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**Thrive, Survive or Die:  
The Crossroads of Nonprofit Organizational Resilience and Crisis  
Management.**

by

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## **Abstract**

The events of recent years have highlighted the increased need for nonprofit organizations to develop competencies in crisis management and engage in activities to develop resilience. This research project utilized a mixed-methods approach. Firstly, a comprehensive review of literature is included exploring cross-sectoral best practices in the fields of risk and crisis management, definitions, and theoretical conceptualizations of organizational resilience. To complement these findings and provide nonprofit-specific perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of experts including nonprofit leaders, experts, and academic researchers. Qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted and combined with the literature findings in the proposed Nonprofit Resilience Umbrella Model, which combines overarching nonprofit resilience concepts, with key resilience factors, and specific activities within the phases of crisis management. The model is combined with key recommendations for the included nonprofit resilient factors (leadership, organizational culture, financial health, sustainable orientation, information technology, and communications), crisis management activities, and effective governance through the establishment of policies and procedures. This research has provided recommendations for nonprofit leaders and professionals to lead the development of resilience capacity and effective crisis management practices to ensure NPOs are built to survive and thrive. Limitations of this research include the broad view of nonprofit organizational crisis management and organizational resilience, and the small sample size included in the qualitative analysis. With additional time and funding, future studies could examine crisis management case studies in specific organization types, sizes and include multicultural perspectives to gain further insight into factors contributing to resilient NPOs.

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## **Introduction**

The events of recent years have brought four critical issues to the forefront: global pandemics, economic crisis, racial inequities, and climate change. Across sectors, these issues have plagued organizations with multiple unexpected events of varying typology and severity. Empirical literature describes these unexpected events as “rare events”, “surprises”, “catastrophes”, or “crises” (Duchek, 2020).

A crisis is defined as “a time of great danger, difficulty, or confusion when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Crisis can occur both internally and externally to an organization and differ greatly depending on aspects such as the type, place, time, frequency, and duration (Duchek, 2020). Crises have the potential to threaten the safety of an organization’s publics’, its financial stability, and its reputation (Coombs, 2014a).

No organization is immune to crisis (Jordan et al. 2016). Frequently the challenging conditions brought by crises test organizations in multiple dimensions and often result in their disintegration. With increasing globalization and the acceleration of technological advances both societal and organizational vulnerabilities are progressively increasing alongside the frequency and complexity of crisis events that occur (Björck, 2016).

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are recognized for the promotion of grass-roots economic development, delivering essential human services, protecting civil rights, preventing environmental degradation among many other objectives that were previously poorly addressed or wholly neglected by the state (Salamon, 1994). NPOs utilize collaborative networks and engage in advocacy efforts, to influence political decision-making and power dynamics to improve the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable populations, and in doing so mitigate social risk (Hutton et al. 2016).

Haupt & Azevedo (2021), highlight that the nature of nonprofit work and involvement in emergency response efforts predisposes NPOs to a range of potential operational and reputational crises. When a crisis strikes NPOs are required to act concurrently (Duchek, 2020). The required action will vary depending on the type of crisis.

For instance, the crisis response required by Oxfam in response to the media publication of sexual misconduct allegations (Komarek-Meyer & Krišová, 2018), is vastly different from the crisis response required by The Museum of Chinese in America when 85,000 of its artifacts were lost in a fire (Correal, 2020), or that of the International Committee of the Red Cross delivering humanitarian aid in conflict zones in Syria during the COVID-19 pandemic (icrc.org, 2021, May 5).

The first requires rapid action to rescue the organization's reputation, whereas the second requires assessment of the acquired damage and re-strategization of the organization's activities given the loss of most of its assets and revenue-generating items. Whereas the third requires a rapid and coordinated response to ensure those whose lives are endangered receive timely, high-quality, and appropriate humanitarian services that address their most urgent needs.

The events of recent years, including the Covid-19 pandemic, have highlighted the increased demand for nonprofit services when a crisis occurs. Many NPOs at the community, national, and international levels play a central role in crisis response and frequently serve as the last of defense protecting societies' most vulnerable communities (Karlsson-Brown, 2020).

This increased demand for NPO services continues into the crisis recovery phase and requires NPOs to invest resources to protect and assist these populations (Tobin & Montz, 2009), who are increasingly impacted by unforeseen circumstances (MacRae, 2020).

The events of the last 16 months including the global pandemic, racial justice movement, the economic downturn, and the long-term repercussions of these events are compounded for the most vulnerable members of society. Statistical data has demonstrated the health and social equity issues that exist globally. For example, in the United States, the mortality rates for Black, Latinx, and Native Americans with COVID-19 are twice that of white Americans (Hooper, 2020). The systemic racial and socioeconomic inequalities perpetuated during the pandemic exacerbate the existing central challenges faced by disadvantaged communities.

The increased demand for nonprofit action and the challenging economic environment perpetuates the vicious cycle for NPOs who tend to operate with inadequate and short-term funding contracts with granting institutions. The urgent need for reactivity, met with the continuous cycle of unsustainable funding hinders NPOs from fulfilling their full potential. Increased demands for their services in times of crisis often result in a deviation from or abandonment of planned strategy for long-term sustenance to serve their stakeholders in the current circumstances (Karlsson, 2020).

Although nonprofit efforts in the immediate response phase may have mitigated social risk for communities, the fragility of many NPOs leaves them in increasingly vulnerable states following a crisis, which poses a concern for the longevity and sustenance of their community engagement (Karlsson, 2020). To sustain quality services and meaningful engagement with their communities, NPOs must actively engage in efforts to build resilience.

Organizational resilience is defined as “the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper.” (Denyer, 2017). In the disaster context, resilience relates to the ability of an organization or community to effectively react and respond to a disaster (Erfourth, 2020).

To develop resilience NPOs must actively engage in efforts to improve resilience capabilities (underlying capabilities that contribute to resilience) (Duchek, 2020). In doing so

NPOs will increase their resilience capacity, which is defined as the “ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival” (Lengnick-Hall et al. 2011, p. 244).

Nonprofit leaders have an integral role in the development of organizations that are prepared for and equipped to navigate crises in the interests of the communities they serve and to ensure the mission-critical issues facing our society are addressed. Practices of organizations that have survived and thrived through various crises should be examined carefully, to enable others to learn and engage in efforts to build resiliency with the interests of their communities at the forefront.

The purpose of this capstone research project is to examine why organizations thrive, merely survive or die when faced with crises. This research will aim to answer the following research questions:

***R1. What factors and practices contribute to resilient organizational crisis management efforts?***

***R2. What activities can nonprofit organizations engage in to prepare for potential crises?***

***R3. What enables nonprofit organizations to act effectively at the moment when a crisis hits?***

***R4. What organizational factors and practices enable nonprofit organizations to emerge stronger following a crisis?***

***R5. How can nonprofit organizations apply the findings of this research project to support their efforts in managing crises associated with the global pandemic and build resilience for the future?***

This research aims to provide an overview of nonprofit crisis management literature and examine the theoretical underpinnings of organizational resilience from a nonprofit management perspective, enabling myself and others to engage in practices to equip organizations and the sector to thrive in chaotic situations.

The first section of this report will include a comprehensive review of existing literature on crisis management and organizational resilience. The second section will present the qualitative findings of a semi-structured interview conducted with a diverse group of experts in the nonprofit sector and academic research field surrounding nonprofit crisis management and organizational resilience. Following the analysis, a model of organizational resilience for NPOs will be presented outlining key recommendations to guide nonprofit professionals to optimize resilient crisis management efforts within their organizations.

## **Section 2: Literature Review**

This section will provide an overview of the literature surrounding crisis management and organizational resilience. The research surrounding crisis management accelerated in the late 1980s and stems from a variety of different streams and sectors. This review will provide insight across sectors with a nonprofit focus. The study of organizational resilience is a more recent research endeavor and has become a prominent talking point across sectors over the last decade due to the increased number of unexpected events organizations face. The first section of this review will discuss the definition of crisis, crisis and risk management, crisis communication, crisis typologies. The second half provides a summary of organizational resilience definitions, conceptualizations, and factors that contribute to resilient organizations.

### **Crisis Definitions**

Within the various literature streams, there are many definitions of crisis. Jordan et al. (2016), highlight that crisis definitions encompass ‘common characteristics’ which indicate that crises have the potential to produce negative organizational outcomes. Examples of these “common characteristics” include “loss of control”, “intense scrutiny”, “urgency”, “disruption”, “panic”, “disruption of normal activity”, “threat to financial stability, credibility, and reputation” (Jordan et al. 2016; Coombs, 2014a; Seeger & Ulmer, 2002; Stoldt, Dittmore, & Branvold, 2012).

Theoretical frameworks of organizational crisis tend to take a systemic view with a focus on chaos theory, sensemaking, and organizational learning theory providing the underpinnings (Jordan et al. 2016). Coombs (2014b), defines a crisis as “a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly.” The author suggests that within the crisis management context “threats” include potential damage to an organization, its stakeholders, or the sector at large. Coombs (2014a), implies that crises have the potential to threaten the safety of an organization’s publics’, its financial stability, and its reputation.

### **Crisis Management**

Crisis management or crisis response refers to a strategy adopted to deal with an event in an effective and timely manner that addresses the critical needs of the moment, where survival and mitigating the effects of the event are prioritized (Strengthening Nonprofits, 2014). Coombs (2014b), described crisis management as “a process designed to prevent or lessen the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders.” Bonilla (2015) recommends that NPOs can build resilience by engaging in contingency planning and developing crisis management capabilities among staff members.

In their review of the literature surrounding crisis management and organizational resilience Williams et al. (2017) identify two central definitions of crisis as an event and as a process with corresponding definitions of crisis management for each definition. The first

defines crisis as “low-probability, unanticipated, high impact (i.e., harmful) events that are unpredictable, surprising, and threaten the viability of the organization” (Williams et al. 2017. p.5). In this context, crisis management is described as the coordination of stakeholders and resources during an unexpected event to restore systemic alignment (Williams et al. 2017).

The second definition describes crises as “processes extended in space and time, where a “triggering event” is the result of a long period of incubation; that is, crises occur in phases” (Williams et al. 2017. p.5). From a process perspective, crisis management is defined as a combination of signal detection, response during the event, and post-crisis activities to safeguard a system and restore its alignment (Williams et al. 2017).

Many scholars recommend the adoption of a conceptualized framework that provides definitive stages to a crisis as a process. These frameworks typically have three to five stages in which organizations should take specific actions or engage in preparatory activities to promote the effective navigation of a crisis (Jordan et al, 2016).

Frequently referenced examples include five-stage frameworks suggested by Pauchant & Mitroff, (1992) and Mitroff (1994). The earlier of the 5-stage framework includes signal detection, preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. The latter from Mitroff (1994), is adjusted slightly to include detection as the first and prevention as the second stage. Coombs (2014a) introduced a three-stage model which suggests that Crisis Management Plans (CMP) should be divided into pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages. Similar stages are included in

modern capacity-based conceptualizations of organizational resilience (Duchek, 2020), which will be discussed in the second half of this review.

The pre-crisis stage should involve preparation and prevention measures through the identification of risks. A risk is defined as “any factor that may hinder an organization from achieving its goals” and may relate to an organization's programs, people, finances, infrastructure, or geographical location (Lockwood Herman, 2009). The crisis stage involves real-time response to the situation and should include the initial recognition that a crisis is occurring and taking the appropriate actions to contain it. The post-crisis stage involves reflection and learning to enable the organization to better prepare for future crises (Coombs, 2014).

The author suggests that the pre-crisis stage should involve system-wide preparation and prevention and should consider the various typologies of potential crises that could occur. These activities should be part of an organization’s risk management activities and should involve the assessment of internal and external issues that have the potential to evolve into a crisis. (Coombs, 2014b).

## **Organizational Risk Management**

Nonprofit risk management should be viewed as a process in which an organization identifies and assesses the significance of risks and engages in preparatory activities to enable the organization to avoid and mitigate those risks. Engaging in the risk management process allows NPOs to cope with uncertainties by proactively engaging in activities to protect their critical resources and assets (Lockwood Herman, 2009).

Concerning the external organizational environment both Mitroff (1994), and Coombs (2014a), recommend the proactive assessment of external issues that have the potential to impact the organization, its stakeholders, and the wider community. Jordan et al. (2016) suggest that the proactive management of organizational threats should be approached from a risk management and reputation management perspective. Organizational reputation management should focus on how stakeholders view the organization, whereas risk management should both identify and eliminate potential risks to the organization (Jordan et al. 2016).

Karlsson (2020), suggests that risk management strategy should be individually tailored to the organization (concerning size, purpose, operations), and should assess and anticipate all

organizational activities (Karlsson, 2015). Jordan et al. (2016), suggest that organizational risk management should be viewed as a process of detection, assessment, and mitigation.

Karlsson (2015), highlights that risk management is frequently one-sided and should include the prevention of potential problems, and the recognition and exploitation of potential opportunities. The author suggests four key governance principles including communication, integration, inclusion, and reflection to promote sound organizational risk management practices and informed and transparent decision making.

Hutton et al. (2016), suggest effective organizational risk assessment should incorporate both physical and human dimensions to mitigate potential impacts and build resilience. For example, organizations should consider environmental risks associated with the organization's geographical position (i.e., wildfires, flooding, hurricanes) (Stephenson et al. 2010), and operational risks including volunteer engagement, workplace sexual harassment, embezzlement, fraud (Fried & Kastel, 2020).

The Nonprofit Risk Management Centre (n.d), outlines seven essential steps for nonprofit risk management planning. The first step is establishing the purpose of the plan, followed by assigning risk management responsibility to a risk management committee, acknowledging and assessing organizational risk, assessing and prioritizing risk, forming risk management strategy, implementing the plan, and reviewing the plan regularly.

Risk management activities within NPOs may include background checks of volunteers to protect service/program users, establishing and revising key organizational policies (gift acceptance policy, safeguarding policy, whistleblowing policy), developing board orientation and training materials, risk assessing organizational events, and insuring property, vehicles, and equipment (Gloeckner & Lockwood-Herman, 2018).

Karlsson (2015), discusses the limited expertise in risk management within the UK public and third sectors, as compared to the private sector where risk management activities are well established. The author further highlights the sector-based generalizations that are contradictory and suggests that risk management activities often depend on organizational size. The author discusses the difficulties encountered by NPOs who engage in partnerships without assessing the associated risks.

The University of Suffolk & PolicyBee (2018), report of survey findings from 330 small UK organizations demonstrate that risk management practices are poorly understood and utilized in the UK third sector. The findings suggest that many non-profit organizations had not had any risk management or governance training with lack of time, insufficient funding, and “not knowing where to go for training” identified as key barriers.

The study also found that only 8% of the sample had a risk register, and identified that organizations are most concerned about money, with the largest external risk being the loss of funding (70%) and the largest internal risk being reduced income of revenue streams. Other

major risks focused on people, concluding the recruitment of volunteers (62%) as the second-largest external risk, while risks linked to staff and volunteers the second largest for internal risk (The University of Suffolk & PolicyBee, 2018).

Reflecting on the impacts of unforeseen events that have challenged UK (and global) third sector organizations through numerous operational, financial and reputational avenues, Karlsson (2020), discusses the need for improved risk management within the third sector. As highlighted in the research surrounding third sector risk management (McDonnell, 2016; University of Suffolk & PolicyBee, 2018; Karlsson, 2020; Karlsson et al. 2020), risk management practices within smaller UK and Scottish third sector organizations have not improved despite their lived experience of small and significant sector-wide shocks.

The significance of these events and their sector-wide implications highlight the increased need for risk management practices to aid the development of organizations to enable the sustenance of operations beyond the ‘new normal’ society is presently navigating (Karlsson, 2020).

Research conducted within Scottish and European third sector organizations indicates that systematic risk governance strategies should be actively utilized within partnerships and cross-sector collaborative relationships (Karlsson, 2015). The author discusses the impact of power distribution in partnerships, particularly referring to the association of power with important resources including finances and indicates that partners who lack a voice in

partnership decision-making may lack the ability to raise risk-related concerns. The author reiterates the need for all participating organizations within the partnership to individually and collectively assess risks associated with their participation. In cases where internal operational staff lack risk management experience, external expertise should be sought (Karlsson, 2015).

Establishing an ethos and engagement in risk management at the board level is thought to be insufficient (Karlsson, 2020), and proactive leadership is integral to activate risk, reputation, and external issue awareness and management to help organizations prepare and avoid potential crises (Coombs, 2014b; Karlsson, 2020). Organizations should seek to establish a 'risk culture' through the implementation of risk training and strategy development throughout the organization (Karlsson, 2020). Further, it is recommended that an organizational-wide awareness of potential risks within the internal and external environment and the establishment of up-to-date and robust policies and guidelines are effective means of mitigating risk and promoting proactive management at all levels of the organization (Coombs, 2014b).

Through the analysis of the UK government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic Macrae (2020), highlights the increased social risk encountered by socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. The author discusses the role of cross-sector engagement in social risk analysis for planning to ensure future responses are improved. Macrae (2020), advocates for the adoption of long-term social risk perspectives focused on prevention and early intervention in response to lessons and the long-term ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic. The author

reiterates that considering social risk is a cross-sectoral activity, central in building community resilience and preparing for unpredictable shocks in the future (Macrae, 2020).

Karlsson (2020), highlights the need for the provision of practical and actionable guidelines to improve risk management in the sector and suggests that consideration should be given to how sector-wide awareness and utilization of existing guidance can be achieved, and how organizations can effectively communicate the need and benefits of risk management practices within both organizational and any collaborative strategies the organization utilizes.

### **Crisis Management Planning in the Nonprofit Sector**

Aljuhmani & Emeagwali (2017), reiterate the importance of crisis management to improve NPOs' ability to be flexible and react quickly in crises. The authors highlight that crisis management enables organizations to think clearly and make timely, fact-informed decisions in uncertain situations.

Time should be invested in the formation of robust Crisis Management Plans (CMP) detailing personnel to lead the organization through specific aspects of the crisis and the communication strategy and tactics that should be adopted (Coombs, 2014b). The author reiterates that a CMP serves to guide organizations through crises rather than rule them. It is suggested that creating a CMP, updating it annually, and practicing its implementation to test its

robustness helps organizations to react quickly and make effective decisions (Barton 2001; Coombs, 2007).

Adequate planning is frequently cited as a facilitator to increased resilience in acute shocks (Barassa, 2018). Through the study of ten New Zealand organizations from a variety of sectors and industries McManus et al. (2007), found that resilience was supported by organizational engagement in planning for the continued supply of essential resources and services in times of crisis.

Within the crisis management literature, there are several CMP outlines referenced. Coombs (2014a), suggests a fifteen-component CMP in which the first seven relate to the immediate crisis stage and the latter eight relate to the post-crisis phase. The author suggests that a CMP should be accurate, concise, user-friendly to promote the effective handling of crises. Watkins (2002), provides a CMP with ten components for the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis stages. Details of the included components of both plans are summarized in Table 1. Coombs (2014a), suggests that a reduced version of the CMP can be formulated by including components five, six, eight, and eleven.

Coombs (2014a), suggests that the composition of a crisis management team will depend on the organization and its endeavors. Broadly speaking a crisis management team may include personnel with expertise and crisis-specific training from public relations, operations, finance, human resources, security, and legal compliance.

In their guide for crisis management for NPOs, *Strengthening Nonprofits* (2014), suggest that a crisis management team should include primary decision-makers within different levels of the organization. The crisis management team should be composed of a diverse range of expertise and individuals with varying responsibilities to promote an effective and holistic response effort. The authors suggest that a lead and secondary person for each of the following responsibilities should be included in the crisis management team: decision-making authority, organizational spokesperson, communication with personnel & volunteers, communication with donors, communication with board members, communication with clients/service users, and crisis record-keeping (*Strengthening Nonprofits*, 2014).

Recent literature has highlighted the importance of including Information Technology personnel in crisis management teams, as many organizations have transitioned with the digital revolution (Posey, 2020). Cybersecurity and data management are also frequently highlighted as important components of an NPOs CMP (Gloeckner & Lockwood-Herman, 2018).

Several studies highlight the importance of the crisis management teams engaging in crisis scenario exercises to practice and develop effective decision-making skills and communication strategy implementation (Spillan & Crandall, 2002; Coombs, 2007; McManus et al. 2007). The research conducted by Erfourth, (2020), highlights the challenges that many NPOs face due to resource constraints, and the negative implications this has on their ability to engage in adequate crisis management planning and preparation activities.

Business continuity plans (BCP) and disaster recovery plans (DRP) are frequently referenced in the crisis management literature (Coombs, 2014a; Somers, 2009; Watkins, 2002), and should be included in nonprofit crisis management planning (Jordan et al. 2016). Business continuity planning outlines how business or operations will continue during an unexpected event and should outline aspects of operations that may be affected in a crisis. A DRP focuses on how the organization will rebuild or recover following a disaster such as an environmental disaster or power outage has occurred (Zhang & McMurray, 2013).

Through the case study analysis of multiple Florida-based NPOs Erfourth (2020) argued that the utilization of Information technology (IT) disaster recovery planning (DRP) should be a central component of organizational post-disaster recovery plans and is an essential antecedent of organizational IT resiliency.

**Table 1. Crisis Management Plan Outlines (Coombs, 2014a; Watkins, 2002).**

Publication	Crisis Communication Plan		
	Crisis Stage	Crisis Management Plan Component	Description
Coombs (2014a)	Crisis (Initial response)	Cover page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revision dates</li> <li>● Confidentiality reminders</li> <li>● # of copies in circulation</li> </ul>
		Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explaining the importance/significance of the CMP</li> </ul>
		Acknowledgment form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Employees sign &amp; return to HR to confirm they have read</li> </ul>
		Rehearsal Dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Detailing practice dates &amp; training activities</li> </ul>
		Initial Action Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Instruction of:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who to contact in a crisis</li> <li>- How to launch CMP</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		Crisis Management Team Contact Sheet	Detailing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Contact for members of the crisis management team responsible for executing CMP</li> <li>● Key stakeholders/members who should be informed of crisis.</li> </ul>
		Crisis Risk Assessment Section	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Identifies potential crises from organizational risk assessment</li> </ul>
	Post Crisis Phases	Incident Report Sheets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A detailed record of crisis event &amp; actions taken by the organization</li> </ul>
		Proprietary Information Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Details of confidential information</li> </ul>
		Crisis Management Team Communication Strategy Worksheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Detailed specifics of communication strategy/messaging</li> <li>● Record of communication used in crises</li> </ul>
		Secondary Contact Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Details additional stakeholders that need to be contacted out with the crisis management team</li> </ul>

		Stakeholder Contact Worksheets	<p>Details of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Communication plan for media/stakeholders who contact the organization seeking information about the crises</li> <li>● Designated communications personnel</li> </ul>
		Business Continuity Plan (BC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Details of how the organization will resume operations in crisis (e.g., if relocation is required due to damage).</li> </ul>
		Crisis Control Center Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Where organizational staff should meet, relocate or move to safety in case of crisis</li> </ul>
		Post Crisis Evaluation Forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluation of crisis management process</li> <li>● Identification of positive, negative aspects and areas for improvement/change to aid future response efforts</li> </ul>
Watkins (2002)	Pre-crisis	Range of Planning Scenarios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Several scenario plans outlining organizational response for potential crisis identified in risk management planning</li> </ul>
		A flexible set of responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Responses that can be molded or segmented to address unexpected scenarios that involve combinations of event</li> <li>● Examples include facility evacuation or lockdown, fire or police response, response to a medical epidemic</li> </ul>
		Plans to match responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Core plan that links scenario to the responses (e.g., active shooter = facility lockdown &amp; police response)</li> </ul>
	Crisis	Designated chain of command	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Details of core crisis response team</li> <li>● Details of crisis communication plan</li> </ul>
		Preset Activation Protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Protocols for activating a coordinated crisis response</li> <li>● Outlines clear signposts that indicate protection mode vs normal operating mode.</li> </ul>
		Command post & Backup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offsite location where the crisis management team can relocate and re-initiate operations if facilities are non-functional/unsafe</li> </ul>
		Clear communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enable contact of individuals on/off-site</li> <li>● Should include backup options external to the central communications system.</li> </ul>

		Backup Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Contact information</li> <li>● Records</li> <li>● Key organizations documents</li> </ul>
	Pre-crisis	Regular simulation exercises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Practice of protocols and procedures to be utilized in a crisis</li> </ul>
	Post-crisis	Disciplined post-crisis review	<p>Identification of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Success?</li> <li>● Failures?</li> <li>● Lessons learned?</li> <li>● Changes for improved future responses?</li> </ul>

Resource constraints were identified as key barriers to the participating organizations' ability to engage in the development of DRP. The findings further indicated that nonprofit managers utilize basic knowledge to create organizational DRP and that these plans are infrequently tested or utilized to train staff (Erfourth, 2020).

Somers (2009), discusses the increased utilization of 'Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) planning since the 9/11 attacks in New York. COOP is a federal initiative intended to increase engagement in emergency planning to allow organizations of departments to continue operations under a broad range of emergencies. Like BCPs, COOP plans encompass guidelines and policies to ensure critical functions can continue through the effective utilization of human capital and resources in emergencies (bu.edu, n.d). Through the surveying of 96 full-service, municipal public works departments Somers (2009), suggested that latent resilience was increased through the utilization of COOP and managerial information seeking before a crisis. The findings indicate that engaging in robust organizational emergency planning and proactively increasing the organization's awareness of its environment can strengthen 'positive adaptive behaviors' in crises (Somers, 2009).

### **Nonprofit Crisis Communications**

Jordan et al. (2016), highlight that communications have an integral role in nonprofit crisis management and should be incorporated into crisis prevention, planning, and management. Through a systematic review of crisis communication planning literature, Haupt & Azevedo

(2021), recommend that NPOs utilize periods of noncrisis to develop and establish communication strategies to support crisis management efforts. The authors further highlight that leadership's involvement in crisis communication planning is essential to eliminate risks and improve an organization's ability to reduce the impact of crisis while maintaining stable operations and the delivery of quality services within their communities.

Within the field of crisis communication strategy, Coombs and his co-authors serve as the dominant researchers. By summarizing the strongest evidence in the field of crisis communication research, Coombs (2014b), produced a practical guide to aid the utilization of evidence-based best practices by crisis communication practitioners. The author highlights that those involved with crisis planning for organizations should base their strategy on three central research findings. Firstly, organizations must respond promptly and should aim to be the first reporters of any crisis. Coombs (2014b), discusses the strong evidence supporting the use of the “stealing thunder” approach in crisis communications, where an organization can reduce its reputational damage by being the initial reporter of the crisis to the public and its stakeholders. The author highlights the role of social media in accelerating the spread of news and recommends organizations utilize this platform to report on a crisis quickly and effectively, without having to waste time waiting for traditional media to report the story (Coombs, 2014b).

Second, Coombs (2014b), highlights that crises that cause harm to victims must be addressed using a victim-centered communication response where messages focus on the victims and demonstrate the action the organization is taking to help them. Victims include any

stakeholder who was harmed or had the potential to be harmed by the crisis. Harm could be mental, physical, or financial. The author highlights that initial messaging should reiterate the concern for the safety and welfare of the public through the provision of information on the crisis and pointing to resources that can help the victims. Further, evidence reiterates the importance of an aggressive approach in which the organization actively communicates with stakeholders with victim-centered messaging (Coombs, 2014b).

Finally (Coombs, 2014b), recommends that organizations need to take a proactive approach to correct falsely reported information. In reference to his own Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007), the author discusses the application of specific communication strategies for the given situation and reiterates the importance of reserving the denial approach, in which the organization communicates that it has no responsibility for the crisis, for situations where misinformation has been circulated (Coombs, 2014b). Specific crisis typologies proposed by Coombs (2007), are detailed in Table 3.

As outlined in the CMP examples in Table 1 (Coombs, 2014a; Watkins, 2002), organizations should include a comprehensive crisis communication strategy within their CMP. Coombs (2014a), outlines best practices for crisis communication within each of the proposed crisis stages which are detailed in Table 2. (Coombs, 2014a).

In the interest of ensuring the organizational reputation is upheld during a crisis, Coombs (2014b), recommends that organizations should engage in the prior training of an organizational

spokesperson, who is responsible for talking to the media and speaking on behalf of the organization during a crisis. Emphasis is placed on the importance of organizational public relations in ensuring the spokesperson is informed of key facts, up-to-date information, and is prepared to effectively respond to questions. Further, the utilization of effective vocal (clear & steady voice, non-technical language) and physical (appearing confident, strong eye contact) communication when engaging with the media (Coombs, 2014b).

In addition to training, the pre-crisis phase should involve the preparation of message templates to aid timely and effective messaging when a crisis occurs. It is recommended that specific messaging templates should be prepared for each of the organization's communication channels, including the organizational website (Coombs, 2014b), news releases, email, text, phone calls, and social media (Bortree, 2019).

Ott & Theunissen (2015), outline practical guidelines for organizations communicating on social media during a crisis. The authors suggest that crisis communication strategies on social media need to be transparent and authentic and recommend that messaging used on social media should match the tone of the platform. The findings of their research suggest that engaging with stakeholders who are affected by the crisis on social media is beneficial to the organization. Their research also indicated that engaging with angry social media users who are unaffected by the crises will not benefit the organization. Further, the authors pointed out the importance of establishing social media communication policies that outline when offensive content should/should not be deleted.

Gruber et al (2015), guide organizational Twitter use during crises. The authors suggest that organizations should develop communication strategies before the crisis and maintain a presence on social media platforms throughout the event. The authors reiterate the importance of being transparent throughout the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases and utilizing stakeholders who have an influential presence on social media (Gruber et al. 2015).

Findings from an interdisciplinary systematic review by Eriksson (2018), suggest key social media focus areas for effective organizational crisis communication. The review findings suggest that organizations should engage in pre-crisis preparatory work to establish social media presence and that organizations should continually monitor their social media accounts. Further, it is suggested that organizations should utilize social media to facilitate the quick dissemination of key information to a wide range of organizational audiences during a crisis. The findings highlight that organizations should not abandon engagement with traditional media communication during a crisis as research suggests that stakeholders view these sources to provide more credible information than social media (Eriksson, 2018).

Concerning the handling of fake news regarding stakeholder consumer privacy on social media, findings from Vafeiadis et al. (2019), suggest that NPOs should examine the level of issue involvement of various stakeholder groups before initiating a communicative response to protect or defend the organization. The authors highlight that like regular nonprofit

communication strategies, crisis management strategies should be segmented for different audiences (Waters, 2011).

**Table 2. Crisis Stages and Crisis Communications Best Practices (Coombs, 2014b).**

Stage of Crises	Best Practice
Pre-crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement a CMP.</li> <li>● Designate crisis management team, spokesperson &amp; conduct relevant training.</li> <li>● Conduct annual crisis simulation exercises.</li> <li>● Prepare and externally audit select crisis management messaging for various crisis scenarios.</li> </ul>
Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Act quickly to have an initial response within the first hour.</li> <li>● Ensure fact-checking is accurate and thorough.</li> <li>● Inform key spokespeople of key points and crisis information to ensure consistent messaging.</li> <li>● Prioritize public safety above all else.</li> <li>● Utilize all of the available communication channels.</li> <li>● Express concern/sympathy for crisis victims/affected stakeholders.</li> <li>● Ensure all employees are included in the initial response.</li> <li>● Prepare to provide support to victims of crisis (internal &amp; external stakeholders).</li> </ul>
Post-crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Deliver correct and factual information to stakeholders promptly.</li> <li>● Keep stakeholders updated on progress in the recovery phase and organizational efforts/activities.</li> <li>● Analyze the organization's crisis management effort. Use lessons learned to improve future crisis management efforts.</li> </ul>

### **Crisis Typologies**

Due to the nature of the nonprofit organizational activities and their involvement in emergency response efforts, NPOs must be prepared to deal with a range of operational and reputational crises. Spillan & Crandall, (2002), highlight the variation within the crisis classification research and the lack of agreement surrounding which should be applied in crisis management planning.

Coombs, (2007) SCCT segments crisis into three typologies based upon the degree of organizational responsibility and was the first typology theory to provide scenario-based

guidance to help organizations select a communication strategy. The level of accommodation of the communication strategy increases with the level of organizational responsibility in a given situation. For example, if an organization has high responsibility, responses should be apologetic or compensatory, whereas low responsibility may call for a more defensive communication strategy (Bjorick, 2016).

Coombs (2007), describes three crisis typologies which include victim crisis, accidental crisis, and preventable crisis. In a victim crisis, an organization is said to be the ‘victim’, and holds weak responsibility for the event, and is likely to experience mild reputational threat. Nonprofit examples of a victim crisis include the recent fires which occurred in Chinatown, NYC, that destroyed 85,000 artifacts belonging to the Museum of Chinese America (Correal, 2020).

Coombs (2007), suggests that accidental crises occur when unintentional actions taken by the organization lead to a crisis. Organizations hold some responsibility for the crisis and therefore experience moderate reputational threat. An accident example from the higher education sector includes that of The University of Glasgow, which was accused of having failed to provide support and accommodations to visually impaired students during the remote learning period in the COVID-19 pandemic (Urquhart, 2020).

The third typology proposed by Coombs (2007), is preventable crises occur when capabilities and intentional actions are taken by the organization that put stakeholders at risk.

The organization, therefore, has a strong attribution of crisis responsibility and therefore is exposed to a severe reputational threat. A highly publicized example of a preventable crisis is the Oxfam Sex Scandal (Komarek-Meyer & Krišová, 2018).

After failed attempts of internal whistleblowing, an internal employee raised her concerns externally and uncovered widespread sexual misconduct within the organization's operations in other international locations and within the organization's charity shops in the UK. The investigation of Oxfam revealed a failure of leadership and governance to safeguard its stakeholders and provide adequate channels for reporting malfeasance (Tavanti & Tait, 2020). Table 3., provides a summary of the three typologies proposed by Coombs (2007), with proposed examples, and real nonprofit crisis cases.

Through a review of the literature surrounding crisis typologies BJORICK (2016), suggests an interdisciplinary approach to crisis classification. The author analyzes four prominent two-dimensional crisis typologies, including SCCT (Coombs, 2007), and Weiner's (1995), attribution theory (WAT), that focus on crisis response from a stakeholder perspective to develop appropriate crisis management and communication theories.

**Table 3: Crisis Types from Situational Crisis Communications Theory (Coombs, 2007).**

<b>Crisis Typology</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Nonprofit Examples</b>
<b>Victim</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization is victim</li> <li>• Weak attribution of responsibility</li> <li>• Mild reputational threat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural disasters (Flooding, wildfires, earthquake)</li> <li>• Rumor: Spread of false/damaging information in public circulation</li> <li>• Violence in the workplace (attack of employees on sight from internal/external actor)</li> <li>• Product tampering (External actor causes damage to the organization)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire destroys property and 85,000 artifacts belonging to the Museum of Chinese in America (Correal, 2020).</li> <li>• Shooting at Oikos University campus (McVeigh, 2012).</li> <li>• Fake news of Planned Parenthood selling fetal tissue (Stortstrom et al. 2018).</li> </ul>
<b>Accident</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unintentional actions of the organization lead to the crisis.</li> <li>• Minimal attributions of crisis responsibility</li> <li>• Moderate reputational threat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges: Accusations from Stakeholders regarding organizational operations</li> <li>• Technology/equipment error induced accident</li> <li>• Technical-error product harm results in a product recall.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food Product recall at North Texas Foodbank (ntfb.org, 2021).</li> <li>• Clinton College football team fatalities in bus crash (Kulmala &amp; Dys, 2016).</li> <li>• University of Glasgow accused of failing disabled students in the pandemic (Urquhart, 2020).</li> </ul>
<b>Preventable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization takes intentional actions/ knowingly puts stakeholders at-risk/ made inappropriate decisions/violates law/regulatory boundaries to the crisis</li> <li>• Strong attributions of crisis responsibility</li> <li>• Severe reputational threat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human-error accidents/product harm</li> <li>• Organizational deceives stakeholders</li> <li>• Organizational violate law/regulations</li> <li>• Management actions put stakeholders at risk &amp; injuries occur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oxfam Sex Scandal (Komarek-Meyer &amp; Krišová, 2018).</li> <li>• MIT Epstein Donation Scandal (Ashley &amp; Sansern, 2019).</li> <li>• The College Application Scandal (Byrd &amp; Nelson, 2019)</li> </ul>

The authors also include Gundel’s (2005), predictability-influence matrix which considers the level of predictability of the crisis and the level at which the organization could influence the antecedents of a crisis. The final typology included is the probability-impact matrix from Taleb (2007), that utilizes a statistical/mathematical theoretical risk assessment approach to

classify risks concerning the probability of occurrence and impact/payoff (Bjorick, 2016). A comparative view of the different typology theories is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. Crisis Typologies adapted from Bjorick (2016).**

Typology Theory	Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) Coombs (2007).	Weiner's (1995), Attribution Theory (WAT)	Probability-Impact Matrix (Taleb, 2007)	Predictability- influence Matrix (Gundel, 2005)
<b>Research Discipline</b>	Crisis Communication	Sociology & Psychology	Mathematics & Statistics (risk assessment)	Crisis and disaster management
<b>Perspective</b>	Crisis communications to address stakeholder perception	General Public & stakeholders	Risk & Crisis management professional	Crisis/disaster management professional
<b>Dimension 1</b>	Cause of crisis (internal/external to the organization)	Cause of crisis (internal/external to the organization)	Probability of crisis event occurring	Predictability of crisis
<b>Dimension 2</b>	Level of organizational intention	Organization's ability to control the cause	Impact/payoff of a crisis event	Organizations Influence on the cause of the crisis
<b>Proposed Crisis Typologies</b>	1. Intentional -Highest responsibility -Intended organizational mistakes -Harm to stakeholders  2. Accidental -High responsibility -Unintentional organizational mistakes harm stakeholders  3. Victim -Low responsibility -Organization & stakeholder are victims - Viewed as nonpreventable (e.g., Terrorist attacks)	1. Inside/outwith control -Employee sabotage  2. Outside/outwith control -Terrorist sabotage -Stakeholder's perception=positive/sympathetic  3. Inside/within control -Neglected maintenance -Stakeholder perception= Negative/Blame  4. Outside/within control -Failure to protect against common external threat	1. Predictable -Affordable/High probability/known -Mean reversion, throwing a dice  2. Predictable -Not affordable/High probability/known -Airplane accident with a severe death toll  3. Predictable -Affordable -Low probability/unknown -Casino win over time  4. Not predictable -Not affordable -Low probability/unknown -9/11 attacks/Subprime/system breakdown	1. Conventional crises -Easily predicted/easily influenceable -Quality control and crisis planning  2. Unexpected Crisis -Hard to predict/easily influenceable -Emergency Response  2. Intractable crises -Easily predicted -Hard to influence -Reduce complexity/conflict of interests  4. Fundamental crises -Hard to predict/hard to influence -No preparation possible
<b>Phase of crisis</b>	Pre-crisis & crisis	Pre-crisis & crisis	Pre-crisis & post-crisis	Pre-crisis & crisis
<b>Implications for practice</b>	-Level of organizational responsibility based on behaviors & emotions of stakeholders - Situational context -Crisis communication strategies	-Level of organizational responsibility based on behaviors & emotions of stakeholders	-Developing organizational resilience  -Focusing on worst-case scenarios.	-Organizations risk & Crisis Management Planning  -Organizational regulations

The author discusses the valuable insights provided from the four theoretical views but highlights the limited practical guidance provided for crisis management and communication practitioners. Bjorick (2016), recommends that crisis typologies should encompass a holistic view of the antecedents, outcomes, and stakeholder perceptions of a crisis combined with the optimal management and communication strategy. The author provides an interdisciplinary framework that combines the findings of various research streams. The framework suggests that organizational decision-makers should take a systemic view and utilize scenario planning to devise and implement management and communication strategies specific to the situation.

Bjorick (2016), suggests that the framework provides a structure for the development of possible scenarios, and aids the development of pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis management and communication strategies. Further, the author highlights that a collective crisis knowledge base can be developed through the utilization of the varied perspectives included in the proposed framework, which are more likely to relate to the varied perspectives of crisis management team members, who typically include individuals from different arms of the organization.

### **Crisis Management and Organizational Resilience Crossroads**

Through their review of crisis management and resilience literature Williams et al. (2017), suggest that both research streams are aspects of “the challenge of adversity” (Williams

et al. 2017, p.18). The final section of this literature review will explore the definitions and conceptualizations of organizational resilience, and factors that contribute to resilient organizations.

## **Resilience Definitions**

Due to the increasing number of unexpected events experienced by societies around the world, there has been an increasing interest in research surrounding resilience as a desirable characteristic of individuals and organizations across a variety of contexts and sectors (Dakrow, 2018). This has resulted in a large variety of discourses and definitions from varying research streams surrounding organizational resilience (Mafimisebi & Thorne, 2017).

Examining organizational resilience definitions proposed by different national governments demonstrates the magnitude of variation. For example, the UK defines it as the “capability of an organization to anticipate and respond and adapt to, incremental change and sudden disruptions to survive and prosper”, Australia defines it as “a business’s ability to adapt and evolve as the global market is evolving, to respond to short-term shocks, be they natural disasters or significant changes in market dynamics and to shape itself to respond to long-term challenges”, whereas Canada suggests that “Resiliency is your company’s ability to protect people, assets, data, and technology through proactive measures that help mitigate risk” (Power, 2015). Further the United States defines resilience as “the ability to adapt to changing conditions and withstand and rapidly recover from disruption due to emergencies (Obama, 2013).

Duchek (2020), describes the research of organizational resilience as ‘fragmented’ across various related constructs including organizational crisis response, organizational reliability, workforce resilience, and adaptability of operating models. In a review of literature from 1998-2015 Duchet (2019), derives three central perspectives to the definition of organizational resilience. The first perspective views resilience as an organization's ability to ‘resist and recover’ when faced with crises, enabling a timely return to the expected performance level. For example, Linnenluecke et al, (2012), define resilience as an organizational “capacity to absorb impact and recover from the actual occurrence of an extreme event”, while Boin & Van Eeten (2013), refer to ‘recovery resilience’ as an ability to return to a “state of normalcy”.

The second perspective derived from the review by Duchet (2020), goes further than the return to normal organizational operations and is focused on the improvement of both capabilities and processes. This perspective indicates that organizations must adjust and develop strength when emerging from a crisis. In this context Lengick-Hall et al, (2011), defines organizational resilience as “a firm’s ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive changes that potentially threaten an organization's survival”.

Rather than being viewed as an ‘ability’ as seen in the first perspective, organizational resilience is seen here as an ‘active and purposeful’ coping response to crises. Resilient

organizations utilize ‘dynamic capabilities’ which allow them to adapt and re-strategize according to the demands of their situation (Teece et al. 1997).

The third perspective outlined by Duchek (2020) expands on both the ‘resistance and recovery’ and ‘adaptation’ definitions of organizational resilience and includes the concept of anticipation. For example, Somers (2009), states that “resilience is more than mere survival; it involves taking proactive steps to ensure that an organization thrives in the face of adversity.” Further Boin & Eeten (2013) describe this concept as ‘precursor resilience’, whereas Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal (2016), define organizational resilience as the capacity to “anticipate and adjust to the environment”.

Expanding on the anticipatory perspective, findings from a mixed-method in-depth analysis of fifty high-performing corporate firms over 60 years suggest that resilience is achieved through the continuous renewal of competitive advantages (Teixeira & Werther, 2013). The authors propose that organizational innovation processes take three main forms: reactive, proactive, and anticipatory. The analysis suggests that resilient organizations are anticipatory innovators, that actively anticipate the needs of their stakeholders. The author further emphasized the importance of fostering an innovative organizational culture where innovation is encouraged, collectively practiced, and openly received by leadership to aid the development of new ideas, allowing organizations to continuously renew their competitive advantages by innovating (Teixeira & Werther, 2013).

Mamouni Limmios & Mazzarol (2011), discuss the wide exploration of organizational capacity to maintain central operational activities while engaging in organizational learning and adaptation. The authors suggest that balancing exploration (scanning for new opportunities) and exploitation (improving capabilities) increases an organization's awareness of their environments and likelihood of engaging in opportunities when they arise which allows organizations to simultaneously maintain and improve their capabilities and resilience.

Although the literature highlights that many scholars have defined organizational resilience as a defensive response and the ability to ‘resist and recover’, there has been a recent expansion in perspectives and shift towards a “conceptual umbrella” (Masten & Obradovic, 2006), that encapsulates anticipation as well as active anticipation and coping. This shift aligns with the theory proposed by Coombs (2014a), outlining specific action types within each of the crisis management phases. Ducheck (2020), proposes that organizational resilience should be defined as “an organization's ability to anticipate potential threats, cope effectively with adverse events, and to adapt to changing conditions”.

### **Theoretical Conceptualizations of Organizational Resilience**

The literature demonstrates the evolution of organizational resilience conceptualizations over time, as attention to this research stream has increased. Conceptualizations vary depending on the definition utilized and the goal of the research being conducted. Resilience was introduced

to the social science field by Wildavsky (1998), who differentiated between anticipation as a means of ‘predicting and preventing’ before a damaging event, and resilience as an ability to cope with unexpected events at the moment and ‘learning to bounce back from adversity.

Several scholars highlighted that the ‘bouncing back’ conceptualization lacks robustness in its ‘...machine-like view of systems, with simple cause and effect relationships..’ (Barrassa, 2019). Despite this, Dakrow (2018), highlights that the theory outlined by Wildavsky (1998), served as a foundation from which a significant portion of ideas surrounding organizational resilience have emerged.

For example, Somers (2009), introduced the conceptualization of “active and passive” resilience. Active resilience involves the development of new competencies and resources to sustain long term organizational transformation, allowing organizations to avoid system shocks rather than simply reducing their impact. Active resilience requires the development of new activities that enable organizations to survive both current and future crises, with zero or minimal economic loss. It requires the modification of resource utilization and the development of new skills and competencies to aid organizational transformation.

Passive resilience consists of temporary measures or changes to organizational routines in the face of a crisis. Passive resilience allows organizations to absorb smaller short-term shocks, such as an external crisis, without making significant changes to their operations.

Following the absorption of shock or navigation of the situation, passive resilient organizations tend to return to their original state (Altintas, 2020).

Suryaningtyas et al. (2019), suggest that organizational resilience can be viewed as ‘operational’ resilience and ‘strategic’ resilience. These conceptualizations align with the ‘passive’ and ‘active’ resilience as outlined by Somers (2009). The authors propose that operational resilience involves adaptive interpretation and engagement in activities to overcome a crisis to re-establish a previous state. ‘Strategic’ resilience is described as a capability to act quickly and effectively to transform threats into opportunities within a competitive environment.

Similarly, Mamouni-Limnios & Mazzarol (2011), introduced the concept of “offensive versus defensive resilience”, where offense resilience involves adaptation, while defense involves a resistance approach to disruptions or threats internal or external to an organization. Bonß (2016), also builds on this conceptualization of resilience. The author views “basic” resilience as the focus on reducing systemic vulnerability and the maintenance of existing structures and operating methods, and “reflective” resilience as a means of reconsidering, renewing, or reorientating a system to enable capacity building (Bonß, 2016).

Duchek (2020), identified three central conceptualization streams including resilience as an outcome, as a process, and as a set of capabilities. The author highlights that the studies focused on resilience as an outcome tend to explore general attributes, organizational factors (e.g., availability of resources), behaviors, relationships, governance practices that positively or

negatively contribute to the development of resilient organizations but fail to demonstrate how resilience may be achieved in practice, or how (or if it is possible) to design resilient organizations (Duchek, 2020).

Accompanying the inconsistent definitions of organizational resilience, process conceptualizations in the literature vary between research streams (Duchek, 2020). Linnenluecke et al. (2012), suggests a five-stage process from the (1) Anticipatory adaptation, (2) Exposure, (3) recovery and restoration, (4) post-impact determination of the organization's overall resilience, and (5) future adaptation. As the authors define resilience as “impact resistance and recovery” only stages 3 and 4 of the process encompass resilience.

McManus et al. (2007), provide another process-based conceptualization which includes (1) building situational awareness, (2) managing keystone vulnerabilities, and (3) increasing adaptive capacity. It is suggested that these stages act as a practical guide for improving resilience.

Literature from recent years has moved away from singular outcome-based conceptualizations and propose that organizational resilience is achieved through a combination of coping with challenging circumstances, adapting, and engaging in transformative change to allow the successful navigation of future challenging situations, viewing systems as both complex and adaptive (Barasa et al. 2018).

Several of the scholars including Manfield (2016), Darkow (2019), and Duchek (2020), have initiated a shift towards capability-based approaches to organizational resilience, suggesting that practical and valuable insights can be gained by engaging in capability-based research that underlines the varying phases of the process of developing organizational resilience. Duchek (2020), combines process and capability-based conceptualizations to develop a conceptual framework, suggesting that organizational resilience should be viewed as a “meta-capability”.

The author utilizes three-time references in the process which matches with an action type, which include:

1. Anticipation stage: Preventive action is taken to detect and scan the organization's internal and external environment for potential developments.
2. Coping stage: Concurrent action, allowing organizations to “deal with”, “respond to”, or “positively adapt” to navigate the immediate situation.
3. Adaptation phase: Reactive action is required to enable the organization to reflect, learn & adapt to ‘transform’ or ‘advance’ its practices and processes, which further develops anticipation capabilities and aids the avoidance of or improved handling of unexpected events.

## **Factors Influencing Organizational Resilience**

Numerous research streams explore factors, behaviors, and practices that aid the development of resilient organizations. This section will discuss key organizational governance and leadership practices, along with factors that contribute to resilient organizations.

### **Organizational Structure and Governance Practices**

Numerous studies suggested organizations should be viewed as complex adaptive systems (CAS), that utilize multiple routes to achieve a desired outcome. This is commonly cited as the use of ‘collateral pathways’, which utilizes alternative methods to achieve the same goal when systems (or organizations), are faced with challenges or disruptions (Barasa et al. 2018). The use of collateral pathways is a strategy recognized for fostering organizational resilience (Stephenson et al. 2010; Pal et al.2012; Ager et al. 2015; Barasa et al. 2018).

Another related construct identified in the organizational resilience literature is redundancy, which refers to the maintenance of resources or components that are non-essential for routine functioning but will strengthen operating capacity in times of disruption or emergency (Barasa et al. 2018).

Through a study of California's water planning and management process, Booher & Innes (2010), identified decentralization, self-organizing system behavior, and non-linear planning as key governance practices to aid organizational resilience. The findings suggested that non-linear planning allowed for a cyclical process in which continual feedback was provided between stages and learning could occur through trial and error (Booher & Innes, 2010).

Barasa et al. (2018), highlighted the benefits of embracing deliberative democracy and promoting transparency in organizational decision-making practices. Research findings indicate that these decision-making practices increased trust, empowerment, motivation, and commitment amongst staff members which was thought to aid organizational resilience through challenging circumstances (Booher & Innes, 2010; Stephenson et al. 2010; Herrfahrdt-Pähle & Pahl-Wostl, 2012).

Duchek (2020), details the lessons learned from the resilient responses of High-Reliability Organizations (HROs) through crises. HROs have been widely studied in crisis management literature. HROs are recognized as resilient organizations due to their ability to maintain stable operating conditions in highly demanding work environments, with minimal tolerance of error (Darkow, 2019).

In the HRO context resilience is viewed as an organizational ability to maintain and regain stability allowing operations to continue during a crisis and/or under continual and evolving stress (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011). Strategies utilized by HROs discussed in the literature

include improvisation (Loyd-Smith, 2020), coordination strategies (Faraj & Xiao, 2006), and the utilization of “ad hoc” (Weick et al. 1999), “epistemic” (Rochlin, 1989), or “informal latent” (Bourrier, 1996), networks to enable the dissemination of information required to enable organizations to cope effectively in a crisis.

Many of the strategies were built upon “the five hallmarks of HROs” outlined by Weick et al. (1999), which encompass the factors that enable the maintenance of stability through mindful and reliable operations in adverse or uncertain situations. The “five hallmarks” of preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise (Leveson et al., 2009), are summarized in Table 5.

Several authors identified decentralized governance as a characteristic of Resilient organizations (Wildavsky, 1998; Somers, 2009; Barasa et al. 2018; Loyd-Smith 2020), through which controls are distributed rather than held through traditional ‘centralized’ or ‘hierarchical’ models in which leaders and managers have full control and decision-making authority. Centralized governance models are thought to diminish creativity and innovative behavior among employees, which are central to adaptation in crises (Somers, 2009). Wildavsky (1988), details the role of ‘decentralized anticipation’ in achieving greater degrees of safety, compared to centralized organizational structures in which decision making, agreement, and instruction will take longer.

**Table 5. Hallmarks of High-Reliability organizations are derived from the work of Leveson et al. (2009).**

Hallmark of HRO	Description
<b>Preoccupation with failure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Monitoring operation for small process failures or minor deviations.</li> <li>● Addressing any detected error/failure (regardless of size) to prevent cascading effects and to promote learning.</li> <li>● Staff encouraged to report failure</li> <li>● Culture of transparency that supports sharing of failures and information to guide learning and new best practices.</li> </ul>
<b>Reluctance to simplify interpretations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acceptance and embracing of complexity.</li> <li>● In-depth analysis to understand the root causes of problems/errors.</li> <li>● Utilization of data &amp; performance measures to guide change.</li> <li>● Technical competence and specialized knowledge among frontline workers.</li> <li>● Leaders/management are:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open to change</li> <li>2. Utilize/listen to frontline expertise</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<b>Sensitivity to operations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Operations and processes are continually evaluated to inform decision making, guide learning, and improve future performance.</li> <li>● Frequent and open communication between operations and management.</li> <li>● Recognition and active scanning of the continually evolving environment to guide strategy and decision making.</li> </ul>
<b>Commitment to Resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Engagement in anticipation and preparation activities.</li> <li>● Establishing effective communication and control mechanisms.</li> <li>● Development of multidisciplinary teams and cross-functional networks to increase the effectiveness in high stake situations.</li> <li>● Promotion of flexibility &amp; bricolage.</li> <li>● Continual shift between pre-planned practices and improvisation.</li> </ul>
<b>Deference to experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ability to shift between hierarchical and functional expertise to meet the demands of the situation.</li> <li>● Decisions are guided by frontline workers who have expert knowledge and access to the latest information.</li> <li>● Dialogic coordination (protocol breaking &amp; joint sense-making).</li> <li>● Continual training to enhance knowledge &amp; competence among staff.</li> </ul>

Loyd-Smith (2020), explored the concept of decentralization and autonomous decision making to aid resilient organizational responses in the context of a ‘low-chance-high impact

event', which is described as "one which creates an urgent threat to social and life-sustaining systems, creates deep uncertainty and requires international governmental intervention". The author discusses the challenges faced by the global healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for frontline organizations to be adaptable in the initial phase of the crises. The article discusses the importance of 'loosening' tight control measures which typically apply in normal operating conditions and the adoption of creative or 'improvisative' practice to promote effectiveness and functionality while the situation stabilizes.

The act of improvisation is described as a creative intersection of "intuition and spontaneity" (Loyd-Smith, 2020, p.1). The author discusses the role of improvisation in facilitating the re-establishment of order in chaotic and uncertain situations by finding practical solutions. Loyd-Smith (2020), introduces three critical factors that contribute towards increased organizational capacity for improvisation.

The first factor is increasing autonomy and decision-making power among organizational staff. In doing so, the front-line staff are encouraged to improvise and utilize their expertise and intuition to make the right decision in the moment, increasing the likelihood that individual units will overcome the challenges brought on by the high-impact event.

The second critical factor is maintaining structure. Although a loosening of control is required to enable improvisation in crises, the author highlights that solutions are rarely achieved through archaic approaches and suggests that adaptation of existing practices is enabled through

improvisation. The maintenance of a structural frame from which adaptations can occur is critical to enabling collective action through effective lines of communication. Loyd-smith (2020), suggests that coordination and autonomous decision-making allow staff to improvise while ensuring their behaviors are continuously integrated with those of others which helps to maintain organizational stability and flexibility in its adaptation to the current situation.

The third and final factor is ‘creating a shared understanding’. Resilient organizational responses to low chance high impact events are enabled by collective action, in which sub-units have a sound awareness of the interdependencies of their actions, and a holistic view of the situation. By establishing a shared understanding individuals can work towards a larger common goal and develop an increased awareness of how their actions and decisions align with others to achieve it.

The author reiterated the importance of sacrificing optimization in low chance- high impact crisis events and suggests that adopting improvised methods of operating, increases an organization's ability to survive and recover from such events. Loyd-Smith, (2020), discusses the importance of ensuring organizational integrity is upheld, and stakeholder (or patient) safety is maintained throughout any improvisation activity but highlights that maintaining the utilization of stringent protocols or hierarchical decision making may result in greater harm to patients and a failure to survive the crisis.

In their exploration of medical trauma center responses, Faraj & Xiao (2006), discuss a related construct of variations of coordination practices. The first of which is “expertise coordination” which relates to working within the boundaries of protocols, knowledge sharing, and structures required to enable the timely utilization of knowledge and expertise. The second is “dialogic coordination” which involves joint-sense making, cross-boundary interventions, decentralized decision making, and protocol breaking which ensures operations are successful in time-critical situations. The authors discuss the importance of utilizing a situational approach for the selection of appropriate coordination practices to promote resilience responses (Faraj & Xiao, 2006).

Improvisation as defined by Loyd-Smith (2020), and the coordination practices outlined by Faraj & Xiao (2006), enable organizations to develop timely solutions and coordinated responses in times of unexpected events. Studies indicate that High-reliability Organizations (HROs) fluctuate between strong centralization during normal operating status and decentralized decision-making during crises (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). This adaptive structure allows HROs to respond rapidly whilst being flexible to their changing environment (Somers, 2009).

The practices of HROs should be considered as important resilience capabilities to aid effective crisis management in NPOs regardless of their mission or size. When organizations can collectively and successfully adapt to their new environment in times of crisis, they increase their capacity and ability to withstand shocks, maintain function and engage in transformative activities when faced with challenging and unstable environments.

## **The Value of Social Capital**

The literature frequently discusses the significance of organizational social capital and the establishment and leverage of networks to aid resiliency in everyday operations and crises. Kaltenbrunner & Renzl (2019), describe social capital as the “mobilization of available resources or assets through a social structure”, which could include relationships between the organization and its staff, stakeholders, and wider community.

Hutton et al. (2016), examined factors that positively and negatively contributed to disaster response efforts following the February 2011 Earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand. The analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews found that NPOs that worked within established collaborative agencies and shared resources were able to transition successfully between the response and recovery phases of the crisis. Further, the findings identified that during the response phases a lack of established relationships between emergency authorities and local nonprofit leaders hindered effective decision making, which impacted the assistance received by vulnerable populations within the region. In turn, the authors found that NPOs that were contracted with the government were more prepared for long-term recovery.

Andrew et al. (2016) conducted a data analysis gathered from semi-structured interviews with 44 non-profit, public, and private organizations serving communities affected by the Great

Floods of 2011 in urban and rural provinces in Thailand. The findings suggest that resiliency was increased by engaging in strategic collaborative partnerships or networks through the mobilization of the additional resources which are essential in disaster response efforts. The findings further revealed that non-profit and private organizations demonstrated greater resilience than public sector organizations and that organizations operating in rural areas were more cohesive and socially connected. This aided the strength of their partnerships as compared to urban organizations that were geographically fragmented, which was thought to negatively affect their engagement in cohesive relationships and partnerships.

Delilah Roque et al. (2020), present how community resilience was enhanced through social capital. By looking at two rural barrios in Puerto Rico, the study demonstrates how the communities' actions pre-and-post-Hurricane María assisted the residents in coping and reducing vulnerability. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with community leaders to assess the communities' capacities in their organizations, emergency management, collaborations, and ongoing efforts to mitigate future shocks. Findings show that social capital facilitated recovery efforts and enhanced resiliency through shared values, network expansion, new partnerships, and a desire to make their communities more robust and less vulnerable to upcoming environmental disturbances.

### **The value of Human Capital**

Barasa et al. (2018), highlighted the wide recognition of human resources as a key attribute to organizational resilience. Key aspects of human capital discussed included the abundance and skillsets of staff members. Staff commitment and motivation toward organizational goals were found to be the most influential aspects of human capital on organizational resilience. In the healthcare context staff commitment and motivation were found to enhance adaptation and the acceptance of challenging circumstances in the face of terrorism insurgency in Yobe State, Nigeria (Ager et al., 2015).

Several studies discussed the prioritization of staff wellbeing as a characteristic of organizational resilience. Following the Christchurch earthquakes, the resilience of infrastructure organizations was enhanced by fostering a ‘social environment’ in which staff felt able to openly share their feelings, felt listened to, and had their worries addressed (Walker et al., 2014).

Through the analysis of 296 publicly funded Spanish organizations Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2019), found that a supportive employee work environment, built upon responsible, ethical and protective human resource management practices, which they label as Corporate Social Responsibility for Employees (CSRE), helps to enhance organizational resilience. The findings further suggest that organizational resilience promotes improved performance by developing organizational learning capacity.

## **Information management**

The management and utilization of information are frequently referenced as a factor contributing to organizational resilience. Within the crisis context Lapão et al. (2015), identified the successful transmission of information as a central facilitator of timely and effective adaptation to the challenges in the face of an Ebola disease outbreak in Lusophone African Countries.

Information management also encapsulates the management of knowledge. Duchek, (2020), states that a broad and diverse knowledge base is an integral ‘antecedent and driver’ of organizational resilience that enables organizations to build a sound foundation on which further resilience capabilities can be developed. The author suggests the seeking of new, and utilization of learned knowledge can help organizations develop multiple plans or strategies for various crises and determine suitable solutions (Duchek, 2020).

Duchek (2020), highlights that knowledge facilitates the development of coping capabilities. Knowledge management practices should involve the active seeking of awareness of the organization’s environment, cited as ‘environmental scanning’. This should involve engagement in environmental analysis to increase awareness of competitors, the political, social, and economical factors, and regulatory demands (Stephenson, 2010). Knowledge is also gained through organizational-wide reflection and learning following crisis events (Duchek, 2020).

## **The Impact of Technology**

Several studies have demonstrated the role of information technology in strengthening an organization's resilience and agility, enabling them to perform better in unexpected or unstable situations (Oh & Teo, 2006; Chung et al. 2019). Nah & Siau (2020), discuss the competitive advantage of organizations that possess human capital (staff competence), psychological capital (hope optimism, confidence), and adaptive capabilities aided by information technology infrastructure to maximize resilience and aid recovery in adverse situations. The authors further highlighted the importance of technological infrastructure and digital engagement to promote socially distanced operations and suggest that resilience can be built through the utilization, expansion, and enhancement of digital channels and data analytics (Nah & Siau, 2020).

## **Leading with Resilience**

Several studies identify transformational leadership as a positive attribute to organizational resilience. Bass & Avolio (1994), describe transformational leaders as individuals who are visionary, inspirational, and consider the needs of others. Through the analysis survey responses of individuals working in emergency response teams, local governments, and nongovernmental organizations Valero et al. (2015), suggest that transformational leadership is displayed by individuals who build resilient organizations by inspiring others and articulating a shared vision for the navigation of future challenges. The findings also indicate that

transformational leadership has a positive impact on perceived organizational resilience among staff members. Interestingly the analysis also indicated that staff elected for their positions (e.g., mayor), rather than those who were appointed for their positions (nonprofit leaders & appointed officials), were increasingly likely to focus on resilience building in their organizations (Valero et al., 2015).

Through the study of two nonprofit behavioral health organizations Witmer & Sarmiento Mellinger (2015), found that servant and transformational leadership styles contributed to resilience as organizations adapted to funding changes. Through a review of leadership theories, Dartey-Baah (2015), suggests that resilient leadership qualities (emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, learning and adaptation orientation, performance-driven and shared leadership) are encompassed in a combination of transactional and transformational leadership styles, and suggest that resilient leadership should be “transformational leadership”, and enable organizations to engage in system-wide change and meet the demands of the fast-paced and changing external environment.

Lembani et al. (2018), identified dedicated leadership as a central attribute to quality service delivery and system resilience within maternal care delivery in South Africa. Leaders who build trust, and support, empower, motivate staff and stakeholders are said to contribute to resilient organizations. Review findings from Barassa et al. (2018), imply that leaders who created a clear and shared vision aided resilience by providing focus and encouraging agency among staff members during the crisis and challenging situations. In the HRO context, several

scholars identified the importance of shared decision making and the willingness of leaders and managers to seek feedback from frontline operating staff during crises (Weick et al. 1999; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2011; Loyd-Smith, 2020).

### **The Role of Organizational Culture**

Witmer & Mellinger (2016), identified hope and optimism as characteristics of a resilient attitude, which helped organizational members (leaders, managers & staff), cognitively prepare for adaptation while organizations underwent change processes. Viewing challenges as opportunities for learning, improvement, and developing new capabilities was identified as an important attribute of resilient organizations (Sawalha, 2015; Walker et al. 2014). Several studies discuss the importance of organizational cultures that encourage creativity and innovation to enhance an organization's ability to adapt and transform its practices, which are identified as central antecedents of organizational resilience (Lee et al. 2013, Mafabi et al. 2013, Sandanda, 2014).

Through a review of shared leadership literature, Routhieaux (2015), suggests that nonprofit organizational resilience and adaptability are enhanced by a culture of shared leadership. The author further proposes that developing a culture of shared leadership should be viewed as a holistic process that is practiced through different organizational streams including leadership and management, recruitment, staff training and development, and accountability and

performance reviews. The author suggests that this holistic approach will promote system-wide development, sustainable practices, and resilience.

## Methodology

This research project utilized a mixed-methods approach. Firstly, a comprehensive review of the empirical literature surrounding organizational crisis management and organizational resilience was conducted. The studies included both qualitative and quantitative research and provided a holistic view of the topic from an organizational management perspective. The studies included in the literature review included those focused on organizations from the nonprofit, public and private sectors.

To complement these findings and provide nonprofit-specific perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse range of experts including nonprofit leaders, experts, and academic researchers. Interviewees were invited to participate based on their expertise in nonprofit crisis management and organizational resilience and were selected to participate based on availability. The interviews questions aimed to answer the following research questions:

***R1. What factors and practices contribute to resilient organizational crisis management efforts?***

***R2. What activities can nonprofit organizations engage in to prepare for potential crises?***

***R3. What enables organizations to act effectively in the moment when a crisis hits?***

***R4. What organizational factors and practices enable organizations to emerge stronger following a crisis?***

Interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom between February 14th and April 29th, 2021. Interviews ranged from between 36-64 minutes. Participants were asked for consent to record in the email invite, and before initiating recording on the day. The transcriptions were downloaded and utilized in a qualitative analysis, which is summarized in the following section.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Qualitative Interviews**

The interviewees for this project included a diverse group of experts in the field of organizational resilience and organizational management research and leaders from a variety of backgrounds within the U.S nonprofit sector and further afield. The identities of the interviewees are kept confidential, however, a description of their backgrounds are detailed below:

**Interviewee 1 (I1): Nonprofit leader, academic & consultant (U.S).**

**Interviewee 2 (I2): President and CEO of Capacity Building NPO in a rural Community (U.S).**

**Interviewee 3 (I3): Executive Director of member organization (U.S).**

**Interviewee 4 (I4): Academic lecturer and researcher in Risk Management in the Third Sector (UK)**

**Interviewee 5 (I5): Academic researcher in Cross-sector Organizational Resilience (UK)**

From the interviews, perspectives from nonprofit leaders who have lived and led NPOs through a variety of economic, pandemic, environmental, operational, and reputational crisis

events were explored. The interviews provided insight into their view of organizational resilience and factors that enable organizations to navigate crises and develop resilience capabilities and capacity. Further, this aspect of the research provided perspectives from academic researchers with specific expertise in the UK and European third sectors, and cross-sectoral organizational resilience.

### **R1: What factors and practices contribute to resilient nonprofit organizational crisis management efforts?**

#### **Organizational Resilience Definitions**

Interviewee 3 (I3) highlighted that the global pandemic has altered their definition of nonprofit organizational resilience and described it as an ability to *“react effectively to changes both expected and unexpected changes that are happening”*. I4 described organizational resilience as an ability to *“adapt and weather shocks and quickly get back into the normal business or whatever the normal becomes after that.”* Both I1 and I5 discussed the common view of organizational resilience *“ability to bounce back from unexpected events... to absorb the shock, and to move forward to continue operations”*. (I1), and highlighted that organizational resilience is more than just *“bouncing back”* to a state of normalcy (I5).

Several of the interviews discussed the importance of adaptability, highlighting its contribution to resilience by enabling NPOs to pivot *“quickly to continue operating within the*

*changing environment and thriving by making the best of the situation*” (I4). I1 stated that they prefer the term “adaptability” rather than resilience as the term indicates that organizations can *“move and avoid... adapt and change”* to their environments. I1 highlighted that adaptability enables NPOs to “handle risk or pursue opportunity.”

I5 described organizational resilience as a process in which *“an act of whether that's an individual, system or a community, to build capabilities to interact with their environment in a way that allows them to positively adjust and overcome the adversity of some degree”*. I5 highlights that there are multiple elements to resilience that should include responding to potential threats and dealing with events as they unfold. He suggests that resilience should be viewed as anticipating, preparing, and adapting to a crisis.

I5 also discussed the similarities between safety and resilience. They described safety as *“a dynamic non-event”* and highlighted that something is defined as unsafe when there are failures or if something goes wrong. They highlighted that organizations are constantly adapting to their situation and resilience may only be noticed if an event occurs that causes a breakdown or stops things from happening as usual.

### **Contributing Factors to Resilient NPOs**

I2 described organizational resilience from a tactical perspective and a skills perspective.

They highlighted that practical characteristics of NPOs included solid funding, financial awareness, a clear strategic vision, mission alignment, and understanding the needs of its stakeholders that shape the mission. They reiterated the importance of ensuring the internal and external organizational stakeholders are on board with the strategic vision of the organization and discussed the importance of actively analyzing the larger systemic factors that affect the organization's ability to achieve its mission. All of the interviewees highlighted that no one predicted the pandemic and its long-term effects on society and the sector. For this reason, I4 highlighted that in addition to risk management practices, resilient responses are enabled when organizations can respond quickly.

### **Organizational Culture**

I2 highlighted that resilient organizations have a culture (across leadership, the BOD, staff, and external stakeholders) that supports adaptation to the changing environment and discussed that the pandemic has demonstrated that in times of crisis organizations either have to *“adapt or die”* (I2). They discussed the importance of ecocentric and collaborative leadership to help organizations recognize and utilize the strengths of their members to “promote maximum efficiency” (I2).

I5 discussed the research surrounding organizational culture and employee support of organizations during a crisis. They highlighted that employees are usually quick to act in favor of their organizations and tend to go *“above and beyond”* when a crisis hits as their income and

livelihood depend on it. Further, he highlighted that managers have tried to determine how they can sustain the crisis work ethic and *“bottle that energy”* into normal operations and discussed the ethical implications surrounding the topic.

### **Long Term Sustenance**

Several of the interviewees discussed the importance of focusing on the long-term sustenance of the organization to build resilience. I2 discussed the concept of resourcefulness in the nonprofit sector and the importance of embracing a sustainable mindset with policies and operations focused on long-term viability.

Referencing the financial crash and the global pandemic, I1 highlighted that no one can predict the intensity or nature of crises or have plans to deal with them. For this reason, I1 reiterated the need for nonprofit leaders to adopt a long-term view of their organization and mission, where strategy is developed to sustain the organization for the foreseeable future:

*“Leaders who think long term...make sure that they're building the infrastructure, the internal staff capacity and financial resources for the long haul”* are better prepared to handle crisis management and the daily challenges in the sector (I1).

I1 further discussed the role of leadership in ensuring the BOD are “*on board*” with the long-term vision to enable decision making to support sustainable operations and adjustments to the operations and activities during a crisis.

## **Governance**

From a governance perspective, I1 highlighted that board members can often have damaging effects on an organization in times of crisis if they are too absorbed by the mission or a certain program and are unwilling to shift funding and unable to focus on the long-term survival and health of the organization in those moments. They reiterated that board members can’t overcommit to a certain area of the organization and need to take a holistic view to protect the organization and its long-term viability.

I3 discussed their experiences of working with a BOD and the commonly experienced difficulty of ED’s in communicating the importance of investing in adequate organizational technological infrastructure. I3 highlighted that the pandemic forced governance to recognize that IT is essential for the organization to function in crises when the central office space is inaccessible.

I3 highlighted that “*things are not simply going to go back to the way they were*”, and that to survive nonprofits must have governance on board to support the organization through the

changes brought with these events. They discussed the ability to hold emergency meetings with board members and committees was integral to their organization's ability to make urgent decisions when the pandemic hit, and the importance of technology to enable this.

I4 highlighted that leadership and governance (BOD), should together be incorporating risk management into their central organizational strategies. They discussed the taboo topic of risk management in third sector organizations and mentioned the hesitancy to talk about it within the nonprofit sector as compared to private or industrial sectors. I4 suggested that organizations should be applying a risk lens to their strategic plans to guide better decision-making and reiterated that risk should not be separated from other organizational activities. Further I4 discussed the importance of developing risk management capabilities within the third sector, whether it be through the help of experienced board members or external expertise. I4 highlighted that many organizations feel they lack the time to implement risk management into their practices but suggest that it should be viewed as a central antecedent for building organizational resilience and sustainable practices.

## **Organizational Size**

Several of the interviewees discussed the impact of organizational size and its effect on an organization's ability to pivot during a crisis (I2, I4). I2 discussed the ability to pivot quickly

and the operational advantages of smaller organizations that already have the technological infrastructure or have the funds to provide everyone with the equipment and resources needed to work from home, whereas mid-size NPOs with more people, and maybe fewer resources would have struggled comparatively. I4 also highlighted that many third sector organizations in the UK may be staffed by one or two people which is vastly different from large institutions like a University. I2 highlighted the need for smaller organizations to seek capacity-building expertise from their communities, and I4 suggested that universities should offer complimentary consulting services and engage with third sector organizations within their communities to help them build resilience.

### **Technological Infrastructure**

I3 and I4 discussed the benefits of having a robust digital infrastructure in place before the pandemic, that enabled organizations to transition quickly to home working and the shift to the virtual environment. I4 further discussed the advantage held by organizations whose staff were digitally fluent and did not require training for online working in a digital or virtual environment and highlighted that this decreased potential time delays enabling organizations to pivot quickly for their stakeholders and focus on quality service delivery.

I2 and I3 discussed the challenges faced by organizations that didn't have cybersecurity measures in place before the pandemic and the disadvantages of organizations that lacked technological literacy and experience before the initiation of remote working. I3 reiterated the

importance of seeking expertise within the community to support smaller organizations with technological/digital/cyberinfrastructure.

## **R2. What activities can NPOs engage in to prepare for potential crises?**

### **Organizational Financial Health and Stability**

All of the interviewees discussed the importance of financial resilience, and ensuring nonprofits have the funds to survive if a crisis hits. I1 highlighted that *“cash is king”* and reiterated the importance of establishing a financial *“safety net”* with adequate unrestricted funds to utilize in times of crisis. They reiterated that *“if you don't have the cash it doesn't matter what your plan is... if you're not making payroll...none of the other stuff matters”* (I1). I2 highlighted the need for NPOs to be *“unapologetic about covering its costs”* and highlighted the need for organizations to move away from the practices that contribute to the *“nonprofit starvation cycle”* to promote sector-wide resilience.

Through various real-life examples, I1 highlighted the importance of building the financial resources (cash reserve/liquidity) to enable organizations to handle and survive future crises including changes in funding availability, economic conditions, and social demand. They reiterated the importance of reacting quickly in the moment, adapting, and looking at the new *“new normal”* moving forward. I1 suggested that NPOs must seize opportunities in their new

environments to improve the long-term health and sustenance of organizations. They stated that leaders must work with their BOD to assess their ***“business revenue model going forward”***.

I4 discussed the importance of establishing a stable funding base and ensuring that incoming revenue is established for the foreseeable future. They also highlighted the importance of having a variety of revenue streams, rather than relying solely on single sources such as yearly grant contract renewals. I4 also discussed that vast amounts of emergency funding were made available to organizations in Scotland during the pandemic and highlighted that some NPOs have received more government funding than they ever had previously, suggesting that organizations who adopted an opportunistic approach have been able to capitalize on the situation and build resilience through Covid, despite the challenges.

I4 discussed the problems which arise from poorly defined nonprofit-government relationships where there is a lack of differentiation between partnerships and contract work. They highlighted that third sector organizations often are forced to compete for these contracts and that short-term funding (often yearly or less than three years), has negative implications for an organization's ability to develop or improve their programs and work.

I4 discussed the motives behind, and perceptions of the third sector work and its contribution to this cycle: ***“I think the biggest problem for the third sector is always going to be that they go back to the same problems all the time...there isn't a sustainable solution that fixes the entire system in which the third sector operates... and that goes back to all these***

*things that are embedded in culture, why people don't see the third sector as valuable or think it's not necessary, or whether it's only there to gather and get funding... it's all these kinds of misconceptions..." (I1).*

## **Risk Management**

I3 suggested that risk management should complement the wider organizational strategy. I5 discussed the importance of leaders allowing their organizations to partake in inadequate preparatory activities and providing the resources necessary to do so. I3 highlighted the role of leadership in recognizing and seeking input from stakeholders to prepare for potential crises. They stated that they view risk management planning as an “*environmental scan*” and consideration of mitigating risk that prevents you from sticking to your strategic plan.

I2 and I3 discussed the importance of assessing geographical risks associated with an organization’s geographical location and preparing for potential threats of environmental disasters that could potentially affect an organization and its communities. I2 highlighted that rural organizations especially must consider the logistical implications that crisis could bring and the impact this can have on their ability to operate and serve their communities.

I2 and I3 discussed the importance of assessing risks and investing in risk mitigation infrastructures such as cybersecurity and technology. They highlighted that many small to midsize organizations lacked the resources and knowledge surrounding this, despite the fact that

they are handling sensitive information of stakeholders' and donors' data. They also highlighted the role of “*capacity building*” organizations in supporting smaller organizations to get up in running in the new environment.

I3 further discussed the importance of supporting organizations to develop policies and procedures to guide their new and changing ways of operating in the pandemic, and the benefit of utilizing templates and shaping them to fit their mission and activities.

As a researcher in this area, I4 discussed the importance of risk management in third sector organizations. They talked about their involvement in a university initiative focused on supporting local NPOs with expertise and training to develop resilience through capacity-building and risk management activities. They commented, “*I think that's where the support of others is as needed... to support organizations... help them understand risk management and how they can use it.*”

I4 discussed the organizational size and highlighted that it tends to be medium to smaller-sized organizations that lack risk management capacity. They discussed the importance of integrating operational and strategic risk thinking as they are interconnected and discussed the importance of establishing a culture that integrates risk management thinking at all levels of the organization.

I4 discussed the common negative view of risk and highlighted that nonprofits should consider the opportunities associated with risk, and suggested that things could be framed around resilience, as it might be easier to get people on board with *“managing resilience”*. They discussed the requirement of organizations to make a statement regarding risk management in their annual reports in Scotland and that this practice has become a sort of tick-box exercise, rather than something that is thought about and understood.

I3 and I4 discussed the time and resource challenges that prevent organizations from engaging in risk management activities. I4 highlighted that there never seems to be a right time to address risk management, but the pandemic has highlighted that there has never been a better or more critical time to invest or spend time on managing risk. Further, they highlighted that risk management is viewed as something that takes time away from services or central programs, whereas it should be viewed as a long-term measure to ensure the organization can continue to serve its stakeholders well into the future.

I4 discussed the need to have someone internally who is motivated to drive risk management within an organization and highlighted the value of gaining momentum internally and within the BOD. I4 highlighted the resilience of the sector as a whole, and its long-standing ability to survive major and minor shocks through many crises (recessions, government austerity measures, the pandemic, etc.). They discussed the impact of public sector development in the UK, and how this separated the third sector in a sense and highlighted the visible resilience of third sector organizations in times of crisis, such as the pandemic.

I4 highlighted that the lack of risk management and stable funding means that in times of crisis, third sector organizations are *“stripped back.. Just the bare bones are left”* and have to spend years building back up again. They discussed how this hinders progress on social issues. I4 further suggests that if organizations had better risk management capabilities, they would be better able to adapt during crises and sustain the momentum of long-term plans.

## **Crisis Management**

When discussing crisis management I2 reiterated the need for policies that *“operationalize the steps that need to be taken in the event or the wake or in anticipating a disaster or a pandemic”* and suggest that crisis management policies are broad to prepare organizations to cope with a wide range of events that could potentially occur. They highlighted that the recent events have reminded us that *“there's kind of something always around the corner”*.

I2 suggested that strategic plans should be specific and exact, whereas CMPs should be tactical to enable your organization to pivot within its strategy without making major disruptions to the organization. They highlighted the need for organizations to use their strategic plans as a *“flag in the sand”* when a crisis hits but be able to accept that that plan may need to be deviated from or adjusted.

I3 highlighted that the pandemic has increased the awareness and recognition that emergency planning and crisis management should be a priority within NPOs and that these activities should be incorporated into long-term planning. I3 suggested that organizations should have an internal ***“crisis management champion”*** who can devote time to these issues and suggested that it is beneficial to have someone on the board with expertise in this area to support the organization to incorporate crisis and risk management into their planning and operations.

I3 suggested that the organization should be ***“brainstorming with their different groups of stakeholders”*** to consider potential crisis events that could occur and make plans to address what action would need to be taken to deal with those situations. They suggested that the BOD, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders should be involved and considered in the planning process. They reiterated the need for organizations to look outside their internal operations and view ***“the wider ecosystem”*** in which their organization sits to consider factors that could impact it.

I3 discussed the benefits of engaging with their organization's wider community and networks to learn and discuss best practices for disaster management following wildfires and earthquake scares in recent years. They highlighted that this allowed their organization to think about potential crises and establish plans which outlined how the organization would navigate a situation where they were required to work remotely. I3 expressed how helpful and integral these plans were, and how they facilitated the transition to remote working when the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

I5 highlighted that crisis management requires resources and the importance of planning for scenarios that are more likely to occur. I5 further suggested that there should be a degree of flexibility within these plans to enable their adaptation across an array of situations. They reiterated the importance of scanning the organizational environment for those “*top three risks*” and being mindful that plans must be flexible.

### **R3: What enables organizations to act effectively at the moment when a crisis hits?**

#### **Contingency Planning**

I1 recommended that leaders should engage in contingency planning, where the organization engages in a “*quick and dirty analysis*” of numbers to determine where resources can be shifted to accommodate the changes brought by the new situation or environment. They highlighted that following the organizational strategic plan is often not attainable in crisis, and that “*contingency planning is about the ability to recognize at that moment what you need to do*” (I1). They emphasized the importance of being able to analyze the situation, think critically and make decisions in the moment.

Utilizing examples from the financial crash and the following recession in 2008, they compared the success of organizations who utilized contingency planning to reduce expenses,

shift programming and engage with funders to survive the crises versus those who decided to ***“ride it out”*** and make little change to their operations and resource utilization (I1). Further I1 stated that organizations who assessed the situation, acted quickly, and utilized contingency planning to shift their operations when the pandemic hit and highlighted that ***“these groups handled the crisis and came out healthier”***.

I3 discussed their organization's utilization of contingency planning and the positive outcomes achieved by creating task forces within the BOD to make plans for both the worst-case scenarios and less severe outcomes that could result from the pandemic.

### **Improvisation in Crisis Response**

I5 discussed the research surrounding improvisation and its origins to jazz music: ***“they perform together on a stage without having determined beforehand what they're going to do so, you know, your basis starts playing a note and then I don't need that drama starts changing them, you know, all of a sudden everyone's playing a different tune working together.”***

I5 highlighted that there are assumptions that rational decisions within organizations must follow a process and that this is not necessarily based on robust evidence. I5 discussed the value of improvisation in crisis management, and its ability to help organizations move away from

constricted response efforts that rely on information to optimize decision making. I5 discussed the changing nature of the crisis and the negative effect increased control measures have on the ability of frontline staff to be creative and adapt their practices to respond optimally in the current environment.

I5 also discussed the recovery phase of the crisis and the learning and reflection process that should follow. They highlighted the need to include the viewpoints of people from all aspects of the organization to allow a better understanding of what occurred, and to prevent ***“leadership bias or a tendency to kind of overlook certain things”***.

I5 also highlighted that in cases of successful crisis response efforts, there is a tendency to ***“copy and paste the response to a future situation”***, which was suggested to be “unproductive” as every crisis will be different. I5 discussed the importance of moving away from rigidity in crisis management and the need for flexibility and adaptation to dynamic situations. I5 highlighted the human tendency to dislike complexity, and desire to develop simple solutions for complex problems. I5 highlighted that ***“by their very nature of complex organizations are complex.”***, and so in crisis management and learning from a crisis there are no simple solutions or bullet point answers that can account for the many elements and factors that contribute to the complexity of a given situation. They suggest that learning should ***“embrace that complexity and be okay with it.”***

## Leadership

When discussing crisis leadership, I3 referred to a concept of the “*organizational sandwich*” where the meat is the E.D between the two slices of bread (being the staff and the BOD). They highlighted the increased pressure that comes from both slices during a crisis, and that staff and the BOD require additional support, reassurance, and direction. I3 further discussed the increased need to educate the BOD on up-to-date information regarding the situation to guide their action, as well as guiding staff on what the plan is to address the changing situation, and how it will affect everyone involved. They highlighted that during the pandemic everyone had external stressors to work and that put more weight and responsibility on leadership to provide both sides with additional support and time.

I3 also highlighted that during chaotic times, “**there's really nobody there to support you, I mean technically, the President of the Board is sort of, you know that's their job, but you know it totally depends on who that person is**”. They highlighted the importance of being patient, even in times where there is an urgency to make things happen quickly. They discussed the challenges brought by the environment that changed by the “*minute, hour, and day*” and the need to make decisions that would be best at that moment but also benefit that organization in the long run.

## Timely Decision Making

All of the interviews highlighted the need for organizations and their leaders to make timely decisions in crises, where there is *“high uncertainty and limited information”* (I5). I1 highlighted that nonprofit leaders need to be *“comfortable with being uncomfortable”* and avoid *“analysis paralysis”* (over-analyzing the situation) when a crisis hits.

I1, I2, and I3 discussed the importance of leadership's decision-making to guide both the BOD and the organizational staff in times of crisis. I1 highlighted that the staff and board look at their leader as a source of stability at that moment and that organizational action and crisis response efforts are halted without guidance and instruction from those tough decisions. I1 highlighted that executive salaries are given to those who must make these difficult decisions on a daily and in high-pressure circumstances.

Concerning crisis decision-making, I5 highlighted that there is no time to deliberate but often decisions are made by those who do not have front-line experience of what is happening. They discussed the case of the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK during the initial period of the COVID-19 pandemic and that managers making decisions were often completely disconnected from the clinical frontline environment and were making decisions that impeded an effective and efficient response.

I5 also highlighted that the role of leadership changes significantly when a crisis occurs and the type of event that will impact that change. I5 reiterated the need for leaders to trust their employees and used the analogy of a ship in a crisis: *“it's not the captain that's leading the ship*

*anymore. It's the crew and the captain is keeping watch on Deck, but the crew are the ones who are actually leading that response and if you try and get the captain to lead the response you end up with a boat that essentially sinks because it just can't keep up with the changing weather conditions. I don't like analogies, but I think that one sort of works.”*

I5 discussed the perception that leadership often becomes the central point during a crisis and highlighted that it is unrealistic to expect leadership to manage everything the organization is dealing with in highly uncertain situations. I5 suggested that there cannot be an over-reliance on leadership to make all the decisions in crises as everyone is operating in a way they are not used to and unprepared for. He suggests that often, a situation will be better handled if there is some autonomy and sharing of decision-making power, allowing those who are experts in their specific roles to make the best decisions in the current situation.

I5 highlighted the time delays that occur, and often disjointed responses caused by leaders who grab power and demand that every decision is passed by the top executives which creates *“a bottleneck”* in the response effort. They reiterated that the response needs to be coherent, work to a central structure, with maintained communication, but suggested that effective responses are enabled when decision-making power is given to those *“dealing with the situation on the ground”*.

## Crisis Communications

I2 suggested that resilient organizations utilize strategic communications for public and community relations and suggested that in times of crisis organizations must use clear communications with their internal and external stakeholders.

I2 and I3 discussed the role of leadership in ensuring that people are informed and listened to during a crisis and highlighted the importance of supporting staff through the challenges. I3 emphasized that honest, authentic, and clear-cut communication with different stakeholder groups is very important to reassure stakeholders by demonstrating that **“even if you don’t know what the plan is right now, you are carefully assessing the situation and planning accordingly”** to the changing environment.

I3 discussed the racial justice issues that have been prominent over the last year and discussed challenges faced by their organization as a membership organization, **“who usually have not taken much of a political stand on things”**, and the difficulties their organization faced when deciding on how to be proactive at that time, and what approach should be taken regarding the release of public statements and deciding what could be done to best support the community.

I3 further discussed the importance of utilizing clear communication and making sure that everyone is on the same page during a crisis. I3 highlighted that times of crisis are hectic,

with lots going on, and found that they needed to take extra time to ensure everyone had a clear understanding of the situation and plan.

### **Collaborations in Crisis**

The interviewees had both positive and negative perceptions of role nonprofit collaborations during times of crisis. I2 discussed the importance of collaboration in crisis, especially in small island communities or rural areas. They provided an example of food security coalitions that were accelerated in the pandemic, due to the increased food insecurity among vulnerable community members when the first lockdown commenced. They discussed the barriers to initiate this coalition in recent years and that the initiatives had been very slow to take off, and the mindset shift that occurred in Covid due to the urgency of the situation. They highlighted that these barriers to collaboration disintegrated in pandemic and folks could see the bigger picture.

*“This rapid response mechanism kicked in where previously these organizations didn't care to collaborate. They couldn't see the bigger system enough to want to collaborate...somehow the pandemic spelled that out so clearly. That just didn't matter. They didn't even need a memorandum of agreement, they just rolled up their sleeves and said let's just do this work together... there are lives at stake, let's*

*just do whatever it takes... The obstacles and the silos rapidly melted away and they were doing it in such creative ways.” (I2).*

I2 further discussed the silver linings and **“nonprofit sector awakenings”** that occurred during the pandemic and the embrace of nonprofit organizational collaboration and support rather than sheer competition for resources. I2 also discussed the positive cross-sector collaborations (nonprofit, government, social enterprises) that developed due to Covid and the need for this style of working to continue to enable progress in the address of society’s social issues: **“...we can’t all just scurry back to our corners and then start doing things in a vacuum without knowledge of what the other is doing... to that original idea of really capitalizing on the strength of the nonprofit sector, corporate, and government.”**

I2 and I4 discussed the importance of governments and NPOs working towards better working relationships, built on trust, with improved funding models and contracts that focus on ensuring the services provided are of quality, rather than towards saving money. I2 reiterated the importance of collaboration to enable social change through policy. I2 also highlighted the government's reliance on the nonprofit sector to deliver services in times of crisis which was evident during the pandemic and hopes that this will be recognized and respected when the government engages with the nonprofit sector in the future.

I1 highlighted that strategic partnerships and collaborations are expensive and many organizations don’t consider the time and resource commitment that these efforts require. They

suggested that NPOs should carefully “*weigh up*” the positive impact of the collaborative effort versus the negative impact that could result from central staff and leaders spending valuable time away from central organizational activities.

Similarly, I4 highlighted that many collaborations can be beneficial, however, frequently organizations fail to assess the risks associated with their engagement in collaborations or partnerships. They highlighted that during the pandemic, many third sector organizations in Scotland were quick to commit to partnerships, both within and outside with the sector without considering the associated risks. I4 suggested that third sector organizations are often so focused on the service users that they fail to think about their survival, which will impact their ability to provide services in the long run.

I1 reiterated that collaborative efforts with a long-term focus are more likely to be successful in addressing social issues and having an impact. They reiterate that in times of crisis “*collaborations can just be extremely difficult to maintain*”, due to the scarcity of resources, and internal focus of individual organizations. Further I1 highlighted that collaborations focused on better delivering a mission are more likely to succeed than those that are focused on saving money. They provided examples of organizations that engaged in mission-driven collaborations to holistically address issues when Covid hit. For example, nonprofits that provide disadvantaged youth with scholarships to college partnering with tech companies to ensure the students had laptops and noise-canceling headphones to facilitate their college attendance while sheltering in place.

**R4: What organizational factors and practices enable nonprofits organizations to come out of crisis stronger?**

**Mission Alignment and Community Focused Crisis Response**

Several of the interviewees highlighted that resilient NPOs are those who remain aligned with their core mission in times of non-crisis and crisis. I1 highlighted that organizations must understand the needs of the clients they serve, how the current circumstances have impacted those needs, and adapt to serve the changed needs of the people in their community.

*“Being attuned to the changing needs of the people that you're serving I think is really, really critical to these organizations. They weren't just saying, and this is what I think groups need, I'm going to go ahead and do that. They were really listening to engage with their clients and the people on the ground.” (I1).*

They reiterated the need to look at the mission and assess how it will be achieved in the current circumstances. They provided examples of organizations adapting the way they delivered services and the services they delivered to meet the needs of clients while sheltering in places such as school kids learning from home and the provision of learning resources, laptops, Wi-Fi connections, school dinners, support for parents, etc.

I2 discussed the importance of recognizing the organization's priorities when a crisis hits and assuring that maintaining the safety and honor of the clients and of all the stakeholders is the ultimate priority. I2 also discussed the need for organizations to *“be aware of the environments and willing to pivot and adapt as needed to serve their communities and to survive.”* They described *“positive adaptations”* made by smaller organizations within her area and instances where the central programs were flipped to meet the needs of the community in that given moment. They provided an example of a small and young nonprofit that conducted mobile eye-testing for low-income communities that switched its central program to mobile Covid-testing in the same communities during the pandemic. In doing so they were able to meet the needs of the community and gain government funding that they would not have received otherwise and keep staff employed during the tough economic circumstances.

### **Positive Adaptations and Learning from Crises**

I3 discussed positive changes that emerged from the pandemic within their organization and highlighted that the events enabled the BOD to recognize the importance of investing in IT, and further demonstrated the importance of upgrading their website 18 months before the shelter in place period. I3 highlighted that the upgrade allowed them to easily transfer materials and information online. When discussing crisis reflection and learnings I3 also referred to a previous crisis that encouraged their board to operate with greater transparency, particularly regarding hiring and HR aspects of their organization.

I1 and I2 highlighted younger organizations are often better able to pivot or change their services to meet the needs of the situation in times of crisis. Both interviewees highlighted that more established and older organizations frequently have an established group of stakeholders (internal and external) who hold on to the organization's roots and traditional ways of operating. I2 discussed the aforementioned case of the mobile eye clinic who were under five years old as an organization and suggested this meant they were *“less hung up on legacy”* and were able to temporarily move away from their central mission to meet the new needs of their communities when a rapid emergency response was required (I2). I2 highlights that the organization will likely return to its central and long-term strategy once the pandemic has passed and testing is required less.

I2 discussed changes that have taken place during the pandemic including the benefits of remote working, and the finances nonprofits can save on rent and costs associated with physical space. They highlighted that this varies depending on the organization, but in their case, they operate mostly through electronic and digital resources and so this transition is easy and makes sense from a financial perspective.

Both I1 and I2 highlighted the need for nonprofits to use this time to assess their operations in their new environment following a crisis. I2 suggested that organizations need to make changes to enable the provision of competitive and fair wages to employees and a means of attracting talent to the sector. I1 reiterated that acting quickly at the moment, adapting to the

*“new normal”*, and seizing opportunities is central to the long-term health and sustenance of NPOs navigating the crisis.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

This research has provided an in-depth exploration of crisis management in the nonprofit sector, and factors that contribute to resilient NPOs in times of crisis and non-crisis. The findings have demonstrated that organizations and crises events are both complex in nature. Further, the findings have highlighted that there is vast variation in the typology of both NPOs and the crisis events which have the potential to occur.

Due to the turbulent global environment, it is impossible to predict what lies ahead and plan accordingly for every possibility. NPOs cannot adopt a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to crisis management and must be proactive in their efforts to assess the potential operational and reputational threats associated with their work.

The literature review highlighted that the theoretical conceptualizations of crisis management and organizational resilience overlap to some extent, and collectively identify three central phases of crisis (pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis). In turn, both research streams identify and suggest specific factors and activities within each of these phases that enable organizations to develop resilience in times of crisis and non-crisis. The research indicates that during the pre-crisis phase, organizations should plan and prepare. During a crisis, situational awareness and timely action are required to enable organizations to cope and adapt. In the post-crisis phases,

organizations must reflect on the experience and events that have occurred and engage in inclusive learning, and transformative change to build resilience and improve future crisis management efforts.

The qualitative data analysis complemented the cross-sectoral perspectives within the literature and provided nonprofit sector-specific insights. Central themes identified included the role of resilient leaders in developing resilience capacity within their NPOs. Nonprofit leaders have the task of collectively guiding the BOD and organizational staff through times of crisis and non-crisis. Emphasis was placed on the role of leadership in fostering an organizational culture in which internal and external stakeholders are aligned with the NPOs' long-term vision and support a sustainable orientation to promote the long-term health of the organization. Furthermore, it was highlighted that decision-making needs to be timely in times of crisis and that leaders must trust, listen to and support their staff, who are experts in their roles. It was suggested that decision-making autonomy is an important contributor to resilient organizations that enable effective crisis responses by allowing front-line experts and workers to make decisions.

Participants reiterated the importance of risk management within the nonprofit sector and discussed barriers that prevent NPOs from engaging in risk management activities which included lack of time, resources, and expertise. NPO financial health was frequently discussed as a key NPO factor that contributes to an organization's resilience capacity. Adequate financial

resources enable NPOs to engage in risk and crisis management activities and allow NPOs to cope during crises through the utilization of un-restricted funding.

Participants also utilized their lived experiences to highlight the value of crisis management planning and the utilization of contingency planning enabling NPOs to cope and adapt and survive crises. IT infrastructure stood out as a key factor enabling organizations to cope during and adapt to their new environments brought by the global pandemic and other potential crisis events in the future. Further emphasis was placed on the importance of clear and transparent communication with internal and external stakeholders to enable resilient crisis management efforts.

The analysis suggested that NPOs will emerge stronger from crisis if they take time to reflect, learn and adapt during the post-crisis phase. It was also highlighted that NPOs must remain aligned to their central mission and ensure the current needs of their community guide their crisis response efforts and future activities. To enable the practical application of these research findings the Nonprofit Resilience Umbrella Model (Figure 1) has been proposed, with accompanying key recommendations for nonprofit resilient factors and crisis management activities (Table 6).

The findings and recommendations are directed as a guide for nonprofit professionals who can lead their organization's engagement in the development of specific capabilities and capacities to build resilient NPOs who are equipped to navigate whatever challenges lie ahead.

The findings of the comprehensive literature review and qualitative data analysis provided answers for the research questions 1-4. The following recommendations guide decision-making nonprofit leaders and professionals to address the fifth and final research questions of “*How can nonprofit organizations apply the findings of this research project to support their efforts managing crises associated with the global pandemic and build resilience for the future?*”.

With mission achievement and nonprofit sustainable development at the forefront:

*Recommendation 1: NPOs should view resilience as a process and consider specific activities within the three phases (pre-crisis, crisis, post-crisis), that enable effective crisis management.*

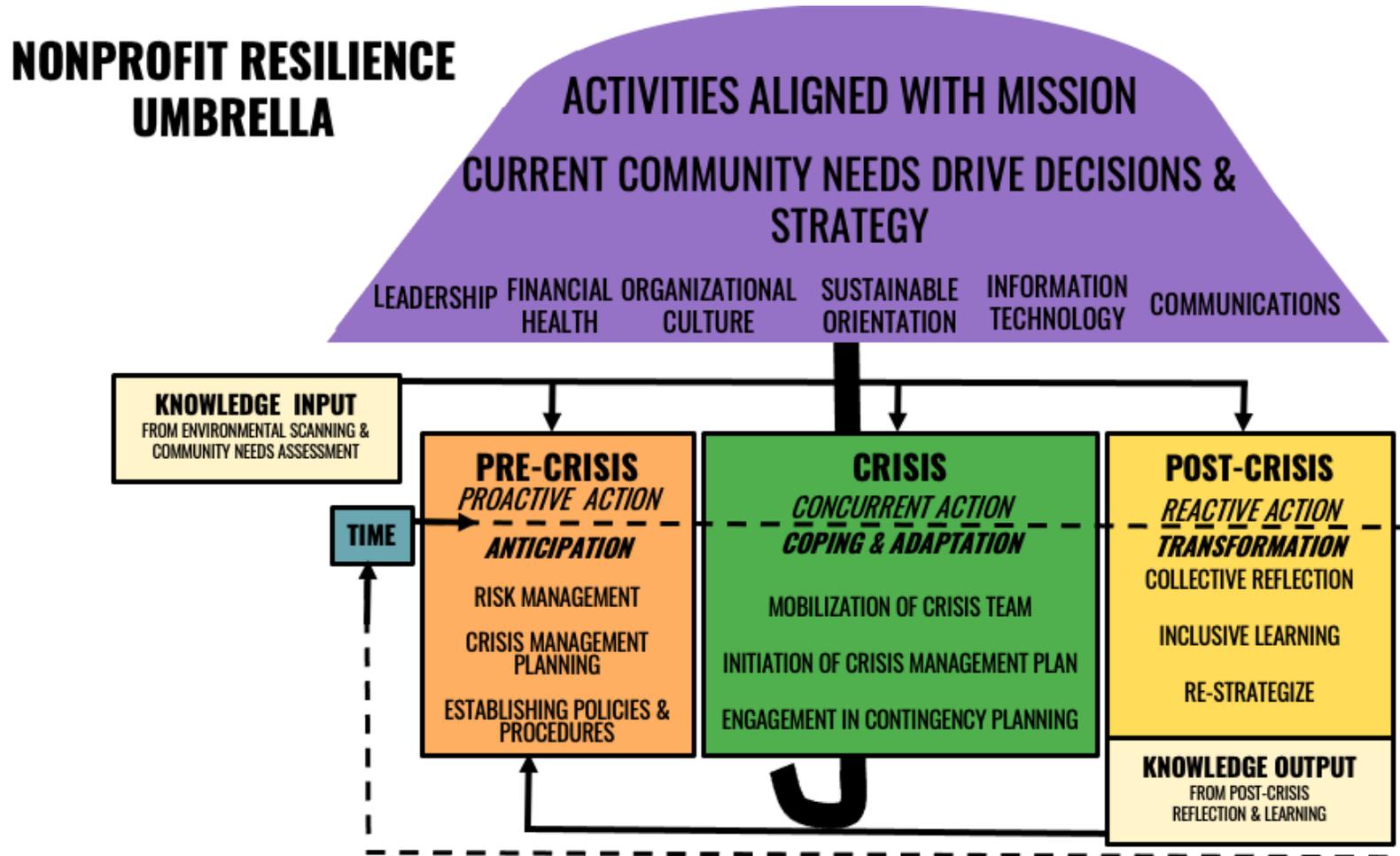
*Recommendation 2: NPOs should engage in activities to strengthen foundational resilience factors that enable mission achievement and support risk mitigation, successful crisis management, and transformative learning following the survival of crisis events.*

The findings of this research indicate that resilient NPOs ensure their activities are aligned with their core mission, vision, and values and ensure the current needs of their community guide strategy and decision-making. The Nonprofit Resilience Umbrella Model is designed to provide a visual representation of these central overarching concepts combined with the key NPO factors (leadership, organizational culture, financial health, sustainable orientation, communications, information technology, and sustainable orientation), that enable mission

achievement through the development of resilient organizations that have the capacity and capabilities to navigate crisis and challenges. Key crisis management activities are outlined within the three phases which sit underneath the Nonprofit Resilience Umbrella.

The findings of this research highlighted the important role of resilient nonprofit leaders who can lead the development of risk-aware, growth-minded, and sustainability-focused organizations. Nonprofit leaders have the task of cultivating the trust of their internal and external stakeholders and ensuring they are invested in the organization's long-term vision that aligns with the central mission and prioritizes the long-term health of the organization.

Figure 1. Nonprofit Resilience Umbrella Model



**Table 6. Key Recommendations for Resilient Nonprofit Crisis Management**

		PHASES OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT		
		PRE-CRISIS Proactive Action (Anticipation & Preparation)	CRISIS Concurrent Action (Coping & Adaptation )	POST-CRISIS Reactive Action (Transformation)
	<b>NONPROFIT RESILIENCE FACTORS</b>	<b>NONPROFIT RESILIENCE UMBRELLA</b> <i>Organizational activities in alignment with mission, vision &amp; values.</i> <i>Needs of community drive decision making &amp; strategy.</i>		
Input of knowledge from: 1. Continuous Environmental Scanning 2. Assessment of Community Needs 3. Organizational post-crisis reflection & learning process	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethical leadership &amp; decision making</li> <li>Resilient Leadership (Transformational, dedicated, eco-centric)</li> <li>Fosters growth culture and long-term organizational vision with staff &amp; BOD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision making                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy</li> <li>- Timely</li> </ul> </li> <li>BOD/Staff guidance and support</li> <li>Initiation of crisis management plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads engaging and inclusive organizational learning processes.</li> <li>Willingness to admit failures.</li> <li>Willingness to change and improve organizational practices and incorporate learnings into future crisis management planning</li> </ul>
	<b>ORGANIZATION CULTURE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aligned with mission, vision, values</li> <li>Risk Aware</li> <li>Open to change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open to change, Adaptation &amp; adjustment.</li> <li>Situational awareness</li> <li>Maintenance of structure &amp; communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement in reflection and learning</li> <li>Culture embracing creativity &amp; Innovation</li> <li>Opportunity seeking</li> <li>Change accepting</li> </ul>
	<b>FINANCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial awareness</li> <li>Adequate Unrestricted Funding</li> <li>Sustainable fundraising and resource development practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingency planning and adjustment of resource allocation to fund crisis response efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial awareness</li> <li>Contingency planning and adjustment of resource allocation to match new organizational environment/strategy</li> <li>Replenish unrestricted funding</li> <li>Re-establish sustainable fundraising and resource development practices in new environment</li> </ul>
	<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish communication and stakeholder engagement strategies on variety of platforms</li> <li>Establish communications with media and press</li> <li>Conduct regular Public relations training with key organizational spokesperson</li> <li>Establish Crisis communications strategy as part of crisis management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate crisis communications strategy to match given crisis typology (strategy/messaging templates/contact information)</li> <li>Steal thunder- be first to report when possible</li> <li>Ensure communications/information is fact checked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-crisis reviews of crisis communications strategy to guide future efforts and identify areas for improvement.</li> <li>Communicate crisis review, learnings and following action plan with stakeholders</li> <li>Continue to report on positive organizational activities and news</li> </ul>

Input of knowledge from: 1. Continuous Environmental Scanning 2. Assessment of Community Needs 3. Organizational post-crisis reflection & learning process	IT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in adequate Information Technology infrastructure</li> <li>Train all staff to develop IT literacy</li> <li>Invest in adequate data protection &amp; cybersecurity measures.</li> <li>Seek external expertise within the community</li> <li>Incorporate remote working/site evacuation instructions into crisis management plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize current IT infrastructure to support crisis management efforts.</li> <li>Invest in new IT infrastructure if required to support coping</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review IT utilization / operations during crisis.</li> <li>Identify infrastructure failures/areas for improvement in the new operating environment &amp; in future crisis management efforts</li> </ul>
	<b>CRISIS MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>PRE-CRISIS Proactive Action (Anticipation &amp; Preparation)</b>	<b>CRISIS Concurrent Action (Coping &amp; Adaptation )</b>	<b>POST-CRISIS Reactive Action (Transformation)</b>
	<b>CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANNING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk management (guides policies/procedures/crisis management plan)</li> <li>Crisis management planning (scenario bases)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crisis communication team</li> <li>Crisis communications plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select and initiate appropriate plan for given situation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflection and assessment of crisis management plan effectiveness</li> <li>Lessons feedback into establishment of renewed crisis management plan</li> <li>Investment in additional required trainings</li> </ul>
	<b>EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE: ESTABLISHING POLICIES &amp; PROCEDURES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk assessment guides development policies and procedures to match organizational activities.</li> </ul> Nonprofit Policy Essentials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowers</li> <li>Fundraising/Gift acceptance/Investing</li> <li>Safeguarding</li> <li>Up-to-date Bylaws</li> <li>Anti-discrimination</li> <li>Conflict of Interest Policy</li> <li>Document/data retention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure key policies and procedures are followed if applicable in crisis situation</li> <li>Be willing to adapt policies during crisis if it promotes the safety &amp; wellbeing of staff/stakeholders/public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement new/ policy changes identified in the organizational learning process.</li> <li>Adjust/create new policies required according to new operating environment &amp; protection needs of stakeholders i.e., cyber security for remote working or staff wellbeing guidelines for remote working/ reintroduction to office space guidelines etc.</li> </ul>

Resilient NPO leaders invest time and energy in fostering a culture in which the BOD and staff members feel inspired and empowered to fulfill their roles and enable the organization to achieve its mission. Resilient leaders can think critically and make difficult, high-pressure decisions in times of crisis and non-crisis. In turn, these individuals are willing to admit failures, eco-centric in their approach. The findings of this research highlight that organizational adaptability and resilience are enhanced long-term by creating a culture of shared leadership. Therefore, resilient nonprofit leaders must be trusting of staff expertise, embrace autonomous decision making, and listen to the advice and concerns of staff working on the frontlines.

Resilient NPOs prioritize financial health and engage in sustainable fundraising practices. Nonprofit leaders need to be unapologetic for covering full costs and educating their funders on the importance of developing substantial unrestricted funding to support the organization through disasters or economic circumstances, leading to crisis. Resilient NPOs promote transparency and utilize carefully constructed communication strategies to engage with their various stakeholder groups, regardless of the circumstances.

In turn, resilient NPOs invest in modern and robust information technology infrastructure to enable NPOs to operate effectively and efficiently in this continually developing digital environment, where technology is arguably essential.

Each of the overarching resilience factors included in the model promotes the development of resilient and successful NPOs, and in turn enables them to adequately prepare for, cope during, and transform following crises. In Table 6, central activities and contributing aspects of the key resilience factors are outlined for the pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis to guide resilient nonprofit crisis management. NPOs who are sustainability orientated are likely to recognize the importance of and approve the investment of time and resources into risk and crisis management activities that will promote the long-term health and sustenance of the organization.

Within the pre-crisis phase NPOs should be proactive, anticipate potential risks and engage in activities to prepare for potential events that could occur. Central activities include risk management and environmental scanning and crisis management planning.

NPOs must promote effective governance through the development of organizational policies and procedures to guide organizations to engage in ethical and legal practices and prevent behaviors that could potentiate reputational crises. Through the case study analysis of nonprofit scandals Tavanti & Tait (2021), highlighted the importance of promoting effective governance to ensure the establishment of appropriate and robust organizational policies and procedures, integrating training to promote an ethical organizational culture, and establishing mechanisms that enable reporting of destructive behaviors within NPOs to promote ethical leadership and conduct within the sector. These practices are central in NPO crisis prevention and aid the development of ethical and resilient NPOs.

When a crisis strikes, NPOs must be quick to respond, enabling the organization to cope and adapt to continue addressing the current needs of the situation and to enable the continuity of operations in the new environment. The findings of this research highlighted the importance of engaging in pre-crisis planning to establish a variety of scenario-based plans that outlines a crisis management team with personnel to lead specific aspects of the response, clear instructions for organizational staff members, a robust communications strategy, and details of the action required to enable the organization to continue operating. When a crisis strikes organizations must mobilize the crisis management team and utilize and adapt the appropriate crisis management plan to initiate an effective crisis management response. As the crisis unfolds, organizational leaders and BOD should engage in contingency planning to enable the organization to continue operating while ensuring the organization's long-term health is prioritized.

In the post-crisis phases, NPOs need to be reactive and engage in transformative activities that enable the organization to engage in an inclusive reflection and learning process, which will gather diverse perspectives of the crisis management effort from the various levels within an organization and initiate output of knowledge, which will guide the improvement of future crisis management planning activities and the adjustment of current, or the creation of new organizational policies and procedures. Additionally, organizations should revise their current strategy and consider potential opportunities that should be considered, or changes that should be made following the crisis to enable the organization to thrive in its new environment.

Throughout the phases of crisis management, resilient NPOs assess the current needs of their stakeholders while simultaneously fostering an innovative organizational culture, to aid the development of new ideas, allowing organizations to continuously renew their competitive advantages and achieve their mission. As outlined by the dotted line in the model, Nonprofit resilience should be viewed as a process within which crisis management activities are continuously engaged in and improved with time. NPO crisis management activities within each of the phases should be guided by knowledge gained from environmental scanning activities and the assessment of the community's current needs.

## **Conclusion**

Within several stages of the research process, it was highlighted that the nonprofit sector is known for its resilience. Despite the varying crisis and challenges NPOs face, the mission-driven nature of nonprofit work means that the “sweat equity” of nonprofit professionals carries organizations through incredibly challenging and frequently unexpected challenges. In more recent years, the concept of the nonprofit starvation cycle has been discussed frequently and is closely related to the concept of nonprofit organizational resilience and the ability to manage crises. As highlighted in qualitative findings, poor practices and strategy within the sector result in the near decimation of many organizations when a crisis occurs, and the reversal of years of hard work and progress which must be rebuilt, time after time.

The events of recent years have highlighted that crisis events such as the global pandemic or environmental disasters do not affect everyone equally, and the most vulnerable communities and members of society are worse affected. Nonprofits organizations must strategize to solve the mission-critical issues facing society, rather than investing in short-term fixes. These issues will not be solved overnight, in a week or a year. To ensure NPOs are built to continue operating throughout and survive the shocks and challenges this turbulent world may throw at them, nonprofit leaders must adopt a long-term view, engage in sustainable practices, and develop resilience capacity within their organizations. In failing to do so, NPOs are failing their communities and unlikely to achieve their missions.

This research has provided recommendations for nonprofit leaders and professionals which can be incorporated into the practices of NPOs to aid the development of resilience capacity and effective crisis management practices to ensure NPOs are built to survive and thrive.

Limitations of this research include the broad view of nonprofit organizational crisis management and organizational resilience, and the small sample number included in the qualitative analysis included within this project. With more time and funding, future studies could examine crisis management case studies in specific organization types, sizes and include multicultural perspectives to gain further insight into factors contributing to resilient NPO

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