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Overcoming the Challenges of COVID-19 by Hospitality Educational Administrators: A Grounded Theory Approach

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Abstract

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Keywords

COVID-19, education administration, grounded theory approach, hospitality, interview, India, qualitative

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Overcoming the Challenges of COVID-19 by Hospitality Educational Administrators: A Grounded Theory Approach

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The coronavirus pandemic has affected all walks of life across the globe. Higher education institutions confronted multiple challenges and disruptions in teaching and learning. However, the challenges hospitality education administrators need to resolve are distinct compared to other traditional higher education programs. This study aimed to understand the experiences and responses of hospitality educational administrators under crisis. The findings of the study are expected to assist hospitality education institutions to be prepared and respond better to any crisis in the future. To understand the challenges faced and strategies adopted by hospitality educational administrators, we interviewed 23 hospitality administrators across India. We have adopted a grounded theory approach to describe the challenges and strategies the hospitality educational administrators adopted. The analysis of data through the grounded theory approach yielded five main themes: antecedents that influenced the hospitality educational administrators' response to the crisis, approaches toward strategies, strategies adopted to manage the crisis, perspectives of the consequences of strategies adopted, and intervening conditions that influenced the administrators' choice of strategies. The result indicates that hospitality educational administrators need to be proactive. They have to create a crisis management system, adopt technology in teaching and learning, and engage with all stakeholders to manage the crisis. This study has multiple implications for hospitality educational administrators, policymakers, and researchers in educational administration.

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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has affected individual lives, economies, industries, and nations. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the pandemic a global emergency that has triggered an unprecedented economic and social crisis (Stoica, 2020). It has led to a massive disruption in higher education institutions worldwide. The teachers and learners underwent an overnight change in academic content delivery and learning (Santiago et al., 2021). The higher education institution (HEI) administrators and educational service providers have been thrust to deliver academic instruction through a digital interface. Apart from the uncertainty, administrators in educational institutions were confronted with the issues of equity, generating resources, accessing technology, training teachers, and ensuring the well-being of all stakeholders during the pandemic with no time to prepare (Marshall et al., 2020).

Researchers have observed that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education is not equal across different disciplines (OECD, 2021; Syauqi et al., 2020). Its implications for skill-based educational fields, including hospitality, are much different and complex due to its

nature (Gupta et al., 2021; Sharma & Srivastava, 2020). COVID-19 has led hospitality educational administrators (HEAs) into uncharted territory with the abrupt ending of internships, closure of hotels, and migration to emergency remote teaching from face-to-face learning. Hospitality education institutions were in a greater crisis than other traditional higher education disciplines (Catrett, 2018; Dani et al., 2020; Ye & Law, 2021). The institutional leadership and their response during the crisis had a pivotal role in managing and overcoming a crisis. (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). In the context of hospitality education, HEAs' approach and strategies to manage the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant long-term impact on both hospitality education and the industry's well-being (Tiwari et al., 2020).

Scholars emphasised that any undesirable change in the academic process will negatively impact hospitality graduates' knowledge, attitude, and soft skills (Joshi & Gupta, 2021; Tiwari et al., 2020). Subsequently, this undesirable impact on prospective employees will ultimately affect the industry's growth, service delivery, and well-being (Tiwari et al., 2020), as industry and academia share a "symbiotic" relationship. It has become essential for academics, researchers, and policymakers around the globe to understand how the HEAs manage to overcome the challenges of the pandemic. Scholarship on the role of educational administrators during a crisis, especially in hospitality education, is often neglected. Existing studies in hospitality education were mostly pedagogic research focused on curriculum-related issues (Fidgeon, 2010; Tiwari et al., 2020). Despite much peer review research on the impact of COVID-19 on education, how HEAs reacted to this unpredictable crisis remains scant (Wut et al., 2021; Wassler & Fan, 2021; Ye & Law, 2021). Recognising the absence of literature on the impact of the pandemic, this study aims to generate a theory to explain the crisis management practices adopted by HEAs and also reveal the strategies adopted and the factors affecting their decision-making process. The findings of the study not only support the HEAs in the current study context but also provide a perspective and guidelines on crisis management practices to be adopted by hospitality education institutions globally. The research question that this research aimed to answer is how HEAs responded and adopted strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Considering the novelty and absence of literature on the crisis management process adopted by educational administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers in this study adopted a grounded theory approach. The study findings have implications for hospitality educational administrators, researchers, and policymakers in higher education.

Review of Literature

Crisis Management

Crisis management is an administrative approach where the administrator of an institution makes an effort to deal with crisis conditions by preparing and planning to confront them. It includes the prediction of the crisis, developing scenarios to analyse its impact, diagnosing the strength and weaknesses of the organisation, and closely supervising with anticipation of the emergence of the crisis. The science of crisis management is interdisciplinary in nature and deals with psychology, sociology, and other social sciences, and now become a separate science of its own (Al-Dabbagh, 2020). A crisis is a complex and prolonged event that causes an immediate threat to the well-being of stakeholders, assets, and reputation of an organisation. Crises are highly unpredictable and will be a significant threat to the strategic goals of the organisation (Smith & Riley, 2012).

Crisis in Higher Education

For higher education institutions, a crisis is not an isolated event. In academic institutions, crises frequently include external emergencies or events requiring immediate response (Urick et al., 2021). Institutions' responses to crises play a pivotal role in managing, overcoming, and sustaining the operations. Educational administrators play a predominant role in managing higher education, similar to the manager in a business organisation (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Today, higher education institutions (HEI) are similar to large corporate houses with a large staff and huge budgets (Baldwin, 2009). An education administrator plays a complex role (Chang, 2017; Urick et al., 2021), which is more challenging as they have to manage the complex interaction between students, teachers, parents, board members, government agencies, institutional management, bureaucrats, and recruiters. The support of administrators is essential to make great educational institutions (Baldwin, 2009). Chang and Hsu (2010) also state that current institutional administration practices are very different from the past. Even though multiple crises have surrounded them during the past decade due to natural and manmade crises, the nuances and severity of COVID-19 landed the administrators on the road less travelled. Harris (2020) asserts that the pandemic has drastically changed the concept, role, and practices of educational administrators globally, irrespective of their role in the education system. Today's educational administrators operate in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments like their counterparts in other industries (Weaver et al., 2022). Choice of decisions by administrators in times of crisis is a matter of concern and significance for the whole organisation, its stakeholders, and its sustainability (Al-Dabbagh, 2020).

Hospitality Educational Administration

Partlow and Gregoire (1991, 1993; Gregoire & Partlow, 2002) found that role and activity of HEAs differ significantly among hospitality programs. Teaching, curriculum planning, and public relations are considered essential activities. They have found that educational administrators feel frustrated with the lack of time for administration as they spend most of the time on the customary requirements of institutions such as teaching, counselling, curriculum planning, and attending meetings. However, Gregoire and Partlow (2002) observed some changes in the HEAs role during their follow-up study after a decade. They have spent more time on meetings, preparing reports, and performing other tasks unrelated to the program. They are also expected to spend more time on administration and external funding. A framework for hospitality and tourism education developed by Chang and Hsu (2010) outlined the multiple roles of HEAs which are essential for the effectiveness, efficiency, overall quality, and sustainability of the institution: management of finance, strategic planning, resource mobilisation, mobilising funds from government and industries, fostering specialisation among students, improving teachers' skills, curriculum planning, ensuring industry-academia cooperation, creating an international and inter-school alliance, and academic research and development. Kalargyrou (2009) states that administrators in hospitality institutions often are faculty members who do not have leadership experience. Skills and abilities need to be developed through formal training before they are entrusted to administrative positions, which is almost non-existent. From the existing literature, it is evident that crisis management is not a familiar or priority area for HEAs. Although crisis management is not new in the hospitality and tourism industry, the existing literature is often linked to terrorism, financial crisis, risk perception, and disaster management, unlike a pandemic. In their systematic review, Wut and colleagues (2021) concluded that existing literature in hospitality and tourism focused on the crisis, which had a low magnitude, time-bound, and low impact on the business. There has been

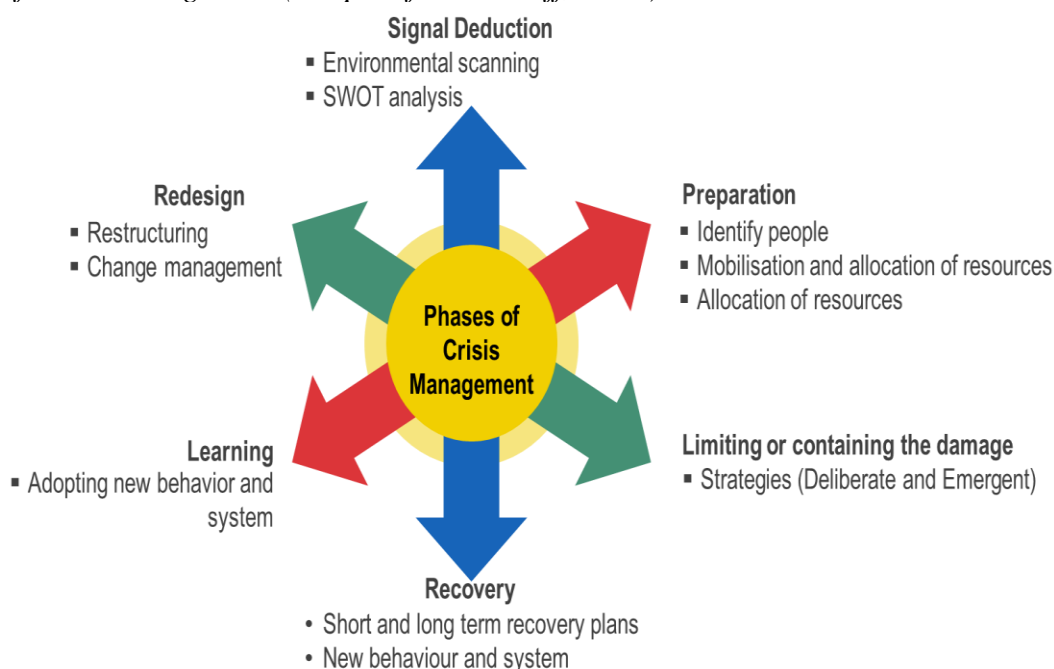
no research on crisis management in hospitality education or HEAs' approaches to crisis management.

Crisis Decision-Making Process

Various researchers have proposed different approaches and processes for managing the crisis (Mayer et al., 2008; Mitroff, 2005). Wang and Hutchins (2010) justify that the crisis management process developed by Mitroff (2005) is comprehensive as it consists of the crisis management process suggested by other crisis management researchers. Mitroff (2005) proposed a six-phase crisis management process consisting of signal detection, preparation, limiting or containing the damage, recovery, learning, and redesign (these phases of crisis management are presented in Figure 1). Mitroff insisted that organisations must continuously monitor external and internal environments during the whole process of crisis management.

Figure 1

Phases of crisis management (Adopted from Mitroff, 2005)



Mitroff (2005) states that a systematic assessment of the environment allows firms to adjust their plans based on changes in the external and internal environment. It implies that administrators need to assess the trends in their environment and develop strategies to achieve the expected outcome. For HEI, it could be student enrolment (Townsend et al., 1992), mobilisation of the fund, and other academic outcomes (Keller, 1983). However, it is challenging for educational institutions and administrators to detect a crisis in advance as they are not equipped for it (Smith & Riley, 2012). In the crisis preparation phase, organisations have to find personnel, mobilise resources, and allocate resources to manage the crisis (Smith & Riley, 2012; Wang & Hutchins, 2010). During the containment phase, organisations should involve actions and strategies to contain, mitigate, and reduce the effect of a crisis (Wang & Hutchins, 2010). Like many other concepts borrowed from business, higher education also borrowed the word “strategy” as it stepped into a highly competitive marketplace. In this research, we operationalise “strategy” as academic administrators’ actions concerned with

developing a possible match between the opportunities and risks present in the external environment.

In developing strategy, organisations evolve two sets of approaches in making strategy: deliberate and emergent. The process of deliberate strategic planning is structured, rational, and orchestrated by top management. Nevertheless, many strategies are often a result of serendipity evolved by lower-level managers, often called “emergent strategies” (Hall & Jones, 2011; Mintzberg & Waters, 1989). Emergent strategies are often unplanned strategies, evolved in response to unpredictable conditions. Emergent strategies are often more appropriate and successful (Mintzberg & Waters, 1989). Organisations adopt deliberate and emergent strategies (Andersen & Nielson, 2009; Smith & Riley, 2012). Andersen and colleagues (2019) suggest that organisations need to adopt both emergent and deliberate strategies in a turbulent environment. However, the biggest challenge for administrators in crisis management is implementing the strategy and leading the institution during a crisis. Lack of time, financial resources, personnel, preparation, and training for crisis management are critical factors that hinder the implementation of the strategies (Gainey, 2009).

Many researchers have proposed various strategies to address the crisis effectively: crisis communication (Convento, 2019; Gainey, 2009; Moerschell & Novak, 2019; Wang & Hutchins, 2010), reputation management (Convento, 2019; Moerschell & Novak, 2019), counselling (Convento, 2019; Izumi et al., 2020; Wang & Hutchins, 2010), development of crisis teams (Izumi et al., 2020; Moerschell & Novak, 2019), incident management (Convento, 2019), review of policy (Wang & Hutchins, 2010), the delegation of decision-making and allocating of resources (Wang & Hutchins, 2010) emergency training (Moerschell & Novak, 2019; Holzweiss et al., 2019; Wang & Hutchins, 2010), advocacy of technology (Mastrodicasa, 2008), contingency planning (Izumi et al., 2020; Moerschell & Novak, 2019), prioritising the welfare of internal stakeholders (Convento, 2019; Moerschell & Novak, 2019), and relationship with external and internal stakeholders (Convento, 2019; Gainey, 2009; Moerschell & Novak, 2019). Izumi and colleagues (2020) highlighted that the organisations have adapted short-term and long-term strategies to manage the crisis.

After the containment phase, organisations need to enact long-term and short-term recovery plans to reassure the stakeholders that they will return to their normal business. In the learning phase of crisis management, the organisation analyses the impact of the crisis on the central and ancillary organisational systems. Based on the impact, it then adapts new behaviour and systems to improve its crisis management practices. During the final phase of redesign, organisations promote change and initiate restructuring of the organisation from the knowledge learned from the crisis (Cordeiro et al., 2021; Mitroff, 2005; Wang & Hutchins, 2010). Although various researchers have proposed different approaches to manage the crisis, they share a common thread in the process.

Pandemic-Induced Crisis in Hospitality Education

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world, contributing 10.3 per cent of the global GDP (WTTC, 2020). The continued growth of tourism in recent decades has created an enormous demand for hospitality institutions worldwide. Hospitality education is quite significant for the growth and sustainability of tourism as it shares a symbiotic relationship. As the supply of trained professionals to the industry is the ultimate aim, curriculum design and teaching paradigms in hospitality higher education institutions are very different from other educational disciplines (Robinson et al., 2015). Hospitality educational institutions adopt all means, including work-integrated learning and hands-on training of skills required to professionally handle industry-related issues, which also helps the employability of students (Atef, 2018; Leung et al., 2018). An abrupt ending of the internship and migrating to

emergency remote online teaching due to the pandemic has created many administrative challenges (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). Hospitality education institutions confronted a greater crisis than any other traditional higher education program during the pandemic (Dani et al., 2020; Ye & Law, 2021). Apart from the uncertainty, administrators in educational institutions were challenged with the issues of equity, generating resources, accessing technology, training teachers, and ensuring the well-being of all stakeholders with no time to prepare (Marshall et al., 2020). James and Wooten (2005) described that ambiguity and complication at the time of crisis tend to decrease the possibility of taking the right decisions, which subsequently worsens the crisis and its associated outcomes.

As crises and disasters are complicated, the challenges faced, and strategies adopted by the HEAs may be unique. Conger (1998) suggested that the qualitative method will be more appropriate for understanding decision-makers' behaviour in a crisis. A qualitative research approach, especially the grounded theory method, will be most appropriate to capture this unique phenomenon, and generate a theory (Al-Dabbagh, 2020). Therefore, the researchers in this study have adopted the grounded theory method to understand the challenges faced and strategies adopted by hospitality educational administrators.

The Context of the Researcher

The authors of this research work are currently employed at Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India. While Senthilkumaran Pirmanayagam is employed as a professor of hospitality and tourism, Partho Pratim Seal is employed as an associate professor of hospitality management. Both authors have more than two decades of experience in teaching hospitality and research. Both have been trained in quantitative and qualitative research methods, including meta-analysis. During their two decades of teaching experience, they have been assigned different administrative roles, such as head of the department, program coordinator, and members of the board of studies. In their more than two decades of teaching experience, neither author has witnessed challenges to the academic community like the one brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. While much research has been published on the impact of the pandemic on students and teachers, studies on HEAs' responses are scarce. Considering its significance and the vacuum in the existing literature, the authors of this study decided to undertake this qualitative research study on the experiences and responses of HEAs. Our goal in conducting this study is to help educational administrators and educators who are expected to take the position of educational administrator in the future learn more about the responses and strategies adopted and their consequences. These findings are also expected to help hospitality education institutions to prepare and effectively manage the crisis in the future. In the current study, researchers have used the qualitative research methodology of grounded theory to create a new theory to explain the HEAs' response to the crisis and the strategies adopted. The theory proposed by Mitroff (2005) was used for conceptualising the crisis management process considering the limited theoretical orientation towards crisis management in higher education.

Methodology

Since there has been little or no research on crisis management in hospitality higher education institutions or HEAs' responses to a crisis like a pandemic, the researchers in the study determined that grounded theory would be the most appropriate to explore HEAs' responses. The researchers in this study adopted the grounded theory approach proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1998). It is primarily inductive, by which researchers develop a theory on a phenomenon by systematically analysing the collected relevant data. The decisions on this

study's research design are aligned with the epistemological principles of the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm uses the subjective experience of individuals to understand the world (Creswell, 2013). The data analysis emphasises academic administrators' experiences within the social context rather than providing an explanation. The study's context and purpose influenced the mode of data collection and selection of the sample.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study was conducted between November 2020 to January 2021, in the early stage of re-opening academic institutions after declaring the national-level closure of higher education institutions in India on 24th March 2020. Characteristics of participating institutions and the educational administrators are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Institution and participants characteristics

Participant Id	Institution Type/ Year of Establishment	Institution characteristics			Educational Administrator characteristics				
		Number of Students	Courses offered	Affiliation	Domicile	Gender	Age	Designation	Number of Years in the position
SU1	Private / 2013	165	Undergraduate Program in Tourism & Hospitality	A unit of a private university	Haryana	Male	56	Deputy Director	8
SU2	Private / 2011	220	Undergraduate & Master's Program Hospitality	A unit of a private university	Gujarat	Male	41	Head of the department	2
SU3	Private / 1992	360	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Maharashtra	Male	46	Principal	12
SU4	Private / 2012	3000	Undergraduate & Master's Program in Hospitality, & Tourism	A unit of a private university	Punjab	Male	44	Principal	5
SU5	Government / 2018	526	Undergraduate & Master's Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Maharashtra	Female	48	Head of the department	2
SU6	Government / 1994	600	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	Affiliated to NCHMCT	Punjab	Male	58	Principal	10
SU7	Government / 1995	600	Undergraduate & Masters' Program in Hospitality	Affiliated to NCHMCT	Assam	Male	56	Principal	3
SU8	Government / 2019	77	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	Affiliated to NCHMCT	Jharkhand	Male	42	Principal	2
SU9	Private / 1993	160	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to state University	Telangana	Male	51	Principal	3
SU10	Private / 2012	115	Undergraduate Program in Tourism & Hospitality	A unit of private university	Rajasthan	Male	42	Head of the department	7
SU11	Private / 1992	400	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	A unit of private university	Karnataka	Male	55	Principal	13
SU12	Private / 2018	48	Undergraduate & Master's	A unit of private university	West Bengal	Male	44	Head of the department	2

			Program in Hospitality							
SU13	Private / 2009	300	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to state University	Uttar Pradesh	Male	44	Principal	6	
SU14	Private / 1988	240	Undergraduate & Master's Program in Hospitality	A unit of private university	Karnataka	Male	49	Dean	3	
SU15	Private / 1986	1420	Undergraduate & Master's Program in Hospitality, & Culinary Arts	A unit of private university	Karnataka	Male	52	Principal	3	
SU16	Private / 1980	870	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Kerala	Female	48	Principal	5	
SU17	Government / 1981	570	Undergraduate & Masters' Program in Hospitality	Affiliated to NCHMCT	Odisha	Female	51	Principal	4	
SU18	Private / 2001	310	Undergraduate Programs in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Maharashtra	Female	45	Head of the department	6	
SU19	Private / 1999	450	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Gujarat	Male	47	Principal	6	
SU20	Private / 2011	120	Undergraduate & Diploma in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Assam	Female	38	Director	9	
SU21	Private / 1994	120	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Tamil Nadu	Female	44	Head of the department	6	
SU22	Government / 2014	310	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	College Affiliated to State University	Uttar Pradesh	Male	55	Principal	5	
SU23	Private / 1993	150	Undergraduate Program in Hospitality	Affiliated to NCHMCT	Telangana	Female	50	Principal	7	

The participants for the study were educational administrators of hospitality institutions which offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs in hospitality management. During the pilot test of the interview protocol, interviews were conducted with two HEAs of institutions in the same geographical location as the researchers in this study. Some of the questions included in the interview schedule are presented below:

- What were some of the incidents and actions from stakeholders that guided your response to the crisis?
- What were your priorities when the lockdown was declared?
- How did you respond to the challenges related to students' internships and placement?
- How would you describe your strategies to manage the crisis?
- Can you describe your experience in managing issues during the pandemic?
- Please describe the support rendered by your governing or institutional administration.
- What was the most challenging part of this crisis? Please share your experiences.

- How do you describe the outcome of your strategies and their reflections?

After the pilot testing, three sampling approaches were used to identify the participants. First, eight participants for the study were recruited through purposive sampling. HEAs with at least two years of experience were included in the study. The participants were the HEAs employed in institutions located in the same province of the country where the researchers of the current study were employed (Creswell, 2013). The second strategy of sampling is theoretical sampling. The maximums variation sample approach is initiated after identifying the key dimensions of variation and then identifying the cases that vary from each other as much as possible. Maximums variation sampling was utilised to construct a holistic understanding of the phenomenon by uncovering as many different key dimensions as possible. It provides detailed high-quality descriptions that help in documenting the uniqueness of the experience and simultaneously explain the shared pattern that cuts across the cases (Patton, 2002). During this stage of sampling, e-mails were sent to 364 HEAs across the country as per the list available from a leading magazine which publishes the list of hospitality colleges in the country (Careers360, 2019). In response to the mail, twelve HEAs had given consent to participate in the study. However, about ten HEAs were included in the study to induce the maximum variation based on the diversity in the geographical location, board structure of the institution, courses offered, gender, age, and experience of the HEAs. Later two HEAs during the interview process wanted to opt out of the study as they did not want to share any information about their institutions.

Third, theoretical sampling was considered for recruiting new participants, which further helped explore new insights obtained from the first phase of the study. Theoretical sampling makes the researcher responsive to the data. It allows the researcher to explore the gravity of the concepts which are derived from the data and helps to decide upon the concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). The seven HEAs who were respondents after a reminder mail to participate in the study were included in the third stage of sampling. The date, time, and schedule for the telephone interview were mostly decided by the participants. The interview lasted from 45 minutes to one hour as the participants were not restrained from sharing their experiences.

The interview data was shared with the participants to cross-check the accuracy of the data. The 23 HEAs who participated in the study were either heads of departments, principals, Deans, or directors of their institutions. The age of the administrators ranged from 41 to 55 years. The range of experience of HEAs who participated in the study varies from two to thirteen years. Sixteen of the participants were male, while seven were female. The sample constitutes ten HEAs from institutions affiliated with state-run universities, eight from institutions that are part of private universities, and five from institutions affiliated with the National Council for Hotel Management & Catering Technology (NCHMCT), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Protection of Participants

All participants were requested to submit informed consent to participate in the study and recording of the interview. The purpose of the study was explained in detail to each participant who had given consent. Before the interview was conducted, the participants were informed that their interactions with the researchers would be recorded and would be deleted after transcribing the interview. The participant had the option to decline the interview and/or decline to reply to any question, skip any question, or stop at any given time if not comfortable with the interview. All audio recordings were stored in a password-protected laptop. The

original audio recordings were deleted after the interviews were transcribed. The consent form and the written transcriptions were kept in the homes of the researchers.

Analysis of Data

The data collected through the interview was analysed using open, axial, and selective coding as part of the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). The data was initially coded with open coding, in which the data is first broken into discrete parts and then closely observed for any similarities or differences. During the coding process, some categories emerged through microanalysis and open coding. After open coding, the next coding process is axial coding, which relates categories to various subcategories. In the process of axial coding, the concepts that emerged from the data are compared and refined. The main point in axial coding is that the researcher must determine how categories are related and overlap. For example, both the “swapping of courses to next semester” and “moving internship to next year” are about flexibility, so they are coded into one category labelled “academic flexibility.” All categories are unified and categories that need further explication are narrated with descriptive detail during the selective coding.

The final stage of coding is *selective coding*, the process of integrating and refining categories. The theoretical saturation of data happened during the analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Morse, 1995) by restricting the study sample and richness of data, which is achieved by the in-depth interviews and the quality of questions put to the participants as in Table 2.

Table 2
Coding

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	Theoretical Coding
<i>“Mobile (phone) never stopped ringing and was on the phone to answer students, parents, teachers, HR (Human Resource) managers and people from university (Officials from higher education institutions). I understand that I am answerable to everyone and must do something.”</i>	External pressure from the stake holders	Challenges from the stake holders	Antecedents condition
<i>“Our university has excellent IT infrastructure that is required for non-classroom classes. We started our online class on 20th March 2020, before the lockdown was announced in the country.”</i>	Readiness to manage uncertainties	In build systems within organizations to manage uncertainties	Deliberate approach to strategic decisions
<i>“Our continuous communication has saved us from many problems.”</i>	Continuous communication	Crisis communication	Strategies
<i>“We have proposed swapping internship and skill-based culinary, service, housekeeping and front office courses into subsequent semesters.”</i>	Adjustment in curriculum	Academic flexibility	Strategies
<i>“As teachers and students familiar with online classes, it will be used as the best alternative to manage any uncertainties.”</i>	Familiar with online classes	Learning new skills	Consequences

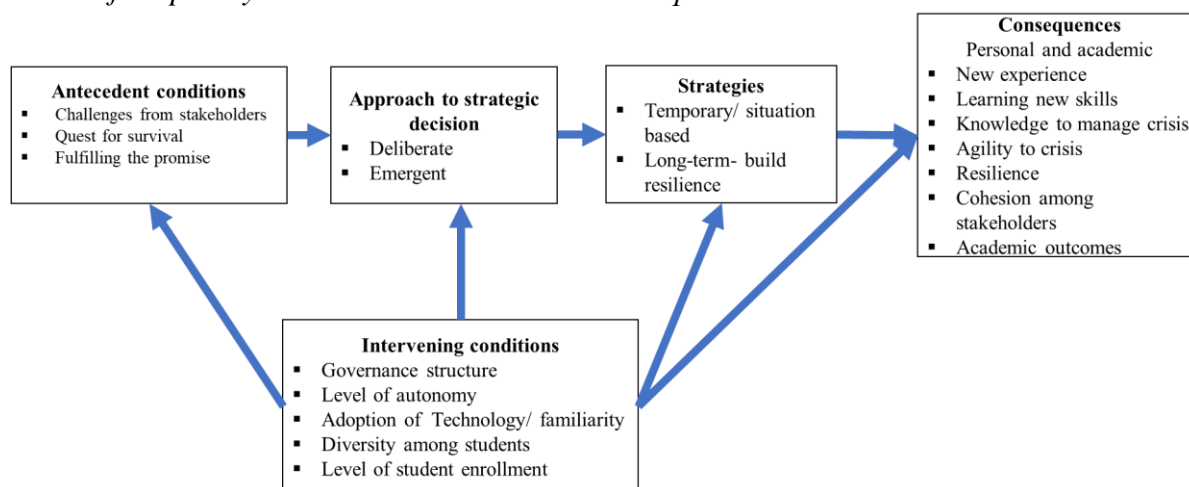
The challenge in the study was to derive meanings from the links and the relationship. The analysis was completed by developing the theoretical constructs that add theoretical meaning and substantive theory (Glaser, 1978). The researchers have adopted various safeguards to establish trustworthiness in this grounded research study. The summarised essay about emerging categories was presented to each participant to know how their data fit into emerging categories. The researchers utilised a third-party audit by an academic expert to review the coding, conceptualisation, and verification of categories and the emerging grounded theory model. At the time of sharing the data with the third party, the demographic and institutional profile had been masked to protect the privacy of the participants. Using comparative analysis, the researchers went back to compare the theoretical link against the raw data. The dependability of the data was achieved through theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 1998; Creswell, 2013).

Results

In this section, we describe the theoretical framework that evolved from the themes generated using the grounded theory approach to the HEAs' responses to the crisis. It was found that the various factors and events acted as antecedents and directed HEAs' responses to the crisis and their approach toward strategies to protect the well-being of their institution and stakeholders. The result also indicates that many intervening conditions influenced their strategic choices and outcomes. The conditional matrix that visually narrates the HEAs response to the crisis is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Model of hospitality educational administrators' response to the crisis



Antecedents that Guided the HEAs' Responses to the Crisis

The finding reveals that three types of antecedent conditions directed HEAs' responses to their choice of strategy to manage the crisis. The expectations and pressure from stakeholders of an academic institution, such as students, teachers, parents, and hospitality recruiters (primarily external forces) acted as significant determinants. A head of the department of hospitality management institution affiliated with a state university stated (SU2):

Never heard and tough to react. Twice the lockdown has been extended. Mobile (phone) never stopped ringing and was on the phone to answer students, parents, teachers, HR (Human Resource) managers and people from the university

(Officials from higher education institutions). I understand that I am answerable to everyone and must do something.

The second condition that guided the HEAs' responses was their quest for survival, an internal factor. More than five hospitality education administrators stated that the pandemic would impact their survival if they had not acted quickly to respond to the challenges arising due to the pandemic. All the participants felt that there was an uncertainty on payment of salary and pressure to increase the course enrolment. Except for a few institutions, the salary cut was a major issue to be dealt with by the educational administrators. A principal of a college affiliated with a state university narrated (SU 9):

When the lockdown has extended thrice, the management felt the pinch of mobilising funds to pay staff salaries. We have received a mail from our Chairman that our salary for June 2020 has been reduced by 40 %, and the same will be continued till we reach the full strength of our program. We all decided to work as a team to manage the issues and fill our seats (enrolment) by using our fullest possible effort.

The third condition that guided HEAs' actions was fulfilling the promises made by the educational institutions to their stakeholders. A principal of a hospitality institution, a constituent unit of a private university in Karnataka, stated (SU15):

As a top brand in hospitality education in the country, we want to honour our promise of delivering world-class hospitality education. We have tried our best to address the unique need for hospitality education during the pandemic: hands-on learning of culinary and hospitality skills. We must address this most challenging part of hospitality by reinventing the curriculum.

All the quotes narrated above reveal that educational administrators in the study context faced multiple challenges. Both internal and external factors acted as antecedents that forced the HEA's responses to manage the crisis.

HEAs' Approaches to Strategy

The interview of academic administrators on the strategies adopted to manage the challenges in hospitality also reflects the two sets of approaches. The result reveals that HEAs' responses in a few institutions were guided by their organisational process, which was mostly inbuilt and developed during their organisational planning. In terms of shifting from face-to-face classes to online, the principal of the private university stated (SU1):

The lockdown didn't come as a surprise as it was being apprehended that it would come, which happened on 16th March 2020. Our university has excellent IT (Information Technology) infrastructure that is required for non-classroom classes. We started our online class on 20th March 2020, before the lockdown was announced in the country.

In terms of addressing the challenges and problems faced by the students, he continued:

As there is a mentor (teachers) system for the students (mentees), our students can directly speak with their respective mentors. The teachers and our

administrative staff are cordial, dedicated to their work, and support the students with empathy.

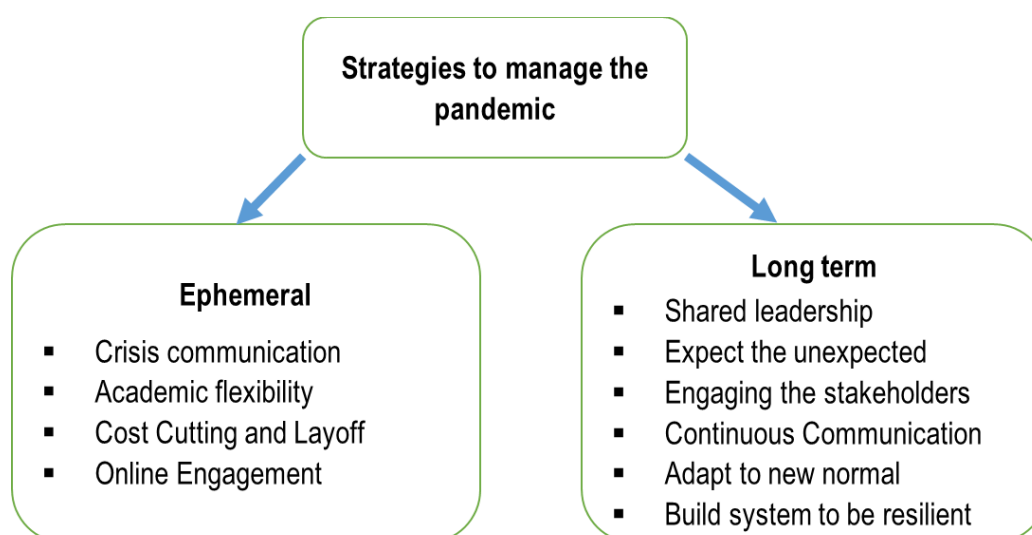
In contrast, HEAs' responses to the crisis in many institutions are situation-bound. The responses emerged from the situations and mostly adopted a trial-and-error approach. A respondent stated (SU10):

Strategies Adapted by the HEAs to Manage the Crisis

The results indicate that HEAs have adopted two different sets of strategies to overcome the challenges of the pandemic. One set of strategies is ephemeral, adapted by HEAs to solve the challenges in that particular time and context, primarily momentary reactions to fulfil stakeholders' expectations. A few HEAs adopted another set of strategies that not only addresses the current crisis but also makes the institutions adapt, change, and build resilience with long-term and future perspectives. The strategies adopted within each set of strategy are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Strategies adapted by the educational administrators to manage the crisis



In terms of ephemeral strategies, crisis communication is the most commonly adopted strategy among hospitality educational administrators. In terms of solving the issues raised by students, parents, teachers, and recruiters, continuous communication with stakeholders helped the administrators move ahead with the day-to-day affairs of their institution. The principal from a private university explained (SU11):

Even though colleagues and staff were working from home, we worked for more than 16 hours and spent a lot of time communicating with students, parents, and hotels. Between their preparations for the following week's classes, they have to reply to the queries of students and parents. Yes, it needs a lot of planning and time management. Our continuous communication has saved us from many problems.

The second most common short-term strategy adopted the educational administrators is insisting on academic flexibility. A principal of the hospitality institution of a private university explained (SU15):

Once we have recognised that the pandemic will prolong, we have proposed swapping internship and skill-based culinary, service, housekeeping and front office courses into subsequent semesters.

Some institutions have exercised flexibility to enable the parents to pay the tuition fee in multiple instalments to reduce the financial burden on parents. A dean of hospitality institution of a private university narrated (SU14):

With the job loss of parents and many businesses being affected, we had allowed the parents to pay the tuition fees even in twelve equal instalments.

The third most common strategy is reducing the cost of operation. The strategies adopted are reducing teachers' salaries, restrictions on the hiring of faculty, and laying off existing teachers. Teachers who joined the institution within the last twelve months and senior faculty who earned the highest salary were forcefully relieved from their job. A head of the department stated (SU8):

The most affected are our temporary and contract-based teachers. In some departments where the student enrolment is low, the senior teachers were relieved from the job by just giving one month notice. Few of our temporary teachers were either asked to leave or have left the job as they worked without pay for more than two months. Even we have negotiated with college management to retain the teachers by compromising 40% of our salary. We have lost our good young teachers. I do not think there will be new recruitment of teachers in the near future.

The fourth strategy adopted to manage the administrative challenges is the online engagement of students to overcome the isolation and stress students face in online learning. The principal of the hospitality institution of a private university acknowledged (SU15):

We organised events virtually for a week giving a break to academics that provided relaxation to students and faculty.

Besides the short-term oriented ephemeral strategies, hospitality educational administrators adopted various strategies that aimed to solve the current challenges posed by the pandemic but also help the institutions build resilience. All the participants in the study narrated that they have shared their tasks with various teams of teachers and other employees within the organisation to manage the challenges. The teams have been given autonomy to respond to the crisis considering the organisational values and objectives. The principal of a state-run hospitality institution stated (SU17):

We have formed many groups of faculty and staff. They have tried their best and solved many challenges for our students, parents, recruiters, and others. At times, I felt everything was possible with my committed and passionate team. My role is to keep them together and provide resources. These efforts are not temporary; I want to make it our culture.

The pandemic has changed the way hospitality educational institutions usually function. The educational administrators from a few institutions narrated that now in every educational process, there is an in-built mechanism and policies for expecting the unexpected. The pandemic helped education administrators to think beyond the current challenge. A principal of the university narrated (SU13):

Even though I want absolute control in every academic process, I am fully conscious that when a crisis happens, it can take away everything from my control. Expecting the unexpected will give some space and time to manage the crisis. Now starting from admission to placement, we have some plans to overcome the uncertainty.

Engaging various stakeholders of hospitality educational institutions is considered important to manage the challenges during the pandemic. A principal from a private university stated (SU16):

One thing we always want to ensure is that we want to be highly engaged with our stakeholders than ever to retain their trust in us. They have become our strategic partners in many instances to manage the challenges. We have informed them in advance before they ask for it. In most of the issues, when we narrated the issues with transparency, they listened and supported us.

Every participant in the study has adapted continuous communication as a key strategy to manage the pandemic challenges. The principal of the hospitality institution explained (SU3):

The whole system would become paralysed if we do not communicate with our stakeholders. We have ensured that communication is done with all our stakeholders. Let it be a parent, student and or HR (Human Resource) manager from a hotel; we set communication with all stakeholders as a priority. Every day, we have connected with students, teachers, parents and recruiters to provide information.

Adapting to new changes is another most common strategy among hospitality educational administrators. When administrators felt that many things were not in their control, they were ready to face the demands of new situations. The director of a hospitality institution affiliated with a state university explained (SU21):

We have sensed that “normal” is not coming back, and we cannot wait for normal. The only way to overcome it is to plunge into it and get along. With available resources, we found ways to achieve our target. In terms of admission, placement, teaching, and evaluation, our team has adopted new methods that we have never thought of before but like to use it in future too.

Educational administrators’ narratives in the study indicate that short-term and long-term oriented strategies are adapted to manage the crisis.

Consequences of the Strategies Adopted by HEAs

The results indicate that the strategies adopted by the HEAs led to different outcomes. The results divulge that there are two set outcomes for HEAs responses to crisis: personal and academic. The first personal outcome for HEAs is learning and adoption of technology. A principal of a private hospitality institution stated (SU16):

I don't want to stop what we have learned from the pandemic., We want to continue using technology even after moving to face-to-face interaction. As teachers and students familiar with online classes, it will be used as the best alternative to manage any uncertainties, though offline classes cannot be replaced. We have understood that fulfilling the emotional need of our stakeholders is most important. The pandemic has exposed the flaws in our existing system. Now, I hope we are somewhat resilient to crisis.

The crisis arose due to the pandemic was considered an opportunity rather than a threat. A HEA from a state-run hospitality institution said (SU6):

This pandemic has yielded two strong advantages for us. All of us, including students, teachers, and parents, have finally made an effort to use technology for teaching, learning, and interaction. Senior and junior faculty members become one community as they rely on each other. Even though it greatly impacted us, I would see COVID as an opportunity rather than a threat.

More than two-thirds of the participants also felt that the pandemic's impact was costly as it affected their survival. All but four of the participants reported that the pandemic has severely affected their enrolment of students for their hospitality programs which is the primary source of their revenue. A principal from a state-run hospitality institution stated (SU8):

In terms of enrolment, we suffered a lot. In our B.Sc. program, where we had an intake of 280, we could only get 20% of the students in 2020. We are trying to curtail the cost, and the less number will have its implications for the next 2 to 3 years.

However, few educational administrators have narrated that low enrolment for their undergraduate program has been compensated by higher enrolment in their post-graduation program. The head of the department explained (SU5):

The number of students enrolled on our undergraduate program was reduced from 176 to 148. However, surprisingly, we have been able to get very good enrollment for our postgraduate program. Most of them were our graduates of the 2020 batch. Few of our alumni have also enrolled as they have been asked to take long unpaid leave by the hotels (employers). We found this as God's grace to ensure that faculty working unaided continue to get paid.

In a college, the admission for the hospitality program has been higher than the regular enrollment which is attributed to the adoption of technology and trust in the brand. A principal of a private university commented (SU4):

The way our university handled the pandemic was a great learning experience. students, parents, and teachers were very optimistic. We all understood that collaborating with each other would help manage any crisis. Our investment in technology is instrumental to our success. The increased enrollment in 2020 is higher than in 2019. The total intake of 569 (students) reflects our agility and the trust of the student community in us.

The above quotes of HEA reveal that there are two sets of outcomes. One set of outcomes is more personal to the academic administrators, which are mostly internal in terms of their understanding, empathy for co-workers, and change in the perception of the entire academic process. Another set of outcomes, both good and bad, reflects the HEAs choice of strategies to manage the crisis.

Intervening Conditions that Influenced the HEAs' Responses to the Crisis

The continuous comparison of data between different cases revealed that many intervening conditions had influenced the antecedent conditions, strategic approach, strategic decisions, and outcomes of the crisis management process adopted by HEAs. In terms of institution types based on the structure of the governance, the study participant represents three distinctive groups. The first group of hospitality institutions are funded and managed by the Government of India. The second set of hospitality institutions are part of private universities established under section three of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956. The third set of institutions are independent departments of academic institutions or colleges affiliated with state-run universities.

The level of academic autonomy is also interdependent on the type of institution. The hospitality institutions of private universities have the highest level of academic autonomy. The institutions affiliated with state universities have the lowest academic autonomy level than the hospitality management institution run by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Participants from hospitality educational institutions, part of private universities, frequently stated that they have used swapping of the semester, change in or reduction of internship periods, and fast transformation from offline classes to online teaching.

The findings of the study indicate that institutional affiliation has a significant influence on the antecedents of HEAs responses, strategies adopted, and outcomes. A principal of a state government-run institution stated (SU8):

We don't know when and how to begin. We are waiting for instructions from our governing council and ministry. Uncertainty in everything. Most of our prospective students have moved to private colleges for admission.

The head of the department of private hospitality management college, which is affiliated with a state-run university, stated (SU20):

Our university has greater control over curriculum, teaching and assessment to ensure uniformity. We are less free to employ any change in pedagogies. We are restricted - our academic process as per the guidelines given by the university and nothing beyond.

The third intervening condition is their level of technology adaptation in their academic process. A principal from a private university who is familiar with and adopted the technology for education stated (SU4):

We went online from 20th March 2020, before the announcement of the lockdown. Our university has trained us well to use online teaching and LMS (Learning Management System). Our cloud campus system allows every student to connect with us from anywhere and anytime via the Internet. For us, Covid is not a surprise.

Diversity of the learners is another factor that influenced the HEAs' responses to the crisis. Institutions with a diverse group of students in terms of gender and statehood have faced different challenges than institutions with low diversity, where most students belong to specific local regions. A principal narrated that (SU15):

More than 40 % of our students, both girls and boys, come from Delhi and North East. Four days before the lockdown, we requested the university and the parents of women students to arrange for a vehicle to send them back to their homes. Once the lockdown had been announced, some boys struck here almost for more than four months. The kitchen is operated for very few students. We have mobilised the resource through local vendors and even from our farms.

HEAs from institutions with more students have faced different challenges than institutions with fewer students. For example, the principal of a private university from Karnataka narrated (SU15):

For us, the big challenge is arranging internships and placements for more than three-fifty students. The major setback for us was that our recruiters had not honoured their placement offers to our students, but they promised to consider it at a later stage. They too are helpless.

The statements of hospitality educational administrators on their responses to crisis reveal that governing structure of the institution, autonomy, level of technology adoption, diversity among students, and number of students enrolled in the program acted as intervening conditions influenced the antecedent conditions and the strategic choice of HEAs.

Discussion

The pandemic has proved that higher education institutions were not immune from crisis. The sustainability of educational institutions and creating trust among the stakeholders in education depends on the responses and strategies adopted by the HEAs during the crisis. This study is distinctive as it tried to examine the challenges and the strategies adopted by the HEAs in hospitality education institutions where teaching professional skills is vital for students' employability. The analysis of data through the grounded theory approach yielded five main themes: antecedent conditions that decided the educational administrators' response to the crisis, the approach of administrators towards formulating strategy, strategies adapted to manage the crisis, consequences and organisational outcomes of strategies, and intervening conditions that shaped administrators' response to the crisis.

As emphasised by Mitroff (2005), both external and internal factors acted as the antecedents of HEAs' responses to the crisis. The study finding indicates that while challenges arising from the pandemic have acted as an external factor, the need for survival and the intention to fulfil the promises made by the education institutions to its stakeholders acted as an internal factor. The study finding is consistent with the finding of Hill and Jones, (2011) that external and internal environment stimuli are the antecedents for organisations response and

strategic choice. Hospitality educational administrators adapted both deliberate and emergent strategies to manage the crisis. The deliberate strategy in response to the crisis was guided by the organisation's objective of stakeholder well-being. Emergent systems are evolved by the administrators adopting a trial-and-error approach considering the situational factors surrounding academic institutions. The result in the current study is congruent with the findings of Hill and Jones (2011) and Mintzberg and Waters (1989). The findings also support the suggestion of Andersen and colleagues (2019) that in a turbulent environment of business, organisations need to adopt both emergent and deliberate strategies.

The finding also indicates that few institutions, primarily private universities and other hospitality educational institutions, do not have any plan for managing pandemic-like crises. In most cases, the institutions do not have a system to deduct the crisis in advance. The result of the study reveals that HEAs have adapted both short and long-term strategies. Short-term strategies are used as a time-bound solution to address the challenges. Crisis communication, academic flexibility, layoff, and online engagement with stakeholders are commonly used short-term strategies by educational administrators. Shared leadership, expecting the unexpected, continuously engaging with stakeholders, and adapting to the new normal are adapted to build resilience to crisis. The findings of the study are aligned with the findings of Izumi and colleagues (2020), Moerschell and Novak (2019), Convento (2019), Wang and Hutchins (2010), Gainey (2009), and Mastrodicasa (2008).

Regarding outcomes of strategies adopted by educational administrators, the results indicate two levels of outcomes: personal and institutional. In terms of personal outcomes, the administrators consider the crisis management process adapted during the pandemic as a rewarding experience, which was expected to help them develop crisis planning and build resilience to manage the crisis in the future. They have also perceived that the pandemic helped them identify the gap in their institutional administration, which they believe is essential to adapt and be resilient to future crises. In terms of academic outcomes, the pandemic substantially impacted student enrolment, which is ultimately perceived to have a long-term effect on the survival of many hospitality institutions in the study context. The findings on the outcomes of crisis management aligned with the results of Wang and Hutchins (2010) and Cordeiro and colleagues (2021) that there will be a reflection of crisis management practices on organisational outcomes that can be both positive and negative.

The findings of the study also disclose that the antecedents of educational administrators' strategic approach, choice, and the institutional outcomes of crisis management practices are affected by many intervening conditions surrounded by the organisation, as emphasised by Weiner and colleagues (2021), Smith and Riley (2012), and Wang and Hutchins (2010). The intervening condition includes the governance structure of an institution, level of academic autonomy, adaption and familiarisation with technology, number of students enrolled, and diversity among students. The overall findings of the current study support the crisis management process suggested by Mitroff (2005). However, the findings indicate that HEAs in the study context struggled to detect and prepare for the crisis. The finding implies that HEAs need to develop a mechanism to mobilise the resources to manage any emerging crisis swiftly.

This study is distinctive as it tried to answer how hospitality educational administrators responded and adopted strategies that they hoped would ensure their institution's and its stakeholders' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This study contributes in multiple ways that support educational administrators as individuals, policymakers at institutions, and hospitality higher education policymakers in the study context. Drawing from the grounded theory approach, the study contributes significant insights that advance our understanding of the crisis management practices adopted by HEAs. The findings of this study encapsulate the complex and multi-faceted nature of the decision-making process during a

crisis in hospitality higher education institutions. The study has identified the interplay between antecedents of crisis and the consequences of crisis management. This study is the first one to attempt to provide a comprehensive understanding of crisis management practices adapted by hospitality education administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the social construction of the experiences of educational administrators during the crisis and their approach. It fills the gap in existing knowledge on how the crisis has been managed at hospitality higher education institutions in a developing country. The other contribution of the study is the identification of intervening conditions that influence the HEAs' responses to the crisis. The research also highlights the ironies that educational administrators faced during the crisis. In a situation where teachers need much support, they have been laid off by many institutions because of cost-cutting.

Practical Implications

This study has multiple implications for hospitality educational administrators, policymakers, and researchers in educational administration in higher education. The current research divulges that educational administrators played multiple roles among their stakeholders as leaders, motivators, facilitators, trainers, counsellors, strategists, and resource mobilisers. Educational administrators in this study exemplified the characteristics of a leader as they assessed and responded to the needs of their institutions' stakeholders. In general, the study concludes that hospitality educational administrators are reactive to the crisis rather than proactive as they have not been trained or exposed to this kind of crisis. As the scope and role of educational administration in hospitality institutions are expanding, formal training in academic administration is crucial for teachers who are to be promoted as administrators.

In the current study context, the results indicate that hospitality educational institutions are not well prepared for a crisis, and a crisis management system is absent, except few institutions. The finding implies a need for a crisis management system in hospitality higher education institutions. The system should guide the role of institutional policymakers, educational administrators, individuals, and stakeholders in crisis management, the process to be followed during a crisis, and strategies that help build long-term institutional resilience instead of providing short-term solutions. Technology adaptation in teaching and learning, one of the intervening conditions, has played a pivotal role in all the stages of crisis management, varying from communicating with stakeholders to managing content delivery. There is a need to adopt technology and integrating technology as a component to associate with stakeholders will help educational administrators. Academia must collaborate with the industry beyond their interaction for students' internship and recruitment. It should incorporate skills and knowledge to manage the crisis in collaboration with industry partners to inculcate this new professional trait. Internships being a pivotal component of learning professional skills and employability among hospitality students, innovative or technology-based online and virtual internships should be evolved during any emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. A combination of virtual and onsite internships at different windows during the program may be incorporated during the curriculum design.

Limitations and Scope for Further Research

Although the research is able to generate a grounded theory on educational administrators' responses to the crisis, the study has few limitations. First, the data for the study was collected in the middle of the pandemic crisis, where many educational administrators had to continue their efforts to manage new crises every day till the end of the pandemic. This limits the comprehensiveness of the challenges and the strategies followed by the participants.

Secondly, the small sample size of 23 may not represent all the hospitality institutions in the study context. Third, the study could not provide micro-level planning undertaken by the educational administrators to manage the crisis. Fourth, the data collected was limited to HEAs' experiences, mostly recollections. As the data was collected through telephone interviews, the researchers in the study were unable to observe the interaction between professional and organisational culture and the style of individual decision-making of educational administrators on crisis management practices in situ. Another limitation is that, due to the use of the grounded theory approach, the result cannot be generalised. Despite these limitations, this research offers valuable insights to educational administrators and policymakers on the crisis management practices of hospitality higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interpretative grounded theory approach followed in the study also provides multiple opportunities for further research. Empirical validation of the theory generated in this study using the grounded theory approach may provide an opportunity to researchers to strengthen the existing knowledge on academic administration during the crisis.

Further research may be required to understand the micro-level planning of educational administrators as it may be more valuable to academic administration in hospitality and other similar institutions. The interdependence among educational administrators and other stakeholders merged as an important strategy to manage the crisis. However, the stakeholder relationship during different crisis stages needs to be studied from the perspective of whether these practices persist and become systematic in every phase of the crisis. Further studies may be conducted in other developing countries and in different cultural contexts to test the theoretical model that emerged from this research work.

Conclusion

This grounded theory study centred on HEAs' responses to crisis management. The result indicates that most hospitality education administrators have struggled to address the crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and hospitality institutions lack a crisis management system in the study context. The result indicates the need for crisis preparedness, training, and strong collaboration between stakeholders. As hospitality education is the backbone of the tourism industry in the country, higher education institutions must consider and develop a crisis management system that is relevant and resilient. As the nature and function of industry and academia have changed drastically, there is a need for strong collaboration and continued communication between hospitality institutions and business units. Institutions must invest and augment the capabilities and skills of their students, who would be prospective hospitality managers prepared well to respond to a pandemic like the crisis in the future.

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