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# Master Thesis

## Crisis Management in Cross-Cultural Teams

*A qualitative study of leaders in Norwegian shipping*

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Best regards,

*Maria Krakus*

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## **Abstract**

Globalization in the business world has increased the need to understand how cultural differences affect leadership performance. An individual's cultural frame affects how they perceive the world around them, influencing their interactions with other people, reactions to events, and attitudes toward leaders. The foundations of structure and communication in multicultural teams can further be distorted by crises, throwing a wrench in organizational routines. Since a growing number of maritime accidents are attributed to ineffective communication and misinterpretation of different behaviors on multilingual and multicultural vessels, cultural complexity in the shipping industry has gained intensive attention.

Although research literature in cross-cultural management has increased substantially in the past years, there remains a gap in research on crisis management in cross-cultural teams. Hence, the aim of this study was to contribute to an enhanced understanding of cultural differences in the context of crisis management. An exploratory, qualitative study was conducted to answer the research question. After reviewing the relevant literature, the authors conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with six male leaders from the shipping industry to address their experiences with crisis management in a multicultural workplace.

The results reveal that culture affects various aspects of crisis management. Language misunderstandings, insufficient cooperation, or conflicting expectations can all influence how a crisis is handled. In order to benefit from cultural diversity in a crisis, the leader's ability to include team members seems to be crucial. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural competency and that a cultural approach should be incorporated in all phases of crisis management.

## **Keywords**

Leadership, Culture, Hofstede, Cross-cultural management, Crisis management

**Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Shipping Industry	2
1.2 Research Question	4
<b>2.0 Literature Review</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Leadership	6
2.1.1 Leadership Styles	6
2.1.2 Implicit Leadership Theories	9
2.2 Culture	10
2.2.1 Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions	11
2.2.1.1 Power Distance	12
2.2.1.2 Uncertainty Avoidance	12
2.2.1.3 Individualism/Collectivism	13
2.2.1.4 Masculinity/Femininity	14
2.2.1.5 Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation	14
2.2.1.6 Country Comparison	15
2.2.1.7 Criticism of Hofstede’s Dimensions	16
2.2.2 Acculturation	16
2.2.3 Managing Cross-Cultural Teams	17
2.3 Crisis and Crisis Management	19
2.3.1 Crisis	19
2.3.2 Crisis Management	19
2.3.3 Situational Leadership	21
2.4 Communication	21
2.4.1 Cross-Cultural Communication in Crisis	23
<b>3.0 Methodology</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1 Research Design and Method	26
3.2 Data Collection	27
3.2.1 Sample and Sample Procedure	27
3.2.2 Interviews	28
3.2.3 Evaluation of Interviews	29
3.3 Data Analysis	31
3.4 Quality Criteria	32
3.5 Ethical Considerations	34
<b>4.0 Findings</b>	<b>35</b>
4.1 Model	36
4.2 Leadership	37
4.2.1 Leadership Styles	37
4.2.2 Priorities	44
4.2.3 Meeting New Cultures	45
4.2.4 Attitude Toward Multiculturality	47
4.3 Crisis	50
4.3.1 Pre-crisis	52
4.3.2 Mid-crisis	53
4.3.3 Post-crisis	57

4.4 Communication	58
4.4.1 Challenges with Filipinos	61
4.4.2 Trust	62
4.4.2 Adjusting Communication	62
4.5 Structure	63
4.5.1 Hierarchy	64
<b>5.0 Discussion</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1 Leadership	69
5.1.1 Leadership Styles	69
5.1.2 New Culture	71
5.1.3 Attitude Toward Cultures	72
5.2 Crisis	73
5.2.1 Pre-crisis	73
5.2.2 Mid-crisis	74
5.2.3 Post-crisis	75
5.3 Communication	76
5.4 Structure	78
<b>6.0 Conclusion</b>	<b>82</b>
6.1 Practical Implications	83
6.2 Limitation and Further Research	83
<b>7.0 References</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>109</b>

## 1.0 Introduction

Research shows that the world's cultures are increasingly interconnected, and the business world is becoming more global (Thomas & Peterson, 2018). As national borders diminish, cultural barriers will most likely increase and present new challenges and opportunities in business. Many issues have already arisen because of increased globalization, including the need to build effective international companies, identify and select qualified leaders for these entities, and manage and interact with culturally diverse people within organizations (Neeley, 2015). Hence, the need to understand how cultural variations affect leadership performance has become essential and recognized in international research (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Segalla, Fischer, & Sandner., 2000; Walumbwa, Lawler, & Avolio, 2007).

Previous research on cross-cultural management has examined contextual factors that may influence the effectiveness of different leadership styles. This research is based on the premise that the relationship between management style and employees' attitudes can be influenced by the cultural context (Jung, Yammarino, & Lee, 2009). Studies indicate that cultures such as Filipinos and Russians prefer leaders who take control and are visible, while other cultures, like for instance Norwegians, prefer leaders who work behind the scenes to achieve results (Tsui, Nifadkar, & Ou, 2007). Additionally, in cultures where people prefer authoritarian leaders, sensitivity can be perceived as a sign of weakness, while in cultures with preferences for a caring leader the same sensitivity may be essential for effective management (Den Hartog, House, Hanges & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1999). Hence, understanding how individuals perceive leadership in different ways can be critical for managers in multinational work environments (Segalla et al., 2000).

Daily we are exposed to news reports from Norway and the rest of the world about wars, disasters, and accidents. Most recent crises, such as the war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic, have disrupted our perceptions of the world and affected people's lives in endless ways. Such conflicts and widespread diseases place risk on human lives, health, and material damages, imposing a lot of extraordinary demands on the employees involved (Larsson, 2010). In this

endeavor, leaders and subordinates alike have a significant duty, and a chance to make a difference and save lives. However, there is also the possibility of failure, which might result in detrimental consequences in terms of injury or death. By looking back at history one can easily find countless examples of inadequate management in crises. The terrorist attack on Utøya in 2011 and the explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon serve as unfortunate examples of this. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack at Utøya, Norwegian Police's response has received criticism for their handling of the situation, as they obeyed orders and waited for backup instead of approaching the terrorist directly without hesitation (NOU, 2012). BP's Deepwater Horizon accident was attributed to a series of human mistakes and technical failures, including overconfidence on the part of the company, a lack of planning for low-probability but high-impact oil spills, and generally an absence of safety culture (Marker, 2020).

Competent leadership is crucial to successful outcomes (Laurence, 2011), and the examples above illustrate that too often there is a mismatch between how a situation was handled, and what it demanded. Managing in an operational, dynamic setting may be very challenging. For this reason, researchers acknowledge that leadership is context-dependent and that a leadership style must be adapted to the situation (Bass & Bass, 2008; Hannah, Campbell, & Matthews, 2010; Vroom & Jago, 2007).

### 1.1 Shipping Industry

According to Norges Rederiforbund (2021), Norway is the world's fourth largest shipping nation by value and has been a major player in shipping and shipbuilding for more than 150 years (International Trade Administration, 2020). In recent years, maritime shipping has become the most in-demand transport method for the international movement of merchandise, responsible for the carriage of around 90% of world trade (International Chamber of Shipping, 2020).

In the post-war period, Norwegian seafarers came ashore with skills and knowledge that made them valuable assets in the daily operation of the business (Tenold, 2019). They became managers, port captains, supervisors, surveyors, and consultants. Most shipping firms have now outsourced the employment of



seafarers to management companies abroad. Today, the competence on board in a purely Norwegian setting is diminishing, and the majority of those working on vessels registered in the Norwegian International Ship Register (NIS) are foreigners (Tenold, 2019). According to a report by the International Chamber of Shipping (2020), 89% of companies operate ships with mixed nationality crews, with an average of three nationalities on board. In Norway, 20 000 Filipino seafarers make up the core troops of the country's merchant fleet (Lamvik, 2013). In comparison, only about 2 000 Norwegians were registered in NIS in 2018 (Sjøfartsdirektoratet, 2019).

The crew works and lives together for weeks, often months, in a limited space, and is faced with the same work tasks every day (Gu, Liu, & Bao, 2020). In order to ensure proper execution of the navigation task, there is a need for a stringent management system on board (Gu et al., 2020). Modern cargo ships are predominantly male environments characterized by rigid occupational hierarchies (Sampson & Thomas, 2003). Every member has their own set of responsibilities depending on their competence and experience. The work environment is hierarchically structured with the captain holding the highest rank, closely followed by a chief officer. Different types of officers follow, with their internal ranks, and deck ratings, who are mariners without a certificate of competence (Ingpen, 2015). The significance of this occupational hierarchy is visible in how crew members often refer to themselves and others by rank rather than name (Sampson & Thomas, 2003).

Even though the ship can be described as a total institution, the crew members do not always act as one collective group (Serck-Hanssen, 1997). Østreng (2006) discovered that a ship with Northern European officers and Filipino ratings had two distinct cultures, identities, and communities based on different ethnic backgrounds, ranks, and salaries even though they were on the same vessel. Furthermore, there may be an informal leader who is able to lead people and influence their behavior, owing to his capabilities, behavior, and personal qualities (Pozolotin, Torskiy, Kostyrya, & Chesnokova, 2014). This person's influence may sometimes even be stronger than that of an authorized leader. These informal leaders can form micro groups based on profession, work regime, or ethnic lines,

which is especially important in the case of multinational crews (Pozolotin et al., 2014).

Safety plays an important role in shipping, and relatively recent accidents and groundings such as Estonia, the Scandinavian Star, KNM Helge Ingstad, or Ever Given justify training carried out in this area. Occupations at sea are high-risk compared with most other occupations (Håvold, 2007). Even though the modern ship and communication technology is highly developed, the crew still faces risks from harsh weather conditions, technical failure, fire, groundings, or collision (Gu et al., 2020; Sampson & Thomas, 2003; Wankhede, 2021). A study of hazardous occupations for the period 1976–1995 reported that seafaring was one of the most dangerous occupations in Great Britain, where seafarers were 26 times more likely to have fatal accidents, compared with other British workers (Roberts, 2002). For this reason, onboard training plays a critical role in renewing and maintaining seafarers' skills and further shaping their professionalism where the safety culture is maintained (Xue, 2003).

## 1.2 Research Question

Cross-cultural management is a relatively young and interdisciplinary research field (Barmeyer, Bausch, & Moncayo, 2019). Researchers from various backgrounds deal with the challenges of interculturality within organizations, and its psychological, ethnological, and linguistical aspects (Chanlat, Davel, & Dupuis, 2013). On the other hand, organizational research has long been interested in crises and crisis management, as managers strive to handle a crisis effectively and lessen the damage (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short, & Coombs, 2017). Due to globalization and crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, research literature in both cross-cultural management and crisis management has increased substantially in recent years. Despite the fields' significance, we observe a lack of studies on the relationship between the two research areas. Since shipping is considered the most global industry in the world and its work environment entails high-risk exposure, it is of great interest to explore how its cultural diversity can affect the crisis management on board. As a matter of fact, according to Hu (2017), cultural complexity aboard ships has become an issue of attention, with an increasing number of maritime accidents attributed to ineffective communication and

misinterpretation of different behaviors on multilingual and multicultural vessels. Because of the stressful nature of a crisis, there is reason to believe that these issues may be enhanced in such situations.

Therefore, the purpose of this master thesis is to investigate and explore how cultural differences affect crisis management in the shipping industry. We are interested in what factors influence the dynamics present in such situations, their significance, and how they interact with each other. The study draws on existing literature on culture, leadership, and crisis management, laying the foundation for an empirical exploration and analysis of leaders' experiences as cross-cultural team leaders in crises. Based on the background information and purpose presented above, we derived the following research question:

*How do cultural differences affect crisis management in the shipping industry?*

The research question is of interest for the informants and the whole shipping industry since managing cross-cultural teams in crises is a part of their everyday work. The thesis is also of great relevance for outside cross-cultural managers who can gain insight into how cultural differences affect crisis management, and the challenges it imposes on communication, cooperation, and structure. We hope that this study will contribute to increased understanding and engagement around the topic.

## 2.0 Literature Review

Based on the research question, a discussion of relevant literature and theories is presented in this chapter. By reviewing and discussing the literature, we gained knowledge and understanding of research that has been conducted with respect to our research topic. Furthermore, this overview will expose issues that are not covered by researchers today and require further investigation. Hence, the literature review serves as a foundation for the analysis in our research.

### 2.1 Leadership

Although many intuitively know what is meant by the word leadership, it has been proved challenging by researchers to develop a universal definition of the term. Different definitions throughout the years have been influenced by world affairs and politics and the discipline in which the topic has been studied (Northouse, 2019). Modern factors such as growing global influences and generational differences, contribute to leadership having different meanings for different people (Northouse, 2019). Overall, despite the significant body of literature on leadership, it remains one of the most misunderstood business phenomena (Gandolfi, 2016).

Despite the multitude of ways in which leadership has been conceptualized, several components have been identified as central to the phenomenon, including the fact that leadership is a process, that it involves influence, occurs in groups, and involves common goals. Based on this, Northouse (2019, p. 43) has developed the following definition: “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”.

#### 2.1.1 Leadership Styles

Throughout the years, the view on how an ideal leader should be has undergone different phases focusing chronologically on the aspects of controlling, empowering, and nurturing (Buchanan, 2013). These concepts have given origin to different leadership styles and their core values (Gandolfi & Stone, 2018). Based on this, Gandolfi and Stone (2016, p.22) defined leadership style as “an intentional means by which a leader influences a group of people in an

organization to a widely understood future state that is different from the present one". The authors of this definition emphasize that not all leadership styles lead to a better organizational future state and choosing an adequate leadership style for a situation is therefore a pivotal decision.

Transformational leadership is currently one of the most popular approaches to leadership, focusing on its charismatic and affective elements (Northouse, 2019). This style emphasizes intrinsic motivation and follower development which fits the needs of today's work groups in Western societies (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The emphasis on followers' needs, values, and morality distinguishes transformational leadership from other approaches because it suggests that leadership has a moral dimension (Northouse, 2019). Leaders can be transformational in the confidence with which they delegate autonomy to others, helping them develop, and accomplish higher-order objectives (Kuhnert, 1994). Hence, the goal of this leadership style is to transform people and influence the followers to accomplish more. To achieve this, transformational leaders need to create a common vision and clarify the followers' roles and how they should contribute to the organization's goals (Northouse, 2019). According to Jung, Chow, and Wu (2003) transformational leadership creates a culture in which employees feel empowered and encouraged to freely discuss and try new things nurturing organizational innovation. The leader is concerned with assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings and the employees feel that they are being heard even when they express opposing viewpoints.

Transactional leadership, on the other hand, is based on the exchange between leaders and their followers where followers' effort is either rewarded or corrected (Northouse, 2019). It occurs when one person takes the initiative in contacting others for the purpose of an exchange of something valued (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Despite not individualizing the needs of followers or focusing on their personal development, transactional leaders are influential because it is in their followers' best interest to do what the leader wants from them (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Northouse, 2019). Hence, a leader's ability to meet and respond to the reactions and expectations of their followers is crucial for their effectiveness (Kellerman, 1984). Since leadership expectations are to a high degree influenced

by a follower's cultural background and experience, transactional leaders must be aware of these individual differences and be able to respond to them (Thomas & Peterson, 2018).

Autocratic leadership is generally understood as displaying a particular style of leadership where power and authority are concentrated in the leader (House, 1996). Harms, Wood, Landay, Lester & Vogelgesang Lester (2018) propose that autocratic leadership is more likely to be reflective in the desire of authoritarian subordinates for strong leaders. Individuals with a high level of authoritarianism tend to be vulnerable and dependent, and willing to sacrifice their autonomy to maintain a sense of security (Kirscht & Dillehay, 1967).

Cross-cultural research has provided examples of how authoritarianism may be expressed in different ways across cultures. It has been associated with supporting collectivistic values across several cultures, particularly those associated with hierarchical collectivism and animosity toward out-groups (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). Furthermore, authoritarianism tends to be stronger among individuals from lower socio-economic groups (Adorno et al., 1950). Research has also shown that identifying with a highly effective, autocratic leader gives a sense of security, especially if the alternative is perceived as chaotic (White & Lippitt, 1960; Castelnovo, Popper, & Koren, 2017). Since individuals tend to look for stronger leaders in times of chaos and effective leadership has been associated with reduced stress in subordinates, most people prefer autocracy over anarchy, especially in times of crisis (Harms et al., 2018).

Laissez-faire leadership traditionally represents an absence of leadership, and thus, has been interpreted negatively among researchers (Northouse, 2019). Translated directly, the French phrase implies a "hands-off, let-things-ride" leadership approach with no feedback, exchange with followers, nor any attempt to help them grow (Northouse, 2019). Recent research argues, however, that laissez-faire leadership can be positive in some contexts, allocating more respect to subordinates' boundaries, autonomy, and self-control (Yang, 2015). Laissez-faire leaders have an attitude of trust and reliance on their employees without micromanaging or too much guidance (Western Governors University, 2020). In

such cases, laissez-faire leadership is a strategic choice by the leader to empower followers to take the lead (Northouse, 2019).

When opposed to more “business-as-usual” times the significant unpredictability of a crisis exacerbates the challenges associated with leadership (Ahern & Loh, 2021). Each leadership style has its own set of issues when it comes to managing crises (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022). For example, in the case of an extreme time crunch, transformational leadership may not be the most appropriate since it takes time to build consensus. Likewise, since a transactional leader is bound by rules and regulations, he or she might not be well suited to manage the dynamics of most emerging crises (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022). Similarly, in times of crisis, an autocratic leadership style might face difficulties that require organizational flexibility or innovative action. Hence, leaders may be most effective when they combine transformational leadership behaviors with elements of laissez-faire and transactional leadership (Antonakis & House, 2014).

### 2.1.2 Implicit Leadership Theories

Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT) is a cognitive theory of leadership developed by Lord, Foti, and De Vader (1984). Its main premise is that people classify cognitive stimuli by comparing them to category prototypes. These prototypes are certain representations of leaders’ traits and behaviors that followers hold at an unconscious level in order to distinguish leaders from non-leaders (Schyns & Schilling, 2011; Lord et al., 1984). Those conforming to these schema consistent expectations are categorized as leaders and considered worthy of influence (Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Ling, Chia, & Fang, 2000; Offermann & Hellmann, 1997).

ILTs develop early in life through parent-child relationships and continue to evolve into adulthood as individuals increase their understanding of effective and ineffective leadership (Carnes, Houghton, & Ellison, 2015). Since the perceptions are subjective processes reflecting the self, the sociocultural environment exerts a strong influence on a person’s leader prototype (Ling et al., 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Subramaniam, Otham, & Sambasivam 2010). Therefore, most characteristic traits of a leader in one culture may be very different from

prototypical traits in another. Subsequently, the leader and subordinate may not share similar mental maps and their perceptions and expectations may vary. Various research on ILT shows that there are in fact distinct differences in the ILT of respondents from different countries (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2006). Ling et al. (2000) argue that culture provides the mental programming that defines expectations of leadership style. The findings have great practical implications since they suggest that the same behavior may be interpreted in different ways by different people based on their implicit perceptions of a leader.

According to research based on cognitive dissonance theory, followers with stronger attitudes produce more pronounced selective exposure bias toward leaders, whereas ambivalent respondents process information with more effort and deliberation (Festinger, 1957; Lee, Martin, Thomas, Guillaume, Maio, & 2015). The fact that strong attitudes show greater resistance to persuasion is important because persuasion is an inherent part of a leader's role and a central aspect of transformational leadership, in which a leader aims to influence followers' attitudes, values, and beliefs (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In order to be effective, leaders must be perceived by followers as trustworthy and competent (Han Ming Chng, Kim, Gilbreath, & Anderson, 2018)

## 2.2 Culture

Culture is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon (Möller & Svahn, 2004). Several researchers have proposed over 150 definitions of culture and identified different dimensions (Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952). This indicates that there is no single, agreed-upon definition of the phenomenon. However, there seems to be mutual agreement among researchers that culture covers a very broad field. Its scope reaches from man-made artifacts to values, concepts, languages, and philosophies, as well as how animate and inanimate entities, subjects, and objects are treated (Thomas, Kinast, Schroll-Machl, & Weston-Horsmann, 2010).

According to Schein (1992), basic assumptions are at the core of culture and embody an individual's beliefs toward human behavior, relationships, reality, and truth. In international business literature, the most widely known definition is



arguably the Dutch cultural psychologist Hofstede's (1980). He defined culture as: "the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (1980, p. 260). Overall, within the research field, culture is described as the values, ideas, and norms that individuals develop within their society and/or collective unit that distinguish them from individuals from other societies (Pettigrew, 1990; 1979; Hofstede, 1980; Kluckhohn & Kroeber, 1952).

An important hypothesis underlying much cultural research is the stability of a culture's characteristics (Browaeys & Price, 2019). Although cultural groups evolve through time as a result of how they respond to certain challenges posed by their environment, they each maintain certain notions about the world and attitudes toward their fellow members. Hence, researchers within this field have tried to develop dimensions to describe tendencies within a certain cultural grouping (e.g., Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Hofstede, 1980; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997; House et al., 1999). One of the most prominent and widely accepted frameworks for investigating cultural differences in cross-cultural management is the cultural dimensions developed by Geert Hofstede (1980).

### 2.2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede developed a questionnaire to interview a total of 116 000 employees of a multinational computer company. The questionnaire was translated into 20 languages and, as a result, could be administered in 53 countries (Hofstede, 1980). There is no other cultural framework supported by empirical data from such many different countries as this study (Gerstner & Day, 1994).

Hofstede evaluated his findings using correlation statistical and factor analytical methods resulting in the identification of four fundamental cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism/individualism, and masculinity/femininity. In the sections below we will describe each dimension separately and comment on how it is of relevance in accordance with different leadership behaviors.

#### 2.2.1.1 Power Distance

Power distance is defined by Hofstede (1980, 2001) as the degree to which a society accepts the notion that power is allocated unequally in institutions and organizations. Essentially, this dimension reflects how culture relates to authority in various forms (Browaeys & Price, 2019). The distribution of power in society has clear implications for the leadership function because the role is often associated with power and status all over the world (Dickson, Den Hartog, & Mitchelson, 2003). Hence, power distance in a society has an impact on several aspects of leadership.

In cultures where power distance is high, effective managers are essentially benevolent autocrats who are focused on the task (Browaeys & Price, 2019). A study conducted by Adsit, London, Crom, and Jones (1997), revealed that subordinates in high power distance societies are more hesitant to challenge their leaders and more fearful of expressing dissatisfaction with their supervisors. This implies that in societies with more power distance subordinates want and expect more guidance from their leaders. Hence, autocratic leadership is more effective and acceptable in high power distance societies (Adsit et al., 1997). Effective managers in low power distance cultures, on the other hand, are more oriented toward the people in an organization and allow them to engage more in decision-making (Browaeys & Price, 2019). Consequently, relations between the leaders and subordinates are more horizontal than vertical with a more open and less bureaucratic form of communication (Bialas, 2009; Shane, 1994).

#### 2.2.1.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

According to Hofstede (1980), uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous risky situations and to what extent people prefer predictability in their lives. In other words, it refers to how uncomfortable individuals of a society are in ambiguous and unclear circumstances and to what extent they want to avoid them by relying on social norms and procedures to mitigate the future's unpredictability.

Previous research suggests that planning and detailed agreements are the norm in high uncertainty avoidance contexts, whereas flexibility and innovation are more

prominent in low uncertainty avoidance contexts (Offermann & Hellmann, 1997; Shane, 1994). Uncertainty-avoiding cultures perceive life as a battle against stress and anxiety. They may be willing to accept familiar risks but not the danger of the unknown (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). As a result, managers in high uncertainty avoidance cultures would be expected to have precise answers to questions, give exact instructions, and maintain the rules and regulations of an organization (Browaeyns & Price, 2019).

In contrast, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance generally tolerate differences and are not disconcerted by ambiguity. They perceive that there may not always be answers to problems and believe in generalists and common sense (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Managers in such cultures would be expected to merely enforce or establish rules only as necessary as they cannot potentially possess all knowledge and may need to draw on others who are more competent in their decision-making (Browaeyns & Price, 2019).

#### 2.2.1.3 Individualism/Collectivism

Individualism/collectivism is concerned with the relationship between the group and the individual (Hofstede, 1980). It is essentially about the importance a cultural group attaches to relationships. In individualistic cultures, people emphasize the achievements of the individual and how they are expected to achieve their own goals (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). In contrast, collectivistic cultures place more emphasis on collective achievements where people take part in different “in-groups” and take care of each other in exchange for loyalty (Hofstede, 1980; 2001).

According to research, collectivistic values seem to fit well with some of the processes central to transformational leadership, such as identification processes and the central role of the group (Jung & Avolio, 1999). The fact that collectivists tend to develop a stronger attachment to their organizations and are more willing to prioritize collective goals before individual goals is also central in a transformational leadership style (Triandis, 1995). However, since individualistic cultures are expected to be more motivated to pursue their own self-interests and

ambitions, research suggests that they may be more motivated by a transactional leadership style because it is more short-term focused (Jung & Avolio, 1999).

#### 2.2.1.4 Masculinity/Femininity

This dimension was developed by Hofstede to characterize certain societies as being either assertive and competitive (masculine in nature) or more caring and, hence, more feminine. According to Hofstede (1980, 2001), masculinity entails dominating ideals in a culture that emphasize aggressiveness, toughness, and exercise of power, while feminine cultures are characterized by values such as caring for others and being less self-centered.

Highly masculine cultures see work as a challenge offering the possibility of recognition and high rewards (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Performance and competing with others to achieve goals is emphasized. Highly feminine cultures place greater emphasis on the broader picture, particularly interpersonal interactions at work (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Hence, in cultures with a high level of masculinity, the achievement, motivation, and acceptability of “machismo style” management should be higher than in countries with a low level of masculinity (Triandis, 1994).

The four dimensions presented above have had an enormous influence on the development of management theories in many management areas, particularly those focusing on relations between the leader and the subordinate. Especially important in this respect are the two dimensions power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Browaeyns & Price, 2019).

#### 2.2.1.5 Short-Term versus Long-Term Orientation

Hofstede later amended the four dimensions by a fifth based on the results of the Chinese Value Survey (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987). He gave it the label of short-term versus long-term orientation. This dimension shows to what extent long-term thinking is valued. Fostering virtues related to past and present particularly with respect for tradition, preservation of face, and fulfilling social obligations is part of the short-term orientation (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Hofstede claims that in such cultures social change is easily mobilized. In

contrast, fostering future-oriented values, particularly persistence and thrift, as well as ordering relationships by status are all examples of virtues in cultures with a long-term orientation (Browaeys & Price, 2019). According to Hofstede (2001), this mindset resists change and creates stable and binding social structures over generations.

The sixth dimension, named Indulgence, is still relatively new and has not yet been widely employed in intercultural training and research. Hence, only the five dimensions mentioned above will be of relevance to our study.

### 2.2.1.6 Country Comparison

Hofstede Insights (2022) has created a tool that makes it possible to compare the values of the six dimensions of several countries. Figure 1 shows an overview of selected countries and their score on each dimension. It also reveals how each score compares to other countries. Indulgence has been excluded because we decided to only look at the first five dimensions. The countries depicted were chosen based on the cultures our informants had encountered the most.

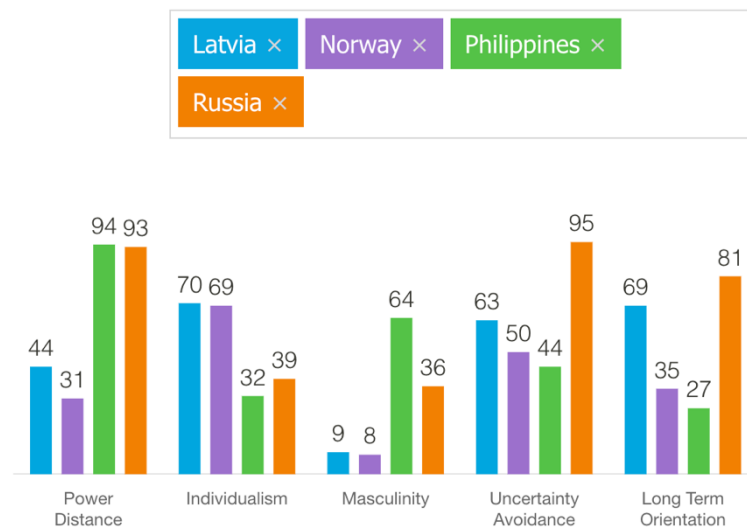


Figure 1: Country comparison based on Hofstede's dimensions.

### 2.2.1.7 Criticism of Hofstede's Dimensions

The terms developed by Hofstede and the mindsets underlying these cultural models are very practical. This is probably also the reason why Hofstede's work is acknowledged beyond the field of academics and has found much resonance in individuals internationally. However, it is worth noting that despite its widespread use, Hofstede's work has been heavily criticized (Gerstner & Day, 1994; Dickson et al., 2003). Some of the critique deals with cultural bias since the study is based exclusively on Western values (Gerstner & Day, 1994). Additionally, the framework has been criticized for ignoring the fact that there is significant cultural diversity within countries and for not considering how culture changes over time rather than remaining static as the dimensions indicate (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). Despite these criticisms, there is no doubt that Hofstede's work has had a significant influence on cross-cultural leadership research and, hence, will be of great relevance to this thesis.

### 2.2.2 Acculturation

An important aspect of cultural differences and cultural comparisons is the concept of acculturation. Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, p. 149) defined acculturation as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups". At the group level it will involve changes in social structures, cultural practices, and institutions, whereas changes in a person's behavior will occur at the individual level. These changes can occur over a long period of time, including years, generations, or centuries, and result in certain psychological and sociocultural approaches between the groups (Berry, 2005).

Different studies have explored the aspects of acculturation and cultural changes. A longitudinal study conducted by Murphy Jr. and Anderson (2003) found evidence for cultural changes among Japanese students in the United States. The data was collected when the sample arrived in the United States, after one year, after two years, and one year after returning to Japan. The results revealed a significant change in the sample's values as the students conformed toward a more Western culture. Additionally, according to a study conducted among

seafarers at a Norwegian shipping company, a crew seems to adapt to each other's cultural values (Håvold, 2007). For example, Filipinos, who, according to Hofstede (1994) are a collectivist culture, scored higher on individualism, while Norwegians, who have individualistic tendencies (Hofstede, 1994), scored higher than expected on collectivism (Håvold, 2007). These studies reveal that acculturation can result in differences between individuals with the same cultural background.

### 2.2.3 Managing Cross-Cultural Teams

As a result of the growing globalization of world trade and the work of Hofstede (1980) introducing the national culture dimensions, the influence of national culture on business activities has become increasingly acknowledged during the last three decades (Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). A multicultural firm is doomed to fail if cultural differences are disregarded by a manager who only considers his or her own cultural norms (Dereli, 2005). Hence, understanding cross-cultural management becomes crucial for a multicultural company to succeed.

Managing cross-cultural teams requires certain skills and knowledge, some of which researchers value as crucial. Bordas (2007, p.8) defines multicultural leadership as “an inclusive approach and philosophy that incorporates the influences, practices, and values of diverse cultures in a respectful and productive manner”. Successful leaders should have a “profound understanding of the terrain they seek to change” (Hochschild, 2010). A potential leader should therefore prepare both intellectually and emotionally for this task, preserve empathy for others, and try to understand their needs. Furthermore, the leader should research, respect, and understand the new cultures they work with and be open to learn from others with a hunger for more knowledge and self-development (Frost & Walker, 2007; Muna, 2011). Overall, the research points out that leaders operating within a global context must be attentive to cultural differences and possess competence in intercultural behavior (Webb, Darling, & Alvey, 2013).

Research shows that ethnically diverse work groups can act more cooperatively than homogenous groups, that tends to increase when situational cues favor

cooperation (Cox, Lobel, & McLeod, 1991). Furthermore, if the task is relatively complex and requires many abilities, heterogeneous groups should outperform the homogeneous, and the positive effects are even greater when the tasks are divisible (Moreland, Levine, & Wingert, 2013). Other benefits of diversity can be better decision-making and greater creativity (Moreland et al., 2013). However, increased diversity may also lead to interpersonal conflicts and communication breakdowns such as language misunderstandings (Cox, 1991). As time passes, a group may learn in its own unique way how to profit from diversity among its members (Moreland et al., 2013). While the addition of a member with a new cultural background may at first cause a stir and disrupt the effectiveness of the team, as the group ages, members may develop strategies to deal with the problems of intercultural interaction. However, it is not the cultural diversity itself that promotes group performance, but the result of effective cultural diversity management (Thomas & Peterson, 2018).

The complexity of culturally diverse teams requires leaders who can deal with its multiple challenges and use cultural diversity as an advantage rather than a disadvantage to the organization (Thomas & Peterson, 2018). Each member of a workgroup, including the leader, has their own cultural frame of reference, which consists of values, beliefs, and experiences that are firmly established in their culture. They impact how individuals respond to, interpret, and anticipate events where even simple gestures can have different meanings across cultures (Frost & Walker, 2007). In order to maximize the positive consequences of both homogeneity and diversity while minimizing the negative consequences of both, the leader must be aware of these cultural frames and take them into account when interacting with their team (Jackson, 1992).

Nonetheless cultural differences, there are certain leadership attributes that are universally recognized across cultures. In several cultures leadership is concerned with either the task, the relationship with members, or both (e.g., Chong & Thomas, 1997; Smith, Misumi, Tayeb, Peterson, & Bond, 1989). Other studies have found that managers, regardless of culture, display a desire to get things done while using less authority (Bass, Burger, Doktor, & Barrett, 1979). Additionally, the GLOBE project identified a list of 22 leadership attributes universally



endorsed as positive aspects of effective leadership (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Some of these attributes are trustworthiness, honesty, decisiveness, and being a good communicator. Similarly, there are common characteristics that detract from a leader's effectiveness regardless of where they work. These traits include ruthlessness, irritability, egocentricity, and a dictatorial approach. Based on these attributes, a universal leader is charismatic, value-based, has high integrity, and interpersonal skills (Brodbeck, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2004).

## 2.3 Crisis and Crisis Management

### 2.3.1 Crisis

Organizational crisis has been described by Pearson and Clair (1998, p. 60) as “a low probability, high impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly”. Additionally, Fink (2002) and Hambrick and D’aveni (1988) added a time aspect in their definitions, where Fink (2002, p. 20) described an organizational crisis as “a fluid, unstable, dynamic situation”, while Hambrick and D’aveni (1988) described it as something that can occur instantly or evolve over time.

Based on the definitions, organizational crises seem to be difficult to forecast, have large negative consequences, and necessitate quick, dynamic responses to mitigate their effects. Crises throw a wrench in organizational routines, disrupt accurate interpretation of internal and environmental cues, and force decision-makers to search for urgent and appropriate actions and responses (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

### 2.3.2 Crisis Management

Considerable attention has been devoted to crises and crisis management in organizational research with the aim of reaching an understanding on how and why crises occur (Coombs & Holladay, 2002; Perrow, 1984; Weick, 1993) and how organizations can manage them to reduce the harm (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Coombs, 2007; Kahn, Barton, & Fellows, 2013). The process of combating crises to minimize the damage and resume operations as soon as possible is known as crisis management (Crandall, Parnell, & Spillan, 2013). It involves the ability to

operate effectively in situations characterized by little time, little information, and serious consequences (Olsen & Espevik, 2009). Hence, the repercussions of managing a crisis improperly can be severe.

Crisis management is described in research as a proactive process that involves dealing with a crisis before, during, and after it occurs (Simola, 2014). Based on this, Coombs (2021) developed a crisis-management model as a three-stage process: pre-crisis, during the crisis, and post-crisis. In the pre-crisis stage the goal is to minimize the risks that might lead to a crisis and to prepare strategically and tactically. In the second stage, the organization's response to the crisis, its communication, and how the crisis is handled are essential. In the post-crisis stage, the crisis is resolved, and the organization evaluates how it dealt with the crisis.

To further explore the process of crisis management, Sjöberg, Wallenius, and Larsson (2006) suggested that crisis management can be understood as a process in which multiple aspects influence leadership pre-, during, and post-operation. The pre-operation conditions include training and exercises, previous experiences, personal knowledge of group members, and organizational climate. The leader's appraisal of what is at risk, their stress reactions, behavior, and managerial procedures have all an impact on the situation during a crisis while post-operation conditions include evaluation of the outcome, organizational climate, and stress reactions.

During a crisis, a leader will not have full overview and control over the situation and does not have the capacity to be everywhere. As a result, the leader can be put out of action whilst quick (re)action is necessary to master the current challenge (Olsen & Espevik, 2009). In other words, leaders are subjected to a great deal of pressure in many forms. Usually, important decisions must be made without room for reflection and analysis, almost like instinctive reactions to changes in a situation. This places great demands on, among other things, attention, and interaction (Olsen & Espevik, 2009). A study carried out by CEMS (2020) in the aftermath of Covid-19 showed that leaders need to balance traditional management qualities with "softer" characteristics in order to be effective in a

crisis. This style is often referred to as “Scandinavian” (Lindkvist, 1991). While strategy and results remain important, qualities such as empathy, resilience, and communication skills seem now to be more appreciated than they were prior to the pandemic.

### 2.3.3 Situational Leadership

Previous studies have suggested that situational leadership is best suited for crisis management (Hersey & Chevalier, 2000; Wisittigars & Siengthai, 2019).

According to research, effective leaders during a crisis are those who can recognize followers’ needs and consequently adjust their style (Vera & Crossan, 2004; Northouse, 2019; Sims, Faraj, & Yun, 2009). Holding on to one leadership style during a crisis can lead to ineffective leadership as most leadership behavior is situational and context-specific (Vera & Crossan, 2004; Northouse, 2019; Webb et al. 2013). Because different situations necessitate different kinds of leadership, an effective leader must adjust his or her style to meet those demands (Northouse, 2019). In other words, in order to determine what is needed in a particular situation, a leader must evaluate his or her followers and assess how devoted and capable they are to achieve a certain goal.

Since an effective crisis manager should be able to display multiple styles and competencies as a coherent ensemble, situational leadership is even more significant during a crisis (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022). Earlier research on situational leadership theory underlines the selection of a leadership style for a given situation that has the highest probability of success (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1977; Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979). It advocates leaders to take an all-encompassing effort rather than being oriented toward one or two specific behaviors or styles as it is not a one-size-fits-all approach to solving a crisis.

## 2.4 Communication

Underlying every task that takes place in an international context is the process of cross-cultural communication. According to Berlo (1960), communication is the act of transmitting messages to another person who interprets these messages and gives them meaning. Hence, both the sender and the receiver play an active role in

the communication process, and both need to comprehend the message for the communication to be successful.

When participating in intercultural communication, large and important cultural differences can create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently (Lustig & Koester, 2013). Hence, cross-cultural communication becomes significantly more demanding than communicating in a common culture. The mismatch between the speaker's intended meaning and the listener's interpretation results in what we call a misunderstanding (Qin, 2011). Culture can be one of the causes of misunderstandings and conflicts because it influences to a large extent how individuals perceive the world around them, what meaning they attach to what they perceive, and how they respond to those perceptions (Lustig & Koester, 2013). As a result, its efficacy depends on minimizing the distortion that can occur at any point during the communication process.

In verbal communication, sharing a common language plays a central role (Lustig & Koester, 2013). The multiplicity of languages presents an issue in cross-cultural communication, namely finding a common language that both parties can use effectively (Zander, Mockaitis, & Harzing, 2011). In practice, it means that at least one of the two parties must communicate in a second language. Most organizations have adopted English as the common corporate language as a result of cross-national cooperation (Zander et al., 2011).

Using a second language, regardless of proficiency, has several implications for cross-cultural communication. First, unless completely fluent, it is less automatic, requires more deliberative thought, and demands more effort (Smith & Bond, 1999). Second, the greater the fluency of a second-language speaker the more likely they are to be perceived as competent in other areas and vice versa (Hui & Cheng, 1987). Third, in a cross-language interaction, first-language speakers tend to respond to the lower linguistic competency of their conversation partner by modifying aspects of their speech such as reducing speech rate and sentence complexity that can be perceived as patronizing (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Lastly, if a first-language speaker is unable to recognize signals that indicate a lack of

understanding or does not attempt to create an environment in which it is acceptable to check for understanding, a second-language speaker may pretend to understand in order to avoid embarrassment or appear competent (Li, 1994).

Since the process of intercultural communication can be described as symbolic, interpretive, transactional, and contextual it also involves nonverbal communication (Lustig & Koester, 2013). According to Klopff (1991), nonverbal communication relates to communicative behaviors and events that do not involve spoken or written language such as gestures and movement, tone of voice, or face and eye behavior. Since culture tends to shape the rules, use, and interpretation of nonverbal cues among its members, their interpretation may lead to communication challenges.

Both verbal and nonverbal communication in cross-cultural contexts is significantly more demanding and presents additional opportunities for misunderstanding. Therefore, its complexity requires competence and is dependent on multiple skills such as the ability to manage interactions with others, displaying respect and empathy, or orientation to knowledge (Koester & Oebele, 1988). These skills are necessary to achieve an effective multicultural work environment where both leader and employees can solve tasks without communication barriers.

#### 2.4.1 Cross-Cultural Communication in Crisis

Recently, research in crisis communication literature examined the role of culture in crisis communication and concluded that people with different nationalities react differently to the same crisis communication message (An, Park, Cho, & Berger, 2010; Luoma-aho, Moreno, & Verhoeven, 2017). Based on this, it can be assumed that the effects of crisis response strategies cannot be generalized across cultures. Or in other words, a crisis response strategy that proved to be effective in one culture might generate different outcomes in another. Any crisis, regardless of its magnitude, origin, or location, has the potential to affect many people highlighting their culture in an unstable and time-sensitive environment (Yeo, Li, Shin, & Haupt, 2017).

The importance of a leader's ability to remain calm in stressful and dangerous situations has been studied by many researchers (e.g., Steinke, 2019; Miller, 2019; Westberry, Hornor, & Dickson, 2022). If a leader becomes anxious and forfeits calm reflection the system is essentially leaderless (Steinke, 2019). However, it is common for leaders to react poorly in high-stress situations as they can become more closed-minded and controlling or angry and heated (Miller, 2019). It has also been shown that when people experience stress their ability to communicate diminishes significantly, which has an impact on problem solving (Stress Management Society, 2017). The consequences may be destructive, because employees perceive leaders as ineffective or harmful if they are unable to constructively manage their own stress (Westberry et al., 2022). However, the communication problem appears to be two-fold as studies have shown that individuals with high communication skills perform better during stressful communication tasks, while individuals with poor communication skills display high anxiety in similar situations (Hirokawa, Yagi, & Miyata 2008). Hence, in order to mitigate the effects of post-traumatic stress reactions among managers and employees and prevent further accidents, there is a need for procedures for handling experienced stress (Doepel, 1991).

Because cultures are associated with values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors, individuals from similar cultures are more likely to trust and communicate with one another in a crisis, while individuals from different cultures may experience difficulties in doing so (Mileti, 1999). Scholars have suggested that a sufficient level of trust must be present within companies so that individuals will talk frankly and honestly to their peers, subordinates, and superiors (Zand, 1972; Deutsch, 1973). Communication is more likely to be distorted, misleading, or deceptive when suspicion rather than trust exists (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975). According to Roberts and O'Reilly (1974), subordinates who lack trust in their superiors are more likely to withhold information and report a higher degree of distorted upward communication.

If cultural differences are not acknowledged they can lead to disputes and inhibit crisis management cooperation among stakeholders (Bergeron, 2015). Cultural misunderstandings between leaders and subordinates might stymie disaster relief

efforts or worsen the situation of a crisis (Yeo et al., 2017). As a result, culturally relevant and adaptable emergency management methods may increase the quality and efficacy of the response (Yeo et al., 2017). Culturally ignorant strategies and approaches, on the other hand, may have unfavorable outcomes.

### 3.0 Methodology

This section argues for the chosen research design and describes what methodology has been used to answer the research question; “*How do cultural differences affect crisis management in the shipping industry?*”. We will elaborate on the methods used, as well as how primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed to answer the research question. Since it is important to examine the quality of a study, the last part of this section will deal with the evaluation of the data collection process and its quality criteria.

#### 3.1 Research Design and Method

Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019) define research design as the framework for the collection and analysis of data used to answer a research question. Considering that our research question covers an issue that has not, to our knowledge, been studied from this exact perspective before, the aim of this thesis is to give a better understanding of its nature (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). It serves therefore the study’s purpose to choose an exploratory research design. The collected data and insights determine the direction and outcome of the study and contribute to the further development of the research area.

Prior to this study, we possessed basic knowledge about cross-cultural management that we gained from multiple courses in our master's program. We had, however, little understanding of cross-cultural leadership in crisis situations. Since it was in our interest to gain deep insight into the topic and explore how individuals think about certain aspects of leadership, we chose to conduct qualitative research, which is concerned with people’s experiences and helps understand what is important for them (Silverman, 2020). By using this method, we gained a more nuanced knowledge of the informants’ perceptions, expectations, experiences, and attitudes.

Since our aim with this research method was to encourage the informants to discuss freely their opinions and experiences with crisis management in a cross-cultural team, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the suitable method.



Using a method with open-ended questions allowed us to adjust our questions depending on interviewees' answers. Instead of relying only on concepts and questions defined before the interview, the informants were given the opportunity to speak in detail and explain their ideas about diverse subjects (Bell et al., 2019).

The study's approach to the relationship between theory and research was inductive, meaning that we explored collected data, developed explanations for patterns in the data set, and related them to previous research (Saunders et al., 2012). Consequently, the study's structure was more flexible and permitted for changes of research emphasis as the research progressed.

### 3.2 Data Collection

In this study we used both primary and secondary data. The primary data was obtained by the authors with the purpose of answering the research question (Hox & Boeije, 2005). To accomplish a deeper understanding of external and internal factors important in cross-cultural crisis management, there was a need to collect as much significant data as possible. After consulting our area of interest and approach to the topic with our supervisor we decided to use the method of in-depth interviews, since they are useful for clarifying people's judgments and give insights in the informants' personal experiences and opinions (Bell et al., 2019). By studying existing research and literature, we gained insight into relevant theories concerning multi-cultural organizations, different leadership ideals, crisis management, and culture in general. This secondary data was subsequently related to collected primary data in the study's analysis process.

#### 3.2.1 Sample and Sample Procedure

Since we wanted to conduct in-depth interviews, and because it was impossible to examine an entire population, we had to select a sample. The sample, or in other words, the segment of the population that was selected for this research, is based on a non-probability approach. Hence, some informants were more expected to be selected instead of others because the sample was not chosen using a random-selection method (Bell et al., 2019). We wanted to ensure that we would gain access to as wide a range of individuals relevant to our research question as

possible and therefore employed a flexible approach to sampling, in line with recommendations by Savin-Baden and Major (2013).

Considering that this study focuses on crisis management and culture, we selected leaders in shipping who had led employees from different cultures through a crisis as they were considered the most appropriate contributors to finding possible answers to the research question. Interviewing the right person is crucial since it increases the accuracy of the answers and limits the risk of misinterpretations due to lack of knowledge (Bell et al., 2019). The informants selected for the study are mainly a result of contacts through our supervisor Olav Kjellevoid Olsen. Two informants were sampled using the snowball sampling method (Patton, 2015). The final sample consisted of six males: four Norwegians, one Latvian and one Filipino from several Norwegian shipping companies. The informants held different positions at the time of the interview, however, all of them had experience of being captains and managing a multicultural crew on a vessel. Their seniority within the industry averaged roughly 20 years.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), a sample size should be big enough to provide data and theoretical saturation. Additionally, it should be limited enough so that information overload would not complicate the in-depth analysis. The sample size of six is the result of achieving saturation where we noticed that informants' experiences became similar and further interviews would give little new information. We considered the sample to be generative of enough data, an observation supported by Eisenhardt (1989), claiming that four to ten cases are optimal when gaining in-depth knowledge and understanding.

### 3.2.2 Interviews

In order to deal with the ethical issues involved, the interview process drew on Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) seven-stage process for conducting qualitative interviews. We developed a semi-structured interview guide where we structured the questions into themes based on the literature review (See Appendix A) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before conducting the interviews, we presented the interview guide to our supervisor and sought his advice on its structure. We also had some follow-up questions written down in advance that helped us capture

significant reflections.

When making appointments for interviews we sent a short description of the study to the informants so that they could prepare in advance. All six interviews took place in random order during March 2022 and were conducted by both authors where we switched roles of being the interviewer and transcriber. The purpose of this was to let the interviewees relate to only one person and thus make the conversation more comfortable and organized. Because our informants were in different locations, we decided to conduct the interviews digitally. In order to create a professional environment, we chose to use the meeting room facilities at Media City Bergen/NCE Media where we were situated in a private, soundproof room. All in-depth interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams where five of the informants had their cameras on. The interviews were recorded with both sound and video by using the recording function in Microsoft Teams. With the purpose of avoiding misinterpretations and treating all informants equally, we conducted all interviews in English, preserving the exact narrative and its essence.

The interviews began with some small talk and a short explanation of the study. Each informant gave their consent after we assured them of their anonymity and asked for their permission to record audio and video. Thereafter, we asked some background questions concerning demographics, seniority, and personnel responsibility, as well as informants' definition of a crisis and perceptions of a leader. Subsequently, we proceeded to the main part of the interview. To begin with we tried to follow the order of the questions but were flexible when the informants alluded to other topics. We made sure to cover all questions in the interview guide and accommodated pauses to give the interviewees opportunities to reflect on the answers (Bell et al., 2019).

### 3.2.3 Evaluation of Interviews

In accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) 10 criteria for good quality in interviews, we attempted to create a positive atmosphere throughout the interviews so that the informants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with us. Therefore, we made sure to explain to the informants that we were seeking their personal opinions, perceptions, and experiences. Furthermore, we tried to

follow Kvale's criteria of a successful interviewer (1994). This was achieved through tentative listening and the assurance that there were no right or wrong answers. We felt relaxed during the conversations, which often resulted in laughter and jokes from both sides.

After the first interview we realized that some of the questions in the interview guide could be interpreted as leading or unnecessary. Hence, we revised the interview guide and became more satisfied with the new version. Its structure facilitated good flow in the dialogue, where we mostly asked open questions before asking more specific ones. We also made sure to verify answers when we did not clearly hear the informant's reply. The length of the interviews felt natural and at the end of each one we asked if the informant wanted to add or clarify anything. Despite the intention of asking open-ended questions and covering all topics in each interview, we sometimes experienced that the informants did not understand the essence of a question and answered vaguely or evasively. Hence, we had to ask follow-up questions in order to direct them back to the topic. This may have resulted in some questions being more leading than desirable. Additionally, certain informants were asked follow-up questions that should have been asked in every interview since they could have been of great relevance to others.

Conducting the interviews digitally gave us and the interviewees the flexibility of time and location. While it is convenient for the participants to choose their own space (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, & Cook, 2020), it resulted in distractions a couple of times, such as telephone calls. Furthermore, the quality of the communication could have been better with face-to-face interviews since it allows the researcher to observe a participant's physical space, body language, and emotional cues (Cater, 2011). One of the interviewees did not have access to a video camera, allowing us to only hear his voice and worsening the interaction. Another informant had a very slow internet connection that caused multiple interruptions in terms of the sound lagging. Despite the difficulties mentioned, we feel that we managed to gather rich data along with positive participant experiences.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to get a perception of how leaders in a multicultural environment consider cultural differences in a crisis. By analyzing the informants' descriptions we aimed to obtain an understanding of how cultural differences affect a leader's crisis management. To analyze the transcribed material we applied thematic analysis, which is a technique for detecting, interpreting, and reporting patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis in this study was conducted based on Braun and Clarke's six step process (2006).

As the first step, we familiarized ourselves with the collected data. The interviews lasted between 46 and 71 minutes and a total of 362 interview minutes were recorded. A full transcription was completed shortly after each interview and all interview data was transcribed using the transcribe function in Microsoft Word Online. We reviewed the automatically generated transcripts for accuracy against the recordings, corrected minor errors, and noted long pauses and laughter. When this process was completed, we ended up with 127 single-spaced typed pages. When the transcribed material was finalized, we printed it out and went through the transcripts highlighting important statements and noting down thoughts and reflections. At first, we divided the transcripts between us so that each of us read three of them followed by a brief discussion on thoughts and reflections that had arisen. After this, we switched transcripts so that we both had read all of them.

As the next step, we started to organize the data in a meaningful and systematic way through coding. By using this method, we managed to break down large amounts of data into manageable parts which made it easier for us to find connections and relations in the data material. The coding process was conducted using the comment function in Microsoft Word Online and, in accordance with the exploratory design of the study, we mostly used inductive, data-driven codes (Bell et al., 2019). Since we did not have pre-set codes but developed and modified the codes as we worked through the dataset, we also used open coding (Bell et al., 2019). To begin with, we divided the interview transcripts between us again so that we analyzed three of them each and identified initial codes. Then we switched the transcripts and compared our codes, discussed, and modified them. We filled the different codes in a table created in Word to easily get an overview

of the results. In this process we showed a high degree of consensus regarding the codes. After analyzing all six interviews we had a total of 390 codes.

To ensure consensus we went through all six interviews together and looked for redundancy and overlap among the 390 codes with the purpose of defining categories. By grouping the codes together into wider concepts, we identified 66 categories which we further reviewed separately and in relation to each other. The 66 categories were then combined and reduced to five overarching themes with subcategories and associated descriptive codes (See Appendix C for code list). The process of labeling the themes and determining the substance of each theme was dynamic and occurred throughout all steps of the analysis. The five themes were named culture, leadership, crisis, communication, and structure. These themes appeared to be a good representation of the entire dataset and illustrated important dimensions of how the cultural aspect affects crisis management. A thematic “map” of the dimensions is presented in Figure 2 in chapter 4.

The next step in the analysis was to write about each theme, including what it entails and how the themes relate to each other. The results are presented in chapter 4 where we showcase and explain excerpts that demonstrate the essence of each theme. The final step was to present the findings in the discussion section in chapter 5, demonstrating how the themes seem to be connected to each other and comparing them to previous research.

### 3.4 Quality Criteria

Evaluating the quality of the research is important when designing and conducting a study. The three most important criteria for evaluation are reliability, validity, and replication (Bell et al., 2019). However, since the aim of qualitative research is to explore, understand, and discover, Tolley, Ulin, Mack, Robinson, and Succop (2016) explain that these criteria should be redefined for qualitative research to ensure greater applicability when evaluating and suggested that the criteria developed by Guba (1981) would be of greater relevance. Guba (1981) proposed four new criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are of relevance for the evaluation of this thesis’

quality since the collection of data was conducted through in-depth interviews with real participants.

To ensure the study's credibility we made sure to have broad knowledge and understanding of research relevant to the topic so that the design of the interview guide was in line with our research question. Furthermore, the in-depth interviews gave us an opportunity to secure informants' understanding of concepts used in the questions, strengthening the study's credibility.

Nevertheless, because of the chosen design, the thesis will have some limitation regarding its transferability. Since we conducted in-depth interviews within a small group, the findings tend to be oriented to the significance and contextual uniqueness of the aspect of the social world being studied (Bell et al., 2019). However, by regularly comparing each interview with the rest and considering the data material as a whole rather than in pieces, the transferability of the study is strengthened.

Because this research is based on perceptions of informants' reality, there is reason to question the dependability of the study. The interview guide developed before the interviews can be used to replicate the study. However, since the information collected stems from individual perceptions and meanings that can evolve over time it cannot necessarily be guaranteed that one will get the same results. Thus, the study relies on the subjective meaning and perception of each informant which may have influenced the outcome's dependability. However, we made an overview of all categories and codes and read all transcripts several times during the analysis process in order to strengthen the study's dependability.

The study's confirmability may have been affected to some degree by our own subjectivism. Since our perceptions and interpretations of informants' answers might have been influenced by our cultural values and predispositions, we acknowledge that the results may be biased by our cultural lenses. Complete objectivity is impossible in business research, however, we tried to be as neutral as possible by discussing the findings with each other. By providing rich descriptions of informants' statements and using extensive citations, we strived to

present collected data in an objective way, and hence strengthened the confirmability of the study.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

In social science studies it is important to have a conscious relationship to the ethical aspects related to the researcher's role and the performance of the research project such as honesty, impartiality, and independence (Hewitt, 2007). Several laws and rules have been developed to ensure the ethical aspects one must abide by.

This research project relied on the informant's experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Consequently, we adhered to relevant GDPR rules and secured informants' confidentiality and anonymity. In order to preserve confidentiality in the data, information that might have threatened the anonymity of the informants was removed from the study. The collected data was deleted at the end of the project.

Considering that we were to gather demographic data from the participants, the project was sent for approval to the National Center for Research Data (NSD) and given permission to collect data granted that we secured the informants' anonymity. We obtained participation consent from the informants before the interviews informing them of the study, its purpose, and what the data would be used for (see Appendix B). The participation was voluntary, and it was possible to refrain throughout the study.

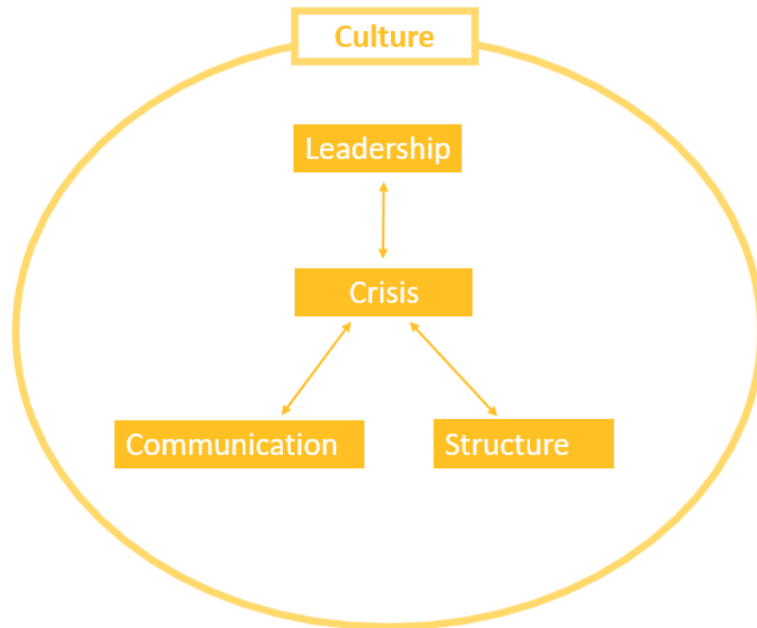


#### 4.0 Findings

In this chapter we will describe and discuss the content in the themes we derived from the coding of the data material. The overall model that emerged after the analysis is presented in Figure 2 below. Culture, leadership, crisis, communication, and structure are the five themes that all or most of the informants addressed. In the following, “all informants” refers to all 6, “most informants” refers to 4-5, while “some informants” refers to 2-3. The informants are referred to with the letter “I” and their respective numbers (e.g., I6). Since all informants were males, we refer to them as he/his/him. Four dots “....” have been used to indicate omissions in quotations where information was removed due to anonymity or because it was considered unimportant. In order to easily discern between our own material and informants’ statements, we chose to present the quotations in separate sections and in italics, as we consider this the most lucid.

The results and interpretations refer to how six male leaders, all of whom have worked as captains, experience leading crews consisting of several cultures mainly Norwegians, Filipinos, and Eastern Europeans. The number of team members varied between each informant, but the range was between 6-20 persons. Some of the informants mentioned that there are seldom changes in the crew and many stated that the crew knows each other very well. Hence, they feel like a family on board who develop their own unique culture.

## 4.1 Model



*Figure 2: Thematic model*

Based on the analysis a thematic model was developed, showing how the cultural aspect influences a leader in a crisis and the mutual effect on structure and communication. The double-headed arrows between the boxes show the relation between the themes and how, based on the findings, the interaction is mutual. The model illustrates the course of agility under pressure which is the objective of effective crisis management of a multicultural group.

The model demonstrates how a crisis affects the leaders' behavior, as well as how the leader influences and changes a crisis. Since the research subjects were leaders and the findings reflect their perspective, we have placed Leadership on top to highlight how the remaining factors influence the behavior of the leader. Crisis serves as the context of leadership; hence this theme is placed directly beneath Leadership. Communication and Structure were two main themes that appeared to be of importance and had a direct, mutual impact on a crisis. The findings show that culture is a factor that permeates all these components and influences the

entire leadership process in a crisis. Therefore, Culture is depicted as a circle that permeates each theme.

Seeing that culture affects in various ways all aspects of crisis management we decided to not present it separately but rather incorporate it into the presentation of each theme.

## 4.2 Leadership

In the literature review of this study the authors elaborated upon the importance of leaders adjusting their style toward different contexts. Hence, in the semi-structured interviews, the leaders were specifically asked about their leadership style, priorities, and experiences with the multicultural environment in the shipping industry.

### 4.2.1 Leadership Styles

All informants in the study were leaders operating in a high-risk, cross-cultural setting. Even though many of the characteristics described below seem to be set in a usual working environment, their traits can be used as a foundation for behavior and reactions during crises. Since their analysis might provide us with a general understanding of how these cross-cultural leaders handle crises, we believe it is relevant to examine the leadership styles of the informants. The leadership styles were decoded by deeper analyzing the informants' statements, reactions, and wordings. As a result, the findings are a sum of our impressions of them from the interviews as well as a more in-depth analysis of each conversation log.

One of the common characteristics of all informants was the awareness of their continuous learning. As some of the examples show, the leaders seemed conscious of their shortcomings with some of them being humble and admitting their mistakes.

*I grew up.... You will actually, as long as you're willing to learn. Then you will continue to grow up until you retire. (I2)*

*I do a lot of mistakes here during my career. Some of them I hopefully have learned a bit from.... And try to avoid happening again. (I3)*

*You should always be humble enough to know that you could also make mistakes and you should seek support with your team or your crew. (I6)*

Furthermore, all leaders explained in various ways how they include the team in both daily situations and in crises. The captain's reliance on his crew members and willingness to cooperate were typical characteristics.

*As a captain, you need to tell every each one of us. I mean, every each member of the crew to be part of this crisis, how to solve it? (I4)*

*There is no system to that, but as a leader on board, you are depending on the guys you are working together. Because the captain is nothing without his crew. (I3)*

*It's not about myself for sure. I can be only leader if I have around people near me. You cannot be leader alone. (I1)*

*We need to trust each other.... Because when you're out at sea, you have nobody else can help you. You have only each other and that is very important. (I5)*

Some leaders made it clear that they wanted their crew to be self-going and certain of their tasks. During the interviews, informants referred to the special context of a ship hierarchy, the crisis, and their personal preferences for cooperation.

*When you have a crisis, then you will learn that they are more self-going, and you can trust them that they know their task during a crisis.... When you have a situation, everybody knows what to do without asking you. (I5)*

*You would like people to adhere to instructions, but you would also like them to think for themselves because we cannot think about everything for everyone. (I6)*

*We've been very concise and clear on tasks. But that.... I think they thought.... Those in your group know exactly what they are to do. (I2)*

There was a general consensus among all informants that their crew members should open up and express themselves, but their proactiveness and encouragement were varying. When asked about the crew voicing their thoughts the leaders responded positively, as some of the examples demonstrate.

*They come up to me, sometimes during lunch, whatever, or when I stay on a bridge....be not afraid to ask.... I try to minimize the distance, but the person can easily come to me. (I1)*

*That's why I in my daily job is and I'm visiting the vessel I use a lot of time because the guys on board want to talk to you. And I want to talk to them, and we learn to know each other. (I5)*

*You must be open for always for their order suggestions, even if it's a wrong or right suggestions, but you need to be open. Uh, you know you need to ask them because maybe they're just too shy to express their ideas. (I4)*

However, when asked directly about the team members' opinions, some of them failed to provide clear responses and appeared instead to believe that their leadership style was successful based on the lack of any responses and the crew members' visible positive attitudes. We observed that this only applied to non-Norwegians who appeared to be content with this kind of response.

*At least they're smiling. (I1)*

*Uh, actually I cannot say, you can ask them.... Yeah, I think they're happy. I can hear them laughing, I mean smiling every day. Honestly, this is a good, uh, positive vibes to me (14)*

According to one of the informants, the crew's threshold for voicing their opinions and providing feedback depended on how inclusive the captain was. In this context he criticized delegative leaders for how their behavior can result in a crew that is less self-going.

*That depends on the different captains, how including they are.... You will get more feedback if you are more including. Then the ratings will open up more, give you better feedback, that's what my experience is. If you are always boss, they are not self-going and they wait for the next task, and don't do anything by themselves.... They are used to, ok, we do what we are told to. And then they don't bother. (15)*

Furthermore, cooperation appeared to be dependent on the captain and his abilities to include the crew members. His role and guidance were essential, but not everyone seemed to be equally good at this.

*They are working well together because the captain is a good captain....it depends very much on the top officers. If they include the rest of the crew (15)*

*Important for the captain or leader to actually invite for such inputs, to be honest I don't think everybody is equally good at doing that.... Eastern European officers might not be very clever at that, maybe especially if they have a crew of the Filipinos. They can be a bit too self-secure. That is not good. (16)*

One of the informants mentioned how the access to internet has made it more difficult for the crew to get to know each other. He perceived it as something negative since the strength of a relation affects cooperation.

*Nowadays, we have internet on board, all the media available, there's less communication. There are less social life on board than it was before.... Don't get to know each other in the same way, they take longer time. (I3)*

It was interesting to observe that the informants were to varying degrees aware of how different situations affect the way people react, how they act as leaders, and how the structure, communication, and dynamics in the group are changing.

*For sure, it depends on the situation, if I see the guys start after a heavy waves or whatever, it can be some stressing and I cannot check "Guys you need to!". You need to find a way how to explain to them. (I1)*

*Do you think that you as a leader in a leader role act differently than you know, like regular situations, than in stressful situations? (Interviewer)*  
*Yes, by all means. It's in a way two completely different things (I6)*

During the interviews we noticed some differences between the informants' leadership styles. Later, when comparing the answers of the informants to each other, we could clearly detect differences in their priorities, mentality, and management. There was a distinction, for instance, in the structure and working relations that the leaders preferred. While the Eastern-European captain wanted to maintain a balance and not become friends with the crew, the Filipino captain was more relation-oriented emphasizing how he wanted to be friends with the crew and appreciated the family feeling in the company.

*You need to keep a distance.... Do not come too close, but for sure not come too far away.... When you're friends, you never be a leader for each other.... On board we have a position, why we have positions? Because who can more be more responsible, more, whatever? So this is, not mix it up. (I1)*

*I'm always telling them that we are here as a family, as a team.... And if*

*you have a good cooperation on board and you have a good team, everyone are friends with everyone, then you will have a good place to work.... I'm not acting exactly as a captain. I want to be friends to them. This is very important. (I4)*

The leaders also seemed to have different approaches to handling disputes and crises. In situations where individual crew members could be held responsible for a fault some of the informants emphasized the importance of not blaming the individual, but rather finding out where it went wrong and viewing the mistake as a possibility for improvement.

*If there is some bad things, let's say in a day, there is a member of the team that made some mistakes. Yeah, you don't need to blame this individual, you need to talk to him. (I4)*

*No we are not perfect. Everybody can make a mistake. (I1)*

Another leader expressed sympathy and compassion for an officer who became distressed and uncooperative during a crisis. He began by explaining the incident and the officer's behavior before immediately assuring us that the operation was successful and explained how such circumstances could be stressful for everyone.

*I should mention that of course we are also stressed. So everyone is a bit stressed and worked up so and the phone line might be not the best, and there are so many aspects that is coming into play, but of course. It's not given that everyone is tackling our situation like that in a good way. Most people would get stressed. (I6)*

The interviews gave us valuable insight into the leaders' attitudes and manners. The Filipino captain was perceived by us as soft, caring, and considerate of other peoples' needs. This opinion is based on a number of descriptions and statements for instance when he expressed concern with crew members isolating themselves in their cabins.



*Maybe they're thinking that they are not part of the team. Or maybe they have some problems at home or I don't know, but you must need to talk to them as a leader. Because you never know that each individual is facing a different kind of problems at home. (I4)*

The same captain also praised his company and how they handled the corona restrictions. Throughout the interview he often complimented them and talked about how the Norwegian leadership style is the best and thus wants to imitate it.

*That is a good thing of this company, because they are really helping us compared to other companies.... I mean the leadership I mostly learned it from Norwegians. (I4)*

In contrast, the Latvian captain could be perceived as angry by his Filipino crew members since his voice was more high-pitched. The citation from his description of a conversation demonstrates that he intended for them to understand and accept that it was a cultural part of him. Additionally, he had overheard crew members discussing this trait in a conversation.

*“We are Filipino, you cannot speak like that forever.” See guys, come on. It can be only one two ways or you speak normally or you not speak. Yeah, but it's not. Yeah, you must be softly, “What you mean I must be softly?”. (I1)*

*I just saw some guys “how he looks like very angry”. “Ahh never mind about what he is angry, it's normal for him.” “Why?” “Yeah, but he's from Russia.” (I1)*

The informant was also self-aware of how strict he can be. He gave off an aura of power and decisiveness.

*As a captain, due to my experience, due to my knowledge, my decision will be correct decision from my side and I really hope the crew is also feeling*

*like this.... I can be strict. Believe me I can be strict, but no, I tried like minimize the distance. For sure, respect my position. (I1)*

We were curious how the informants related to the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia and whether it had any impact on the relationships on board. The Norwegians did not mention the topic in any way other than perhaps offering help to those affected. On the other hand, the non-Norwegian informants made it quite clear that they tried to avoid such conversations on board because of the potential conflicts.

*I try to avoid such discussions.... For example, you're watching the Russian news one side, in another side you are watching Latvian news it was opposite side and you start to mix everything. (I1)*

*Please don't make it a topic on the board. Because this will create a misunderstanding or argument that, we don't need that to happen. I immediately telling them not to talk because this is not a good example, but a topic to be talked to on board because you, the people will get different perceptions, different beliefs. Yeah, yeah, it's the beginning of arguments on board and I don't like it. (I4)*

#### 4.2.2 Priorities

We noticed that the informants had clear priorities in their position as leaders. Due to the numerous risks that seafarers may encounter, safety was mentioned several times during the interviews and seemed to be a central concern for most of them.

*First of all, we need to take care about our job about safety. (I1)*

*We were sincerely trying to prioritize health and safety first (I2)*

*We are very serious about the working safety culture.... That's what I bring forward during a meeting with the crew is that you cannot relax on this. (I5)*

The leaders were also asked about what they see as most important during a crisis. Most informants said that their main priority was the crew and their well-being.

*The biggest concern is of course the crew on board, how they handle it, how they handle the situation and how to help them and to assist. (13)*

*In more or less everything that we do we always put priority on human life, that is number one. And then the other aspect is coming as number two and three and four, but the human life and our colleagues that is always on the top of the priority list. (16)*

*You just chatting with the family and you start to feeling you're missing. And for sure, if you stay on this stress situation only continuously about work or continuously about problem at home and country, you become crazy. And this is a what I try to solve. (11)*

#### 4.2.3 Meeting New Cultures

It emerged from the interviews that the leaders approached new cultures in different ways. When asked if they had received any education in cross-cultural management some informants stated that they had not gotten any formal training but had instead learned about it more practically through their experiences.

*No formal cross-cultural education as such, but of course the work training in shipping is indeed very multicultural. From day one you work with all different, or not all, but a lot of different nationalities.... No formal education as such, but a lot of on the job training I would say. (16)*

Additionally, we asked about any behavioral changes or preparations regarding new crew members from new cultures. Again, because of the leaders' vast experience, many no longer prepared for such encounters since their lifelong exposure to many cultures made it unnecessary due to their multicultural experience throughout the years. However, some of them acknowledged the importance of preparations and adjusted their behavior.

*Like I say, fresh blood is coming.... It's no problem. It's no, absolutely not.... Like I say it's not a big point for nationalities. (I1)*

*Maybe I adjusted a little in the beginning, but probably, after a while they also got to me so they even understood my humor in time.... Probably mostly because of my insecurity. I didn't like or want to insult them in any way. I didn't want to come there and be the big boss, the white one from Norway (I2)*

*In the beginning you were basically thrown out into it, then you can try to find out about that and the best way to do it is to have a positive attitude.... I guess that if you and me met for the first time. We are a little bit more careful. Or, uh, more uh, we are not that directly. Right? We try to, uh, as we say in Norwegian "prøvande" until we are more familiar and we know each other better. Right? (I3)*

*I will say yes. It is a time, it is a while since I last met with a completely new culture, so I don't really remember 100% how I prepared at that stage for it. Maybe I wasn't fully grown up at that stage, so I just dived into it, huh? But it's really wise to study. See it is. I mean, it's so much good information now at the Internet you could see at least the basic things. Uh, but to be prepared that? That's never been a stupid thing. (I2)*

Some of the informants also acknowledged that, as a result of globalization, there are fewer cultural differences now and that cooperation has increased their awareness of these differences.

*The world is becoming smaller, and so the young people.... Because the ratings are the younger people you know, and they are more informed maybe than the older. (I5)*

*They have been working together for several years.... They have a common understanding of each other and they basically know the cultural differences. (I3)*

#### 4.2.4 Attitude Toward Multiculturalism

When interviewing the informants, we wanted to get a grasp of their attitudes on multiculturalism in general as well as the specific cultures they had encountered. The findings were derived from both their answers to the topic-related questions and from their statements and opinions throughout the conversations. All the leaders had a wide range of experience working with people of different nationalities and it appeared that some of them behaved unconsciously differently depending on the culture. However, some of them did acknowledge that it could be crucial to keep the differences in mind.

*It's because I've been working with diversity and culture for so long now that it's just sort of. It's part of what I'm doing and I'm not, like when I'm going to meet either it's German or Russian, even or a Filipino or Indian? I'm not thinking that much how I should behave. I'm not. I'm really not.... And I would say that that is probably 'cause I've been doing this for so many years. It falls more and more natural. But that doesn't mean it's not important. It's extremely important. (I2)*

*You need to know about some culture and take to attention for that. (I1)*

*Me personally, at least I've tried to treat them all equally, so to speak. I don't care about their passport or the color of their skin or whatever.... We need to work in the best way possible with him or her. But unfortunately, I know that not everyone is having that same attitude, at least not in real life. But maybe they say they do. (I6)*

The leaders expressed in diverse ways that they wanted to treat crew members equally and with respect regardless of their cultural backgrounds. They were well aware of various cultural differences and their negative and positive impacts.

*If you try to mix it up nationality for sure you need to respect. (I1)*

*You have to handle them with respect regardless of cultures. (I2)*

*There's different cultures, but you have to respect them as human beings even if we have different backgrounds and everything. (I5)*

*I think that if you meet them with a degree of respect that they deserved then it is no problem. (I6)*

One of the leaders specifically reflected upon the positive aspects of multiculturalism. He expressed how important it is to utilize a mix of nationalities and discover what unique traits each has to offer.

*I would say it's actually very good to have a mix of different nationalities on board because it gives you a chance to utilize the different cultures in the practical and the best way. As I said, all cultures have something good which the other cultures maybe don't have or haven't been thinking about. If yourself are a little bit open minded, you will see the differences and you can shift between the different cultures and you will see that this works. (I3)*

Despite having a positive attitude toward cross-cultural teams, most leaders acknowledged cultural differences between various nationalities. We noticed that all informants at first found it difficult to acknowledge the differences and formulate their opinions. As the interviews continued, they seemed to become more comfortable and were more receptive to our questions. Some of them expressed that their opinions and observations were stereotyped and generalizing and that they did not want to criticize. These leaders showed a desire to avoid offending anyone and were afraid of saying something “mean”.

*Now I'm talking a bit of stereotypes here, and that is not something that I like to do.... But maybe some nationalities have some ways of communicating and ways of interacting with their surroundings, which is a bit more typical for that nationality than others.... You hear some rumors about the stereotypes about the Filipinos are like this and the Russians are*

*like this, and the Norwegians are like that. Some of it is true, some of it is bullshit. (I6)*

*Even when we tend to believe that, uh, as Norwegian we are better than the Russians or we are maybe better than the Filipinos.... If I want to be a seafarer the combination of nationalities is like this and I am not better than the other and it works very well. But if you say that “I am Norwegian, I am the best seafarer in the world, they all have to follow me” you will not survive. (I3)*

One of the informants elaborated on how he used to perceive Filipinos in the beginning and that his opinion eventually changed. He also mentioned his experiences with Indians and how challenging this cooperation was.

*Uh, I mean in the beginning it's a bit, uh, it's a bit strange culture (Filipinos), but in the end you can't say anything else that they are really nice people.... You could feel that they are sort of submitting. (I2)*

*I've been working a lot toward Indians. They are stranger than us. More elbowing their way forward. I mean, uh, you should not quote me on that, but they are not my favorite people. They're also more stubborn, difficult to have impact on. Discussions with Indians will be a lot more based on persuasion than cooperation. That's a cultural issue.... On general level they are more difficult than Filipinos. (I2)*

Additionally, some informants mentioned that they had limited experience with Chinese, Italians, and Koreans and descriptions of these nationalities were expressed in a negative manner. In their statements, the leaders focused on how cooperation with these cultures could be in a crisis.

*Italians they are very bossy, you know. And when they said “This is my rules, you need to follow the rules”.... They are really bossy. (I4)*

*When we have some crisis on board with my Korean officers, it's really*

*stressful. (I4)*

*In the Western world, I think it's quite clear to everyone that you always put priority on human life.... I'm not convinced that all Chinese, for instance, would have that same priority order. It could be that they are willing to sacrifice a bit more to please the owner. (I6)*

#### 4.3 Crisis

The informants were asked to provide extensive descriptions of crises they had encountered during their careers, as well as their personal leadership experiences in these situations. They described a variety of situations, some of which were quite serious.

*We had a death on board one of our vessels, where one person went down in the cargo tank and became unconscious and passed away. That is a crisis definitely. (I3)*

*We actually had some accidents on board vessels, which was quite serious.... We actually collided while we were submerged with the submarine. That is not something which is very fun. (I6)*

One important observation was that non-Norwegians struggled with coming up with examples of a crisis. It generally took some time and further questions needed to be asked before they could provide an example. After encouraging the informants to reflect more on what a crisis can be they both admitted that it happens on an everyday basis.

*Yeah, we have some crisis.... Actually, we have it on our everyday basis. But uh, mostly it is all minor crises. (I4)*

*Every day is crisis. It's part of every day, believe me, yeah. (I1)*

The Covid-19 pandemic was mentioned by all informants, but it was varying to what degree they saw it as a crisis. While one informant stated that the pandemic



was an extreme and serious situation, another informant indicated that Covid-19 was not that hard for him and the company.

*We had a very serious situation, uh, last summer. There were some slight suspicion that some of the crew members had COVID. There were two ships.... And 55 people divided on the two ships, 51 got infected, and we lost two of them.... And that was an extreme situation. (I2)*

*Corona is one part of the crisis that is happening to us now in maritime industry.... Compared to different companies, the crisis they are having compared to us, that is what we are not facing.... It is not hard for us. (I4)*

While talking about their examples and experiences with crises, some of the informants provided their definition of a crisis. It became clear that the informants had different perspectives on what a crisis is. However, they emphasized the emotional aspect of a crisis, the unpredictability, and the fact that something is at risk.

*You start all crises what the hell was that, you know you just feel something. (I1)*

*When something unforeseen is happening on board the vessel. (I5)*

*You are at risk of, uh, personal life.... Basically, risk of life. (I3)*

Additionally, it is important to note that one informant informed us that a crisis is usually referred to as an emergency in the shipping industry.

*Well, uh, you refer to it as crisis, but just to pinpoint, in our business we normally refer to it as an emergency so that we are clear that we're talking about the same things. (I6)*

Based on what informants said during the interviews, the crisis management process may be divided into three parts. Therefore, we have decided to present

remaining themes of crisis as a process in these three parts: pre-crisis, mid-crisis, and post-crisis.

#### 4.3.1 Pre-crisis

During the interviews descriptions from the informants about how they prepare and train for a crisis surfaced. All informants emphasized the importance of preparations and training in order to manage a crisis in the best way possible and that one's preparations before a crisis determine the outcome.

*You need to be trained. It is impossible to be thrown into something like that without having in any way trained on something similar. (I2)*

*When it comes to an end, it's all what's happening before a crisis depends on what the outcome will be. (I5)*

*We are spending quite a lot of time exercising and drilling these things exactly because we don't have time to run around and discuss who is to do what. (I6)*

In relation to crisis groundwork, one informant specified the importance of being mentally prepared, whereas another informant emphasized the significance of having competent leaders.

*Uh, also for both officers and ratings to be mentally prepared. That they have done this such of thinking in front when we do have such an incident. (I5)*

*Obviously, you need competent and qualified managers.... You need also to be very well organized. (I2)*

One informant emphasized the importance of building up trust in the relations with crew members before a crisis happens.

*When you have a normal situation, then you are.... Building up trust and confidence and learning to know, uh, your ratings and junior officers so they trust you also. (I5)*

#### 4.3.2 Mid-crisis

The next step that emerged in the crisis management process was the crisis itself. According to some informants, everyone in the crew was aware of their responsibilities as a consequence of training, drills, and predefined roles. As a result, the risk of failing or handling a crisis improperly decreased.

*We've been very concise and clear on tasks.... So that those in the crew knows exactly what they are to do. (I2)*

*We have predefined roles and that is actually down to a physical A4 piece of paper, which is with some bullet points. In case we have an emergency; do this, do this, do this. And that is predefined per role. (I6)*

*That is why we have to do a lot of training so they know what to do in different crisis situations and that doesn't matter what culture or nationality you're coming from. (I5)*

Since the crew had assigned tasks that were a natural part of their positions, some leaders did not see any problems with task delegation during a crisis. Because everyone was aware of their responsibilities, they usually knew what had to be done, which made the crew easier to manage.

*When you have a situation, everybody knows what to do without asking you. (I5)*

*At least they know what to do.... For me, it is much easier to control. (I1)*

*Me as an emergency response team leader, I don't necessarily have to detail and instruct everyone what to do because they know where the other should be. (I6)*

Leaders' decision-making processes were described as altered by a crisis. Some of the informants elaborated on how different cultures have various expectations of a leader. The leaders appeared to have difficulty managing the varying proactiveness and needs for guidance.

*Uh, so to take decisions in such situations, it's, needless to say, much more challenging (I6)*

*When you have a crisis, then you will learn that they are more self-going, and you can trust them that they know their task during a crisis.... When you have a situation, everybody knows what to do without asking you (I5)*

*Asian people, Filipinos are probably more reliant on the leader to take decisions. And with Scandinavians....the problem might be the opposite. He's not waiting for any instructions, he's just acting. And that could also be wrong in some situations.... Eastern Europeans who is a bit in between. You would like a bit of everything. You would like people to adhere to instructions, but you would also like them to think for themselves because we cannot think about everything for everyone. (I6)*

All informants agreed that going through a crisis may be very stressful. When asked what traits make a good crisis manager, most informants emphasized the value of being calm and having a cold head. In other words, to untense the stressful situation.

*I think, again, uh, to keep your head cool is very important.... When you are the leader, you have to show to them that you are calm, and the strange thing is that even though the situation is very serious, you should even have a small joke in the back of your pocket. (I2)*

*In crisis situation.... First of all, it is very important that the leader is having a cold head and a warm heart.... It is important that the leader is trying to keep things calm and controlled. (I6)*

*We must be a little bit serious, so no rushing, no stressing. (I1)*

One informant specified how being unable to keep calm and cope with stress can be harmful to the relationship between the crew and the captain.

*It could be really damaging for relationship if you're not able to cope with a very stressful situation because it is very stressful (I2)*

In relation to coping with stress during a crisis some informants pointed out that Scandinavians are good at keeping calm and not losing their composure, and thus, were perceived as the best leaders during a crisis.

*If you ask me, I will actually say that, this is a bit stereotypical, but I would maybe even claim that Scandinavians in general are fairly good with this, uh or maybe, I don't know if it's justified to say that but, but that is my feeling that they don't lose their head immediately. (I6)*

*Actually, based on my experience, the best leaders during crisis situations are Scandinavians. They are calm, they are well prepared. They know how to handle the crisis.... Compared to Asians, because Asians, actually Koreans even, I've been with also some Filipino captains, they are really tough during crisis. (I4)*

When asked if the leaders notice any cultural differences between the crew members regarding their expectations toward a leader in a crisis, most informants expressed that they do experience such variations. One informant explained that the company had used local offices in the respective countries to research if there was something they should be aware of concerning cultural expectations during a crisis.

*Of course, we used the office in Riga, and the locals there, to ask what is expected during a situation like this for the Eastern Europeans, and we did*

*the same with the Manila office and asked about special things we need to be aware of when it comes to the Filipinos during a situation like this. (13)*

One of the informants described how seafarers from different countries had different expectations toward him, which made it challenging to manage the team.

*This is the challenge of the leader. They have really different beliefs and traditions.... They have different expectations from a leader, yes. One of the reasons is the multicultural upbringing. We didn't grow in the same situations, in the same country, in the same traditions. (14)*

In addition, one informant exemplified general expectations among Norwegian officers regarding Filipinos' and Norwegians' approach to seeking information during a crisis. The impression was that the officers expected Norwegians to be self-going and to require little guidance, but that they would need to provide instructions and information at every step for Filipinos.

*When I, as a Norwegian, started sailing, the officers, who also was Norwegians, expect that I seek information myself to learn how things are working. But uh, for maybe Filipino, you have to inform them all the way. You need to educate them. (15)*

However, one informant believed that the need for support after a crisis is something universal and not something that is more present in one culture or another. He described it as a basic instinct in the human body that kicks in.

*There are some basic instincts that is kicking in in these situations and I think that we all work quite similar to each other.... Maybe science will show something different, but I would claim that when it comes to these things we are quite, what's the word, basic. (16)*

Although all informants acknowledged that cultural differences exist in a crisis, they made it clear that the differences could also occur as a result of individual

differences. One informant specified that variations between individuals might be bigger than the average difference between nationalities.

*The cultural aspect is interesting and important, but I just wanted to say that there could be individual differences which is bigger than the cultural differences. (16)*

There seemed to be an impression among some informants that there is a difference in the reactions and proactiveness of Eastern Europeans and Filipinos during a crisis. One informant mentioned that Filipinos feel a need to be informed and are more proactive than Eastern Europeans, while another stated that Filipinos are less proactive than the latter.

*The Filipinos are much more open. They discuss, they talk, they want to be informed and they were, in a way, if I can say more proactive regards to information, the Latvians or the East Europeans were more quiet. (13)*

*Filipinos are less proactive. The Russian and the Baltic from Latvia, Estonia or Lithuania, they are more proactive. They are more like the Scandinavian type, yeah. (15)*

#### 4.3.3 Post-crisis

Most informants emphasized the value of getting feedback from the crew members and others involved after a crisis and explained that they have tried to create an environment where crew members would feel comfortable opening up and discussing the matters of the crisis. One informant specified that the management talked to every ship and wanted the crew to come up with their perceptions on how they handled the crisis.

*We found every ship and talked to them.... We talked to the captains and asked them straight out what, what they thought about the way the company actually were planning and handling situations like this. (12)*

However, some informants emphasized the difficulty of getting feedback after a crisis in a gathered group and how it was easier in one-on-one conversations.

*We try to get the guys on board to talk to us, give us some inputs. But that is very difficult. They are quiet, very quiet, but then if you are one by one you know or two by two, they can come to you with some input sometimes. (15)*

*It is much easier with face to face communication and more faster. (11)*

When asked specifically if the leaders perceive any cultural differences in providing feedback after a crisis, some of the informants mentioned that Filipinos may be more reluctant and careful to open up and express their opinion than people from other cultures.

*I think the Filipinos are more reluctant to come out in open and give some input. (15)*

*Maybe Filipinos for instance, is a bit humbler and more careful than a typical Russian or something on giving their opinions. (16)*

Some of the informants also mentioned the importance of arranging meetings and debriefings to exchange experiences after a crisis. One of the informants specifically identified it as a Scandinavian approach.

*We have a debriefing afterwards where whoever is involved is brought to the office and we sit down and talk through it.... It is actually needed because the captain or guys on board can feel some kind of guilt and feel that the owner is angry with them. This is a Scandinavian approach. (16)*

#### 4.4 Communication

Communication was another main theme that emerged from the interviews. Within communication, the informants reflected a lot upon English language skills, how the language proficiency plays a particularly important role in a



multicultural environment, and the way it affects crisis management. When analyzing the data it emerged that there were variations amongst the informants in terms of the extent to which they perceived language as a challenge and whether they had experienced any language misunderstandings. One informant did not feel that language was a challenge nor had he experienced any misunderstandings, while another could not recall any examples of miscommunication.

*I do not feel like that. At least on the minimum side guys is speaking and it is more fair enough for doing a proper safe job. (I1)*

*Probably yes, but I can't recall actually no, but probably yes. (I3)*

However, most informants did recognize language as a challenge and described how easy it was to be misunderstood. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the informants emphasized the importance of having good English language skills.

*It is very easy to get misunderstandings, hence decent skills in English is important. (I5)*

*Koreans really want to communicate, but the problem is, they're talking not clearly English. (I4)*

There seemed to be an impression among some informants that when a person had poor language skills in the first place these could become even worse and less understandable during a stressful situation, such as a crisis.

*I have experienced that you have had an officer and captain on board a vessel which you are able to communicate with in a good manner under normal circumstances. But the moment that you have an emergency, like for instance, we had a fire on board one vessel. Uh, that captain became so stressed, uh, and worked up, that it was very, very difficult to actually understand what he was saying. (I6)*

*I think people who might not have the best English in the first place, they could probably work well in everyday work. But the moment things turn bad, that could become a problem, so it just underlines that being able to communicate in a clear way in English that is important in our business. (15)*

*It is more difficult to communicate in stressful situations when English is poor. (14)*

Some of the informants also had experience with managing a crew of only Chinese, and because of their poor language skills in English, they hoped that nothing bad would happen.

*If we had some incident of a bigger scale in China, that would probably have been difficult because of the poor language skills in English. (12)*

*We had to use Chinese to go aboard vessel and that was a huge problem because the English was really bad. So we were hoping, really hoping, that we wouldn't run into any big emergencies. (16)*

Some informants mentioned that it was not uncommon for a crisis to happen in another country. Having a delegated crisis management team that secures good communication between the vessel and the administration ashore was mentioned as an important positive factor by many informants. In relation to crises taking place abroad, one informant emphasized the value of people in the crisis management team who were familiar with the culture and spoke the local language.

*What was really important also was that we tried to establish a team on the ground on where the crisis happened. There was many of the crew members who got really ill and had to be relieved. Then we had to deal a lot with Indians and Bangladeshis. We had a representative in Mumbai and we used her and that was very useful.... Having representatives on the crime scene, that is extremely useful. And you get the most accept, and if*

*they on top of that, also speak the local language, it's fantastic. Then you can open many doors within the local authorities. (I2)*

#### 4.4.1 Challenges with Filipinos

Many informants mentioned different challenges with especially Filipinos and the way they communicate. Some explained that one must be sure that Filipinos get the message right because they often answer “yes” even though they do not fully understand what the leader said. As a result, the leaders occasionally asked Filipinos if they could repeat the instructions to ensure that they had been understood.

*When I spoke to my Filipino colleagues in Manila, we did not hang up the phone before they 100% understood what they were supposed to be checking or doing so that they could report back with exact information. (I2)*

*I don't know if he understands. Did this person understand what I just said or what? Because they could not repeat or explain what I just said. In the beginning they said only yes, but if you do not say OK what are you going to do.... That is the biggest difference between Filipino crew and the Russian/Latvian. (I5)*

Another challenge with Filipinos, as one of the informants mentioned, was that they were not very direct in their communication and could often talk around a topic making it difficult for others to understand their exact needs.

*General picture of a Filipino is that they are much softer in a way than European, and especially East European.... A Filipino you can easily talk around what you actually want to ask about, even so much that you are uncertain about what they actually want to ask you about. So, they are quite demanding. (I3)*

#### 4.4.2 Trust

Many informants emphasized the importance of building trust and relations between the captain and the seafarers based on the experience that misunderstandings lessen when the crew knows and trusts each other.

*They understand because I've been here in this company for how many years now and mostly the people on board, I know them since the beginning. (14)*

*Russians and Norwegian and Swedish, they come forward more easy, you know. If there is anything they will tell you. But then also again, trust and confidence. (15)*

Additionally, some informants emphasized the value of building trust with Filipinos both due to their tendency to answer “yes” and because they could be hesitant to deliver any sort of negative news, and hence, tend to hold back important information. This could result in negative consequences for a crisis.

*You have to be aware of for instance a Filipino, you have to learn to know them and trust them. Be trusting toward that because if not, they are just saying yes, yes. (15)*

*Some nationalities in general don't like to give negative news. Uh, maybe especially Filipinos, for instance, they really hate giving you negative news. They would be very happy to share the good news, but if there is bad news, they might hold back a bit.... And that could be dangerous in a emergency situation.... It is very important that you create this environment of trust between the captain and the officers.... So that they know no one will punish you for giving the bad information. (16)*

#### 4.4.2 Adjusting Communication

There seemed to be a variation among the informants in the extent to which they adjusted their communication toward different cultures. Some informants clearly

modified their way of speaking while others did not or were not sure whether they did.

*You have to adjust the wordings, or you have to think about the words you are using. (I3)*

*Yeah, yeah, yes, yes. I do adjust. (I5)*

*The system I'm applying is a one way system. (I4)*

*Hmmm, that's a very good question. I don't think I have, uh, a similarly good response, but I mean. Uh, probably I do adjust, but I'm not thinking about it.... And definitely not when I'm meeting Filipinos, for instance, because I know them so well. (I2)*

*Say that the captain is Norwegian, and you're talking to him. Uh, I'm quite convinced the conversation would be more informal, and in a slightly different manner than it had been with a Filipino or Ukrainian or Croatian or something, but. Yes, I think that is correct, but in principle it shouldn't be. It should be the same, uh, same, uh, information being shared. (I6)*

However, one informant specified that he adjusted his communication based on the language proficiency of the recipient rather than their nationality.

*Because of language issues. It does not matter which country they're coming from, it depends on what level of language skills. Sometimes you have to speak in detail and you feel like you are talking to a kid sometimes. (I5).*

#### 4.5 Structure

Several themes that emerged in the data analysis process were concerned with the structure and changes in the team, both due to cultural alterations and the impact of a crisis. The informants gave us a lot of information on the hierarchy on board, the mix of nationalities, and cooperation. These topics seemed to be connected

and intertwined in bigger processes, therefore we found it natural to place them in the same category. During the interviews, and subsequently while analyzing the data, we discovered that culture affects the structural aspects to a high degree, something the findings below highlight.

#### 4.5.1 Hierarchy

During the data collection and analysis process it became clear how different the structure is on a ship than when ashore. Because of the profession and unique environment, the structure is very set and specific. Some informants explained that positions in a team were often justified by a necessary division of tasks, and the captain's position and decisions had to be respected. According to the leaders' statements, seafarers perceived the hierarchy as something natural and the leaders themselves believed it necessary in order to secure a safe and effective journey.

*On board we have a position, why we have positions? Because who can more be more responsible.... Guys should respect me and not scare. Never scare but respect of my position.... I am a captain. You are chief mate. How to say this is you need to divide it.... We have a position we have responsibility and we need to follow it. (11)*

*I think the organizational border vessel with a captain on top and the rest of the officers and then the crew under there, that is something that has existed for centuries.... I think that most people, being seafarers.... Regardless from where they are.... They're quite used to that and they know that this is actually part of the safety of the vessel, that you have a predefined chain of command.... And they know that the captain is the captain. (16)*

One of the captains explained that seafarers are already aware of the hierarchy associated with the profession before entering. Because of this, it was a deliberate decision and those not adhering to the rules were rare cases.

*I think actually most seafarers around the world having chosen this occupation they are in a way familiar with it, and they understand that this*

*is the way it works in this industry. So, the guys not willing to fit into that that that organization or that system, they are quite far apart, I would say. Uh, not saying that they are not there, but it's not like it's a very big problem. Normally they respect the chain of command. (16)*

Furthermore, one leader emphasized how positions on board are more important than nationality overshadowing cultural background.

*What's a Norwegian chief officer shall do this.... No it's state chief officer.... It's not about nationality, never. And you're responsible, nobody asked you what's the nationality.... Position is position.... My biggest point.... Please not mix it up nationalities. (11)*

We found it interesting that the Filipino captain preferred a flatter organizational structure and wanted to be on the same level as the rest of the crew. He compared himself to the stricter European captains.

*European captain they really like, big man you know. Seldom smiles. I'm not like that. I mean going to the levels. I'm not acting exactly as a captain. I want to be friends to them. This is very important. (14)*

When asked about how different cultures perceive this specific hierarchy, the informants gave us rich descriptions and comparisons of different nationalities. It became clear that different cultures are used to different hierarchies, something that can be problematic and affect the dynamics in the group. One of the informants described how Norwegians must adjust more to the structure than for example Eastern Europeans or Filipinos. The reason was that the Norwegian structure ashore is much flatter to begin with, while in most other countries it is much stricter and therefore closer to the one on board.

*You had to balance that in a different way for sure. Because you cannot operate on a very steep hierarchy with a crew of only Norwegians. It's more similar to the Scandinavian way of doing things, or the Norwegian*

*way of doing the things, like you do in the, in the office or ashore.... It changes basically automatically. (I3)*

*I would say that the Norwegians need to adjust more to the more steep or strict hierarchy. (I3)*

*Eastern European structure is closer to the Philippine one because it's quite different. In Scandinavia we have a much more flat system than they have in East Europe, southern part of Europe or Far East. We have a different type of leadership, more Social Democratic way of doing the things.... In Philippines the structure is closer to the vessels. (I3)*

We noticed from the informants' descriptions of crew setups that Norwegians and Eastern Europeans usually hold higher positions such as managers, captains, or top officers. Filipinos, however, usually held lower positions like junior officers and ratings. Its origin seems to be related to the recruitment shift that started around 30 years ago when Norwegian companies began hiring Filipino workforce. According to one informant, many Scandinavians were laid off at that time causing strained relations between these nationalities which gradually improved over time.

*It's usually Latvian officers and Filipino ratings. (I1)*

*We had a junior officer and ratings from the Philippines. (I5)*

*A lot of Norwegians lost their works because the company start hiring cheaper seafarers like Filipinos. They took away the Norwegian colleagues, you know. So, you didn't give them the respect they should have. And then you have a bad situation on board.... Then it was a more you have to do that, you don't know anything. You just do what I say and so on. (I5)*

*It's normal to have Filipino junior officers and ratings.... Obviously if a Polish captain is used to have a Croatian chief officer and then all of a*



*sudden there is a Filipino chief officer coming in. Then I imagine that they will be actually working to get acquainted with each other.... Filipino can be perfectly well, trained on the same level and competent, but there's another culture and I guess that could be a challenge. (12)*

The Filipino captain told us about some incidents he has had where he was not respected by the crew mainly because of his origin and young age.

*Mostly of my European crew they have been with a European master. So the first time they have this Asian captain, they have this like a culture shock.... This is one of the challenges the leader is experiencing on board.... One of them is you are younger, you are Asian. It's not easy, it's difficult to tell them what you want. (14)*

A certain phenomenon was brought up by one of the leaders that could cause a shift in the team structure. He described a situation in which an entire crew appeared to be persuaded to adopt a particular viewpoint by a single individual acting as an unofficial leader. Though the crew was of Filipino origin, similar situations had also occurred with other nationalities. This force was perceived as a challenge affecting their authority and ability to manage. Such situations were also unforeseen and therefore difficult to prevent.

*Now I'm talking not necessarily only down to crisis and the emergencies, but with Filipinos it is a phenomenon that you should be a bit aware of is that the real leader on board might not necessarily be the captain.... We see that from time to time that the unofficial leader, it might be a might be one of the ratings, might be an oiler on board or something, because he is the oldest guy, and he has a brother who is important in Manila or something like that. (16)*

*That can be a challenge, and it could happen also with other nationalities.... Probably also with Norwegians for all I know, and we have seen it with for instance Ukrainians.... That is a challenge.... They could be a very positive force, but they could unfortunately also be negative. (16)*

When it comes to the structural impact of a crisis, one of the informants described how the structure changes in such situations from flat to more hierarchical. The circumstances of the situation require a change which feels necessary.

*On board the vessel, you need to have a top-down structure in certain situations, and then that especially in a crisis.... Then you need to have a from top to bottom structure, so you do what you are told to do. There is no question that the captain is the God, and then it's going down. You get orders. In a normal situation you can have a more including cooperation with the crew, you know, let them have their opinion and get to come with suggestions. When you have a situation.... No room for discussion, and maybe later when you feel that you have control of the situation then it's more open. (I5)*

In the context of a crisis, the informants described which cultural mixes work together poorly and which appear to be a great match.

*We know that the Filipinos and the Indians they do not get along. That is a bad mix. (I2)*

*Norwegian or Filipino are working well together, basically also the Latvian working ok with the Filipinos. (I5)*

## 5.0 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how cultural differences affect crisis management in the shipping industry. Our aim was to examine the scope of cultural differences and how they influence the dynamics in a crew on board a ship. The study explored the leaders' point of view, how cultural differences affect their management processes, what opinions the leaders hold, and if they adjust their behavior when interacting with diverse cultures. Through in-depth analysis of rich and detailed descriptions we gained insight into important aspects of crisis management in cross-cultural teams. Our findings reveal several factors that affect this unique context and its complexity. In the following part, we will discuss how these findings can be explained by relevant theories and describe how they interact with each other.

### 5.1 Leadership

#### 5.1.1 Leadership Styles

Leaders being inclusive, open to input, and aware of their constant learning is a trait of transformational leadership where leaders create an environment that facilitates free discussion (Jung et al., 2003). Because this trait was displayed by all leaders, it can be presumed to be universal across cultures. However, the findings revealed that the degree to which crew members opened up was contingent on the captain's ability to include them in the feedback process, a trait which appeared to be culture dependent.

The informants exhibit certain traits of transactional leadership through expressing awareness of how different situations and backgrounds affect their and followers' behavior. A transactional leader needs to be aware of expectations toward them in order to be able to respond to them (Thomas & Peterson, 2018). In a crisis followers' expectations were affected by stress and a lack of control, resulting in different requirements than in normal times. According to research on implicit leadership theories, these expectations vary due to people's diverse social-cultural backgrounds and can deviate in times of crises (Ling et al., 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Subramaniam et al., 2010; Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022). The leaders could manage to fulfill these expectations and be effective by

researching these factors and confirming with local offices what Latvians and Filipinos expect in an emergency (Carnes et al., 2015).

The team's cooperation was emphasized by leaders and proven to be influenced to a large extent by trust and the strength of the relationships on board. According to research, individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds are less inclined to trust one other in times of crises (Mileti, 1999). Since operating a ship requires good cooperation, it appears that removing any obstacle that may hinder the establishment of trust and good relations on board is even more critical.

In line with the study conducted by Thomas and Peterson (2018), cooperation was contingent on how inclusive a captain was, a trait not all leaders seemed to possess. On the other hand, several leaders were aware that the better they knew the crew the greater the cooperation was. The informants also pointed out the improvement of cooperation over time, demonstrating how the group members, as well as the captain, learn to benefit from the group's diversity and adjust to each other as time passes (Cox et al., 1991; Moreland et al., 2013; Berry, 2005). One of the attributes a cross-cultural leader should possess, according to research, is an openness to learn from other cultures (Muna, 2011). The findings imply varying degrees of inclusivity and, consequently, different levels of cooperation.

In the interviews, leaders displayed their desire for the team to be self-going, aware of their responsibilities, and stressed the importance of trusting the crew in the execution of their tasks. These characteristics are typical for transformational leaders who need to be confident in delegating autonomy (Kuhnert, 1994), but also for laissez-faire leaders who give followers more self-control (Yang, 2015). However, we observed a change in crisis situations where leaders tended to be more autocratic, assuming command, and demonstrating authority. In compliance with research, in stressful times employees sought autocratic leaders who could give them a sense of control and safety (Castelnovo et al., 2017). This relation appeared to be dependent on mutual trust as the seafarers need to trust the captain to maintain control, and the captain has to trust that the crew members understand and execute the tasks. These needs may be rooted in implicit leadership expectations since, in order to be effective, the leader must be perceived by the crew as trustworthy and competent (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Consequently, the

findings are both consistent with previous research and suggest that leaders are aware of their followers' universal desire for an autocratic leader in times of crisis.

In relation to leadership style preferences, Filipinos expressed a need for a strong leader, and hence, a cultural aspect among Filipinos emerged. Because Filipino seafarers are often the main providers to their families, it is plausible to assume that they come from lower socio-economic groups who tend to be more authoritarian (Adorno et al., 1950). Furthermore, Filipinos have a high score for collectivistic values (Hofstede, 1980), and a collectivistic culture generally expresses stronger needs for leaders who provide a sense of security and control (Kirscht & Dillehay, 1967). The leaders seemed to be aware of these expectations expressing that the Filipino seafarers "have to know that we have control". Considering previous research, the findings illustrate how cultural backgrounds affect how individuals score on authoritarianism and, as a result, what they are prone to expect from their leaders.

The study supports previous research stating that leadership is situational and context-specific (Webb et al., 2013; Antonakis & House, 2014). The findings imply that different leadership styles have traits that are applicable to varying degrees in different situations since the leaders display traits of several leadership styles, changing more toward autocratic in crises. Most of the informants preferred a transformational approach, but the situational context, unique environment, and structure appeared to cause the leaders to automatically adjust to a more laissez-faire and autocratic approach, especially in a crisis that requires a different set of responses (Dirani et al., 2020).

#### 5.1.2 New Culture

From the findings it emerged that the leaders did not give much thought when meeting new cultures and did not place a lot of emphasis on preparations. However, the informants explained how they simply learned about new cultures through interactions and experiences. This finding might be explained by the assumption that organizations and leaders can learn to profit from diversity as time passes (Moreland et al., 2013). Considering that the crews are mostly kept

stable, they have the opportunity to figure out how to cope with multicultural issues (Thomas & Peterson, 2018). Furthermore, a distinct crew composition and the interaction with people from certain cultures might be considered a specific situation. The leaders expressing how they have learned to know individuals and cultures over time indicates that they apply a situational leadership style as they adapt to the changing surroundings (Vera & Crossan, 2004; Northouse, 2019; Sims et al., 2009).

### 5.1.3 Attitude Toward Cultures

In line with studies on cross-cultural management (Frost and Walker, 2007; Muna, 2011), all leaders expressed the importance of respecting other cultures. This is a crucial characteristic of transformational leadership that distinguishes successful multicultural leaders (Northouse, 2019). However, only one informant emphasized the value of having people of many nationalities in a crew and utilizing the beneficial features of all cultures. According to research, heterogeneous groups can benefit an organization and lead to improved decision-making, but these benefits can only be achieved if a leader is successful in managing cultural diversity (Thomas & Peterson, 2018). This may indicate that leaders need to be more conscious of utilizing the positive aspects of each culture and especially in a crisis where taking decisions is crucial for the outcome.

The fact that it took some time for the informants to express their opinions on different cultures may be explained based on the assumption that they viewed the topic as sensitive and feared seeming judgmental. The leaders' use of stereotypes and rumors as justifications reveals a concern of being perceived as disrespectful and unprofessional in a cross-cultural environment (Frost and Walker, 2007; Muna, 2011). However, most of the informants reflected on typical behaviors of different nationalities with whom they had worked with. The informants expressed negative opinions on cultures they had encountered the least, which is consistent with the ideas of acculturation (Håvold, 2007) and learning to benefit from diversity over time (Moreland et al., 2013). On the other hand, when describing Filipinos or Eastern Europeans whom they had cooperated with the most, the informants conveyed their opinions but made sure to follow up with assurances of respect and warm feelings toward these cultures. These findings

reveal that informants had a desire to protect their opinion of cultures with whom they spent the most time with and that they had grown to recognize the positive aspects of these cultures over time (Moreland et al., 2013).

## 5.2 Crisis

Although the informants emphasized different aspects of a crisis, they had similar perceptions of its emotional associations. These findings are consistent with research showing that crisis is defined as something negative that brings out emotions and vulnerability (Seeger et. al., 2003). We did discover, however, that non-Norwegian informants had difficulty defining a crisis and perceived it as something happening on a daily basis. Scandinavian leaders, on the other hand, offered specific examples of crises, some of which appeared to be of a larger scale. These findings may indicate that leaders have different perceptions of crises and, as a result, varying approaches to dealing with them. This can be explained by their cultural frames, the Scandinavian type of management, and individual differences among informants (Frost & Walker, 2007; Lindkvist, 1991).

### 5.2.1 Pre-crisis

Aligned with informants' explanations, crises are prevalent in the shipping industry, and the fact that it has been reported by Roberts (2002) as one of the most dangerous occupations in United Kingdom, demonstrates the importance of training and preparation. It is crucial to be prepared and trained for the unknown in order to reduce the risks that may lead to a crisis and to handle a crisis as effectively as possible (Coombs, 2021). According to findings, training makes crew members aware of their tasks in the event of a crisis, therefore, the leaders have the impression that guiding the crew through a crisis is not particularly difficult. This suggests that by emphasizing independence and autonomy, managing a cross-cultural team might be perceived as less challenging in a crisis.

It is worth noting that previous studies and our findings do not expressly reference dissimilarities in training across countries, but instead state that training is universal and culturally independent. This indicates that cross-cultural training is not a priority in the pre-crisis stage. However, our findings imply that there may be cultural differences in crisis expectations and reactions indicating the need for

more research within this area. The findings demonstrate that being informed about potential cultural differences that may arise during a crisis may be advantageous in dealing with the situation.

### 5.2.2 Mid-crisis

Because crisis management involves the ability to operate effectively in situations characterized by little time, limited information, and substantial repercussions, research supports our findings that managing stress and keeping a cold head are antecedents for effective crisis management (Olsen & Espevik, 2009). The stress reaction of a crisis manager and his or her behavior affect the situation (Sjöberg et al., 2006), and there seemed to be a widespread consensus among the informants that Scandinavians are adept at handling stress and, as a result, were perceived as the best crisis managers. These findings are in accordance with the study carried out by CEMS (2020) which indicated that, in the aftermath of Covid-19, leaders need to balance traditional management qualities with “softer” characteristics, a style known as “Scandinavian” (Lindkvist, 1991).

The findings revealed that the leaders had different expectations toward crew members in terms of information seeking and guidance, which is consistent with research on Implicit Leadership Theories and cultural differences (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Epitropaki and Martin, 2004; Holmberg and Åkerblom, 2006; Ling et al., 2000). Filipinos were perceived as less self-going and sought more information, thus, leaders expected them to desire more supervision, especially in a crisis. This type of relationship between a leader and his subordinates is common in cultures with high power distance where employees have a more passive role and leaders tend to have all power and responsibility (Hofstede, 1980). Employees expect constant follow-up throughout the day in which they are being informed about what to do and how to perform a task, obviating the need for self-reflection. On the other hand, leaders in cultures where power distance is low, such as Norway and other Scandinavian countries, are more open and enable individuals to participate in decision-making (Hofstede, 1980). Our findings are in line with this research, showing that leaders perceive Scandinavians as independent and capable of taking decisions in a crisis. Because different cultures appeared to be unevenly reliant on the leader in a crisis, the findings suggest that a



leader may have a challenge in responding to different behaviors and requirements.

Informants also experienced variations in behavior of crew members within the same culture, emphasizing the importance of individual differences. According to Håvold (2007), a crew consisting of people from different cultures seems to adapt to each other's cultural values which can influence a person's behavior on an individual level. Hence, the concept of acculturation may be used to explain individual differences among crew members (Håvold, 2007). Given that human behavior reflects one's cultural values, the findings might imply a shift in the cultural values of crew members contrary to Hofstede's (2007) assumption of stability. His static conceptualization has been criticized for assigning individuals a passive role and for failing to account for changing cultures over time (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). This study points out the need for a more dynamic understanding of culture.

### 5.2.3 Post-crisis

Notwithstanding the different expectations across cultures, the need for support after a crisis did not appear to be more prevalent in one culture than another. According to research, there is a common need for support and follow-up after a crisis in order to mitigate the impact of stress reactions and prevent subsequent accidents (Doepel, 1991). In the aftermath of a crisis managers need explicit feedback and input from employees to evaluate the outcome and be better prepared for the next crisis (Sjöberg et al., 2006; Coombs, 2021). However, Filipinos seemed to be more hesitant to open up and give inputs than those from other cultures. This may be related to what was mentioned previously about Philippines being a high-power distance society, as well as in the context of the masculinity dimension. The fact that the Philippines score high on power distance might explain why Filipino crew members were afraid of contradicting Norwegian leaders. According to Hofstede (2007), when an employee behaves in a way that corresponds to a low-power distance in a high-power distance culture it might result in negative consequences. Additionally, Philippines has a tendency to be a Masculine society and, as a result, leaders are given sole responsibility and expected to be decisive and assertive (Hofstede, 1980; 2007). This attitude might

be perceived as a total submission from a Norwegian perspective, since Norwegians desired for employees to come with input and take initiative.

Another interesting finding that surfaced in the analysis was the difference in preferences between Filipinos and Eastern Europeans concerning their post-crisis needs. The fact that Filipinos preferred to discuss the matters with their leaders while Eastern Europeans rather wanted to move on, can be explained in terms of Hofstede's (1980) dimension long-term orientation. Since Filipinos are more short-term oriented, they prefer to look back on the past and draw on past experiences as a guide in different situations (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Eastern European countries, on the other hand, score high on the long-term orientation dimension (Hofstede, 1980), indicating that they are more forward-looking and possess tenacity and thrift, making them not dwell on circumstances such as a crisis.

### 5.3 Communication

Working in the shipping industry necessitates good language skills, particularly in English which is used as a common language. However, according to the informants' experiences, linguistic misunderstandings onboard a vessel are widespread. This may be explained by the fact that a crew is made up of people of many nationalities that may impact how individuals perceive the world and what meaning they attach to these perceptions (Quin, 2011; Lord et al., 1984). Consequently, communication in a cross-cultural context like shipping demands competent leaders, the ability to manage intercultural interactions with others, and the ability to display respect and empathy (Koester & Olebe, 1988). These were skills that some of the informants emphasized to varying degrees.

Our findings reveal that leaders alter their communication styles in order to be easily understood and prevent misunderstandings. Despite their good intentions, research suggests that such a manner of speaking can be perceived as patronizing by crew members (Gass & Varonis, 1985). Furthermore, the fact that those who already have poor English language skills tend to get significantly worse during a crisis can be explained based on the research on how people's capacity to communicate deteriorates dramatically when they are stressed (Stress

Management Society, 2017). In a normal situation, unless completely fluent, the use of a second language is less automatic, requires more thinking, and demands more effort (Smith & Bond, 1999). According to our findings, when a person must speak in a second language, communication is likely to worsen even more, indicating that there is no time to think or make an effort to be understandable for others. It is more natural to converse in one's mother tongue as it does not require "that much thinking". This emphasizes the need of having good English language skills, particularly within the shipping industry where there is a lot of stress and effective communication is required.

In order to diminish the possibilities of language misunderstandings some leaders used a third party who knew the foreign language and culture to facilitate communication with the crew, especially in a crisis abroad. As a result of this, leaders gained acceptance from crew members as well as additional opportunities with local authorities. This suggests that knowing what to expect from different cultures might be useful while working in unfamiliar territory.

Scholars suggest that a sufficient level of trust must be present within companies so that employees can talk frankly and honestly with their peers, subordinates, and superiors. According to Roberts and O'Reilly (1974), subordinates who lacked trust in their superiors are more inclined to withhold information from them and report greater levels of distorted upward communication. The informants talked about how difficult it could be to communicate with Filipinos and how crucial it was to build an environment of trust so that the leaders could be certain that Filipinos would not keep bad news from them. In a crisis, building trust between a leader and his subordinates is critical because cultural misunderstandings or withholding information can exacerbate the situation (Yeo et al., 2017).

Additionally, Filipinos tend to express understanding by saying "yes" even when they do not understand the message. According to research, if a leader is unable to notice signals that indicate a lack of comprehension among employees in a multicultural work environment, superiors may pretend to comprehend a message in order to avoid embarrassment or appear incompetent (Li, 1994). Since Filipinos tend to be submissive, and express that they understand even if they do not, it is critical to create an environment where checking for comprehension is accepted.

#### 5.4 Structure

According to the findings, the environment on board a ship is a fixed situation with its own culture, structure, and relations. Because of the high level of risk associated with the occupation, the shipping industry itself can be regarded as a society that involves high uncertainty avoidance and power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Its strong context and pre-determined positions seemed to surpass the cultural differences of crew members especially in times of crisis. The hazardous situation necessitates the use of regulations and safety systems. Our findings demonstrated that the leaders were prone to give specific instructions to their crew members and emphasized the need for trust in job performance, which is consistent with previous research on leadership and uncertainty avoidance (Browaeyns & Price, 2019). Because of the set positions and top-down hierarchy on board, the leaders mostly apply a laissez-faire approach that fits well in crisis situations when the responsibility areas have been trained for (Western Governors University, 2020).

The findings suggest that cultural background influences attitudes toward the structure on board with distinct preferences amongst nationalities. The fact that a crew made up entirely of Norwegians would have a flatter structure can be explained by the country's low score on power distance, which results in more horizontal relations (Bialas, 2009; Shane, 1994). When a new crew member with a different background entered, the structure automatically adjusted to a more top-down orientated, highlighting the dynamic shifts brought on by culture. The fact that Norwegians' structural biases were pointed out and portrayed as requiring adjustments shows that some of the informants were aware of these characteristics and had learned to account for them.

The Filipino captain's desire for a flatter structure and the importance he places on the family atmosphere on board can be understood in light of the country's collectivistic characteristics (Hofstede, 1980; 2001). Even though these traits can be explained by his personality, the captain's preferences can also be related to his inspiration from Scandinavian leadership models and organizational structures. Despite being predisposed to a Filipino hierarchical society with high power

distances (Hofstede, 1980; 2001), his praise for this management suggests that he has acquired some of the qualities typical of Norwegian leaders and cannot as such be considered a general representation of Filipino culture. Moreover, the culture's high-power distance can be detected in other informants' observations, indicating how the Filipino structure is closer to the vessels, and thus, does not require as much adjustment as for Norwegians.

The circumstances and implications of the commencement and development of Filipinos in Norwegian shipping are shown in the history of the Norwegian shipping industry, as well as in our findings. According to the findings, Filipinos usually hold the lower-ranking positions on ships. The fact that the informants mentioned that some cultures may respond differently to a Filipino serving as their commander aligned with the Filipino captain's experiences with disdain from Eastern Europeans indicates that attitudes from thirty years ago still exist. Other cultures' failure to regard Filipinos as competent may be based on implicit theories of leadership that contradicted their perceptions of a trustworthy and competent leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This perspective is strengthened by an informant being afraid that Eastern European leaders were not necessarily good at asking Filipino crew members for input. This is an important finding in interpreting significant differences in these cultures' scores on Power Distance and Masculinity/Femininity. While the Filipino culture scores high on Masculinity, Latvian and Norwegian societies score low in this dimension (Hofstede Insights, 2020). Similar ratio can also be found in the Power Distance dimension with Filipinos scoring high and the other two cultures scoring relatively low (Hofstede Insights, 2020). These differences relate to Filipinos' observed obedience to authority and an acceptance of a powerful leader, as well as Norwegians' flatter structure and relation-orientated mindset (Triandis, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; 2001). The findings may explain the psychological and cultural reasons behind Filipino's inclinations for lower rank positions, as well as their desire in crises for acceptance and advice from leaders, which is typical of a high-power distance culture.

Another interesting finding that emerged was that, in some cultures, an informal leader could receive more respect than the actual leader, which is aligned with

previous research on crew dynamics on board (Pozolotin et al., 2014). The informant acknowledged that this phenomenon could occur in other cultures but pointed out that one should be particularly aware of Filipino crews. This finding may be explained by the Filipinos' collectivistic nature, in which individuals expect to look after one another in exchange for loyalty, acceptance, and inclusion. In a crisis that necessitates unity and mutual trust such shifts in dynamics might be disastrous (Olsen & Espevik, 2009; Yeo et al., 2017). With an informal leader within the crew, being a leader can be challenging as it may disrupt decision-taking and the authority of the leader.

The findings revealed that when a crisis occurs hierarchy changes and immediate responses are necessary. There is no room for big discussions, the leaders are less receptive to input, and the crisis must be handled fast. This is different than normal times when leaders can facilitate input and allow for discussion not being under a time restraint and forced to make quick decisions (Olsen & Espevik, 2009). Even though seafarers from all over the world possess knowledge of the industry before entering a crew, an individual's cultural frame of reference may affect how crew members from different cultures react to this structural change in a crisis (Frost & Walker, 2007). The findings, which are supported by previous research, reveal that different cultures favor different structural forms (Hofstede, 1980; 2001). Regarding a crisis, different cultures have varying preferences for an autocratic leader (Adorno et al., 1950). These factors may have an impact on the preferred leadership style as people from various cultural backgrounds might respond differently to this type of management.

The findings also show that the crew composition had implications for harmony and management on board. In accordance with previous studies, the diversity of the group resulted in different expectations from different nationalities, posing a challenge for the leader (Frost & Walker, 2007; Cox, 1991). The leaders were aware of these discrepancies to varying degrees. The fact that Filipinos and Indians do not get along can be explained based on Hofstede's study (1980), which reveals that the two cultures can be incompatible in several dimensions. Indians elbowing their way forward, as described by one informant, conflict with Filipinos' collectivistic traits that may be even more enhanced in a crisis.

Furthermore, Indians appeared to have stronger attitudes toward leaders resulting in higher resistance to persuasion making them a challenge to manage (Lee et al., 2015). Another explanation may be that these two cultures do not seem to have cooperated a lot, which might contribute to increased antagonism and differences (Berry, 1997; Moreland et al., 2013). This indicates that the composition of a crew can have great implications for a crisis and is dependent on the degree of cultural differences.

## 6.0 Conclusion

With this study our aim was to give an indication of how central national culture is in leaders' experience of managing cross-cultural crews in a crisis. The results show that taking cultural differences into account is critical for effective crisis management.

Leadership style influences how leaders manage crises, how they include team members, invite for input, and facilitate cooperation. Cultural background and, most significantly, language competence have significant impact on communication before, during, and after a crisis. If a leader does not consider crew members' language skills, misunderstandings can easily emerge, leading to task failure, wrongdoing, and worsening of the crisis. Individuals with greater fluency in the working language perform better in tasks under pressure while those less fluent get more anxious and their language skills deteriorate. This highlights the importance of good communication skills in a crisis and how a leader should create an environment of trust and take into account potential communication barriers to avoid possible misunderstandings. Furthermore, different cultures have different preferences for structure on board that affects how they adhere to instructions, cooperate, and to what degree they accept the hierarchy. The need for an autocratic leader in a crisis seemed to be universal across cultures. However, this desire appeared to be influenced by individuals' cultural backgrounds. Knowing and satisfying the different expectations of crew members appears to build deeper, more trusting relations, which has been proven as critical to better crisis management.

The fact that different cultures have different needs and expectations when it comes to reactions, help, guidance, and decision-making in a crisis demonstrates that it is challenging to lead a multicultural team with different behaviors and habits. The significance of cultural approach is based on the cultural competency of the leaders involved, namely the ability to understand diverse cultures and adapt methods to emerging needs during crises. Cultural competency encourages constant learning, communication, and cooperation, and maximizes the benefits of



a culturally diverse team. Therefore, cultural approaches need to be incorporated in all phases of crisis management.

### 6.1 Practical Implications

The results obtained through this study can help to draw several implications that can be applied by leaders managing cross-cultural teams in crisis situations.

Although the study focuses on leadership in the shipping industry, we argue that managerial implications presented are also applicable for other multi-cultural industries, organizations, and firms of various sizes.

From a managerial perspective, this research illustrates how cultural differences can impact the crisis management process and highlights several challenges that call for various measures. Despite the vast amount of training, drills, and preparations for possible crises, seafarers do not seem to undergo any cross-cultural training. The findings reveal how a lack of knowledge about cultural characteristics, their needs, and distinct characteristics imposes challenges on leaders' ability to manage crises. Based on our findings and previous research, we believe that cross-cultural training should be incorporated as a part of regular classes at shipping academies and throughout seafarers' careers to avoid misunderstandings and cultural shock. Furthermore, the findings may serve as a basis to establish programs for maritime leadership development with a designated focus on cross-cultural management in crises. Such an educational program, based on both research and experience sharing, would lead to more effective crisis management.

### 6.2 Limitation and Further Research

Conducting research with a qualitative method implies some weaknesses with the study. Firstly, the results are limited to description rather than prediction because of the inability to draw causal conclusions. However, we found the exploratory, qualitative approach to be relevant due to the purpose of the study and the unexplored research area. This design turned out to be of immense value since it provided access to detailed descriptions of informants' experiences and perceptions.

The authors of this study had no prior experience with crisis situations of relevant nature, which might have impacted the research process positively and negatively (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Maxwell, 2013). Among other things, it may have influenced our ability to follow up on crucial subjects with pertinent questions during the interviews. It did, however, allow for a more open and explorative approach. The authors' impartial eyes may be reflected in the vast number of codes in the initial stage of the analysis. We were able to observe and interpret meaning as outsider researchers because we were not limited by an insider's inclination to overlook phenomena that were so familiar that they could have become invisible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Since we asked the informants to describe situations that took place in the past, they were predisposed to retrospective bias (Barnes, 1998). It is possible that if we had interviewed them while they were in the situation or shortly after they would have focused on other aspects. Most of the informants had accumulated years of experience in the aftermath of the events they discussed that might have influenced how they reflected on their experiences. Since conducting interviews during a crisis is not only difficult, but also unethical, future research may benefit from being conducted in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

It is important to note that the interviews were based on self-report and the informants' own stories and experiences. This can make the findings sensitive to social desirability bias as the interviewees may shape their stories based on how they want to be perceived rather than how the reality was. Additionally, the cultural backgrounds of the interviewees may have influenced their reactions and perceptions of their crew members. Furthermore, the shipping sector is male dominated, which is reflected in the all-male sample. The generalizability of such a homogenous sample is affected by this aspect. However, the sample is considered relevant for the purpose of this study because of its narrow-scoped focus on shipping.

In light of the study and its limitations, we recommend researchers to conduct further research on the impact of culture on crisis management with a different approach. Future research could involve interviewing employees from different

cultures and examining their preferences for an effective crisis manager. In relation to how different nationalities experience leadership it can be interesting to explore how different cultural values affect how one experiences the same leader and investigate if the perceptions and expectations of the employees match our findings.

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Appendix A

## Interview Guide

*Before we conduct the interviews, we will send out a declaration of consent to be signed by the interviewees.*

### 1. Introduction and small talk

- One will write and have the responsibility for voice recording and time (+ asking follow-up questions where it is natural)
- One will ask questions and act as an interviewer

### 2. Information and purpose of the interview

- no answers are right or wrong, we're looking for your opinions and perceptions

### 3. Background questions

*Demographics:*

- Age: How old are you?
- Nationality:
  - What is your nationality and where have you lived most of your life?
  - What languages do you speak?

*Work background:*

- How many years have you been a manager?
- How long have you worked for your current employer?

*Educational background:*

- Have you received any formal education in cross-cultural leadership and/or crisis management?

*About the organization:*

- What type of personnel responsibility do you have?
- How many nationalities does your team consist of? And from which countries?

### 4. Associations and clarifications of definitions

- How would you describe a typical leader, what kind of traits would this person have?
- What is a crisis to you?
- We want to clarify, that in this interview when we talk about a crisis, we mean...(definition) and examples

### 5. Main part

#### Crisis management

Can you describe an experience in which you had to manage a crisis?

How would you characterize your leadership style during the crisis, how do you act as a leader?
Did you adjust your leadership style to the crisis situation or perhaps during the crisis?
What were your biggest concerns/worries during the crisis?
In a situation of a crisis, do you feel that employees see some leadership traits as more important than others?
Have you experienced different expectations from employees from different cultures/countries when leading through the crisis?
How did the employees respond to your decisions/messages/requirements during the crisis? Was there someone who was dissatisfied with your leadership style?
What did you learn the most after leading through a crisis in terms of employees' expectations?
Do you ask for feedback after difficult situations, or crises?

<b>Culture (or cultural differences?)</b>
What kind of cultures have you encountered most in your life, both personal and work-related?
Have you noticed different expectations of yourself as a leader from employees with different cultural backgrounds?
If it is someone who has shown dissatisfaction with your leadership style, which cultures were the employees from?
Have you had any problems in communication, like cultural misunderstandings with an employee? If yes, from what cultures?
If someone contacts you in a personal way during a crisis, what kind of messages has it been, and from which cultural background?
Do you experience that the expectations from the different employees become more similar during a crisis? That the crew needs something universal?
Do you intentionally address your employees from different cultures in different ways?

How would you describe cultural management in your organization, is there a structure for it?

**ILT**

Have you received different reactions from different employees to how you acted during a crisis?

**Situational**

Do you have examples of situations where you had to interact differently with employees from different cultures?

Do you adjust your leadership style when talking to employees from different countries in your daily communication/work? In what ways and what cultures?

**Transformational**

In a situation of a crisis, did the employees prefer that you made all the decisions, or was there someone who wanted to have a say? How did they express it?

How do you get your employees along with your ideas and tasks during a crisis?

How is your organization structured, would you say it is more hierarchical or flat-structures?

**6. End**

- a. Something else or anything you would like to add?
- b. Did the interview give you some new reflections and thoughts on your leadership style and the topic as a whole?
- c. Any misunderstandings? Anything you did not understand or need further clarification of?
- d. Is it ok to contact you afterward if we need to clarify something?
- e. Thank you for your participation in this interview. Your insights are very valuable for our research.

Appendix B

**Information letter and consent form**

**Are you interested in taking part in the research project “Crisis Management in Cross-Cultural Teams”?**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to *examine how cultural differences affect crisis management*. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

**Purpose of the project**

The project is a master’s thesis conducted as a part of a Master’s Programme in Leadership and Change at BI Norwegian Business School in Bergen. The purpose of the project is to investigate and explore how cultural differences affect crisis management in the shipping industry. Research shows that employees from different cultures have different perceptions of an effective leader, but there is little research done on how these cultural differences influence the process of crisis management. Hence, this is something we are eager to explore.

**Who is responsible for the research project?**

BI Norwegian Business School Bergen is the institution responsible for the project.

**Why are you being asked to participate?**

Given that this research focuses on crisis management and culture, leaders who have led employees from different cultures through a crisis, have been selected since they were considered the most appropriate contributors in order to find possible answers to the research question. Since leaders in the shipping industry usually lead teams with different cultural backgrounds, we chose this sector as our population of interest.

The interview objects have been chosen in guidance with our supervisor, Olav Kjellevoid Olsen.

**What does participation involve for you?**

If you choose to take part in this project, this will involve that you participate in a digital interview, conducted over Zoom. It will take approx. 45 minutes. The interview will include questions about leadership, crisis management and cultural differences, as well as some background information. Your answers will be recorded electronically, both sound and video. If any misunderstandings were to occur, we will contact you for a clearance of the issue.



### **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose to not participate or later decide to withdraw.

### **Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data**

We will only use your personal data for the purposes specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Those with access to the personal data are: Maria Krakus, Cecilie Spidsberg (students), and Olav Kjellevold Olsen (supervisor)
- We will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data, unavailable for others than specified above.

The data processors used for transcription and analysis will be Zoom and Microsoft Word.

You, as a participant, will not be recognizable in the publication.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end 01.07.2022. All personal data, including any digital recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.

### **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with BI Norwegian Business School, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- BI Norwegian Business School via Olav Kjellevold Olsen:  
olav.olsen@uib.no

- Students: Maria Krakus maria.krakus@outlook.com, Cecilie Spidsberg cecilie.spidsberg@gmail.com
- Our Data Protection Officer: Vibeke Nesbakken personvernombud@bi.no
- Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 53 21 15 00.

Yours sincerely,

Olav Kjellevoid Olsen  
*Supervisor*

Maria Krakus, Cecilie Spidsberg  
*Students*

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## Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Crisis Management in Cross-Cultural Teams* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 01.07.2022

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(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix C

**Code list**

- Crisis
  - Definition of crisis
  - Examples of crisis
  - Pre-crisis
  - Mid-crisis
  - Post-crisis
  - Decision taking
  - Stress
- Leadership
  - Leadership ideals
  - Leadership style
  - Cooperation
  - Priorities
  - Well-being
- Structure
  - Structure on the vessel
  - Hierarchy
  - Mix of nationalities
- Communication
  - Language misunderstanding
  - Adjusting communication
  - Challenges with Filipino
  - Trust
- Culture
  - Respect
  - New culture
  - Attitude toward multiculturalism
  - Individual differences
  - Cultural differences
  - Culture comparison
  - Nationalities