makes people feel, that they are aware that the leader is working and that the, that they might even have like an idea or two to contribute to the leaders dealing with the leadership. –Panelist, round 2*

Another suggestion was **dealing with crises, and not attempting to silence or minimize them**, which was especially discussed in the context of potentially polarizing internally caused crises, such as acts of discrimination or malfeasance:

> *So, in relation to this question, the fact that the university, as far as I know, doesn't, it's, the university seems to be more worried about protecting its image than necessarily protecting its community. –Panelist, round 2*

Panelists who were leaders of smaller teams reported feeling unprepared for crisis (for full details, see section about organizational crisis practices, p. 57), indicating that crisis preparation at Finnish higher educational organizations may benefit from using a broader conception of both leadership and of those who need crisis leadership support.

In summary, while many of the results of this report are relevant to leaders, key elements related to crisis leadership which emerged in this report include that leadership in a crisis should be evaluated dynamically, and that leaders should view those they lead as individuals with variable needs and situations. Furthermore, leaders should meaningfully listen to those they lead, attend to the practical needs of those they lead during crisis, and should ideally not minimize or otherwise attempt to hide crises, especially internally caused ones. Survey and panel data both indicate that lower-level leaders feel less prepared to handle crises than upper-level leaders, thus, ensuring that leaders at all levels of the organization are involved in crisis preparation and planning would likely be worthwhile.

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

> *[Researcher: What was the main theme that stuck in your mind from this discussion? What do you feel is the most important thing that has been discussed?]*
> *Probably the fact that crisis management is not something that lasts for some kind of moment. But it is work a lot before, then it is work after. It is a much longer continuum in terms of time than what I had originally thought about this concept. –Panelist, round 1*

In the previous chapters, we discussed the main themes of crisis conceptualization, crisis practice, crisis communication, well-being in crisis, and needs of leaders during crisis. In addition to these distinct themes, we found three cross-cutting motifs which we will present in this concluding section. After discussing these themes of everyday leadership, diversity and variation, and context, we will continue to list recommendations for best practices regarding crisis leadership at Finnish higher education organizations and identify directions for future research.

Cross-cutting motifs of everyday leadership, diversity, and context

During our data analysis, the following topics emerged as cross-cutting motifs:

1. **Everyday leadership is crisis leadership/crisis leadership is everyday leadership**, or the idea that crisis leadership skills are important skills to have and practice not just during crisis, but in the everyday.
2. **Diversity or variation**, which can be observed at many levels of crisis leadership, such as between and within crises themselves, higher education organizations, and the people that make up those organizations.
3. **Context**, i.e., that the particulars of any crisis or situation matter greatly in determining the outcome and appropriate leadership response.

The idea of **everyday leadership is crisis leadership and/or crisis leadership is everyday leadership** may seem counterintuitive at first. However, good crisis leadership is not limited to leading during a crisis, when one finds oneself in the "situation room" or—using the metaphor presented by one of our panelists—"wearing a hard hat" amid a rapidly developing catastrophe. Rather, good crisis leadership is found in the everyday: in trust and community building, in awareness of the current situation, in bidirectional inclusive communication, in planning for the future, and in ensuring that policies and practices reflect and address current needs. These and other leadership actions are all, of course, useful during a crisis itself: however, their utility is enhanced if they are practiced before and after the crisis, as skills, trust, community, and other practices are developed among all members of the organizational community. Following from this, the organization itself can be resilient during the crisis by simply continuing to implement all the skills and practices that those in the organization have been using every day, and by being a community of trust and belonging for all its members.

The concept of **diversity**, or variation, appeared in nearly every area of crisis leadership: in the types of crises organizations might face, in people and their needs and experiences during crises, in organizational units within an HEI, in leadership skills needed, in communication, and in well-being support needed. The individuals making up an organization will likely have highly diverse experiences of crisis, even of the same crisis, due to variation in personal context, professional role, how the crisis is perceived, and variable crisis effects. While listing all ways in which people or groups could be variable within higher education organizations is a task for its own report, participants mentioned particularly the following: linguistic, cultural, relationship to the organization, organizational culture, employment groups, student groups, physical location, disability, caregiver status, family status, and prior experiences of crisis. Identifying the diversity present in the organization and ensuring that leadership's policies and practices address the full diversity of the organization should be a primary goal of leadership when it comes to crisis (and everyday) leadership.

The **contextual** particulars of any individual crisis, organization, organizational unit, leader, staff, and moment in time all have the potential to dramatically alter the situational dynamics. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions for crisis leadership, and organizations and those in them who lead in times of crisis must pay attention to the context in which they are working. This does not mean that one cannot prepare for crises; what it does imply, however, is that while detailed and structural planning is beneficial, crisis preparation could also include aspects of "preparing for the unknown" by increasing tolerance of uncertainties, and by supporting the resilience of the organization by emphasizing the importance of a functioning leadership outside of crisis situations (see above discussion of "Everyday leadership is crisis leadership").

Recommendations

In this report we have attempted to highlight many elements of higher education crisis leadership, hoping to, in some small way, address the need expressed by many of the panelists: to have a platform where best practices are shared and developed between organizations. The following list of recommendations (Figure 21) is neither complete nor exhaustive and is not presented in any particular order. We have attempted to summarize many of the main recommendations that emerged from our data, but also hope that each organization can review the findings of this report and draw their own conclusions. We also hope that organizations will continue developing their crisis leadership practices, including sharing their developments with the educational community to allow collaborative development and ultimately, improved outcomes in future crises of different types.

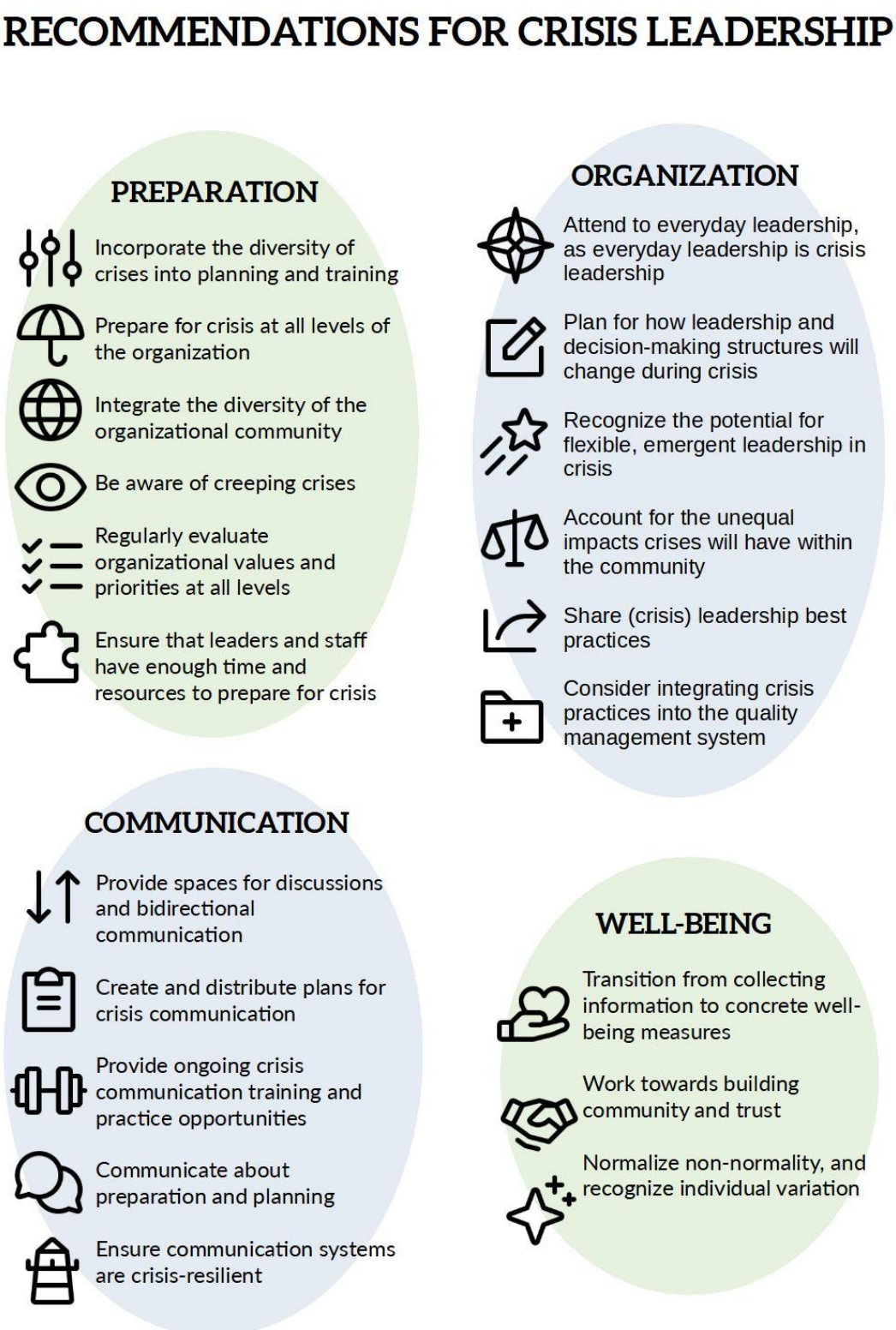

Figure 21. Summary of the project's recommendations. Illustration by Laura Minkkinen.

Preparation

- **Acknowledge the diversity of crises the organization may face and incorporate this into organizational and leadership training and practices.** The environment is constantly changing, and organizations must ensure they are not stuck creating plans for crises past, or crises irrelevant to the present day. Reviewing the crisis conceptualization section may help, and furthermore, ensuring that the organizational leadership's conception of crisis aligns with the reality of the broad diversity of crises the organization may face will likely be useful.

- **Carry out crisis preparation work (planning, practice, etc.), which also integrates the diversity of the community, at all levels of the organization.** While planning for all potential crises is not possible, focusing on elements that apply across crises should help enhance organizational and personal resilience. Those in the middle and lower levels of the organization especially appeared to feel less prepared and reported less crisis preparation occurring, a deficit that should be addressed to promote enhanced organizational resilience. While students were not in the scope of this report, engaging students in this work has great potential for synergistic benefits. Integrating lessons learned from prior crises into existing operations and crisis preparation efforts is also essential.

- **Incorporate the diversity of the organizational community when planning**. Diversity in this context has many meanings, including but not limited to linguistic, work or study role, cultural, experience, communication preferences, and physical or mental abilities. Of particular note is the need to take into account the wide diversity of mental and physical disabilities those in the university community may have when planning for and responding to crises. Organizations should identify the types of diversity relevant to their own crisis planning and ensure both that their crisis plans take this diversity into account and that a diverse section of the community is involved in crisis planning.

- **Be aware of creeping crises.** Some crises start so slowly that it is difficult to grasp them or realize that they are (impending) crises. Take care of things seeming small before they become big.

- **Regularly evaluate organizational values and priorities at all levels.** It is essential for leaders, staff, and others to acknowledge what is important to the community (both in crisis and non-crisis) when working in higher education. Having identified and agreed-upon values and priorities has the potential to clarify decision-making and speed up responses during crisis, potentially saving lives.

- **Ensure that leaders and staff have the time and resources necessary** to prepare for and respond to crisis. Budgeting and work allocation plans have the potential to be key tools in creating resilience within organizations.

Organization

- **Attend to everyday leadership, as everyday leadership is crisis leadership too**. HEIs should pay attention to leadership training from the perspective of trust, communication, and other topics that are relevant to leadership in the everyday, as they will support the resilience of the organization and leadership in crisis.
- **Plan for how leadership and decision-making structures and practices will, should, or could, change during crisis.** Share these plans with the organizational community. This can include discussions of, for instance, how directive vs. distributed or self-organizing the crisis response should be, and how these alterations to structures and practices could vary depending on the situation (e.g., crisis type). Note that this planning is relevant to all organizational levels, as some crises may affect only a part of the organization and thus not require an organization-wide response or organization-wide restructuring.
- **Recognize the potential for flexible, emergent leadership in crisis**. As one panelist said, during crisis it may be wise to ask: "who are those people who have the capacity, who have the trust of the people, who can step up as leaders?" Those in formal leadership positions during crisis may not have the best skillset to handle all elements of the crisis, and therefore delegating and recognizing leadership from others during crisis may provide enhanced outcomes.
- Recognize that **crises will have unequal impacts within the organizational community**. Plan for how leadership can best assist those most affected by any crisis. For example, workers in some professional roles may be overwhelmed with tasks, and the (re)distribution of work during the crisis should be attended to.
- **Share crisis leadership best practices.** Create and use venues for sharing of information on higher education organization (crisis) leadership best practices and experiences across and within organizations at multiple organizational levels. Build on work conducted within ARENE, UNIFI, and others for continuous development.

- **Consider integrating crisis practices into the quality management system of higher education organizations**, including the evaluation of quality management system.

Communication

- **Provide spaces for discussions** on experiences of crisis and feelings (of preparation, of support, of concern, etc.) regarding crises of all types. See quote at the end of our report for an example of the power of open discussion. These spaces for discussion will help facilitate **bidirectional communication** — communication flowing from formal leadership to the organizational community and vice versa — which should promote positive outcomes in all crisis phases.
- **Create and distribute clear plans for crisis communication.** Pay attention to communication during a variety of crises and provide ongoing (crisis) communication training and practice opportunities for leaders at all levels. Communication before, during, and after crisis is complex, requiring a diverse skillset that includes physical, emotional, leadership, and technological skills. Reviewing the themes identified in our results section on communication and reflecting on how they align with organizational practices may provide a useful avenue towards identifying what may be valuable to include in such training and practices.
- **Communicate about preparation and planning**. While all universities are mandated to carry out crisis preparation planning, some in the community (as well as in the leadership levels) are not aware of this planning or not certain that it is happening. Upper leadership appears to be the most aware of crisis planning and preparation, but those in lower levels of leadership and staff likely both need and want to know about current events.
- **Ensure existing communication systems are resilient** and capable of functioning in a wide variety of crises, and that leaders and staff at all levels are aware of the plans regarding communication resilience during crisis. A surprisingly high fraction of leaders in our research shared that they were unaware of what they should do if communication systems would go down.

Well-being

- **Transition from collecting information about well-being to concrete measures and developing practices.** Based on the views of the panelists and survey respondents, as well as on our previous research, it seems there was considerable interest in well-being and a copious amount of related data

collection. However, it remained unclear how the data was channeled into organizational decision-making or concrete actions relating to well-being.

- **Work towards building community and trust.** Among all the discussions of crisis leadership and well-being, the importance of community, belonging, and trust were repeatedly emphasized. These take time to foster, and must be attended to not just during crisis, but well before.
- **Normalize non-normality**. Every organization is ultimately composed of various groups and individuals, each of whom will experience crises differently and have different needs at different points in time. Thus, all crisis leadership work needs to account for structural and individual variation in their staff, students, and other community members while planning for crisis, leading during crisis, and recovering from crisis.

Future research directions

During this project, we identified multiple areas that would likely benefit from additional research (Table 10). Given the relatively understudied nature of higher education crisis leadership, we are certain the listing below is not comprehensive, and look forward to seeing the multiple directions future researchers take in this area.

Table 10. Future research directions identified during this project.

Incorporate crisis diversity into higher education crisis research: How do the demands placed on leaders and the processes of leadership vary with the diversity of possible crises?
Crisis preparation for everyday workers and line managers: How do higher education organizations prepare staff on all levels for crisis?
Supporting well-being during crisis: How can higher education organizations best support the well-being of their staff and students during crisis, and how can they best prepare to do this before crises occur?
Timescales during crisis: How does the flow of time and the pace of activities change during crisis?
Equity in crisis: How can organizations be equitable or incorporate principles of equity into crisis leadership? Have organizations been equitable in their past crisis leadership practices? Is crisis research itself being conducted in an equitable manner?
Honestly evaluate readiness: Are organizations truly ready for future crises, and how can this be evaluated?
Trust in crisis: How does trust interact with crisis leadership? Why do leaders appear to have less trust in their staff in comparison to the other members of the organization regarding crisis preparedness?
Integrate students: How can we integrate student knowledge, experiences, and outcomes into crisis leadership research and crisis leadership at organizations (i.e., preparation, response, and recovery)?

Concluding words

Crisis leadership is challenging. Leaders need to work to ensure the safety of their community and the continuous functioning of the organization, while also attending to their own well-being in a potentially highly uncertain situation. However, "challenging" does not mean "impossible": sufficient preparation and awareness have the potential to prevent problems from becoming crises, and a focus on everyday leadership ensures that the organization is as resilient as possible and as ready as it can be for what the world throws at it next.

Crisis leadership requires both decisive and inclusive aspects, and the ability to recognize the contextual factors affecting different needs (of the organization, of staff, of students, of external stakeholders, of the nation, of the world, and of themselves) in different situations. Crises often force people to face their own mortality, to make literal life-or-death decisions that come with lasting consequences both for those who make them and those who are affected by them. Furthermore, crises are always emotional, and their emotionality can have very material outcomes in the community.

We hope that the combined wisdom of the higher education leaders and other staff who participated in this project will be of some aid, but we do recognize that there is much more to do. We are particularly struck by the importance of exploring how to broadly prepare for crisis across organizations without overwhelming their staff, studying the emotional side of crisis, and opening the potential for student involvement in crisis leadership and its research. Moreover, we have not even touched on the manyfold challenges of continuing to facilitate learning (i.e., teaching) during crisis.

We would like to end with a quote by one of our panelists, as we feel it encapsulates much of what we have discussed during this study and this report: open and inclusive discussions, during which we can share our experiences of crisis, can be the first step in functioning crisis leadership:

> *I was wondering all the time like why am I feeling so comfortable about talking all these different experiences and difficult stuff. And these actually, this kind of situation is actually a solution or something that contributes in itself. Because if you think that this is in the context of a project. But if it weren't in the context of a project, if it were in the context of regular meetings in a certain community, that people have the chance of talking about how they perceive certain situations and how leadership could improve or lead in different ways and so on, that would create something that I at least have never experienced in my academic career so far, which is the opportunity to talk about personal experiences that indicate structural problems. So, kind of, I appreciate this space. And I just wanted to bring this up here because I think what you're doing is in itself an example of what could be done. –Panelist, round 2*

REFERENCES

Aarnikoivu M., & Saarinen T. (2022). Chapter 4 Finland. In A. Veiga & T. Seidenschnur (Eds.), *The role of European universities in an age of pandemic* (pp. 99-123). Working papers 37. Danish school of education, Aarhus University.

Aarrevaara, T., Dobson, I., & Pekkola, E. (2011). Finland: CAPtive academics: An examination of the binary divide. In W. Locke, W. K. Cummings, & D. Fisher (Eds.), *Changing governance and management in higher education: the perspectives of the academy* (pp. 243-262). *Springer*.

Abbas, R. K., Nahhas, E. A. H., Zoabi, K., Marey-Sarwan, I., & Abu Ahmad, H. (2021). Real time experience of participants in higher education during the coronavirus: A case study. *Curriculum and Teaching*, 36(1), 51–70. https://doi.org/10.7459/ct/36.1.05

Antikainen, M., Terkamo-Moisio, A., & Häggman-Laitila, A. (2021). Hoitotyön johtajien ja hoitotyöntekijöiden työhyvinvointi ja työskentely koronapandemian aikana. *Tutkiva hoitotyö*, 19(4), 3–11. https://erepo.uef.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/26748/1642590998843224327.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

Bass, B. M., & Bass, R. (2008). *The Bass handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (4th ed., pp. 15–23). Free Press.

Blackmore, J. (2020). The carelessness of entrepreneurial universities in a world risk society: a feminist reflection on the impact of Covid-19 in Australia. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(7), 1332–1336. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1825348

Boin, A., Kuipers, S., & Overdijk, W. (2013). Leadership in times of crisis: A framework for assessment. *International Review of Public Administration*, 18(1), 79–91.

Boin, A., Rhinard, M., & Ekengren, M. (2014). Managing transboundary crises: The emergence of European Union capacity. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 22: 131-142. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12052

Boin, A., & 't Hart, P. (2003). Public leadership in times of crisis: mission impossible? *Public administration review*, 63(5), 544-553.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (*2006*). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bravo-Laguna C. (2021). Transboundary crisis management under the volcano: The case of the Icelandic ash cloud. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 29(1), 77–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12303

Buama, C. A. C. (2019). *Crisis communication and crisis management*. Society Publishing.

Bundy, J., Pfarrer, M. D., Short, C. E., & Coombs, W. T. (2017). Crises and crisis management: Integration, interpretation, and research development. *Journal of Management*, 43(6), 1661–1692. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316680030

Carr, R. M., Lane-Fall, M. B., South, E., Brady, D., Momplaisir, F., Guerra, C. E., Montoya-Williams, D., Dalembert, G., Lavizzo-Mourey, R., & Hamilton, R. (2021). Academic careers and the COVID-19 pandemic: Reversing the tide. *Science Translational Medicine*, 13(584). https://doi.org/10.1126/scitranslmed.abe7189

Clark, B.R. (1983). *The higher education system. Academic organization in cross-national perspective*. University of California Press.

Coaxum, J., Farrow, M., & Manning, J. (2022). Education leadership programs responding to current American crises. *Impacting Education: Journal on Transforming Professional Practice*, 7(3), 34–39. https://doi.org/10.5195/ie.2022.223

Collins, R. (2011). Credential inflation and the future of universities. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3(2), 228-251.

Constitution of Finland [*Suomen perustuslaki*] 731/1999. Ministry of Justice.

Coombs, W. T., & Tachkova, E. R. (2022). Elaborating the concept of threat in contingency theory: An integration with moral outrage and situational crisis communication theory. *Public Relations Review*, *48*(4), 102234. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102234

Corbera, E., Anguelovski, I., Honey-Rosés, J., & Ruiz-Mallén, I. (2020). Academia in the time of COVID-19: Towards an ethics of care. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 21(2), 191–199, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2020.1757891

Cornell, D. G. & Sheras, P. L. (1998). Common errors in school crisis response: Learning from our mistakes. *Psychology in the Schools*, 35(3), 297–307. https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1520-6807(199807)35:3<297::aid-pits9>3.0.co;2-k

Dayagbil, F. T. (2023). Anticipation, coping and adaptation practices for teaching and learning continuity of higher education institutions. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 11(1), 106–119. https://doi.org/10.18488/61.v11i1.3267

Facer, K., Parry, B., Taylor, L., Bradley, J., & Little, S. (2022). Embracing the unpredictable effect of one person: an interview with Professor Keri Facer. *Literacy*, 56: 86–92.

Filippou, K., & Jokila, S. (2024). Academic, social, and financial changes in international students' lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 14(2), 1-18.

Georgi, F. (2019). Toward fortress capitalism: The restrictive transformation of migration and border regimes as a reaction to the capitalist multicrisis. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 56(4), 556-579.

Haklay, M. (2013). Citizen science and volunteered geographic information: Overview and typology of participation. In D.Z. Sui & S. Elwood (Eds.), *Crowdsourcing geographic knowledge: volunteered geographic information (VGI) in theory and practice*. Berlin: Springer, 105-122.

Helsloot I, & Groenendaal J. (2017). It's meaning making, stupid! Success of public leadership during flash crises. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 25, 350–353. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12166

Henig, D., & Knight, D. M. (2023). Polycrisis: Prompts for an emerging worldview. *Anthropology Today*, 39(2), 3–6. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12793

Hier, S. P., & Greenberg, J. L. (2002). Constructing a discursive crisis: Risk, problematization and illegal Chinese in Canada. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 25:3, 490-513. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870020036701

Kassem, R., & Mitsakis, F. (2024). UK higher education staff's mental health and wellbeing during Covid-19. *Employee Relations*, *46*(2), 229–249. https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-03-2023-0166

Kaukko, M., Kemmis, S., Heikkinen, H. L., Kiilakoski, T., & Haswell, N. (2021). Learning to survive amidst nested crises: can the coronavirus pandemic help us change educational practices to prepare for the impending eco-crisis? *Environmental Education Research*, 27(11), 1559-1573. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2021.1962809

Kele, K., & Mzilen, P. (2021). Higher education leadership responses applied in two South African comprehensive universities during the COVID-19 pandemic: A critical discourse analysis. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 6. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/the.v6i0.114

Kihlström, L., Huhtakangas, M., Karreinen, S., Viita-aho, M., Jormanainen, V., Keskimäki, I., & Tynkkynen, L. K. (2021). *Globaali pandemia ja paikalliset ratkaisut: COVID-19 pandemian paikallinen hallinta ja johtaminen Suomessa*. https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/143125/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-731-9.pdf?sequence=1.

Kivistö, J., & Kohtamäki, V. (2022). COVID-19 and Finnish universities: A flexible policy response. In F. Netswera, A. A. Woldegiyorgis & T. Karabchuk (Eds.), *Higher education and the COVID-19 pandemic* (pp. 303-315). Brill.

Kohtamäki, V. (2024). Ammattikorkeakoulujen autonomian hybridisyys ylläpitäjähallinnon ja osakeyhtiöhallinnon konteksteissa. *Tiedepolitiikka*, 2(2024), 40-51. https://doi.org/10.58957/tp.142713

Kotter, J. P. (1990). *A force for change: How leadership differs from management*. Free Press.

Kuoppala, K. (2014). Korkeakoulut organisaatioina. In E. Pekkola, J. Kivistö, & V. Kohtamäki (Eds.), *Korkeakouluhallinto: Johtaminen, talous ja politiikka* (pp. 245–290).

Le, A. T. (2021). Support for doctoral candidates in Australia during the pandemic: The case of the University of Melbourne. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(1), 133–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1859677

Liou, Y.-H. (2015). School crisis management. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 51(2), 247–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x14532467

Marchant, E., Dowd, J., Bray, L., Rowlands, G., Miles, N., Crick, T., James, M., Dadaczynski, K., & Okan, O. (2024). The well-being and work-related stress of senior school leaders in Wales and Northern Ireland during COVID-19 “educational leadership crisis”: A cross-sectional descriptive study. *PLOS ONE*, 19(4), e0291278. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0291278

McNamara, A. (2021). Crisis management in higher education in the time of COVID-19: The case of actor training. *Education Sciences*, 11. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11030132

Menon, K., & Motala, S. (2021). Pandemic leadership in higher education: New horizons, risks and complexities. *Education as Change*, 25. https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/8880

Merjonen, P., Sainio, M., Torppa, M., Hämeenaho, P., Poikkeus, A.-M., & Aro, T. (2022). Millainen johtaminen tuki peruskoulujen henkilöstön työhyvinvointia covid-19-pandemiasta johtuneen etäkoulun aikana? *Kasvatus*, 53(5), 513–529. https://doi.org/10.33348/kvt.125526

Miller, M. T. (2021). Do learning organizations learn? Higher education institutions and pandemic response strategies. *The Learning Organization*, 28(1), 84–93. https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-09-2020-0159

Nokkala, T., Aarnikoivu, M., & Saarinen, T. (2023). "We shouldn't let academia exhaust ourselves anymore!": Pandemic practices and the changing psychological contract in twenty-first-century academia. In R. Pinheiro, E. Balbachevsky, P. Pillay, & A. Yonezawa (Eds.), *The impact of covid-19 on the institutional fabric of higher education: Old patterns, new dynamics, and changing rules?* (pp. 321–344). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26393-4_13

O'Shea, M., Mou, L., Xu, L., & Aikins, R. (2022). Communicating COVID-19: Analyzing higher education institutional responses in Canada, China, and the USA. *Higher Education Policy*, 35(3), 629–650. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00276-y

Oxford English Dictionary. (2024). Management. In Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved July 29, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7522524058.

Parpala, A., & Niinistö-Sivuranta, S. (2022). Leading teaching during a pandemic in higher education: A case study in a Finnish university. *Education Sciences*, 12. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030147

Pedraza, J. M. (2010). Elements for effective management of a business corporation crisis situation. In P. Alvintzi & H. Eder (Eds.), *Crisis management* (pp. 1–46). Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Pekkola, E. (2011). Kollegiaalinen ja manageriaalinen johtaminen suomalaisissa yliopistoissa. *Hallinnon Tutkimus*, 2011(1), 37-55.

Pekkola, E., & Kivistö, J. (2019a). Government, policy, and the role of the state in higher Education (Finland). In J. Kauko, & W. J. Jacob (Eds.), *Bloomsbury education and childhood studies.* Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350995925.0014

Pekkola, E., & Kivistö, J. (2019b). Management, leadership, and governance in higher education (Finland). In J. Kauko, & J. W. Jacob (Eds.), *Bloomsbury education and childhood studies.* Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350995925.0015

Pekkola, E., Siekkinen, T., Kujala, E.-N., Kanniainen, J.-P., & Laihonen, H. (2021). An assessment of COVID-19's impact on Finnish university leadership. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice*, *19*(4), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/14778238.2021.1906773

Pekkola, E., Siekkinen, T., Peltola, M., Laihonen, H., & Kujala, E.-N. (2023). Remote universities?: Impacts of COVID-19 as experienced by academic leaders in Finland. In R. Pinheiro, E. Balbachevsky, P. Pillay, & A. Yonezawa (Eds.), *The impact of covid-19 on the institutional fabric of higher education: old patterns, new dynamics, and changing rules?* Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26393-4_15

Perkins, M. C. (2023). *Reflecting on educational leadership during COVID-19: Experiences of Finnish higher education leaders and lessons for future crises and emergencies*. Master's Thesis in Educational Sciences. University of Jyväskylä. Faculty of Education and Psychology. https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/87283

Perkins, M., Saarinen, T., Siekkinen, T., Pekkola, E., Laine, K., & Minkkinen, L. (2024). *KKJKT Project: An investigation into crisis leadership at Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences using panel discussions and surveys* [project metadata]. University of Jyväskylä. https://doi.org/10.17011/jyx/dataset/96664

Pursiainen, C. (2018). *The crisis management cycle: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Riggio, R. E., & Newstead, T. (2023). Crisis leadership. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 10, 201–224. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-044838

Ruostetsaari, I. (2023). *Huippujohtajat kriisien Suomessa: Eliitit ja vallan verkostot 1990-luvulta 2020-luvulle*. Gaudeamus.

Scott, P. (2018). *The crisis of the university*. Routledge.

Sewpersad, R., Ruggunan, S., Adam, J. K., & Krishna, S. B. N. (2019). The impact of the psychological contract on academics. *SAGE Open*, 9(2), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019840122

Shaya, N., Abukhait, R., Madani, R., & Khattak, M. N. (2023). Organizational resilience of higher education institutions: An empirical study during COVID-19 pandemic. *Higher Education Policy*, 36(3), 529–555. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00272-2

Shen, J. (2010). University academics' psychological contracts and their fulfilment. *Journal of Management Development*, 29(6), 575–591. https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711011046549

Shillington, A. M., Gehlert, S., Nurius, P. S., Delva, J., Hooyman, N. R., Manderscheid, R. W., & Palinkas, L. A. (2020). Commentary: COVID-19 and long-term impacts on tenure-line careers. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 11(4), 499–507. https://doi.org/10.1086/712579

Siekkinen, T. Pekkola, E., & Nokkala, T. (2022). Visible organisational boundaries and the invisible boundaries of the scholarly profession. *European Journal of Higher Education*. Journal article. Published online. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2060846

Simonet, D. V. & Tett, R. P. (2012). Five perspectives on the leadership–management relationship. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *20*(2), 199–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051812467205

Sjöblom, K., Mäkiniemi, J. P., Juutinen, S., Oksanen, A., & Mäkikangas, A. (2022). *Turvallisesti etänä–työhyvinvointi ja sen johtaminen etätyössä: Hankkeen loppuraportti.* https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-03-2690-6

Smith, D. (2022). More pivots than a centipede on ice skates: Reflections on shared leadership in a post-secondary institution during COVID-19. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*. https://doi.org/10.7202/1092709ar

Stark, A., McConnell, A., & Drennan, L. T. (2013). *Risk and crisis management in the public sector*. Routledge.

Stenvall, J., Leskelä, R. L., Rannisto, P. H., Tolkki, H., Cansel, A., Leponiemi, U., & Tupala, T. (2022). *Koronajohtaminen Suomessa: Arvio covid-19-pandemian johtamisesta ja hallinnosta syksystä 2020 syksyyn 2021*. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2022:34. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163995/VNTEAS_2022_34.pdf?sequence=1

Stråth, B., & Wodak, R. (2009). Europe—discourse—politics—media—history: Constructing 'crises'?. In A. Triandafyllidou, R. Wodak & M. Krzyżanowski (Eds.), *The European public sphere and the media: Europe in crisis* (pp. 15-33). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Strayhorn, T. (2021). Lessons learned from institutional responses to COVID-19: Evidenced-based insights from a qualitative study of historically black community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 46(1–2), 30–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2021.1975173

Striepe, M., & Cunningham, C. (2021). Understanding educational leadership during times of crises: A scoping review. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60(2), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-03-2021-0057

Sumer, M., Douglas, T., & Sim, K. N. (2021). Academic development through a pandemic crisis: Lessons learnt from three cases incorporating technical, pedagogical and social support. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 18(5), 1.

't Hart P., & Boin, A. (2001). Between crisis and normalcy: the long shadow of post-crisis politics. In U. Rosenthal, A. Boin & L. K. Comfort (Eds.), *Managing crises: threats, dilemmas, opportunities* (pp. 28-46). Charles C. Thomas.

Tracy, S. J. (2020). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell. http://www.wiley.com/go/tracy2e

Turner, P., & Zepeda, E. M. (2023). Navigating white waters: Generation Z untraditional college transition amid unprecedented social, health, and academic crisis. *Higher Education Studies*, 13(2), 87–105. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v13n2p87

Universities Act [Yliopistolaki]. (558/2009). https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2009/20090558

Universities of Applied Sciences Act [Ammattikorkeakoululaki]. (932/2014). https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2014/20140932

Varga-Atkins, T., Sharpe, R., Bennett, S., Alexander, S., & Littlejohn, A. (2021). The choices that connect uncertainty and sustainability: Student-centred agile decision-making approaches used by universities in Australia and the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, 2021(1). https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.649

Veiga, A., & Seidenschnur, T. (Eds.). (2022a). *The role of European universities in an age of pandemic.* CHEF Working Papers 37. University of Aarhus.

Veiga, A., & Seidenschnur, T. (2022b). Introduction. In Veiga, A., & Seidenschnur, T. (Eds.). (2022). *The role of European universities in an age of pandemic.* CHEF Working Papers 37. University of Aarhus.

Virella, P. M. (2023). Introducing the pillars of equity-oriented crisis leadership: A conceptual framework. *School Leadership & Management*, 43(4), 390–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2186848

Virtanen, T. (2020). Johtaminen korkeakouluissa. In V. Kohtamäki, E. Pekkola and J. Kivistö (Eds.), *Korkeakouluhallinto. Johtaminen, talous ja politiikka. Gaudeamus, 289–328.*

Välimaa, J. (2019). Elämää siiloissa: Managerialismin vaikutuksia yliopistoissa. *Aikuiskasvatus* 39(2), 151–156. https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.82987

Weick K.E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21(1), 1–19.

Werron, T., & Ringel, L. (2020). Pandemic practices, part one. How to turn "living through the COVID-19 pandemic" into a heuristic tool for sociological theorizing. *Sociologica*, 14(2), 55–72. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/11172

Wooten, L. P., & James, E. H. (2008). Linking crisis management and leadership competencies: The role of human resource development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 10(3), 352–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422308316450

Wu, Y. L., Shao, B., Newman, A., & Schwarz, G. (2021). Crisis leadership: A review and future research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32(6), 101518. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101518

Yliaska, V. (2015). New public management as a response to the crisis of the 1970s: The case of Finland, 1970–1990. *Contemporary European History*, 24(3), 435–459. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0960777315000247

Örücü, D., & Kutlugün, H. E. (2022). Navigating the COVID-19 turbulence in higher education: Evidence from Turkish faculty members. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 7(3), 597–631. http://dx.doi.org/10.30828/real.1159121

Authors

Marc Perkins, Project Researcher, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, ORCID ID: 0009-0000-9738-6840

Taina Saarinen, Research Professor, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5117-2756

Taru Siekkinen, Postdoctoral Researcher, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7853-9979

Elias Pekkola, University Lecturer, Faculty of Management and Business, Tampere University, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4805-7423

Kati Laine, Project Researcher, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1747-036X

Laura Minkkinen, Project Secretary, Finnish Institute for Educational Research, University of Jyväskylä, ORCID ID: 0009-0000-9786-5577

Appendix 1: Detailed data on survey questions

On the next page, you will find a table with detailed statistics on some of the survey questions.

	University			UAS			Total		
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
My higher education organisation's management system worked well during the exceptional circumstances	4,22	72	0,755	4,81	37	0,569	4,42	109	0,749
The well-being of staff (all employees) was well-managed during the exceptional circumstances	3,64	72	1,011	4,24	37	1,038	3,84	109	1,056
Coordination within my organisation's faculties supported my leadership during the exceptional circumstances	4,17	72	1,126	4,43	37	0,867	4,26	109	1,049
Leadership had the time and resources to maintain sufficient situational awareness to facilitate rapid decision-making during the exceptional circumstances	3,99	72	1,157	4,54	37	0,96	4,17	109	1,121
Decision-making at the organisational level recognized and accounted for the varying culture and context present across the organisation	3,67	72	1,233	4,08	37	1,233	3,81	109	1,243
Social impact and collaboration continued despite the exceptional circumstances	4,08	72	0,989	4,41	37	0,985	4,19	109	0,995
Lessons learned about crisis leadership during the exceptional circumstances were discussed and integrated into organisational operations in the period after the exceptional circumstances ended	3,87	72	1,363	4,62	37	1,163	4,13	109	1,341
My higher education organisation's internal communication worked well in exceptional circumstances	3,99	72	1,028	4,61	36	0,903	4,19	108	1,027
My organisation's external communication worked well during the exceptional circumstances	4,01	72	1,041	4,58	36	0,841	4,2	108	1,012
My organisation's student administration worked well during the state of emergency	4,35	72	0,906	4,78	36	0,722	4,49	108	0,87
Faculty/organisational day-to-day (staff) management was well-managed digitally	3,94	72	0,854	4,42	36	0,937	4,1	108	0,906
The transfer of teaching to digital delivery was smooth	3,69	72	1,263	4,36	36	1,073	3,92	108	1,239
Research continued uninterrupted despite the exceptional circumstances	3,9	72	1,177	4,42	36	1,079	4,07	108	1,166
International activities continued despite the exceptional circumstances	3,26	72	1,256	3,5	36	1,464	3,34	108	1,327

IT support services for faculties worked well during the exceptional circumstances	4,13	72	0,992	4,78	36	0,722	4,34	108	0,959
National coordination between higher education organisations supported my leadership during the exceptional circumstances	3,76	72	1,64	4,14	36	1,334	3,89	108	1,549
National guidance from the Ministry of Education and Culture and other ministries supported my leadership during the exceptional circumstances	3,37	72	1,707	4,14	36	1,268	3,63	108	1,61