JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY
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Crisis Management in The Swedish Restaurant Industry

A multiple case study about the reflections of seven restaurant owners in the city of Jönköping - from a post Covid-19 perspective

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Title: Crisis Management in The Swedish Restaurant Industry: A multiple case study about the reflections of seven restaurant owners in the city of Jönköping - from a post Covid-19 perspective
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Abstract

Background: Crisis management has become a highly relevant topic due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, restaurants have been forced to implement new business strategies and tactics to mitigate its impact. For restaurants, it quickly became important to adapt and apply the right strategy to survive which created a unique opportunity to form an understanding of what actual strategic choices restaurants have applied during a pandemic.

Purpose: The purpose of this study aims at creating an understanding of how Swedish restaurants in the city of Jönköping have been able to survive the pandemic, more specifically, identify what crisis strategies and tactics restaurant owners have utilized.

Method: The aim of this paper was pursued by a qualitative research method with an inductive approach. In order to investigate the research question, a multiple case study has been conducted. Data have been collected through semi-structured interviews from seven different restaurant owners that form the basis of the empirical data.

Conclusions: The conclusions revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative effect on the restaurants and that they had to make changes in their activities in order to stay in business. The empirical findings demonstrated these changes as three core strategies utilized through different tactics in order to cope with the pandemic. Given that unexpected events can happen in the future at any time, it is crucial for managers to learn from the past and implement different strategies in their business and thereby successfully adjust to the diverse external environment.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the chosen topic. A general background introduction of Covid-19 and its impact on the Swedish restaurant industry will be presented in order to give the reader a deeper understanding of the topic and its relevance. This is followed by the problem discussion, purpose, and delimitations of the study.

1.1 Background

Covid-19 was first declared as a worldwide pandemic on 11th March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). The declaration of Covid-19 meant a series of different preparatory actions in order to limit the contagion of the virus. Such a worldwide pandemic may be viewed as a crisis due to its unexpected and destructive characteristics (Santana, 2004). Thus, it needs to be tackled with several strategies and tactics to achieve the desired goal of staying in business. Hence, many countries enforced restrictions such as social distancing, mandatory face masks, and semi to full lockdowns. This enforcement had a significant consequence on society as businesses had to follow strictly the restrictions that limited their standard working capabilities. Countries in Europe took different courses of action in order to approach the pandemic and minimize the effect on their societies. However, one country that completely distinguished its approach from the rest of Europe was Sweden (Karlsson et al., 2021). As Sweden did not implement restrictions that forced a lockdown upon its inhabitants, businesses could still operate, however, not as usual. With that said, this paper will focus on one particular industry in Sweden that has been affected by this crisis, namely, the restaurant industry.

In order to further understand the importance of this event being studied, it is crucial to understand the restaurant industry's contribution to society. According to Dube et al. (2021), the restaurant industry is an important socio-economic sector that has a huge contribution to the global economy. During the 21st Century, the restaurant industry accounted for hundreds of billion dollars (Muller & Edition, 2020). More specifically, the Swedish restaurants accounted for 140 billion Swedish crowns, including taxes in 2019, however, it decreased by almost 37 % the following year (Statistiska CentralByrån, 2021). Having this said, this industry is vulnerable and sensitive to natural hazards such as Covid-19 and thus needs to be studied to understand how it can be tackled.

1.1.1 Sweden's unique response to Covid-19

When Covid-19 broke out, many countries tried to hinder the contagion by forced quarantine and lockdowns in order to control the citizens´ actions. While countries were fighting to limit the spread of the virus, Sweden received worldwide attention for their unique way of handling the pandemic (Josefsson, 2021). According to Mircheva et al. (2020), Sweden's strategy during the pandemic was mainly based on advice and recommendations from the government rather than restrictions and prohibitions. While countries like Spain and Italy were implementing tight restrictions such as lockdowns with some exceptions on movement for primary needs, Swedish inhabitants were given the freedom to take on their responsibility (Sjölander-Lindqvist et al., 2020). The approach Sweden has taken has been criticized for being soft and favoring a so-called "herd immunity" which later on was labeled as "The Swedish Gamble" (Vogel, 2020, as cited in Josefsson, 2021).

In order to understand the Swedish approach in times of Covid-19, it is crucial to understand that Sweden has a long history of high trust in authorities, institutions, and science (Falk, 2020, as cited in Josefsson, 2021). According to Josefsson (2021), it is written in the Swedish constitution that expert authorities, excluding politicians, are to guide the population during situations like this pandemic. Moreover, Josefsson (2021) describes that the Swedish Infectious Diseases Act 2004:168 implies that Swedes have the right to move freely, and therefore a forced lockdown in Sweden is not applicable. Furthermore, she states that the Public Health Agency of Sweden does not believe that public health work should be constructed on punishments, instead, it should be based on traditional recommendations that have been effective in various cases.

1.2 Problem discussion

The World Health Organization, also known as WHO, was informed on the 31st of December 2019 of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan city in China (WHO, n.d.). The outbreak of the virus has ever since spread worldwide, resulting not only in massive human suffering but also significant economic disruption due to governmental restrictions aiming to minimize the contagion of the virus (Boone, 2020). This outbreak is a rigorous indication that pandemics, as with any rare catastrophes, have occurred in the past and can be anticipated to occur in the future. Although it is impossible to prevent a contagion virus such as coronavirus from emerging, people can prepare measures for difficult circumstances in order to constrain the effect on society (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Businesses are constantly facing changes, hence it is crucial to find ways to deal with them in the best possible way (Karlsson et al., 2021). Daum (2019) states, "you can't claim as your own the great performance of others, but you can study and emulate what made them great". When applied to the present situation, it is vital to study and learn from the past or events like Covid-19 in order to maximize success or minimize losses during difficult times. Previous researchers (e.g. Karlsson et.al., 2021; Jonsson et al., 2021; Song et al., 2021) have studied the restaurant industry from a crisis management point of view, however, the studies have mainly focused on the effects of Covid-19. Therefore, future studies have suggested studying the same phenomena but focusing on the strategies the restaurant industry has utilized. With this in mind, this paper will focus on understanding what strategies and tactics the restaurants, particularly in the city of Jönköing, have incorporated in order to stay in business during times of crisis.

1.3 Purpose

In the view of the problem discussion, this paper aims to create an understanding of how restaurants have been able to survive the pandemic, more specifically, identify what strategies and tactics restaurant owners have utilized. With the purpose in mind, the research question is; ***What crisis strategies and tactics, undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, have been utilized by restaurant owners in order to cope with a crisis?***

1.4 Delimitations

The delimitations of this research concern two areas, the participants in the study and the geographical location. Firstly, the participants in this study have been delimited to restaurant owners. The reason behind the decision to delimitate the participants to only restaurant owners is due to them being the final decision-makers in the decision process. Secondly, the geographical location of Sweden was applied due to its unique approach to Covid-19. As the restaurants in Sweden have been able to operate during the pandemic, the authors thought Sweden was a suitable case to explore more about compared to other countries where it was difficult to do that. To further narrow the scope within Sweden, this research was delimited to businesses in the city of Jönköping, as the authors are located in the same city.

2. Frame of Reference

The aim of this chapter is to give the reader an insight into relevant concepts that have been previously studied. The areas addressed are crisis and crisis management, as well as strategies and tactics.

2.1 Method for constructing a Frame of Reference

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, a significant amount of literature had to be obtained. Thus, the authors' first step in collecting relevant data was to undergo a search for valuable databases. The authors found that, for instance, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Emerald were suitable databases for this study and thus were utilized to acquire background information. Furthermore, in order to capture the most relevant literature in these databases, keywords such as "crisis management", "Covid-19" and "restaurant industry" were filtered. As the authors filtered these keywords and obtained relevant articles, additional ones emerged that eased the process of finding further literature. The keywords were combined in various ways to ensure that the authors have obtained as much relevant data as possible, for instance, "Covid-19 and its impact on the Swedish restaurant industry" or "Crisis Management within the restaurant industry during Covid-19".

Moreover, existing literature was evaluated by, for instance, title and abstract to determine its applicability to the intended research area. Once the applicability of the literature was matched with the aim of this study, further analysis of the data was done to give the authors an in-depth understanding of the subject. Moreover, by evaluating and getting acquainted with the previous literature, the authors recognized relevant theories applied to crisis management which were utilized in order to interpret the empirical findings.

2.2 Literature review

2.2.1 Crises and Crisis Management

Crises and crisis management are two concepts that have been widely researched. However, scholars are not entirely convinced about one common universal definition. The reason behind the disagreements is the field of a subject where the concepts have been studied. Thus, making the concepts being defined in one specific research biased (Leta & Chan, 2021).

According to Boudreaux (2005), a great deal of the literature about crisis discusses the concept at an organizational level, hence the definition of crisis has only focused on one segment. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) developed together a definition of crisis that can be applied to more than just organizationally based events. The two authors agreed on the following definition of a crisis; *"a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, subjective sense of self, and existential core".* This definition includes crises that are non-organizational, for instance, natural disasters such as tsunamis, that not only influence the organization itself but a community system as a whole (Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992, as cited in Boudreaux, 2005). Other scholars, more specifically, Robert et al. (2007) as cited in Leta and Chan (2021) define a crisis as an event that arises from unknown causes and with severe consequences.

Santana (2004), however, disagrees with this definition and claims that a crisis is a process that evolves by its logic as opposed to being an event (Santana, 2004, as cited in Leta & Chan, 2021). Coombs (1999) characterized a crisis as a moment that embarrasses or challenges an organization's character, and that demands an explanation (Coombs, 1999, as cited in Boudreaux, 2005), meanwhile, Gonzales-Herrero & Pratt (1996) have interpreted a crisis as something that is unwelcome and sudden (Gonzales-Herrero & Pratt, 1996, as cited in Boudreaux, 2005). However, according to Sapriel (2003), a crisis is by definition *"an event, revelation, allegation or set of circumstances which threatens the integrity, reputation or survival of an individual or organization".* Sapriel (2003) explains further that a crisis challenges the public's sense of safety, values, or appropriateness. Nonetheless, Santana (2004) argues that the definition of crisis becomes more complex as the crisis is used as a synonym for the terms catastrophe, disaster, and other similar meanings (Santana, 2004, as cited in Leta & Chan, 2021). Despite the different existing variations of definitions of a crisis, many scholars agree on its importance, unpredictability as well as disruptive nature of it (Leta & Chan, 2021).

As many researchers recall that a crisis is something that emerges suddenly without any warnings, many also agree on the fact that it needs to be prevented. According to Bundy et al. (2017), crisis management refers to the actions and communications an organization initiates to reduce the likelihood of a crisis, minimize the harm a crisis may form, and strive to reestablish order following a crisis. Parson (1996), however, means that crisis management is a combination of applied common sense and experience - both your own and others, as well as time, which he explains, needs to be devoted to focusing on the problem. Parson (1996) further states that the purpose of a crisis management plan is to develop several flexible plans that are understood and rehearsed by everyone involved in the implementation of them. He also highlights the importance of considering the whole scenario when creating the plans.

Additionally, Burnett (1998) points out that not all crises are alike. Hence, the same approach to different crises is not appropriate. He also adds that crisis management requires strategic action to be taken to avoid or mitigate undesirable developments and find a solution to the problem. Burnett (1998) further states that crisis management must be a continuous effort. Similarly, Sapriel (2003) mentions that crisis management needs to be institutionalized in her paper. She further explains that not all crises are preventable. However, with adequate risk and issues management processes, organizations will be able to foresee better and plan scenarios. Sapiel (2003) points out that it is proven statistically that a vast majority of today's business crises are non-event-related crises, and that the crisis instead originates mainly from management inaction or neglect. However, Darling (1994), as cited in Larsson & Rudwall (2010), clarifies that crisis management does not correspond to mismanagement, i.e. crisis type situations that arise due to inadequate or lack of planning.

According to Eliasson and Kreuter (n.d) the term crisis management may vary between countries or organizations (Khodarahmi, 2009, as cited in Larrson & Rudwall, 2010). The authors explain that this is due to the level of dynamic that exists in different situations and parts of the world. For instance, Kash and Darling (Larrson & Rudwall 2010) define crisis management as *"a series of functions or processes to identify study and forecast crisis issues"* meanwhile Bundy (Mikusova & Horvathova, 2019) formulated it as followed; "*the* *process by which an organization deals with a disruptive and unexpected event that threatens to harm the organization, its stakeholders or the general public"*.

There are many elements that may affect the outcome of a crisis. According to Smits and Ezzat (Boudreaux, 2005), preparation is one of - if not the most important part. Smits and Ezzat (2003) state that *"Effective crisis management depends upon planning and people"*. Darling (Larsson & Rudwall, 2010), describes that crisis management provides organizations with an organized response to crisis situations. Moreover, Pollard and Hotho (Larsson & Rudwall, 2010) explain that organizations will benefit from planning and developing crisis management plans. The positive effects achieved from doing so, include improved communication and stronger corporate networks (Coombs & Hollday, as cited in Larsson & Rudwall, 2010).

2.2.2 Strategy

According to Roos et al. (2004), a strategy can be defined and used in several ways. Whittington (2011) further explains that researchers have not agreed on one common fundamental definition for a strategy. However, Roos et al. (2004) define strategy as a range of different planned measures that are determined in advance and are employed in order to achieve a predetermined goal. The authors further explain that a strategy can be viewed from five different perspectives developed by Henry Mintzberg. The perspectives are namely, strategy as a plan, strategy as a ploy, strategy as a pattern, strategy as a position, and lastly, strategy as a perspective.

Strategy as a plan refers to a conscious act or guideline to handle a particular situation. The second strategy, strategy as a ploy, can either be general or specific and refers to the actions one takes in order to, for instance, prevent a new entry into the market. This strategy is often referred to as a strategic game that a company uses to be unpredictable and surprise its competitors. Moreover, rarely do all strategies that are planned and aimed to be utilized carry through. Thus, it is essential to look back and analyze these strategies by creating patterns that enable a company to develop better ones in the future. Strategy as a position involves the company itself and its surroundings. In this case, the choice of a strategy is usually dependent on the position the company has in a market and the advantages and disadvantages the business has compared to its competitors. Lastly, Mintzbergs describes strategy as a perspective which is the opposite to strategy as a position. The definition of this strategy entails the company´s understanding of their surroundings and the actions they take based on that. It is vital to distinguish strategy as position and strategy as perspective as the last mentioned one considers the companies´ employees views and ideas as well (Roos et al., 2004).

On the other hand, Porter (1996) claims that not all business decisions are strategic. He implies that a decision can only be characterized as strategic if it contributes with a sustainable advantage to the business. Porter (1996) further states that, to achieve this, the strategy needs to be difficult to replicate. This means that a strategy that can be copied is not actually a strategy but rather an activity that increases productivity. Porter (1996) also adds the fact that although a business needs to presumably adopt both activities, it is the strategic activities that will differentiate a business from another by increasing its performance. However, in this paper, the authors´ understanding of strategy is aligned with Henry Mintzbergs´ definitions of a strategy which is strategy as a plan as it refers to guidelines to handle certain situations.

2.2.3 Tactics

According to Mackay and Zundel (2017), the terms strategy and tactics, is a recurring conceptual couplet for business practitioners and management academics which originally originated in the military. The researchers state that a strategy is associated with direction setting and clarifies further that it can be viewed as a formulation of plans, whereas the term tactics is equated with the specific actions required to implement strategic ideas in organizational practice. In addition to this, Mackay and Zundel (2017) add that tactical actions are recognized as more mechanical and basic in comparison to strategy. Furthermore, to put emphasis on the distinctions between these two terms that are used interchangeably, they explain that strategies are directly linked to an organization´s wider goals while tactics ensure that they are being achieved. Moreover, the authors explain that many researchers have suggested that strategies ought to come first while tactics are set according to the outcomes of strategic evaluation decision-making and planning. According to Ceruti et al. (2019), the terms tactics and strategies are frequently used interchangeably. The authors explain that a tactic is a method or action taken to achieve a broader plan, which in this case is a strategy. Similarly, Roos et al. (2004) clarify that there is a distinction between the terms. According to them, a tactic is connected to the short terms and specific activities that are utilized in order to achieve a determined goal. In contrast, a strategy is a long-term activity. In this research, the definition of a tactic will be aligned with Ceruti et al. (2019) assumption of a tactic.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the reader will be introduced to the relevant theories that have formed a framework for the thesis analysis. Two relevant theories have been found to be useful within crisis management; Attribution theory and Contingency theory. These theories are being used to guide the reader through the reasons behind managerial decisions and the complexity of organizing a company.

3.1 Attribution theory

Two main traits of crises are negative and unexpected (Coombs, 2007). One might know that a crisis is coming but never exactly when or at what negative level. This makes people gather information to arrive at a causal explanation for events. Attribution Theory expert Bernard Weiner (1985) based the theory initially upon how individuals interpret events as being caused by a particular part of the environment, in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic. Weiner (1985) argues that the critical characteristics of an Attribution theory are to search for causes for an event similar to the causes of a crisis and form a judgment that reflects their thinking and behavior. This makes it reasonable to connect crisis management and Attribution theory. People want to know the reasons behind their actions the same way as the causal reasons behind a crisis. Attribution theory allows people to feel control over their own behaviors and situations. Coombs argues (2007) that people's attributions of crises have behavioral effects on the organization when assessing crises responsibly. Likewise, Mowen (1980) points out that managers should evaluate the situation to determine which crisis response is best for the situation. Attribution theory provides a logical bridge for the gap between crisis response strategies and crisis situations (Coombs, 2007). Hence, this theory contributes to why different restaurants adopted different crisis response tactics, although the events were due to the same crisis.

Furthermore, Attribute theory handles how individuals interpret events and how behavior and thoughts relate to each other. This relationship can be interpreted in two ways and can be studied using the theory of internal and external control (I-E theory) related to the Attribution theory. This theory proposes that not everyone in the same situation will attribute the same outcomes to the same causes. I-E theory, in short, explains a person's belief that they are responsible for their own success, whether it is defined by external or internal factors such as luck or personal skills that determine their outcomes. This is essential to attribution theory because people believe that the reasons for their actions come from different values; if it comes from an internal or external attribution (Heider & Weiner, 2002).

3.2 Contingency theory

Several researchers claim that there is no single best method to organize or lead a company. Hanisch & Wald (2012) claim that all decisions should be made on contingent on internal and external circumstances. Hence, it has been recognized that universal solutions to organizational control generally do not exist (Otley, 2016). Kankaew & Pongsapak (2020) states as well that there is an assumption that an organization is an open system that needs to adapt to change based on the surrounding context. This adaptation is significant today as the world is changing rapidly as technology requires and forces companies to develop their business strategies to keep up the pace. However, every organization has its reasons to make decisions suitably within the circumstances whether for survival or effectiveness. This applies to crisis management since crises are complex and uncertain, and thus the managers must adapt their tactics to make it contingent upon the situation (Holla et al., 2018). Crisis managers should take a range of external factors into account, such as threats like crises and the complexity of the issue. Thus, Kouzmin (2008) argues that Contingency theory is about choosing the most suitable control system by considering contingency characteristics. Moreover, this theory has provided insights into how different configurations and modes of operation of control systems have led to other consequences (Otley, 2016). With that said, this theory helps understand the findings of specific tactics the restaurants utilized and aspects of situations that are associated with contingent crisis circumstances.

3.3 Theoretical Framework Synopsis

The theoretical framework gives background information on the two theories related to crisis management that are used to analyze the findings of the research. Not only at a personal level, managers need to understand the actions why people around them behave as they do by using the attribution theory but also to understand themselves. As Heider & Weiner (2002) claims that crises are complex, it is essential for managers to understand that each situation is unique and that there are no universal rules on how to handle the situations. Contingency theory helps understand that each decision should be made contingent on the current circumstances. Together these theories build on crisis management and help to interpret the findings (Holla et al., 2018).

4. Methodology and Methods

This chapter will discuss what methodology and methods can be used in a research paper and which ones were chosen for this specific research. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the data collection and data analysis process along with the quality of the study and possible ethical issues that could be faced while conducting this research.

4.1 Methodology

4.1.1 Research paradigm

According to Collis and Hussey (2014), a research paradigm is a framework that guides how research should be conducted based on people's philosophies and their assumptions about the surrounding world and the nature of knowledge. Similarly, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) explain the word paradigm as something that is used to describe a researcher's worldview. They further clarify that a paradigm establishes the beliefs and principles that construct how a researcher views the world and how they understand and act within that world. Collis and Hussey (2014) believe that there are two main research paradigms; positivism and interpretivism. Some keywords that define the significant differences between these two paradigms (may be viewed as two extremities of a continuous line) are, for instance, qualitative respectively quantitative, and objective respectively subjective. Which one to adopt depends on the specific research question to be investigated (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

The positivism research paradigm originated in natural science. It is based on the assumption that social reality is singular and objective and is not affected by the act of investigating it. In contrast, the interpretivism paradigm is built upon the belief that social reality is not objective but somewhat subjective and is shaped by our perceptions. The center of this philosophy is to explore the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining interpretive understanding (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Compared to the positivists, which adopt quantitative methods, interpretivists select methods that aim at describing and translating through qualitative methods (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Considering that this study seeks to understand the different strategies and tactics the restaurant owners utilized during the Covid-19 pandemic, the interpretivist paradigm is more suitable for this study as the data is collected through qualitative methods. The authors will conduct interviews, giving the subjects the freedom to be able to express their own reality, which will further be interpreted and analyzed by the authors. With inconsideration to this, the interpretivism paradigm will be adopted throughout the paper.

4.1.2 Research strategy

There are two data collection methods that can be utilized during a research period; quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative studies are often based on the relationship between variables where the data is analyzed by using different statistical methods (Collis & Hussey, 2014). This type of data collection method is often associated with quantifying gathering methods such as questionnaires and statistics. On the other hand, a qualitative data collection method usually includes face-to-face interviews or focus groups gathering data in a nominal form such as words and images (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Other researchers, for instance, Rahman (2016), mention that a qualitative approach holistically aims at understanding the human experience in specific settings. Rahman (2016) further states that an interpretivism approach (i.e. qualitative approach) is regarded as idiographic research. Ideographic research refers to the study of individual cases or events (Kelin & Myers, 1999, as cited in Rahman, 2016) and is characterized by its understanding of different peoples' voices, meanings, and events (Richardson, 2012, as cited in Rahman, 2016). Having said that, a qualitative approach was more applicable for this study as the authors aim to understand a human experience in a specific setting to answer the research question. This was done through face-to-face interviews with the restaurant owners to be able to illuminate their experiences.

4.1.3 Research approach

There are two different research approaches that one can use in order to conduct a study; deductive and inductive. Implementing either of them may be helpful for the researcher as it provides one with a better understanding of the research as well as how to efficiently conduct one (Collis & Hussey, 2014). According to Collis and Hussey (2014), deductive research is *"a study in which a conceptual and theoretical structure is developed and then tested by empirical observation".* This approach is also referred to as the concept-driven method and is characterized by moving from theory to data or from an abstract and general level to a more concrete and specific one (Schreier, 2012, as cited in Graneheim et al., 2017).

On the other hand, an inductive approach refers to *"a study in which theory is developed from the observation of empirical reality"* (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Compared to the deductive approach, this approach is also called data-driven (Schreier, 2012; Graneheim et al., 2017) or text-driven (Krippendorff, 2013; Granehiem et al., 2017) and is characterized by its method of searching for patterns. It moves from the data gathered to a theoretical understanding. When analyzing data, the researchers search for similarities and differences, which are subsequently described via so-called categories or themes (Graneheim et al., 2017). As this study will accommodate an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative research finding out themes and patterns, the inductive approach was the most suitable one to apply. Moreover, this study aims at being inductive as the study moves from real-life observations of empirical data to generalizing the subject's perception and understanding of the research phenomena.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Data collection

To achieve the purpose of any research, it is necessary to gather relevant data. The data provided within this paper is mainly collected from semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to gain a more in-depth understanding of the topic. The primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the chosen participants. The decision to conduct the interviews face-to-face was because the authors believed it would minimize any technical issues that might have arisen if the interviews were conducted using online platforms instead. Additionally, the authors believed it would contribute to a more comfortable environment for the participants. The primary interviews were conducted in the timeframe from February to March, and additional contacts were made after the initial interview as clarifications of the empirical findings were needed to ensure transparency. With that said, the data collection was done in the timeframe from February to April 2022. Prior to the primary data collection, literature reviews as secondary data gave the foundation for studying the chosen topic in this paper from which a gap was identified.

4.2.2 Sample

To be able to conduct this qualitative study, the authors decided to contact several fine dining restaurants in the city of Jönköping. This decision is mainly because fast-food restaurants did not get affected by the pandemic to the same extent as fine dining restaurants have. Statistics show that fast-food restaurants have decreased their sales marginally, while other types of restaurants have been struck significantly harder by the pandemic (Statistiska CentralByrån, 2021). With that said, the study was conducted by calling and emailing the restaurants, asking to talk with the owner, and discussing the purpose of this study with them. Once the restaurant owners have shown interest and agreed to participate, the authors set up a meeting directly. Since the participating restaurants are located in the same city as the authors, the process of collecting the sample may be argued to be a convenience sampling method. A total of ten restaurants were acquired, however, three of them withdrew their interests due to personal reasons that the authors respected and thus were left with seven. Moreover, a total of eight people were interviewed, as two people were present during one interview in order to provide as accurate answers as possible. However, we will only refer to one owner in this research, as the other participant mainly confirmed by adding a few comments. Nonetheless, the authors contacted the restaurants with relatively distinct food concepts as they believed this could contribute to different perspectives of their experiences during the pandemic.

4.2.3 Interview design

The primary research data was collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with seven different restaurant owners, as mentioned previously in the paper. These restaurants and the interview details can be found in *Table 1* below. The research authors chose to use semi-structured interviews as it gives the respondent more space for discussion instead of straightforward questions. With that said, the authors had planned some opening questions but changed the follow-up questions structured based on which direction the discussion went by the respondent. Thus, the authors did not strictly follow the formalized list of questions. These types of interviews allowed the respondents to be fully open about their opinions and feelings, letting them have more space to communicate transparently about their observations which a survey would not allow for (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The authors conducted semi-structured interviews asking questions such as the most important tactics taken under the pandemic or which part of the restaurant business was affected the most. The original interview outline format will be found in *Appendix 1,* both in English and Swedish, as the interviews were conducted in Swedish. In addition, after obtaining permission, the interviews were recorded, and notes were documented to facilitate the data analysis later on. In the table below is a summary of conducted interviews including how many respondents were interviewed, as well as the length and the date of the interviews.

Interviewee	**Company**	**Position**	**Date**	**Length of the interview**
Respondent 1	Restaurant A	CEO	11th of February	35 Minutes
Respondent 2	Restaurant B	CEO	10th of February	31 Minutes
Respondent 3	Restaurant C	CEO	22nd of February	42 Minutes
Respondent 4	Restaurant D	CEO	24th of February	37 Minutes
Respondent 5	Restaurant E	CEO	25th of February	25 Minutes
Respondent 6	Restaurant F	CEO	1st of March	51 Minutes
Respondent 7	Restaurant G	CEO	25th of February	40 Minutes

Table 1. The study's selected restaurants & interview table

4.2.4 Data analysis

This study's framework is guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative data approach as previously stated. Thus, the collected data was analyzed through the following method described by Collis and Hussey (2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) argue that under an interpretivist paradigm, it is important to seek depth and richness of data while limiting the scope of the study. Our way of limiting the scope was to conduct fewer but broader interviews within the city of Jönköping. However, after collecting a vast amount of data from the interviews, field notes, and published documents, the data needed to be reduced (Collis &

Hussey, 2014). This was done by three activities; reducing the data, displaying the data, and identifying conclusions and verifications.

Firstly, *data reduction* is a process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The authors went through the data several times and tried to reflect on what was relevant or irrelevant, and looked for similarities and differences in the data. Reflection is a vital part of interpretivist methodology, as there will be a large amount of data collected (Collis & Hussey, 2014). After the data was reflected and organized, the data was reduced to include only relevant information about the topic. Reduced data helped to draw conclusions and verifications as well as summarize the critical points from the interviews. However, none of the data was reduced at this stage, but rather analyzed and organized to visualize the overall picture better. Following the next step of this process was the data display.

Secondly, the *data display* is a way of summarizing complex data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The data display can be in a visual format such as a matrix, chart, or graph that systematically presents the information to draw conclusions. In this case, the authors used a chart that collected the sub-themes of the data where the common themes, in this case, strategies, between the interviews could be discovered. From this display, the conclusions and verifications can be drawn.

Lastly, the final stage of the *conclusions and verifications* was reached. Conclusions can be drawn upon the reduced and finalized data, which are connected to the themes and theories established in the literature review (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The conclusions were drawn through the interviews conducted and transcribed by each researcher. Following this, the data from each transcription had been placed into different sub-themes and ideas that match the theoretical framework, including Contingency- and Attribution Theory related to crisis management. In other words, this was done by Thematic Analysis which uses the codes to categorize the themes that can summarize the topic (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The authors wrote down and recorded the important information during the interviews and found themes related to each other's answers after the coding phase. The thematic analysis helped to interpret patterns and meanings in the data as well as understand general themes, shared values in the data, and how they are communicated between the respondents. Moreover, these themes provide insights into the restaurant owner's motivations behind these strategic decisions. All these emerging themes will be discussed later in the paper.

All these steps helped us identify the themes and make sense of what is relevant and what is not. By starting with the interviews early in February it helped us to make a frame for our study as well as giving the participants space to lead the discussion in a relevant direction increasing the trustworthiness of the study. Finally, the content of all data was analyzed, and the final report was written.

4.3 Research Quality

A research study needs to be verified that it is trustworthy according to Collins and Hussey (2013). As qualitative study is about understanding the nature of reality and knowledge, it is important to consider four different criterias that apprise the trustworthiness and quality of the study. Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability are the criterias that support the qualitative research being credible and the findings being valid. However, several other criteria of trustworthiness exist but these four are the most common ones by Lincoln and Guba (1985) that can be addressed (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Thus, the authors of this research will apply the principles described in the following sections throughout the research process.

4.3.1 Credibility

Credibility is a vital criteria to consider when conducting research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). It assesses whether you have identified and described your data in an adequate way. In other words, this type of assessment ensures that data have been presented correctly, without adding or removing data that might have determined the outcome of a study. To avoid making that mistake, a researcher may be persistent and observe the subject under study to obtain a deep understanding of the topic. Moreover, credibility may also be achieved by the data triangulation method which signifies the usage of multiple sources, different research methods, and more than one researcher to investigate the same phenomenon in a study. That said, triangulation is highlighted throughout the research procedure. By applying this method in a study, it minimizes the bias that might emerge (Collis & Hussey, 2014). As the researchers of this paper have used several different methods such as primary and secondary data in order to collect data, the chances of reaching credible research are in all probability.

4.3.2 Transferability

According to Collis and Hussey (2014), transferability refers to the evaluation of the possibility that the findings of research can be applied in other similar cases to permit a so-called generalization. A qualitative researcher may enhance transferability by thoroughly describing the research context as well as clarifying its central assumptions of it. It is however not the researcher that assesses these criteria, it is the reader that makes the transferability judgment (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In addition, other factors can highlight the transferability of the research such as defining the research question, methods and processes used, and findings together with results as detailed as possible (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Hence, this paper aims to achieve transferability by comprehensively explaining the research and its concepts as thoroughly as possible. We believe that the transferability of this study is to be considered high as it can be transferred and studied in other contexts within the field of crisis management and hospitality. The analysis and findings of the research should be able to be generalized to the restaurant industry in the form of process and concept generalization, as the accounts from each individual are valid. This should enable our findings to be trusted and transferable to other restaurant contexts where the company in question wants to use crisis management strategies in order to cope with the crisis. However, the authors can not guarantee that this research can be applied in other countries than Sweden since cultural and environmental aspects may change the view of crisis management.

4.3.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to how organized and well documented the research process is (Collis & Hussey, 2013). This indicates the stability of observations over time (Bitsch, 2005). The dependability of this study will be assessing participants' findings and proposals of the study in a way that supports the data received from interview participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Researchers can ensure the presence of dependability criteria through, for instance, peer examination, coding, triangulation, and audio recordings (Ary et al., 2010). In this study, the researchers have kept records throughout the research providing how the data was collected, recorded, and analyzed to increase dependability. Finally, the researchers managed and transcribed the process by dividing the interviews. However, the coding of each interview was done individually by both researchers and then compared to ensure dependability and consistency further. This is called Stepwise replication where a qualitative research data evaluation procedure is done by two researchers by analyzing the same data independently and comparing results later on (Todman, 2018). With that said, the research procedure was organized and documented as thoroughly as possible to increase the dependability.

4.3.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether the research process has been depicted completely and is conceivable to estimate whether the findings flow from the data (Collis & Hussey, 2013). In other words, there should be a clear link between the findings and the data. Confirmability implies the degree to which a consideration can be affirmed or backed by other researchers. The researcher's lack of bias of translations is imperative. Confirmability is concerned with finding data and translations of perceptions that are not the result of the researcher's creative energy but are clearly inferred from the data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Moreover, researchers have to act without bias and minimize personal motives that could influence the conclusions. With that said, the researchers of the study should focus on following the interviewees instead of leading the conversation during the interview. To maintain confirmability and understanding of the interviewee's answers the researchers repeat the answers and ask if the context was correctly understood. This gives the interviewee a chance to either confirm or clarify the answer so it better matches what was initially intended. If the researcher follows instead of guides the conversation, this can enhance the research quality since it increases trust for the reader (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

With all this in mind, for this research, confirmability is recognized by using semi-structured open-ended questions, audio recordings, transcriptions, and additional field notes describing details from the moment of collecting the data. In addition, a reflexive journal is kept by the researchers which cover all occasions that have happened within the field. This is necessary to be able to confirm the findings, reflections, and analysis when needed (Anney, 2014). Various documents created during the collection of data are studied several times by both researchers in order to increase the confirmability and trustworthiness of the research as well. By quoting from the interviewees the flow of findings linked to empirical data is disclosed, increasing the confirmability of the study. Since the interviews were performed in Swedish, as it is the native language for most of the respondents and one of the authors, the quotes that are used in this study will be translated into English. Several independent persons will review the quotes in both languages to increase confirmability, accuracy, and research quality.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical implications are one of the core characteristics and basis of a research project (Bell & Bryman, 2007). It is thus important to follow ethical guidelines when conducting research. Ethics is interpreted as a framework of moral values that help people regulate and define what is right from wrong and develop a code of conduct (Zhang, 2017). There are several lists of principles, however, we will follow Bell and Bryman's (2007) principles that are the most relevant for this study; harm to participants, dignity, informed consent, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, honesty, and transparency.

Firstly, Collis & Hussey (2014) states that one of the most important ethical principles is that no one should be forced to take part in the research. This research always started by asking the participants for a free willingness to participate and informing them of the estimation of the length of the interview as well as what was required in the study. During the interview, the participants got the freedom to discuss the points they considered to be the most relevant in regard to the interview questions without forced guidance from the interviewer's side.

Secondly, the authors of this paper tried to avoid any psychological harm such as stress and let the participants decide when they had time for the interviews. The authors did not put any pressure on the participants to avoid causing harm to them as it can be sued for ethical reasons (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In addition, participants were given the right to withdraw at any time to avoid harm. Not only is this a way to protect the privacy of each research participant but it also supports moral and social values.

Thirdly, anonymity and confidentiality is important to offer for the participants (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The authors agreed to keep the participants anonymous because the participants requested it themselves. Anonymity builds trust and honesty within the research and helps them to share more information about the events without being identified with any of the opinions they express. The authors always asked for permission to record or make any notes during the interview in order to keep the participant up to date and get the most transparent information as possible. After each interview, the participants were also asked for permission to contact for follow-up questions. The participants were ensured that their privacy and confidentiality were considered and not shared with third parties or recorded to any cloud server considering the GDPR. The authors prioritized the respect for everyone's dignity as authors and participants.

Furthermore, the authors will strive to communicate openly about the research ideas, data, and results to make sure both authors agree on things before moving on. This means that the authors are accountable for the actions together and keep the agreements when sharing tasks with each other. That is to say, the communication is kept as honest and transparent as possible. Communication is important for this research because research is made through a collaboration between researchers and their participants (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

5. Empirical findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the interviews conducted with the restaurant owners. The empirical findings consist of three main strategies that emerged during the interviews: cost reduction -, sales optimization- and investment strategies. These strategies can be reached through different tactics that are mentioned in this chapter and analyzed further in the next chapter.

5.1 Restaurant A

Restaurant A is a restaurant that aims at serving food from two different cultures and is located in the middle of the city. This specific restaurant has been in business for more than five years and has less than ten employees. They serve both lunch and dinner.

5.1.1 Cost reduction

As the restrictions began to be implemented in Sweden, fewer customers were visiting the restaurant. Thus, Restaurant A decided on reducing as many costs as possible in order to cope with the crisis. Their main costs that became apparent were their staff and therefore Restaurant A agreed on shortening their staff's working hours as one possible tactic. As the staff was minimized, the owner of the restaurant stepped in several times in order to keep the business running. Although this tactic helped to some extent, Restaurant A had to further find other ways to reduce costs. Therefore, they managed to get the rent reduced by 50 % by discussing the financial situation with their landlord that was willing to aid the restaurant. Respondent one affirms that,

R1: "Thanks to our kind landlord, we were able to lower the costs".

5.1.2 Sales optimization

As Restaurant A is a small business, the restrictions regarding the limitation of guest visits made it difficult for the restaurant to maintain its usual sales inside the premises. Hence, they collaborated with different takeaway companies in order to optimize their sales. Besides this, they also reduced their prices and offered several free delivery options to attract more customers. This tactic was significant for the restaurant as respondent 1 explains, *R1: "We were able to increase our sales by 20-30% with takeaway".*

Moreover, Restaurant A saw a great opportunity to take advantage of the circumstances the hotels had to deal with. For instance, Restaurant A was located close to a hotel that was battling to stay in business but unfortunately had to close its kitchen. This resulted in a collaboration between the two businesses which entailed the hotel sending their guests who had bought all-inclusive packets to eat both lunch and dinner at Restaurant A. Respondent one reveals the benefit of this tactic by stating,

R1: "They closed their kitchen which benefited us in the long run".

When the restrictions started to ease upon the restaurants, Restaurant A took the chance to extend their services by having longer opening hours. In addition to this, they also decided to close the kitchen later than usual to give the customers the ability to order more food or drinks. In that way, Restaurant A believed that they could further increase their sales.

5.1.3 Investments

Restaurant A did not make any specific investments for their business activities, however, they applied for financial support from the government in order to be able to continue running their business.

5.2 Restaurant B

Restaurant B is located in the city center and is characterized by its unique food concept that is new in the city of Jönköping. The restaurant has been in business for less than five years and has less than ten employees. They serve both lunch and dinner.

5.2.1 Cost reduction

In order to be able to cope with the crises, Restaurant B realized that they had to cut on all extensive costs. That meant that they were extremely cautious with their purchasing. The owner of the restaurant evaluated what was necessary to buy and in what volume to be able to achieve this strategy. Respondent two expresses his thoughts regarding this strategy by indicating that,

R2: "We had to be extremely cautious with what we bought in order to be able to address this pandemic".

Another tactic they used in order to further reduce costs was to cooperate with the landlord. This cooperation entailed that the landlord would support the restaurant during tough times by reducing the rent they had to pay. Respondent two mentions that,

R2: "The aid we got from the landlord helped us a lot".

5.2.2 Sales optimization

Restaurant B realized relatively early that they could not optimize their income by only offering their food in the restaurant. Despite the fact that the restaurant, prior to the pandemic, had their focus on delivering the food experience only in the restaurant premises, they collaborated with take-away companies. The collaboration made it possible for the restaurant to reach out to potential customers that were afraid to visit the restaurant due to the spread of the contagion virus Covid-19.

5.2.3 Investments

It can be argued that the restaurant invested in their staff by not firing or laying them off. This investment could be viewed as a long-term asset for the business as the majority of their staff was top talent chefs that could only be found in the country where the restaurant was aiming at delivering food experiences from. What Restaurant B did in order to keep their highly valued staff in Sweden was to put more money into the business from their own personal savings. During the pandemic, restaurants were offered some type of financial support from the Government, in the case of Restaurant B, the support was not necessary to obtain.

5.3 Restaurant C

Restaurant C is located in the middle of the city and aims at delivering food from one specific culture. The restaurant has been in business for more than five years and employs less than ten people.

5.3.1 Cost reduction

Due to the restrictions that entailed that the restaurants had to limit their guests based on the size of the place, Restaurant C was not anymore in need of all the staff during specific hours and days. Thus, Restaurant C made a joint decision, including everyone, to reduce their working hours as much as possible to cope with other costs that had to be dealt with. As decisions were equally made between the staff and the owner, it strengthened the relationship and loyalty in the workplace. The strong relationship aided the business as employees were willing to step in and work a couple hours when needed even though they had resigned. During difficult times like this, the owner saw the importance of listening and understanding their employees´ side which resulted partly in the survival of the restaurant. Respondent three states that,

R3: "For us, our employees are everything. Therefore, we had to include them in the decisions we made when Covid-19 struck".

Moreover, as the owner reduced his staff's working hours, he had to work more himself in order to keep the business running. In addition, Restaurant C had to find further ways to reduce costs as minimizing the staff was not sufficient for the survival of the business. Therefore, they set up a meeting with the landlord and discussed the financial situation of the restaurant. As the landlord and the owner had built up a great relationship over the years, where trust and friendship were central, the landlord did not only support the restaurant by reducing the rent but also offered three free months of rent.

5.3.2 Sales optimization

In order for Restaurant C to optimize their sales, they supplied their customers with a takeaway option. The takeaway option had already been implemented in the business but was not utilized or marketed as much as during the ongoing pandemic. Therefore, Restaurant C saw the opportunity to extend their services by collaborating with several different takeaway companies. Nonetheless, during the first two weeks of the implementation of takeaway, the owner offered his customers free delivery to attract them to start ordering via takeaway. As the restaurant was already familiar with this concept, adjusting to this new system was not found difficult but rather eased their way of working as well as optimized the sales.

5.3.3 Investments

Restaurant C did not implement any specific investments during the pandemic other than focusing on takeaway fully. However, they plan different investments after the pandemic as people are more comfortable eating indoors. They plan for instance to hold live DJ events and release a new menu for the summer. The owner of Restaurant C thought these changes were not important to implement during the pandemic, when the full focus was on takeaway and optimizing the sales in order to survive the many challenges Covid-19 brought along. Moreover, Restaurant C decided relatively early that they did not want to receive any support from the government as they were not in need of it.

5.4 Restaurant D

Restaurant D is a family-driven restaurant that offers a unique food concept that is connected to the history of the family. The restaurant has been in business for more than five years and has more than ten employees.

5.4.1 Cost reduction

Respondent four explains that cost reduction had to be done in the business in order to keep the costs as low as possible during the periods where the activity in the business was low. This meant that they became more aware of their purchasing. In an attempt to further keep the costs as low as possible in the business, they were given discounts from their landlord who were willing to assist the business.

5.4.2 Sales optimization

During the pandemic, Restaurant D understood quickly that it was not possible to optimize their sales by only delivering food experiences in their premises. Therefore they collaborated with several takeaway companies in order to reach out to the customers who were not able or were afraid to eat in the restaurant. In that way, Restaurant D was able to attract more customers and significantly increase their sales.

5.4.3 Investments

In the case of Restaurant D, the owners believed it would benefit them to invest during the pandemic. Thus, the owners of Restaurant D agreed on building an outdoor seating which enabled them to receive more customers as the indoor place had limited amount of seats due to the restrictions. Not only did they invest in a new outdoor seating but also developed their bar which entailed implementing a number of new drinks to the menu as well as a new "look" as one of the owners described it. With inconsideration to takeaway, Restaurant D realized that they could market themselves via adding a logo on the takeaway bags and thus invested in different marketing activities. For instance, they started posting and sharing more information on facebook and their own website which became more active during the pandemic. Respondent four´s comment on the success this strategy brought to the business is,

R4: "As strange as it may sound, we did the best year ever, 2021"

Although Restaurant D was financially independent without any loans to pay back, they still took advantage of the support the Government offered. As the support was received in time, it aided the restaurant owners to run their business as usual and even expand it as mentioned above.

5.5 Restaurant E

Restaurant E is a restaurant that offers several dishes from two different cultures, one culture during lunch and the other later in the evening. This restaurant is located in the middle of the city and has more than ten employees. Restaurant E has been in business for less than five years.

5.5.1 Cost reduction

Restaurant E's tactics in order to reduce costs were to minimize unnecessary expenses by being cautious with all purchases for instance, not order more than they needed. Besides this, they realized relatively early during the pandemic that the staff will be costing the business a lot in time of low activity. Therefore, the restaurant owner decided to lay off all employees down to 20 % without firing anyone. This in turn meant that the owner had to work a lot of hours alone in order to keep the business running with as little expenses as possible. Respondent five expresses his thoughts about this strategy by sharing that,

R5: "Cautiousness with purchasing and staff is something that has made us survive during this pandemic. It's about reducing all costs, it is not harder than that."

In an attempt to further reduce the costs, the owner tried discussing a discount on the rent with the landlord, however, in the case of Restaurant E, it was not possible to attain a discount. Respondent five explains that,

R5: "We managed anyway, and it is mostly because we reduced our costs from the very beginning."

5.5.2 Sales optimization

Restaurant E experienced a substantial change in their consumer's behavior. Respondent five describes that,

R5: "During the pandemic, the demand dropped drastically. It is a matter of course as people preferred to stay at home".

In consideration of that, Restaurant E experienced a great loss in their sales due to the customers´changing behavior. Prior to the pandemic, Restaurant E was relying upon the businesses that were surrounded by them, companies that ate lunch and had meetings in the restaurant. As Restaurant E could not rely anymore on these particular sales, they had to rethink and come up with a solution that would compensate for that. What Restaurant E did was to instead focus on takeaway. The takeaway option was already implemented in the business but was not marketed enough to be recognized among customers. However, during the ongoing pandemic, the owner realized that focusing on takeaway would optimize their sales as customers now preferred to order food via online purchasing. Thus, takeaway was the most suitable tactic to attract customers which would further aid in sales optimizations. Respondent five demonstrates the significance of this tactic by sharing that,

R5: "We marketed ourselves pretty much as usual but focused more on takeaway during the pandemic especially during public holidays such as Easter and Valentine's Day."

5.5.3 Investments

The restaurant did not make any major investments during this period, they did however invest in some marketing activities as takeaway was not as significant prior to the pandemic. Besides this, they applied for financial support from the government which they got just in time to be able to continue with running the business. In addition to this, the owner only applied for the support from the government. As the owner thought this support was enough, he did not apply for a loan, partly, because he did not want to have to pay back later but also because the aid he got was sufficient to sustain the business activities.

5.6 Restaurant F

Restaurant F is located in the middle of the city and has less than ten employees. They have been in the business more than five years and offer usually only dinner and drinks but have recently started with having the restaurant open during lunches as well.

5.6.1 Cost reduction

In the case of Restaurant F, the owners believed that the staff was still important to keep even though the activity started to decrease in the restaurant. However, they decided to lay off staff from their original team at a very low level, partly due to minimizing costs but also to give the hourly employed staff hours to work.

5.6.2 Sales optimization

Prior to the pandemic, Restaurant F was only offering their customers dinner and drinks during the evenings. However, during the ongoing pandemic, Restaurant F saw the opportunity to expand their services by opening their restaurant during lunch time as well. This tactic was not only utilized with the purpose of optimizing their sales but also filling out hours for the hourly employed staff. Respondent six highlights the importance of their staff by sharing that,

> *R6: "We highly value all of our staff, therefore we could not just let go of any".*

Moreover, they also focused on takeaway to some extent but did not collaborate with new delivery companies as they believed the business was running relatively good without having to do that. Nonetheless, a tactic they found to be useful during the pandemic was collaborating with students. The collaboration entailed several discounts in order to attract students to visit the restaurant. Furthermore, regular customers were also offered discounts from time to time which was not always taken advantage of as the customers wanted to pay full price to aid the restaurant.

5.6.3 Investments

In order to be able to handle and be conscientious with all the restrictions, Restaurant F invested in an app that was aimed to minimize crowding in the restaurant. The app was exploited in an attempt to make the customers feel safe visiting the restaurant but also respecting the restrictions that were followed with consequences if they were not being respected. Besides investing in this app, they also invested in new furniture to give the premises a new look which would attract customers to visit the restaurant.

5.7 Restaurant G

Restaurant G is located in a crowded part of the city, has more than ten employees and has been in business for more than five years. The restaurant offers a range of different food concepts and is famous for their innovation of creating drinks.

5.7.1 Cost reduction

In the matter of reducing costs as a surviving strategy during a crisis, Restaurant G accepted the fact that they would have to in one way or another eliminate staff as they are one of the major costs a business has to put up with. The first instinct according to one of the owners was to eliminate the extra staff that did not have a binding contract that promised a certain amount of working hours or salary. Respondent seven reveals that,

R7: "The first action we took was to reduce staff costs, especially the employees we call extra staff, who had no specific contract or promised hours".

With regards to the staff that are in the "original" team and crucial for the business in order to achieve their objectives, they could not fire them immediately. Instead, they laid some off in order to reduce the costs further. Moreover, they also had discussions with the landlord regarding receiving some discounts on the monthly rent. Restaurant G was fortunate to also receive help from the electricity company that similarly to the landlord, agreed on helping the restaurant.

5.7.2 Sales optimization

Prior to the pandemic, Restaurant G had plans of extending their services by adding the option of takeaway. However, as this restaurant believes that their customers receive the full experience by eating at the restaurant and enjoying the environment they have created there, the extension of takeaway was not the main focus. Nonetheless, when the pandemic hit the restaurant industry with its restrictions, they accelerated the adaptation of takeaway and started marketing it immediately. Respondent seven expresses his thoughts regarding the successful implementation of takeaway as followed,

R7: "It felt like those who were going to book a table ordered take away instead".

5.7.3 Investments

Restaurant G did not do any special investments besides investing slightly in some marketing activities that included the addition of the service they adopted. The decision to apply for government support was taken in order to be able to keep running the business as normally as possible. However, the owners experienced that the support arrived relatively late. Considering the fact that this restaurant had done well prior to the pandemic and were still doing relatively good during the pandemic, the delay did not affect the business to a greater extent.

6. Analysis and Interpretations

This chapter introduces the reader of the analysis of the empirical findings. The findings are presented as themes as thematic analysis is characterized by qualitative study and used in this research. The themes in this case are the three core strategies the authors derived from the empirical findings.

Through our empirical findings, it has been made clear that all restaurants have been affected by the pandemic in one way or another. The effect the pandemic had on the restaurant industry, forced restaurants to get out of their comfort zone and make decisions that were vital for their survival. From the empirical findings, the authors have been able to derive three main strategies that were obtained during the pandemic by these specific restaurants: *cost reduction, optimizing sales, and investments.* Moreover, in order to achieve these strategies, the restaurants took several courses of actions in terms of tactics that were significantly different.

6.1 Cost reduction

As restrictions started to slightly be implemented in Sweden, customers began to avoid eating outdoors which resulted generally in low activity in the restaurants. Hence, some owners were no longer in need of some employees. In the case of Restaurant A, C, E, and F, the most prominent way of reducing costs was to either shorten the working hours for their employees or lay them off. However, they laid off their employees differently, for instance, Restaurant C set up a meeting with all their employees and agreed on the decisions made during the meeting while Restaurant E's owner laid off everyone equally down to 20 %. Meanwhile Restaurant E's owner laid off his employees as much as he could, Restaurant F had the goal to avoid laying off their employees. Moreover, as some of the employees are more vital for the delivery of the restaurants, Restaurant B, D, F, and G decided on not firing anyone from their original team, however, Restaurant B and G decided on cutting some of their extra employees who were hourly workers or did not have a contract that promised any specific working hours. In the case of Restaurant B and D, the extra staff was not prioritized as much as the staff from the original team compared to Restaurant F who did not differentiate the importance between their employees.

Moreover, minimizing the number of staff was not sufficient for all restaurants in order to cope with the crises. Thus, all restaurants sought some type of support from their landlords. In the case of Restaurant A, B, C and G, the landlord agreed on aiding the restaurant. However, the support differed among these four restaurants, for instance, restaurant A received a discount up to 50 %, while restaurant C got three rent free months besides aiding discounts throughout the pandemic. The other two restaurants, namely Restaurant E and F were not lucky enough to receive similar support from their landlord. Restaurant E tried discussing the financial situation with his landlord which was declined as his premises was owned by a private person who needed to have the full rent paid. In the case of restaurant F, the owners believed the discussion of seeking some type of support from their landlord was not worth taking as their rent was generally lower than any other premises.

6.2 Sales optimization

Considering the fact that many owners experienced lower activity in their restaurants, mainly due to the restrictions but also a changing consumer behavior in a way that consumers got scared of getting sick and preferred to stay home, the owners had to adapt to the new situation. Hence, all restaurants saw the opportunity to either expand their takeaway option or implement it. One restaurant that focused a lot on takeaway and took it one step further compared to the others was Restaurant A. This restaurant did not only offer takeaway but also free delivery for most of the time during the pandemic. Besides this, the owner also took the decision to lower his prices. According to the owner of Restaurant A, the tactics of reducing prices and offering free delivery was utilized in order to attract customers to buy food more often. Restaurant C used a similar tactic, where they offered free delivery the first two weeks. As Restaurant C realized that takeaway was a popular way of ordering food and that their customers did not really care about the small fee that would follow via ordering food that way, they decided to start charging their customers which boosted their sales. In consideration to that, the necessity to reduce prices, like Restaurant A did, was not crucial in their case as their customers valued more the experience of eating that particular type of food.

Moving on to Restaurant G, which saw the importance of implementing the takeaway option due to their customers' changing consumer behavior. The idea of implementing a takeaway option was already discussed prior to the pandemic, however, the owners did not focus on it as much as when the pandemic struck. Thus, the owners accelerated the implementation of it and started marketing it in order to create awareness of the new extended service. As for the other restaurants, namely, Restaurant B, D, and E the owners did not take any specific action regarding the takeaway option, besides focusing on collaborating with several delivery companies in order to boost their sales.

Furthermore, in order to further optimize the sales, Restaurant A took advantage of a very rare opportunity that arose during the pandemic. As this restaurant is located close to a hotel that had been affected by the pandemic relatively hard which in turn resulted in the closure of their restaurant, Restaurant A saw the opportunity to collaborate with the hotel. The collaboration entailed that the hotel would send their guests to Restaurant A in order to fulfill their needs. In that way, Restaurant A could stimulate the activity in their restaurant which boosted their sales.

In the case of Restaurant F which usually only serves dinner, they began opening during lunch-time also in an attempt to boost their sales. Additionally, as Jönköping is a student city, the owners thought they could take advantage of this particular group of people and collaborate with for instance student ambassadors who would communicate further discounts for students. This tactic was only utilized by this restaurant which differentiated themselves in order to achieve the strategy of optimizing their sales.

6.3 Investment strategies

The last strategy that the authors derived from the empirical findings is investing. While some restaurants did not do any specific investments during the pandemic, others really engaged in investing activities. One restaurant that made major investments during the ongoing pandemic was Restaurant D which decided to expand its premises by building outdoor seating. As the owners were not sure about when the pandemic would end, they thought they had to do something that enabled them to serve more customers as their premises were limited to serve a certain amount of people due to the restrictions. They did not only invest in new outdoor seating but also developed their bar which was not in focus prior to the pandemic. The owners agreed on expanding it by also offering drinks, besides beer and wine as well as working on the appearance which would attract the customers to buy more from the bar.

Similarly, Restaurant F invested in their premises by replacing their old furniture with new ones. They also exploited an existing app that was aimed for minimizing crowding and making food ordering more convenient for the customers. The owners believed this would make the customers feel safer visiting the restaurant and thus would generate more revenues in the long run. Compared to Restaurant C which had plans to also expand their business and invest in activities that were aimed at generating more customers and revenue, the owners of this restaurant thought it would be better to wait for these changes. However, when the pandemic was officially declared as over, they started discussing the new business activities for the summer instead.

In the case of Restaurant B they valued their staff by not firing anyone from their original team, they had to invest in the business by putting more money from their personal savings in order to keep their top talents who were crucial for the delivery of the restaurant. Furthermore, Restaurant D, E, and G invested in some marketing activities such as marketing the availability of the takeaway option which would aid in the sales. However, they did it a little bit differently, for instance, Restaurant E focused a lot on marketing the takeaway option during big holidays such as Easter and Valentine's Day while Restaurant D created a logo for their restaurant which was put on the takeaway bags. Additionally, Restaurant D also invested in better sustainable cutlery. In the case of Restaurant E which had newly implemented the takeaway option, they had to focus more on creating awareness about this option by being more active on social media.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, the discussion will be connected to the theories presented in the frame of reference, Attribution Theory, and Contingency theory, as well to build an extensive understanding of the data collected. The chapter will drive conclusions to finalize the research paper.

The analysis chapter revealed that the restaurant owners used the same strategies but different tactics to achieve these three core strategies. These decisions of the restaurant owners can be analyzed through the Attribution- and Contingency Theories. Attribution theory relies on explanations of other people's behavior. Individual interpretations to processes of different events caused by certain parts of the environment, in this case, the Covid-19 pandemic. The restaurant owners realized that their customers were afraid to go to restaurants caused of Covid-19 and could not continue their business as before. The owners of the restaurants explained their customer's behavior by the restrictions and fear of getting sick. They became aware that the customers were scared to come to the restaurant. To solve this issue, they wanted to offer an alternative: a takeaway option. The complexity of the situation made the owners come up with tactics in order to keep their businesses active. For instance, some restaurants achieved a *Cost Reduction Strategy* through firing staff as a tactic, while others focused on primarily keeping the original staff and minimizing buying redundant goods, instead of firing staff. This reflects the statement by Mowen (1980) that managers should evaluate the situation to determine which crisis response is best for their own situation. Coupled with the empirical evidence, keeping the original staff was more important to other restaurants. This theory helps us to understand what lies behind the owner's decisions to achieve new strategies in the restaurant.

The sub-theme of attribution theory is the Internal-External Theory (I-E theory) which means that not everyone in the same situation will attribute the same outcomes to the same causes. It depends if the restaurant believes that their actions are based on luck such as external factors or internal factors such as personal skills. In this case, this attributional style explains why not all restaurants incorporated the same tactics despite being affected by the same external threat, namely the global pandemic. This can be seen from the empirical findings when some of the restaurant owners experienced that they could not do much since they were controlled by external sources, such as the government regulations and restrictions. These individuals ended up using fewer and less effective tactics, as they perceived that their success was in the hands of the government. The other restaurants who adopted an internal attributional style and perceived themselves to be more in control of their success regardless the difficult external circumstances. This way of thinking gave them faith inside the restaurant working closely together with the staff and coming up with new ideas such as a beer bar. They implemented their personal skills and knowledge of takeaways and invested in the restaurant in new ways. This theory explains why different restaurants implement different tactics under similar situations of the same cause as others think their faith is defined by external factors while others believe in internal factors.

Similarly, to the I-E Theory, Contingency theory explains that there is no single best method to organize or lead a restaurant. This is relevant for this study, as it gives understanding of the tactics used in order to achieve the different strategies. This study gives implications that can be used in the future but does not give straight forward answers how to act because everything is dependent on the contingent circumstances. That said, all the decisions should be made contingent on internal and external circumstances. The restaurant owners made different decisions on how to manage their restaurant based on their own circumstances such as financial situation, personal relations, and individual ability to adapt during a crisis. Crises are complex so the owners of the restaurants must be flexible in adapting new sufficient strategies that are suitable with new situations. For instance, investing in outdoor places or the look of the restaurant during a crisis is only applicable for the restaurants that have the financial liquidity from previous years before the crisis took place. The other restaurants that do not have the possibility to do so, can focus more for instance, working closely with home delivery companies. Furthermore, restaurants can think what tactics suit best for their own situation and concept, for instance, sushi type of food is easier to deliver home as a takeaway than fancy pasta dish. With the same situation and regulations under the crisis, the tactics to survive were different based on the restaurant characteristics.

To conclude, the purpose of this study was to create an understanding of different strategies and tactics the restaurants utilized during the Covid-19 pandemic. To answer our research, this study found three core strategies from empirical findings the restaurants utilized through different tactics. Through the research, the authors have learned that restaurants can utilize different tactics based on their situation to achieve these three core strategies. Nevertheless, the empirical findings demonstrated that there is no single best answer to what to do during a crisis and this can be seen from our findings. All of the restaurants acted on their personal interests and had different ways to handle the pandemic. None of the restaurants had planned any crisis management strategies prior, but everyone thought that they had learned so much during the time and will be more prepared if something similar happens in the future. Although a crisis is not a crisis if it does not happen unexpectedly, the empirical findings can be analyzed and learned as an idea on how to minimize the damage in the future and what could fit in everyone's personal interests. As a qualitative study, this study will not give a straight answer on how to act but the findings will rather help to understand the reasons behind the tactics and how they were derived depending on the circumstances in the restaurant industry.

8. Conclusions

This chapter concludes the research paper and provides the reader with information of the study's limitations, implications as well as suggestions for future research.

8.1 Limitations

There are some important limitations that need to be considered to maintain the transparency of the study. Regarding the time frame and environment of this study, the study was conducted within a restricted time frame of approximately five months. During this time the Covid-19 pandemic had made changes in the operational processes of the restaurants resulting in the staff being extremely busy. With this narrowed time and the restaurant being in the middle of organizational strategic rearrangement, the data collection methods were negatively affected. With the increased workload for the restaurant owners, many restaurant owners were not able to participate in the study. Due to time restrictions, those who managed to participate did not have time to dedicate for a full hour-long interview and had to be interviewed for follow-ups via email. This resulted in a limited number of participants and reduced the amount of data that could be collected. Another limitation concerning the scope of data was that only the restaurant owners were interviewed. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted in this research to gain vast data from the respondents. However, since only the restaurant owners were interviewed, this could result in biases. Adding employees' points of view for the empirical findings could have reduced this bias and broadened the perspective.

8.2 Managerial Implications

Drawing from Daums (2019) statement, people can't claim to own the great performance of others, but people can study and learn from what made them great. This means that it is valuable to study and learn from past events like Covid-19 to minimize damages. The findings show that there is no single best method or strategies to organize and lead a restaurant and the decisions should be made on contingent circumstances as the Contingency theory proposes. It is helpful for restaurant owners to understand the situations and people around them, as well as understand the causes of an event as the Attribution theory suggests. Hence, our empirical findings are confirming both theories in this case. With that said, this paper has revealed that there are many different tactics and strategies restaurants have utilized in order to stay in business during the Covid-19 pandemic. Restaurant owners who are responsible for leading the restaurant and experiencing a crisis should make sure to maintain and strengthen these tactics that suit them best. Firstly, they should identify what are their ultimate strengths within these three strategies; is it the skilled staff or loyal customers, or possibly having a good state of financial liquidity to make new investments that can help them in the future. What they choose to rely on, is up to them and their situations, as the Contingency theory supports. Secondly, choosing the right tactic in order to implement their strategy the best possible way. The authors suggest choosing one or more tactics to achieve the three strategies; Cost reduction, optimizing sales, and investments to focus on as guidance during difficult times to keep up the business. However, in order to implement new tactics into a business model organizations need to be able to adjust quickly. This can be done by being alert and taking individual elements of the surroundings such as listening to the staff and customers and making tactical decisions based on that. With being adjustable and thinking of suitable strategies based on the current situations managers should be able to cope better with unexpected events and minimize the damage. This will change and push organizations to innovate and create new ways to cope with future crises.

8.3 Future research

Previous studies have shown that crisis management as a topic is widely researched, however, they have been studied mainly in terms of the effects of Covid-19. This paper contributes to the current knowledge by instead looking to understand different tactics and strategies restaurant owners utilize in order to cope with a crisis in Sweden from a new perspective. Moreover, as discussed in the limitations, this study was conducted with restaurant owners' perspective solely in mind and with a relatively small sample size than would have been allowed during a longer time span. Results from future studies regarding this topic, without these limitations, would be highly interesting. By conducting studies with a broader scope of participants over different parts of the world, a researcher will be able to provide more knowledge for managers to use across larger parts of the world. Likewise, a greater number of restaurants participating would extend the research while increasing its confirmability. All these new perspectives would add more depth to the problem and provide the managers with broader insights to consider in their crisis management strategies. With that said, the opportunities for the future research regarding the topic of the crisis management strategies and tactics utilized to survive are vast, given the increased phenomena of global events between 2020-2022. In the future, more businesses will face different challenges that might be unexpected and negative, as the world is changing fast. With businesses being a significant provider of society in terms of employment and the tax producer, it is crucial for them to learn from the past to not collapse during a crisis, both at the societal- and individual level.

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Appendix A.

<u>Interview outline:</u>

Background information:
Name:
Responsibility area:

Q1: How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your business? / *Hur har Covid-19 pandemin påverkat er verksamhet?*
Q2: In what way have you been forced to adapt according to the restrictions? / *På vilket sätt har ni behövt anpassa er efter de restriktioner?*
Q3: Do you have a plan/strategy for how crises should be handled in your business? / *Har ni en plan/strategi för hur kriser ska hanteras i verksamheten?*
Q4: Was there something you adopted during the pandemic or did you have a clear plan already? / *Var det något som ni adopterade under pandemin eller hade ni redan en tydlig plan?*
Q5: How relevant do you see crisis management? / *Hur viktigt tycker ni det är att ha en krishantering?*
Q6: What has made you stay in business specifically? / *Vad har fått er att* specifikt *överleva under pandemin?*