Integrating Human Resource Leadership into Crisis Management Education: Enhancing Effectiveness in the Food and Beverage Industry in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Companies are looking at novel ways to organize and manage people as the challenges of managing across borders get more complex. It is not only wise but also necessary to comprehend and utilize HR's talents throughout difficult circumstances to guarantee long-term business results and uphold stakeholder confidence. Thus, Human Resource leaders play a pivotal role in determining organizational performance, as well as in shaping how organizations prepare for, respond to, and recover from a crisis. The objective of this study is to understand the barriers that influence the effectiveness of crisis management, particularly in sense-making, critical decision-making, coordinating and meaning- making. The study employs a qualitative methodology, using a case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were used with 16 strategic decision-makers from ten different crisis management organizations mainly from the Food and Beverage industry in Malaysia. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was used to explore how the organizations overcome the crisis and the role of HR in facilitating crisis management. This study revealed that various barriers hamper the crisis management process such as demand for a swift decision making, having the right talent, knowledge and skills in handling crisis, inconsistent information, demand for Human Resource Management (HRM) to provide training, rewards, emotional support in response to crisis and others. This paper contends that when there is an absence of role in managing a crisis, unclear or ambiguities among people and their behavioural readiness in a crisis, this may lead towards failure of effective crisis management.

Keywords: Crisis Management, Covid-19, Lesson, Business Education and Management education, human resource

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing business environment, organizations face an increasing number of crises that can disrupt operations, damage reputations, and threaten long-term viability. The food and beverage industry, in particular, is highly susceptible to crises arising from various factors, including food safety issues, supply chain disruptions, and public relations challenges. As Malaysia's food and beverage sector continues to grow, the need for effective crisis management strategies becomes even more critical. Recent studies indicate that nearly 60% of organizations in the food and beverage sector experience at least one significant crisis each year (Wang & Li, 2023). Human Resource (HR) leaders play a pivotal role in shaping an organization's response to crises. Their unique position allows them to influence organizational culture, employee engagement, and communication strategies during turbulent times. Effective HR leadership can facilitate a coordinated response, ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, and maintain employee morale, which are all essential components of successful crisis management (Hussain et al., 2022). However, despite their crucial role, there is often a gap in understanding how HR leadership can be effectively integrated into crisis management practices, especially within the context of management education.

Management education has a fundamental responsibility to equip future leaders with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate crises effectively. Integrating HR leadership principles into crisis management curricula can provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in managing human capital during crises (Brewster et al., 2021). By focusing on the specific challenges faced by the food and

beverage industry in Malaysia, educational institutions can prepare students to address these issues through innovative solutions and strategic thinking.

This paper aims to explore the integration of HR leadership into crisis management education and its potential to enhance the effectiveness of crisis responses in the Malaysian food and beverage sector. Through an examination of current educational practices and their alignment with industry needs, this study will identify best practices and propose recommendations for curriculum development. By fostering a deeper understanding of the critical role of HR leaders in crisis situations, management education can cultivate a new generation of leaders who are equipped to manage crises effectively and contribute to organizational resilience.

Organizations greatly depend on their Human Resources (HR) department during times of crisis, whether they are caused by external shocks or internal issues, to manage uncertainty, protect personnel, and maintain business continuity. HR plays a critical role in crisis management that goes beyond standard administrative duties to include organizational resilience, strategic leadership, and advocacy for the welfare of employees. HR is essential to how an organization prepares for, handles, and recovers from crises since it is the keeper of organizational culture and the link between management and the workforce. In today's globally competitive world, where strategies are getting more complex, and with unfavourable crisis and unexpected challenges, the human resource team is responsible for the firm's success or failure and must regularly monitor their performance and technique in handling a crisis Dirani (2020). Moreover, since they are regularly asked to assist in the selection of team leaders and members as well as in the creation of team development programs, human resource professionals must also stay current on emerging management techniques. Crisis management has become an important agenda for organisations in today's environment due to its potential impact on organisational performance. Several reasons have been given for the lack of crisis preparedness, such as insufficient resources, overly time-consuming processes, and erroneous assumptions by the organisation's leaders that a crisis will not happen in their organisation (Trachsler and Jong, 2020). Although research in crisis management is argued in the research and practice of its importance (Mirvis, 2020; Hutchins and Wang, 2008; Lai and Wong, 2020), there are ambiguities and failures in the means of resolution, such as the leader's failure in sensing "early warning signals" in response to the crisis, uncoordinated crisis communication, as well as misleading and mixed messages. These failures in the crisis stage are considered barriers in the crisis management process and may threaten the organisation's viability. Moreover, poor coordination between various people responding in the organisation and miscommunication between stakeholders could also lead towards failure in crisis management (Merchant and Lurie, 2020).

Due to the constantly changing environment, organisations have prioritised the development of crisis management strategies to successfully mitigate or prevent crises crises (Donbak et al., 2022). According to Nizamidou and Vouzas (2018), many businesses emphasise tactics and processes to prevent or avoid accidents and disruptions and improve resilience when planning and creating crisis management procedures.

Previous studies show various factors that influence failures in crisis management, such as inconsistent information, lack of teamwork among members in handling crises, unskilled and untalented spokespersons, and a readiness for response to the crisis (Raikes, Jacobson and Baldwin, 2019). These barriers such as lack of time to make an optimum decision (Rouhanizadeh, B., Kermanshachi, S and Nipa, 2020), lack of coordination among organisational members and demand for critical decision- making, lack of motivation to act (Holsti, 2019) are crucial to enhance the overall effectiveness in crisis management. Therefore, to overcome these barriers requires careful attention from the people themselves as they are important assets in the organisation in developing the competence of workers and contributing towards the organisation's overall success (Otoo, F. N. K., 2019)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Crisis Management

This study is grounded in Crisis Management Theory, particularly building on Fink's Four Stages of Crisis (Fink, 1986) and Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2015). These frameworks suggest that organizations must be prepared for different stages of crises, from pre-crisis planning to post-crisis recovery. SCCT, in particular, highlights the importance of leadership communication in mitigating reputational

damage and maintaining stakeholder trust.

In the context of this study, these theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding the role of Human Resource leaders in crisis situations. Drawing on Fink's model, this research explores how Malaysian organizations navigate the pre-crisis, during-crisis, and post-crisis stages, particularly focusing on the unique challenges posed by halal crises in the food manufacturing sector.

Additionally, this study incorporates the Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991), which positions human resources as a critical asset in building organizational resilience. In the context of Malaysia's halal food industry, HR professionals play a pivotal role not only in ensuring compliance with halal certification requirements but also in maintaining employee morale and operational continuity during crises. This study contributes to the existing

literature by offering a contextualized analysis of crisis management in Malaysia's halal food industry. Malaysia, as a global leader in halal certification and production, presents a unique regulatory environment that has not been widely explored in crisis management literature. By focusing on the role of HR leadership during crises, this study addresses a gap in the literature concerning the strategic contribution of HR professionals in managing organizational crises in high- stakes regulatory environments. Furthermore, this study extends Crisis Management Theory by incorporating insights from Malaysia's cultural and regulatory context, providing a comparative lens for future research on crisis management in other industries or regions with similar regulatory frameworks.

Role of Human Resource Development in Crisis Management

Given that a crisis may inflict numerous negative events on people, communities, and the organisation, it is crucial for organisations to apply crisis management systematically either to prevent a crisis or to manage an ongoing one Nizamidou & Vouzas (2018). According to Lockwood and SHRM (2005), numerous crisis events can affect the organisation due to poor management or mismanagement, such as failing to prevent a financial loss, providing an inappropriate working condition, cybercrime, and computer viruses. These incidents highlight that effective crisis management may minimise internal and external losses, allow companies to sustain or resume operations, and provide learning from past experiences (Rasli et al., 2017). With the changing environment today, developing crisis management strategies has become a priority for organisations as crisis planning and crisis management procedures enable organisations to prevent or avoid mishaps and interruptions besides enhancing resilience (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017). Therefore, the role of HR during the crisis has gained importance within organisations as HR is aligned with the company's changing core objectives due to crisis management planning and implementation (James, Wooten, & Dushek, 2011).

However, according to Nizamidou and Vouzas (2018) organisational and employee needs are not adequately considered in numerous cases of crisis events. Sense-making is the process by which strategic crisis managers get a shared understanding of the unfolding danger and its implications. This necessitates the gathering, analysing, and disseminating of information on the evolving threat and its consequences. Detecting a crisis via certain indications is a key responsibility for public authorities to perform during the incubation stage. Coordination can be achieved in different ways, by hierarchical means or network structures. In crisis management, coordination between different actors and organizations is a constant necessity. It is especially relevant in complex crises that are increasingly transboundary because such crises cannot be solved by organizations working alone. Meanwhile, critical decision making is an effective and acceptable strategic judgment while avoiding operational ones in the short and long run. Decisions made during a crisis are frequently linked to both the success and failure of crisis management. Lastly is meaning making which is explaining what is going on, what is being done to fix the situation and reduce the effects, and providing actionable suggestions on how to proceed. Making sense is a critical activity that must be completed at the outset. During an emergent event, these highly competent people can quickly capitalise fully on growth opportunities as they become available. According to McCracken and Wallace (2000) the nine HR characteristics are interrelated. If one is left out, the other SHRD characteristics will be weakened. Not only must the characteristics exist, but also, they must be well-integrated and have an internal fit. All the characteristics are essential in their own right and with each other. If one of the characteristics is weak or absent, then the development of SHRD might be significantly undermined

because the additional characteristics will be weakened. For instance, without a strategic partnership between the top management and the line management, HR cannot be appropriately embedded in the organisation, and there will be a barrier to developing a learning culture in the organisation. The pragmatism approach aims to explore the experiences of people who lived through a crisis situation and focus on the problem (Ansell and Boin, 2019). In line with this, there are four underlying assumptions in facilitating crisis management iitiatives, namely:

1) Sense-making: Organising the process through which crisis managers arrive at a shared understanding of the evolving threat and its consequences. This requires collecting, analysing, and disseminating information about the unfolding threat and its consequences.

2) Critical decision making: Making strategic decisions (while avoiding operational ones) that are effective and legitimate, both in the short and long run.

3) Coordinating: Facilitating the implementation of planned actions and strategic decisions by motivating actors in the response network to work together and perform their tasks effectively and legitimately.

4) Meaning-making: Explaining to all involved as to what is going on, what is being done to remedy the situation and limit the consequences, and offering actionable exercises to move forward.

Even though the task of managing a crisis is not easy, the existence of the four criteria above may allow people in the organisation to face the unknown and deal with uncertainty in the future (Williams et al, 2017). The pragmatic approach accepts the complexity, insecurity, and unpredictability of crisis circumstances while providing a constructive viewpoint on how to proceed. It rejects the traditional techniques and modes of thinking that dominate ordinary governance processes. As a result, strategic managers must be trained in order to be appropriately prepared for the effective adoption and implementation of such an approach (Ansell and Boin, 2019).

Top Management Leadership

The empirical study on leadership has taken three basic approaches: leader traits, leader behaviours, and the impact of situational factors on leaders' success. The literature provides a variety of perspectives on the competencies, skills, beliefs, and behaviours required for effective leadership. Crawford, Brungardt, and Maughan (2000), stated that specific personal attributes were historically regarded to improve a person's ability to lead. Finally, this method has broadened to incorporate a collection of talents or learned behaviours (e.g., physical traits, social background, IQ, ability, personality, task-related abilities, and social qualities) that work together to produce influential leaders Sun and Anderson, (2011).

Strategic partnership with Human Resource Management

Vardarlier (2016) added that it is crucial to have an action plan that is integrated with HRM activities during a crisis as the success or failure of the HR Department affects the whole organisation; hence, there should be an investment in human capital, such as training, before a crisis occurs. McConell (2003) claimed that the success of a company is greatly influenced by the successful management of its processes through every stage of its life cycle; therefore, putting the right employee in the right place and at the right time will enable organisational growth and economic viability, which will indirectly help the organisation to prosper.

Strategic partnership with line management Line management refers to the management of employees who are directly involved in the production or delivery of products, goods, and services. As the interface between an organisation and its front-line workforce, the line management represents the lowest level of management within an organisational hierarchy. Lee (2012) and Harrison (1992) emphasised the need of scresshared ownership of HR, in which line managers and HR employees collaborate on HR issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **cross-case study approach** to investigate crisis management practices within 10 Malaysian organizations. A cross-case study is well-suited to provide a holistic and comparative analysis of how

organizations from different sectors respond to crises. This approach allows for the exploration of both common patterns and unique responses across cases, providing a rich understanding of the role of Human Resources during crises (Yin, 2018). The participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals in key strategic and operational decision-making roles during crisis situations. The sample includes 16 participants from 10 organizations in diverse industries such as food manufacturing, beverages, and confectionery. These participants were chosen based on their direct involvement in crisis management, ensuring that they provide insights that are both relevant and information-rich (Patton, 2002). The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, ensuring that sufficient data was collected to capture the key themes and insights (Guest et al., 2006). However the data was collected primarily through semi- structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives on crisis management. An interview guide was developed based on key research questions, ensuring that the data collected was directly relevant to the study's objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, secondary data such as organizational documents, government reports, and news articles were analyzed to complement and triangulate the interview data, enhancing the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 1978).

The interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). Open coding was first employed to identify key themes, which were then organized into broader categories through axial coding. The use of NVivo software facilitated systematic data management. To ensure the validity of the findings, member checking was conducted with participants, and peer debriefing was used to reduce bias during the analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The internal validity of the study was ensured through triangulation, member checking, and detailed field notes. External validity, or transferability, was addressed by providing a rich, detailed description of the research context and participants, allowing readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other organizational settings.

Table I Characteristics of Study Participants

Company	Description of the company	Job Title
Company A	Multinational confectionary, snack food and beverage company	Head of Corporate and Govern Affairs, External Relations Matters Executive
Company B	Well-knowned bread company in Malaysia since 1990	Manager of HR and Admin, Admin Executive, HR Executive Junior
Company C	Leading Manufacturer of Chocolate and Layer Cake Industry	Manager of Human Resources
Company D	Leading and fast growing bread brand since 1969	Senior Executive Human Resource, Senior Manager HR, Senior Manager Management
Company E	Curry powder manufacturing company since 1984	Branch Director, Executive HR
Company F	Multinational corporation, coffee and biscuits	Talent Acquisition Specialist
Company G	Leading food manufacturing industry in Malaysia, soy sauce and variety of sauces in bottles and cans	Senior Executive HR
Company H	Various curry powder manufacturing company	Senior Executive HR
Company I	Leading rice manufacturing company in Malaysia	Manager HR
Company J	Bread Leading Manufacturer in Malaysia	Manager HR

Sense-making is one of the crucial steps for effective crisis management as it is one of the processes that allows us to gain an understanding of the uncertain conditions or unfavorable situations. It is crucial to note that sense-making for possible crises have an impact on the effectiveness of crisis management because lack of sensemaking, planning and preparation could cause disorganization, lack of information, provoke emotional reaction such as employee low morale, job status concerns, confusion, anxiety and others. Throughout the interview, the case study revealed that there are a number of essential things to do to enhance the crisis management especially in the sense-making process. First of all, in the sense-making stage, such as in the earlier stage of crisis people begin to lose their sense of safety because of the unexpected, unpredictable events. Due to this, a well-prepared contingency plan may provide an organized structure to control the situation and allows for the minimization of a crisis to both individuals and the organization. Other than that, some of the decision makers who involved in handling the crisis mentioned they do have a team involved in handling crises known as Special Situation Management Team (SSMT), while some organization do not have. Hence, during a crisis, managing individual emotions is necessary because not being able to control individual emotion is likely to cause the people to have some emotional conflicts, this is where the HRD plays a role through developing knowledge and skills in handling crises promoting wellbeing, promoting organizational resilience and others. The barriers in sense-making process can be illustrated in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. NVIVO Analysis Project Map Sense-Making issues and barriers and issues influences crisis Management effectiveness

RESULTS

This study examines, from the viewpoint of human resource development, how capable and effective leaders may affect change at each stage of a crisis and aid in reducing the negative effects of force, fear, and uncertainty on both individuals and organizations. The goal of the current study is to demonstrate how HRD can more effectively help organizations develop their leaders, who will then have an impact on their workforce in pandemic situations. In this regard, we recommend that HRD practitioners and academics critically assess the HRD involvements that may be effective during the crisis, which brings about a great deal of instability and ambiguity.

Lessons on sense-making

Lessons on decision-making

Many businesses first experienced communication issues amongst employees during the COVID-19 epidemic, leading to the introduction of the Teams platform, the organization of videoconferencing, and the building of a

dedicated audiovisual area for meetings. Small groups of staff were gathered for briefings, and electronic instructions were distributed. There was no strict verification in this regard; leaders were able to modify their behavior; they communicated with their staff on a regular basis; and they looked out for their well-being, particularly for those who were impacted by the pandemic, since this was one of the staff members' primary duties to ensure their safety. There are number of lessons on crisis decision making that can be drawn from the case. It has been demonstrated that poor in decision making process could lead to very confused information, information overload, unclear action to be taken during crisis and others. Moreover, most of the participants in the case study also mentioned that when there are time- constraints in a crisis, every information, decision, and action needs to be made quickly. The role of HRD such as enhancement leadership in strategy and style influences the way the leaders make decisions, communicate, and delivers information. According to Salvetti (2019), effective team management is a core element of expert practice during a crisis. When facing a crisis, the organisation needs to react quickly, act in a unified and structured manner, and have good teamwork. Targeted communication and coordination of tasks within the team is crucial to handle crises and emergencies successfully. Figure 2 illustrates the analysis of decision- making obstacles. This master theme, titled "decision making under pressure", has faced superordinate themes, i.e., 1) urgent decisions and 2) other barriers. All these themes are related to each other and with decision making. These themes influence the decision-making process in the early stage of a crisis and leads to the salient focused theme, which is decision making under a crisis.This master theme, titled "decision making under pressure", has faced superordinate themes, i.e.,

1) urgent decisions and 2) other barriers. All these themes are related to each other and with decision making. These themes influence the decision-making process in the early stage of a crisis and lead to the salient focused theme, which is decision making under a crisis.

Figure 2: NVIVO Analysis Project Map Decision-Making issues and barriers and issues influences crisis Management effectiveness

Lessons on coordination

The case study shows that most of the coordination issues or barriers towards effective crisis management are resulted from an insufficiently developed network in having the right tools in preparing for coping and recovery from a crisis and improving organisational relationships and communication among members of the organisation. an organization, organizational differences, and location and resource issues. Most of the participants of the case study mentioned on the importance of experience as it may effects the success of the crisis management process. Those who do not have the experience in handling crisis will make the coordination process more difficult since they did not know what to do and how to act. Figure 3 illustrates the obstacles of coordination in crisis management effectiveness. Three themes influence the coordination issues, which are (i) Insufficiently developed network, (2) Organizational differences and (3) location and resource issues. These themes affect the coordination, communication, and control during a crisis to enhance the effectiveness of crisis management as well as build trust, connection, and confidence among people within and external to the organisation. In conclusion, the findings from the interviews show that there were some coordination issues encountered during the response, which was mostly caused by participants. Nobody can deny that these coordination issues can lead to failure in the crisis management process because the success of crisis management is centred on organising the response activities of various public, private, and governmental agencies. The

informants' experience and knowledge in crisis management demonstrated the importance of having the right tools in preparing for coping and recovery from a crisis and improving organisational relationships and communication among members of the organisation.

Figure 3: NVIVO Analysis Project Map Coordination issues and barriers and issues influences crisis Management effectiveness
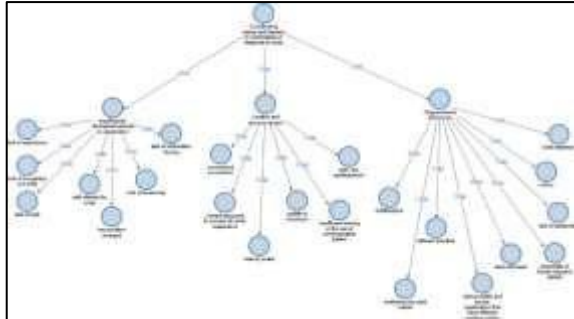
Lessons on meaning-making

There are number of lessons relating to meaning- making that can be drawn from the case study. First of all, there are some barriers to crisis communication that may affect the success of crisis management such as dishonesty, lack of credibility, not giving motivation and others. In this crisis stage, communication is the utmost crucial factor in improving crisis management by inspiring trust, confidence, earning trust and engaging stakeholders. During a crisis, managing individual emotion is necessary because not being able to control individual emotion is likely to cause the people have some emotional conflicts. Hence it is hard to be successful in a crisis management process without considering individual emotions. Figure 4 illustrates the analysis on meaning-making barriers in crisis managers. Interestingly, the participants in the study recollected their experiences regarding how the emotions felt by employees are crucial in the overall crisis management. These themes influence the importance of communication, HR, and support. It is crucial for organizations to always provide spiritual support to increase employees' belief and trust in the organization and indirectly enhance their confidence in committing to their jobs. Therefore, practitioners need to acknowledge the importance of developing coordination in communication, engagement, and technology use for effective crisis planning in the future and as a learning point from the crisis.

Figure4: NVIVO Analysis Project Map Meaning making issues and barriers and issues influences crisis Management effectiveness
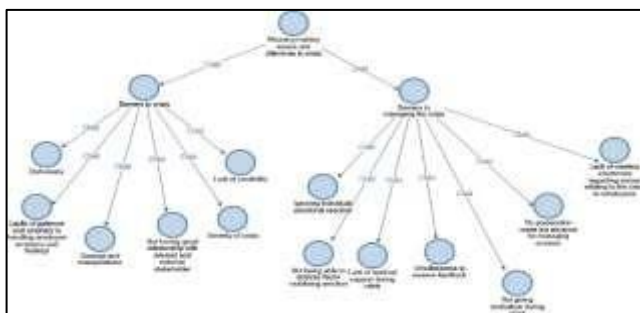
CONCLUSION

Malaysia's multicultural landscape, with approximately 19.5 million Muslims representing 61.3% of the population as of 2013, necessitates stringent adherence to halal certification in the food and beverage industry. This industry's vulnerability to crises, such as false product claims, safety issues, halal compliance, and labeling inaccuracies, is exacerbated by intense competition in the global marketplace. The Malaysia Investment Development Authority (2021) highlights that about 10% of the country's manufacturing output is tied to food processing, with RM21.76 billion of processed food exported to over 200 countries in 2019, and RM20.27 billion imported. Crises, ranging from food poisoning to quality and safety concerns, can significantly impact not only

the organizations involved but also their management, employees, stakeholders, and the broader community. This study specifically examined the critical role of Human Resource (HR) leadership in crisis management within Malaysia's food and beverage sector. By exploring how HR functions influence crisis preparedness and response, the research identifies essential factors that enable organizations to navigate crises effectively, promoting growth and sustainability. The findings indicate that HR interventions, such as effective communication strategies and crisis preparedness training, are vital for enhancing organizational resilience and ensuring successful crisis management.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations, particularly regarding the depth of knowledge and methods employed in crisis communication. Addressing these limitations can enhance the effectiveness of crisis management practices in organizations. Consequently, this research offers valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers, equipping them with strategies to improve crisis management performance and foster stronger relationships with stakeholders. In conclusion, as organizations in Malaysia's food and beverage industry face an increasingly complex and challenging environment, the strategic role of HR in crisis management emerges as essential. By prioritizing HR's involvement in crisis response and preparedness, organizations can not only mitigate the impacts of crises but also position themselves for long-term success and sustainability in a competitive landscape. This study lays the groundwork for future research that can further illuminate the intersections of HR practices and crisis management, particularly in diverse cultural contexts.

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