

Business crisis management in wartime: Insights from Ukraine

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Abstract

Our research documents the experiences of business crisis management in wartime Ukraine. The goal of the paper is to contribute to our understanding of business crisis management in a conflict zone in wartime conditions, a significantly under-researched area. Based on interviews with the owners and managers of 20 Ukrainian companies spanning sectors and geography of the country, the paper provides insights into the various elements that characterize and distinguish war as a crisis type, including having an unknown end point, and, furthermore, what we can learn from how Ukrainian managers have approached this crisis. Among the key findings are how war situations appear to be “cosmology episodes” for which it is not possible to adequately prepare and for which the end point is unknown, both of which call for emergent, adaptive crisis management capabilities and leadership skills characterized by improvisation and other forms of resilience. Notwithstanding this, company wartime crisis management experiences have stimulated intention to more structured anticipatory and preparedness practices, as well as narratives of future renewal in communications with staff and stakeholders, which serve both as a guidepost and coping mechanism during the current crisis.

KEYWORDS

anticipation, crisis leadership, crisis preparedness, internal crisis communication, learning, resilience, strategic foresight, war

1 | INTRODUCTION

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the war that broke out had a well-documented devastating impact on society and the people of Ukraine. This includes a huge impact on businesses. Companies in Ukraine have been forced to relocate and/or shut down all or some of their activities. Factories, stores, and buildings have been ruined. Hundreds of thousands of the workforce are serving in the army, and millions have fled the country (Ratten, 2023). Regardless of where in Ukraine a company is located, business leaders have had to find ways to cope with the instability and impact of the war. However, in the crisis management field, we know almost

nothing about the crisis management of companies situated in an active warzone (Lim et al., 2022). What goes on inside companies when their country is invaded and an armed conflict takes place, destroying lives, buildings, economy, and businesses? How do business leaders respond to and manage such devastating and uncertain circumstances?

To answer these questions, we interviewed 20 senior managers of Ukrainian companies in the period between July and September 2022 to elicit their views on crisis preparedness, actions and responses to the war, learnings and strategic thinking for the future. The goal of this paper is to contribute to the under-researched area of war as a crisis type. We discuss characteristics of war as a crisis

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type by investigating businesses and business leaders during the early months of the war in Ukraine to bring some first insights and answers to the following research questions: How prepared were these Ukrainian companies for the war, and what have they learned from previous crises? How resilient have the business leaders been in their handling of the wartime? What is the role of leadership and internal communications in wartime operations? How is war different from other crisis types that organizations may have to embrace?

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW ON BUSINESS AND WAR IN UKRAINE

War and crisis management have been studied within fields such as global politics (see e.g., Freedman, 2014a, 2014b), however, research on the impact of war on business and business crisis management during wartime remains scarce (Lim et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on business crisis management during wartime has largely focused on how business and continuity *outside* the conflict area are affected. This holds true for current studies of the war in Ukraine, which examine how the war impacts businesses and societies outside Ukraine, such as the shocks and consequences in European countries (Prohorovs, 2022), the expected consequences for firms on the G7 stock market (Abbassi et al., 2023), the economic impact on United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Europe (Mbah & Wasum, 2022), geopolitics and international business strategies (Ratten, 2023), and topics such as the role of stakeholders and stakeholderism in international companies withdrawing from Russia due to the war (Marcinkowska, 2022; Mol et al., 2023; Pajuste & Toniolo, 2022).

Lim et al. (2022) distinguish between studies on business and society *outside the opposing forces* and studies *inside the opposing forces* in their review of research on the impact of war in the Russia and Ukraine conflict. Their research finds some studies conducted on businesses and society inside the conflict area, such as studies on the threats to digital and sustainable growth, and the threat of cyberattacks, especially from the invading country (Davies, 2022; Kolbe et al., 2022) as well as studies on the sanctions and boycotts of Russia and Russian products (e.g., Cassidy, 2022). However, studies on the impact of war on business *inside* Ukraine are almost nonexistent (Korneyev et al., 2022). Notwithstanding this, there is a study (Korneyev et al., 2022) on challenges to the crisis management of business marketing activities in wartime in Ukraine (including challenges such as low purchasing power of the population, sales affected by the unstable situation, departure of customers) with suggestions for how to adapt marketing to the immediate situation where long-term planning is not an option. Tomej et al. (2023) have studied tourism business resilience in times of war during the first 3 months following the invasion of Ukraine, and they found that the organizational resilience of small and medium-sized tourism companies was a matter of the manager's personal resilience (p. 3).

When it comes to leadership, internal crisis management, and leadership communications with staff inside a warzone, we have been unable to identify any academic research conducted, both in general

and pertaining to Ukraine specifically. In this, our study is unique in addressing the business and leadership aspects of a particular type of distress event (war) which is societally widespread and continuous and where uncertainty is ongoing (at the time of study) rather than a finite and localized disruption.

3 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our theoretical framework is based on a conceptualization of war as a crisis type, and two sets of theories that proved beneficial for the structure of the interviews and the discussion of findings. The theories are presented in two parts: (1) approach to crisis management including strategic foresight, anticipation and resilience, and (2) crisis leadership and internal crisis communication.

4 | WAR AS CRISIS TYPE

The nature of crises differs significantly, and crisis management scholars have attempted to establish various crisis typologies (e.g., Coombs, 2019; Drennan & McConnell, 2007; Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1987) that reflect specific aspects of a crisis, such as content, causes, consequences, speed, degree of intentionality or responsibility, normal versus abnormal crises, and so on (for an overview, see Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). War, however, is not directly mentioned in these typologies. According to Lim et al. (2022), war is a complex concept that refers to "a situation where a devastating fight (e.g., an armed conflict, economic embargo) occurs between opposing forces of great influence (e.g., countries, groups of people) thereby impacting the entities under siege (e.g., business and society within opposing forces) and their equivalent stakeholders (business and society outside opposing forces)" (p. 23). This definition serves appropriately for our study, as it applies an overall macro-perspective with a focus on a fight or armed conflict and its consequences for the involved societies and businesses. Furthermore, if we apply a psychological people's perspective, Karl Weick's definition (1993) of crisis as a "cosmology episode" may correspond to the way a war is perceived by people living and working in a warzone: "A cosmology episode occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. What makes such an episode so shattering, is that both the sense of what is occurring and the means to rebuild that sense collapse together" (p. 633).

5 | APPROACH TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT

In our study, we apply a strategic, proactive, and process or life-cycle-oriented approach to the field of crisis management (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). Hence, we distinguish between the precrisis stage, the crisis stage, and the postcrisis stage (Coombs, 2019). The precrisis stage includes prevention (e.g., signal detection, risk, issues, and

stakeholder management) and preparation (e.g., scenario planning, contingency plans, simulations); the crisis stage includes crisis recognition, crisis containment, business continuity, and recovery; the postcrisis stage includes learning, renewal, and postcrisis actions. However, we do not consider a crisis as a linear and sequential life cycle, as crisis stages and the tools to manage them overlap. For instance, risk management, stakeholder relations management, and learning typically occur during all three stages (Gilpin & Murphy, 2008; Jaques, 2007).

5.1 | Anticipation and future-preparedness

Our study further rests on the theoretical framework of strategic foresight, the field of research that seeks to understand and improve anticipatory judgments about future events in the external environment (external to the decision-makers locus of control) and their systemic effects (Bell, 1997; Gordon et al., 2020; Slaughter, 1996). The foresight field spans various domains, encompassing business, governance, and societal contexts, and particularly addresses the leadership capability in which a higher-quality point of view of future contextual environments is formed, beyond what may be validly expected from past-path extrapolation (Van Der Heijden et al., 2002). It does this by way of addressing external signals and applying a suite of sensemaking and probing tools to evaluate possible, plausible and likely consequences. Strategic foresight is often twinned with risk management but differs from it in orienting decision-makers as much to the opportunities as the threats that external change presents. In the context of this paper, we focus on the principles of a company and industry future-preparedness (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018; Rohrbeck et al., 2018) and on how the war has altered perceptions of the need for anticipation as a crisis management practice.

5.2 | Anticipation versus resilience

The two concepts of anticipation and resilience are equally important to crisis management. Hence, we combine a planning approach, that is, establishing contingency plans and crisis management teams, with an emergent approach, including improvisation, contingency, and resilience. Prevention and preparation are important dimensions in crisis management, but a contingency plan does not anticipate everything that will happen. According to Weick & Sutcliffe (2001, p. 79) plans create expectations, and they can be so strong that they influence what we see. Furthermore, plans may preclude improvisation. An emergent approach is needed to cope with and adapt to unanticipated dimensions of a crisis during the course of events. This combination underlines and responds to the complexity of crisis management (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017).

The concept of resilience is at the core of the emergent approach. One of the dominant perceptions of resilience within the crisis management literature is based on its distinction from anticipation. According to Wildavsky (1988), "Anticipation is the

prediction and prevention of potential dangers before damage is done. Resilience is the capacity to cope with unanticipated dangers after they have become manifest, learning to bounce back" (p. 77). Recently, however, Duchek (2020), applying a process perspective, has identified three successive resilience stages: an organization's ability to anticipate potential threats, to cope effectively with adverse events, and to adapt to changing conditions. Furthermore, according to Buzzanell (2010), "rather than an individual phenomenon that someone either possesses or does not, resilience is developed, sustained, and grown through discourse, interaction and material consideration" (p. 1), which points to the importance of ongoing internal communication for establishing and enacting resilience.

6 | CRISIS LEADERSHIP AND INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Crisis leadership includes specific tasks such as making sense of the crisis, making the right decisions for dealing with it, framing the crisis for stakeholders, resolving and restoring normalcy to the organization, and learning from the crisis (Boin et al., 2005). However, fulfilling such tasks is also a matter of leadership attributes and emotional intelligence (Mitroff, 2004).

According to the handbook of research on crisis leadership (Dubrin, 2013), important personal attributes of crisis leaders include strategic thinking, the ability to inspire and to show sadness and compassion for the anxieties and concerns of their teams and employees, to assure directive leadership (taking decisive action to remedy the situation), and extensive communication (pp. 5–10).

Furthermore, James and Wooten (2010) emphasize the importance of positive leadership in times of crisis and argue, "Leaders who have a mindset for learning and adapting to rapidly changing circumstances; seeing possibilities amidst the tragic circumstances of a crisis; and expecting trust and trustworthiness, will be more inclined to identify positive outcomes in crisis situations" (p. 2). The ability to develop trust among stakeholders and to communicate concern and act reliably are central to leadership, according to these scholars.

A theory that fits well with positive leadership is the crisis communication theory of renewal discourse (Ulmer et al., 2019), by which a forward-looking prospective approach to crisis communication may facilitate learning and renewal. To do this, organizations must focus on "learning, optimism, core values and rebuilding rather than on issues of blame, responsibility or fault" (Ulmer et al., 2019, p. 189) and apply a discourse of renewal, that is, "an optimistic form of communication on the future that focus on capitalizing on the opportunities embedded in a crisis" (p. 191).

6.1 | Crisis communication

Our study is based on the staged and integrative approach to internal crisis communication before, during, and after a crisis developed by

Frandsen and Johansen (2011) and Heide and Simonsson (2019) that see both leaders and employees as coworkers and active crisis communicators. Leaders are expected to communicate to staff, to inform and make sense of a crisis, as well as to protect and restore trust and confidence among employees. Employees are expected to communicate concerns and reactions but are also often the experts in specific areas, contributing with suggestions for solutions and acting as crisis communicators on behalf of the organization.

Thus, both crisis leadership communication and coworker communication are important for an organization's resilience and trust in an organization's ability to cope with a crisis. However, we need to know more about how this plays out in businesses during wartime.

7 | METHODS

7.1 | A qualitative study

This qualitative multiple case study on the crisis management of Ukrainian companies during wartime is based on 20 semistructured interviews with Ukrainian company executives conducted during July–September 2022. The interviewees were selected through purposeful sampling, where the salient criteria were executive managers or owners with seven or more years of experience in their sector at established Ukrainian private and public companies, each with no less than 30 employees. The 20 companies represent various sectors of the economy (IT, production, investments, HORECA, agriculture, logistics), as well as various regions of Ukraine, with some located in the relatively safer Western part of Ukraine or de-occupied North, some having relocated to Western regions or partially abroad, and some having lost parts of businesses in the East and South under occupation (for a geographical and sectoral overview, see Appendix A). What unites all interviewees is that all were operating in high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty under wartime conditions.

The interviews were conducted online in Ukrainian or English, depending on the language facility of the interviewee. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 min and were transcribed and coded in NVivo. The interview template included five sections and 13 open, explorative questions aiming to understand (1) the managers' role and perceptions of their crisis management actions and responses to the war, (2) their anticipatory orientation and preparedness before the war, (3) changes due to the war, (4) future thinking in relation to what happens now, and (5) capabilities for future crises and disruptions (see Appendix B). Various interviewees indicated that this interview was the first time they had been able to stop and reflect on the war and its impact on their business, their staff, and themselves, since the war started. Thus, the interviews present their very first deeper reflections on the situation.

In the analysis of the interviews, we identified 12 main codes which mapped closely to the guiding topics of the interviews. Thematical analysis of the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) led us to generate a further 41 subcodes (first-level and second-level

subcodes) providing more detailed information within each main code. To illustrate: the main code "Role of top management team as a response to war" had eight first-level subcodes, and one of them "Find new mode of business" had a further six subcodes. See Appendix C for an overview of the coding process, for examples of subcodes, as well as an example of how a statement could become cross-coded.

8 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the following section, we report and discuss selected findings of our interviews, with focus on our primary question: *What are the elements that characterize war as a crisis type, and how is this similar to and different from other crises?* In doing this, we follow the stages of crisis life-cycle model (Coombs, 2019; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011), albeit one of the distinguishing features of in-war crisis management is its lack of temporal end point. Despite this, there is a view beyond the crisis as part of its management, as reported below.

8.1 | Anticipation, learning and crisis preparedness for the war

With regard to crisis anticipation, interviews reveal that processes for future preparedness before the war were at a very basic level or altogether nonexistent. Business continuity or risk management plans were evident in only half of the interviewed companies, these being mostly IT companies following international certification standards and compliance protocols. The extent of the current societal shock and its business implications, both bad and good, had not been anticipated or prepared for.

Specific to the war situation, almost every one of the interviewees said that it was not possible to mentally prepare for something like a war, as illustrated by one manager saying, "Some companies made all the possible preparations, but of course it was still a bit of a shock. To everyone! No matter how sure you are that this can happen, it's hard to believe when it really happens" (I-5). In their descriptions of war as a crisis, they came quite close to Weick's definition of a cosmology episode, talking about a no-longer-rational and orderly system, and a collapse of sense and sensemaking. As one interviewee put it, "There is nothing, nothing is certain, completely nothing" (I-12).

On the question of what they had learned from previous recent crises (2014 Crimea-Donbass invasion and the Covid pandemic), many managers reported that they had expected a new aggression to be similar to the Crimea-Donbass crisis in 2014 but found that it was not. In fact, previous experience had left them relatively unprepared. This aligns with the role of expectations in relation to plans. They influence what we see (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Even where in place, existing contingency plans did not work out well, according to the managers, because they were not based on a full invasion scenario. However, after 2014, some companies had pulled out of Russia, and/

or diversified into more export-oriented markets and sourced alternative suppliers and were therein partially crisis-prepared.

Interestingly, alongside this, various interviewees perceived Covid-19 as excellent preparation, a kind of “rehearsal” for the war, expressing, for example, “Covid did make us more resilient in a way that you stress out less when new totally uncontrollable things happen” (I-4), and “Because of Covid many processes in the company already worked remotely. It was easy to resume work and there is no difference where you work from geographically. If it had not been for this experience, it would be much harder to keep the company running without stop” (I-7). Processes implemented to cope with the difficulties brought about by COVID-19 proved useful, and in this sense, the pandemic itself functioned as a form of wartime crisis management rehearsal.

8.2 | Crisis handling, leadership, communications and resilience

The study found that, at the time (summer 2022), many Ukrainian businesses were at the “during crisis” stage (Coombs, 2019; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011), with their focus on employee welfare and company financial survival. Most managers mentioned the importance of safety and caring not only about staff but also about their families, emphasizing, “People first, and then business,” and describing a need to “put more trust in people” (I-5). “It was clear that it was no longer about business. It was about how to help our employees and their families” (I-13). “The first main task was to ensure the evacuation of our employees and their families to safety” (I-16).

Some of the managers also mentioned the importance of quick decision-making to keep businesses running, saying, for example, “It is speed that decides in crisis situations. It is better to be wrong quickly than to think long. The situation changes every day, every minute. And the attitude to the situation changes every day. It shakes us psychologically. If we get stuck in the discussion, in the deep understanding, we will not come to an agreement, because everything changes quickly. But speed in making decisions will help only if there is a good strategy” (I-15).

Most of the senior managers also reported needing to communicate more frequently and in greater volume. They had daily meetings in their crisis or management teams, and they informed employees daily on the physical situation of the company. Some also kept clients informed regularly on the situation and their ongoing plans. These managers reported that it was important for them to get employees back to work following the first days of complete disruption to create some degree of normalcy, all while recognizing that employees may have lost relatives in the war or have family members fighting as soldiers. As one manager stated, “Every manager in the team also started to communicate much more, also HR worked a lot. So, they were calling for the people who are in more or less safe zones every day and some of the people even get frustrated. But, you know, it is important to understand that everybody is safe, what their situation is, if they can work today or not” (I-1).

Communication that steered towards optimism, hope, and renewal for the future (cf. Ulmer et al., 2019) was clearly identified as a key leadership skill during war time, for example, “In this period, as a leader you need to give people more optimistic messages and instill hope in the future so they can go through these economically and emotionally exhausting times” (I-4), and “We must believe that it will be better after our victory, and you have to transmit this sense of hope first of all to your employees, partners, investors, and suppliers” (I-5). Some of the interviewees reported that they had also become more tolerant and that “organizations have become friendlier” (I-16) being now more attentive to the context, and to the reactions and vulnerabilities of people in their trust.

Beyond these features, many of which are well-recognized in the crisis management literature, three distinguishing elements of wartime company crisis management stood out, namely, a significant loss of personnel (refugees and emigration), a close connection between company purpose and the war effort of the country, and the particularity of managing a crisis situation-without-end, which demands “marathon-style” resilience in addition to emergency action.

One of the unique war-oriented challenges that Ukrainian business leaders reported was loss of staff. Many employees had left for the warzone to defend the country, and millions had left Ukraine altogether. Among these, some were able to continue working for the company from abroad. One manager reported, “When the war started almost all our employees were evacuated. I was the only one left...In a company with 450 people, there were days when only 4 people were at work. In March [2022], no more than 8-9 people were in contact with the company” (I-15). Another stated, “There’s another risk—that our team members may be drafted into the Armed Forces” (I-4). On this plus side, there were advantages in an upswing in remote working: “I like the way we work now. We went online, something we wanted for a long time. We recruit employees from the whole country, which was not the case before” (I-16).

Second, various interviewees reported that they or their companies had participated in volunteering, donating, and programs aligned with the war effort and the national interest, for example, “Our business vision is largely related to the country’s vision. That is, there should be no psychological gap or value gap, so what’s good for the country is also good for me” (I-17), and “All of a sudden, you as a company are more than a company, as a business entity. You start developing some traits of social unit” (I-2).

Lastly, managers also reported their war-type crisis experience as characterized by a lack of event finitude, as described by one interviewee, “Neither a tsunami nor a natural phenomenon that kills hundreds of thousands of people can compare with war, because they just happened and that’s all, and you’ve accepted the fact. Well, it happened: too bad. Many people weren’t as lucky as you, and you start to move on. But with the war, there’s no end in sight!” (I-11).

In light of this, most of the senior managers saw their crisis leadership in large part as enacting resilience and communicating it to staff, securing safety and evacuation of people, and finding ways to carry on their business despite the enduringly unstable situation.

Where a factory or store was destroyed, they sought to rebuild or relocate immediately, creating resilience via an emergent, adaptive strategy. In their words, "Today our only task is to survive, to survive until recovery begins" (I-17); "The show must go on whatever happens" (I-2).

Many interviewees also reported their own growing capabilities in learning to constantly adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances (cf. James & Wooten, 2010), saying, for example: "You're trying to become more flexible and consider opportunities you would ignore in the past. You just really have to expand your mind" (I-4).

Finally, findings showed that long-term strategic planning had been replaced by short-term operational decisions, and a new *we'll have to see*-mantra.

8.3 | Visions and renewal for the postcrisis stage

Despite operating with no known endpoint to the crisis (at the time of writing), the senior managers reported a conceptual postcrisis stage as part of wartime crisis management. Elements of this include anticipation of renewed business horizons both internally in Ukraine and in external markets. It also includes some indication of a more structured approach to future-preparedness.

As a direct result of the war crisis, which has raised the global profile of Ukraine and associated goodwill, and has also caused a newly grown Ukrainian diaspora, the current and future strategic horizon of Ukrainian business has greatly increased. International markets and partnerships are now a direct element of strategic forward-thinking and are anticipated by many Ukrainian company managers. Many interviewees are looking to access export markets, relocate production, open offices abroad, and pursue international mergers and acquisitions, communicating this in, for example: "The war will change the perception of Ukraine: Ukraine has become popular, Ukrainian things have become popular" (I-19), and "We have a plan to be a more global company. It's just pushed us to start to be more global faster...now it works better for our outside opportunities...Our focus is to have outside of Ukraine the same amount of people like we have in Ukraine" (I-1).

A national business vision is also emerging, with much of the economy and infrastructure to be rebuilt or upgraded, including a sense that business will be modernized, particularly in rebuilding for sustainable production and pursuing higher-value products. In describing this, managers shared the impression that this narrative of the future and its possibilities were part of a coping mechanism for the present. National future rebuilding may also further company alliance to the national purpose, as noted above, and lead to the perpetuation of cooperative arrangements.

There are also small but significant indications that investments in structured future-preparedness activities will grow. The need for a full-fledged risk management function was ubiquitously seen among interviewees. About half of the managers interviewed also perceived the need for a more comprehensive view of potential shocks and changes, a "360 degree-awareness," or "view from above," saying, for

example, "Last year when we were going into the five-year usual planning, we did not have the mindset that what was, can break, and we need to assess such risk" (I-12), or "We see that we were not seriously considering some risks or not looking from the right angle, in terms of geographic diversification, investment planning, and financial security of the business. For this we need an outside look (e.g., independent board member) and definitely need to work more on this in strategic planning" (I-14).

9 | CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides researchers with some of the first insights into the crisis management, leadership, and internal crisis communication in Ukrainian companies during the ongoing war and contributes new perspectives on company crisis management in wartime. The study examines the ways in which war as a crisis type, and wartime crisis management is similar to and differs from other crisis types on various points. It is evident from the findings that many of the aspects of wartime crisis management, as experienced by Ukrainian business managers, echo those of other types of crises, but others are different and allow us to build further understanding. In analyzing the Ukrainian war situation, we compare and contrast it to other forms of crisis management using the process or crisis lifecycle framework.

In the situation under study here, it is apparent that the precrisis stage showed evidence of lack of adequate anticipation of future threats (Duchek, 2020) and therefore of future-preparedness. A considerable reason for this in this case, and we propose in war situations generally, is that war situations appear to function as "cosmology episodes" (Weick, 1993) which it is difficult to immediately recognize and for which it is therefore difficult to adequately prepare. It is apparent that some experiences, particularly the Crimea-Donbass invasion may serve to maintain inadequate precrisis readiness (in providing a too-limited view and expectations of the future), while others, particularly for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, may serve as excellent readiness exercises. Distinguishing between these underscores the need for mindsets and capabilities educated in crisis anticipation and adaptive future thinking. It is apparent that the war experience in Ukraine has created a small but clearly detectable increase in business future orientation practices.

With regard to the in-crisis stage, many features that are familiar from crisis management theory, for example, elements of crisis recognition, crisis containment, communication, business continuity, resilience, relocation and recovery, were manifest in the Ukrainian war situation and resemble other types of crises in their manifestation. Business managers here saw the need for and were variously practicing behaviours consonant with known personal attributes of crisis leaders, including framing the crisis for stakeholders, communicative sensemaking, taking decisive action, addressing employee emotional distress, as part of crisis leadership (Boin et al., 2005; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; James & Wooten, 2010). Thus, they were acting in a resilient way and recognizing the role of internal

communication. Yet, the study also shows that during wartime, leadership and communication more directly concern issues such as supporting employees living in constant fear for their families, safety and evacuation, and the need for immediate relocation or rebuilding of companies being or in risk of being destroyed due to the war to survive and keep businesses running.

However, we are also able to add that during wartime, in-crisis management also directly concerns a loss of manpower (people defending their country at the frontline, or who have left the country). Another additional feature of wartime crisis management is creating a visible alliance between the company and the national war effort, that is managing an expansion of purpose, from company focus to a broader societal purpose and navigating an intertwining of interests of firm and country.

With regard to the postcrisis stage, one considerable feature of wartime crisis management is the absence of a known endpoint. This creates the need for long-term “endurance” crisis management strategies characterized by various forms of resilience, including many forms of strategic adaptation and improvisation, as practiced by managers in the cases studied here. Managers in Ukraine also have maintained an ongoing future-renewal narrative in communication with staff and stakeholders. While much of what this future holds in terms of geographical relocation or industry renewal or international business opportunities may be specific to Ukraine, the broader principle is that war may provide the basis for fundamental conversation about future learning and renewal (Ulmer et al., 2019) and the opening of new business opportunity windows. This process of future-thinking and incipient future building has in itself crisis management benefit in providing purpose, direction, and optimism—a narrative of future opportunities and renewal is one coping mechanism for navigating the present, as evidenced in the Ukrainian situation.

In these ways, this study documents the salient characteristics of the crisis management lifecycle under wartime conditions, as perceived and experienced by managers in the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war, revealing its similarities and differences to other crisis management situations, and adding to the crisis management scholarship and practice fields.

One limitation of this study is its empirically small scale and explorative nature. In addition to further research on business crisis leadership during wartime from a management perspective, a fully rounded view would also encompass employee perspectives. Furthermore, while the war remains ongoing, it would be beneficial to conduct longitudinal studies to learn how wartime crisis management and the future-anticipatory resilience of business leaders in Ukrainian companies develop over time or change in the postwar period, thereby contributing to our growing understanding of wartime crisis management.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study and the interview guides used in this study are available from the corresponding author,

[Winni Johansen], upon request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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APPENDIX A

See Table A1.

TABLE A1 Overview of participants and organization characteristics.

No ^a	Nature of company	Number of employees	Central office	Comments to location	Seniority of manager/owner
1	Strategic communications	>50	Kyiv		Owner
2	IT	2000	Lviv	Offices around Ukraine	Co-owner and top manager
3	E-commerce and engineering	>270	Lviv	Offices around Ukraine	Co-owner
4	Horeca	>2000	Lvivi	Operating all over Ukraine, had to close number of restaurants at East	Co-owner
5	IT service company	30	Lviv		Top manager
6	Investments	4000	Kyiv	1 factory bombed but restored, 1 factory under occupation	Co-owner
7	Logistics	32 (40 before war)	Lviv		Co-owner
8	IT product company	440	Kyiv		Top manager
9	Trade	110	Odessa		Owner
10	Automotive	320 (410 before war)	Kyiv	3 factories were partially ruined but are operating	Owner

TABLE A1 (Continued)

No ^a	Nature of company	Number of employees	Central office	Comments to location	Seniority of manager/owner
11	Agriculture and quarry	1200	Rivne	Business partially under occupation	Co-owner
12	Trade	30	Kyiv	Relocated to Rivne (parts of business were near Kyiv under occupation)	Owner
13	Production	375	Lviv		Co-owner
14	Strategic communications, consulting	65	Kyiv		Owner
15	Production	35	Kharkiv	Relocated to Lviv region	Owner
16	Logistics for auto-motive industry	450+	Kyiv	Business partially under occupation	Owner
17	Production	250	Ternopil		Top manager
18	Impact investment	30	Ivano-Frankivsk		Co-owner and top manager
19	IT service company	70 (50 in Ukraine)	Lviv		Co-owner and top manager
20	Exhibition	>300	Kyiv		Owner

^aTo make it not connectable to any individual or organization, the list is random and does not correspond to interviewee numbers in the article.

APPENDIX B

See Table B1.

TABLE B1 Template for interviews with senior managers in Ukraine, Summer 2022.

<p><i>Part I: War experience:</i></p> <p>A. Top management's role and perceptions of crisis actions and responses to the war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been the top management/board role and actions specifically, as part of the company/organization's overall response to the war? • In managing the crises—so far—has the management team/board operated differently to prior? <p>B. Top management's anticipatory orientation and preparedness, before the war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before full invasion (February 24, 2022), did your top management/board have any role in assessing or maintaining co/org future-preparedness? If so, how did it do this (e.g., risk management, contingency planning, strategic planning, etc.?) • How did the 2014 annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbass region influence your subsequent future preparedness activities? • Did your management experience of the Covid 19 pandemic change your attitude and activities towards “future preparedness for a major disruptive event”? Did this help you or your co/org with regard to the current invasion? If so, how so? <p>C. Changes of top management's perceptions towards future preparedness, due to the war</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the war since February 24th changed your perception of the need to have a role in assessing or maintaining co/org future-preparedness? • Will the war lead to any permanent changes in the roles and responsibilities of your top management in terms of long-term planning future preparedness? If so, in what way? <p><i>Part II: A look to the future</i></p> <p>D. Long-term perspective—Future thinking in relation to what happens now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are perceptions that—beyond reconstruction—the war will provide the opportunity to renew Ukraine economically and facilitate its postindustrial transition. In view of this: • What specific opportunities do you see for transition to future business opportunities after the war? • How might you go about bringing this longer-term vision into everyday actions? <p>E. Capabilities for future crisis and disruptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your co/org you formulate and maintain a long-term business view in short-term chaotic environment? • Which future preparedness capabilities has your co/org developed in last months since February 24? • Which future-preparedness capabilities do you feel your co/org still lacks and need to develop to be future-prepared for the next major disruptive event (opportunity) after the war? • Main learnings?
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APPENDIX C

See Figure C1.

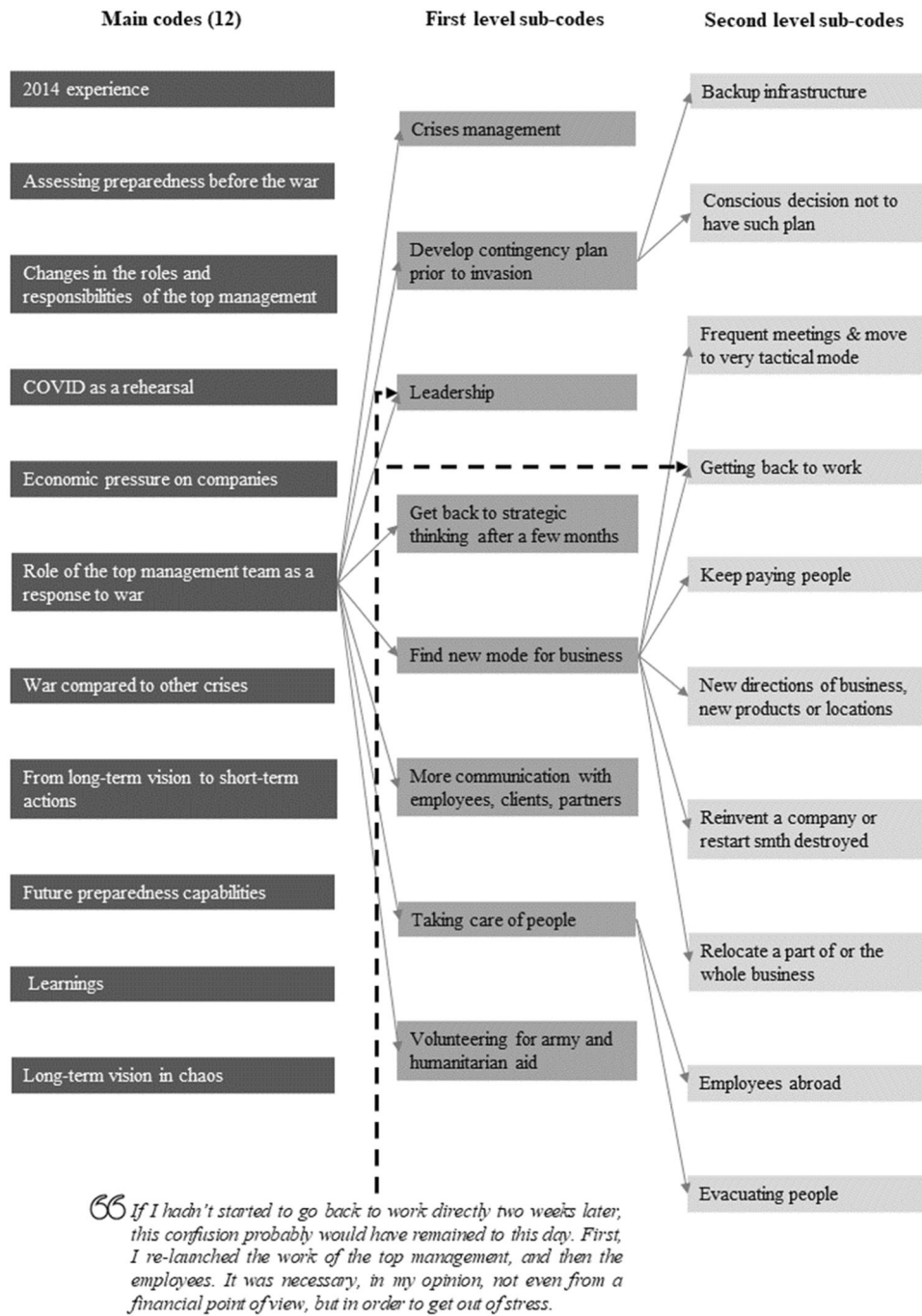


FIGURE C1 Coding in NVivo: main codes and examples of sub-codes and a text unit.