

# Crisis Management Report 2021



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## Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce the BCI's first ever report on Crisis Management. Business continuity's involvement in an organization's crisis management program is crucial to creating and maintaining a resilient organization throughout an incident. We are extremely grateful to have the sponsorship of International SOS in producing this new report.

In general, compared to some other disciplines crisis management is still a relatively new formalised practice throughout the world and it continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Although major incidents have helped to shape crisis management processes over the past four decades, there has been no incident which has had the global depth and longevity of the COVID-19 pandemic. For many organizations, this has helped to reshape crisis management strategies — generally for the better — and we are already seeing learnings made during the pandemic translated into crisis management plans.

At the BCI, we frequently discuss the importance of high levels of collaboration and a non-siloed approach as crucial to creating a culture of resilience in an organization. Such practices hold true throughout the crisis management process and the report shows that siloed working has been reduced during the pandemic with organizations believing this approach will continue post-pandemic.

The report also demonstrates how the organizations which have had the most success with their response have a centralized process but allow some autonomy amongst regional operations to allow them to adopt and shape practices based on their own cultural differences and local laws and regulations.

A centralized structure can also help to provide the crisis management team with expert knowledge with the presence of subject matter experts — which can also be used by the regions where appropriate.

Once again, however, we note that the role of leadership within an organization is paramount during a crisis. Leadership can help to engage the whole organization in the importance of good crisis management, as well as leading the crisis management team through the response. Nevertheless, the report does explain that there cannot be a "one size fits all" approach to crisis management and there are some very defined instances identified in the following pages where management's involvement has been to the detriment of the response.

We continue to be impressed by the level of agility and adaptability that organizations have had to exhibit in order to survive — and thrive — post-pandemic. While following a tried and tested approach with a recognised framework remains at the core of crisis management practice, the ability to adopt and adapt plans to make them quickly appropriate to the incident in question have been showcased in the research carried out for this report. Adopting a more agile approach also resonates well with senior management which, in turn, will improve the effectiveness of crisis management programmes going forward.

We hope you find this new report serves as a useful benchmarking tool and provides valuable learnings on crisis management for you and the organizations your support. I would once again like to thank the International SOS for their valued support of this report.

**Christopher Horne FBCI**  
Chair of the BCI





## Foreword

We have been providing health & security risk management services to customers for 36 years. We have assisted through SARS, avian flu and Ebola. Never have we experienced such a globally challenging environment as the one posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of adversity, however, our fight against the pandemic has provided us with many positive learnings. These have changed how we respond to, and prepare for, crises. The change I have felt most strongly is how 'people' to have been brought to the foreground of crisis management and business continuity. Employee health and wellbeing has become a top consideration for organizations. The more collaborative an organization's culture, the better equipped it is to respond to a crisis.

In addition, we have witnessed the growing involvement of HR and Occupational Health professionals in risk management. This has come through clearly in working with our 12,000 client organizations around the world.

Therefore, we started our conversation with the Business Continuity Institute (BCI). Our aim was to produce new understanding of the recent operational and strategic shift in crisis management. By sharing the vision of creating a more resilient future, we hope that this report equips organizations with the necessary insight for success in future crisis management.

### Arnaud Vaissié

Co-founder, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer  
International SOS





# **Crisis management**

## **Executive summary**



## Executive summary

**Crisis management is becoming increasingly centralised within organizations — which is leading to greater success:** 79.7% of organizations have either entirely centralised their crisis management processes or have adopted a hybrid approach where regions/sites are allowed some degree of autonomy to manage their own events. A purely regional approach in a global organization is much less likely to be successful: 81.3% of organizations that had a centralised/hybrid approach to crisis management reported “good” or “excellent” crisis management capabilities compared to 68.0% who adopted a regional approach.

**Crisis management is no longer purely about best-in-class processes — the people in your organization are integral to a good crisis management programme:** The two leading working practices which practitioners indicate will change post-pandemic are 1) a more collaborative approach to a crisis and 2) that staff health and wellbeing will be considered as an integral part of the response. These responses indicate how many organizations have realised that without healthy staff, who are fully engaged in the response and have good channels of communications, results in a less effective response.

**Good crisis management needs strong leadership:** Senior management lead crisis management in four out of five organizations. The engagement of senior management within the crisis management process helps to ensure every worker in an organization is aware of the importance of crisis management and also appreciative of their own role in a crisis. This is not true in every sector: senior academics are frequently in charge of crisis management in the further education sector, for example, which can lead to slower response times.

**Crisis planning is becoming more agile and adaptive:** Many organizations found that lengthy pandemic plans were not fit for purpose over the past 18 months: less than half of organizations reported their crisis plan was effective during the pandemic. However, three-quarters of those who had an ineffective plan reported they were able to quickly adapt and either wrote a new plan at the start of the pandemic or modified existing plans to make them more relevant to COVID-19. Having pre-planned suggested responses to some of the likely ‘symptom’ scenarios for a ‘respiratory virus’ allowed a swift adaptation of the wider plan to a COVID-19 specific one.

**Business continuity is starting to take a more strategic role in crises:** The pandemic has helped to propel the importance of having a good business continuity programme to senior management — and this has led to many business continuity (BC) professionals being brought in to help advise on whether a new strategic direction is viable from a business continuity perspective. Some management teams have also realised that due to business continuity’s “helicopter view” of the whole organization, they are well-placed to help guide the organization in strategic planning.

**Technology has been crucial in enabling a good response to a crisis:** Just 1.2% of organizations say technology has had “no role” in their response to COVID-19. Whilst there are those tools which have been widely adopted as the norm during the pandemic (e.g. Microsoft Teams), other organizations are now looking towards more specialist tools such as virtual crisis room technologies to actively manage the whole of the crisis.

## Crisis management structure

### Three-quarters of organizations have good crisis management capabilities

75.1% of organizations have “good” or “excellent” crisis management capabilities, with one in ten reporting that capabilities need improving.

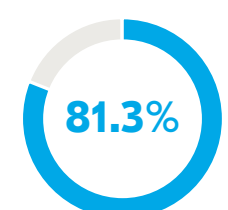
#### Respondents' ratings of their organization's crisis management capabilities



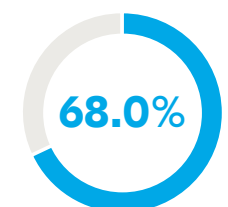
### Centralising crisis management operations leads to a more effective response

81.3% of organizations that had a centralised/hybrid approach to crisis management reported “good” or “excellent” capabilities compared to 68.0% who adopted a regional or business unit-led approach.

#### Percentage of organizations reporting “good” or “excellent” crisis management capabilities



Centralised or hybrid



Regional approach

### Most organizations manage crises through a centralised team but allow regions to adopt an autonomous approach where required

56.3% of organizations manage their response globally but allow the regions autonomy where required in order to elicit an approach more aligned to a region's own cultures and practices.

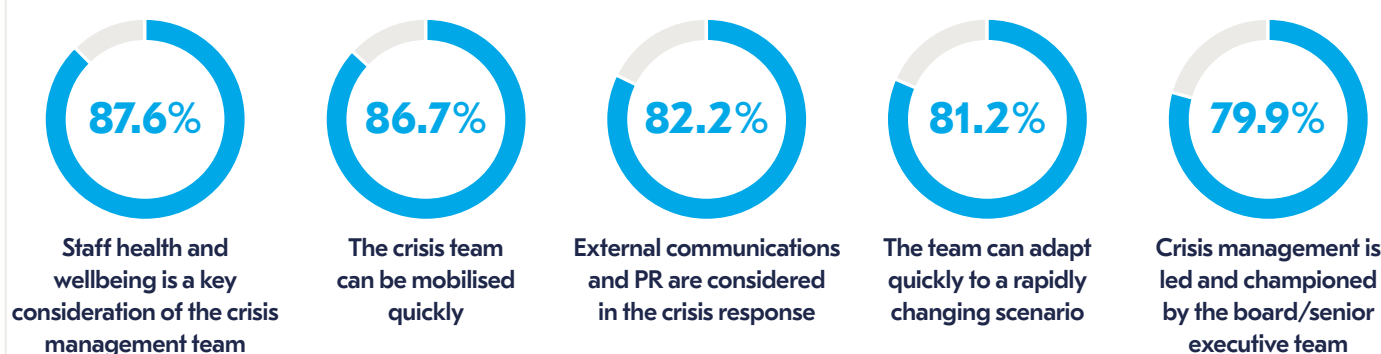
#### Did your organization manage the response through a global, hybrid or regional approach?



### Health and wellbeing of staff is the top consideration in crisis management strategies

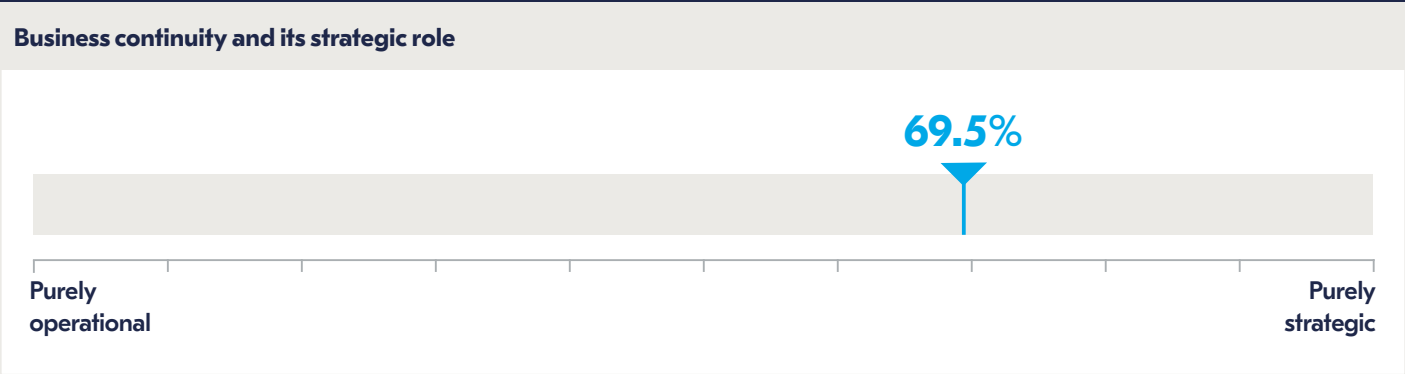
87.6% of organizations “strongly agree” or “agree” that “staff health and wellbeing” is a key consideration of the crisis management team. Speed and agility of response, strong leadership and external communications and PR are considered highly.

#### Percentage of organizations “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” with criteria relating to crisis management processes (top 5 responses)



Interaction and collaboration

**Business continuity is no longer involved purely in the operational response to a crisis**  
The pandemic has showcased to senior leadership that BC is well placed to assist in the strategic part of the response due to their knowledge of entire business and their ability to advise on the viability of new strategic directions to be taken during the pandemic.



**Senior management has increasing appreciation of the importance of organizational resilience when managing a crisis**  
Two-thirds of respondents believe senior management “understands” or “somewhat understands” the importance, with 34.2% believing the pandemic has “very much” helped to increase this understanding.



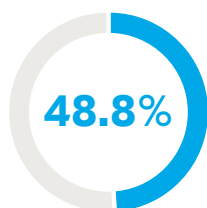


## Planning for a crisis

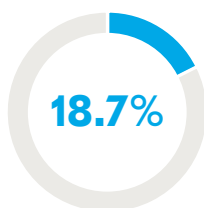
### Less than half of organizations had a crisis plan that was very effective during the pandemic

48.8% of respondents said their crisis plan was successful during COVID-19, with 43.3% either reporting plans were ineffective or they had no plan.

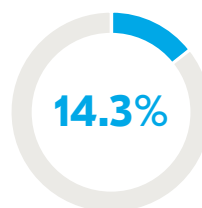
Did you use a crisis plan during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Yes, and it was  
very effective



Yes, but it was not  
very effective



Yes, but we did not use  
it as not fit for purpose



We did not  
have a plan

### Although plans may have been ineffective at the start of the pandemic, organizations' ability to be agile helped responses

4 out of 5 organizations who had no plan or who had an ineffective plan were able to modify their plans or rewrite a new one at the start of the pandemic.

If your plan was not effective or was not fit for purpose, what did you do?



19.9%

We wrote a new plan in the  
early part of the pandemic



59.5%

We modified our existing plan in the early part of  
the pandemic to make it more relevant to COVID-19



14.7%

We managed to get through the  
incident without needing a plan

### Most organizations have already made changes in crisis management as a result of learnings from the pandemic – and less than 1 in 20 plan to make no changes

59.2% of organizations have already identified issues that occurred during the pandemic and adopted them into crisis management plans, with a further third planning to make changes within the next three months. Just 4.5% of organizations plan to make no changes.

Has your organization acted on any issues, gaps or inconsistencies that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



59.2%

Yes, we have identified issues  
and have already adopted  
them into our crisis plans



25.1%

No, but we have identified  
issues but have yet to put  
them into practice



7.3%

No, we have not yet identified  
issues but we plan to within  
the next three months



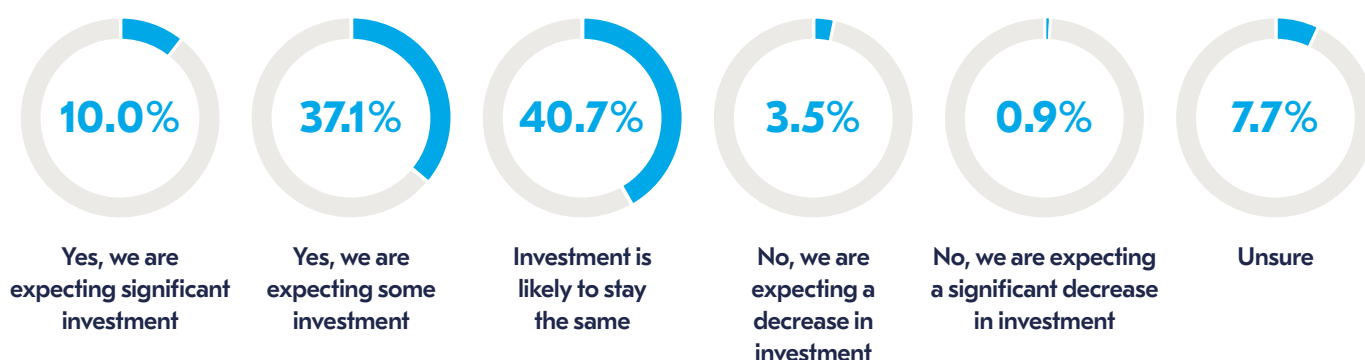
4.5%

No, we do not have plans  
to make any changes  
in the near future

## Nearly half of respondents believe their will be additional investment in crisis management and/or resilience as a result of the pandemic

47.2% of respondents are confident of getting “significant” or “some” investment, with a further 40.7% believing investment will stay the same.

### Will investment in crisis management and/or resilience increase because of the lessons learned during COVID-19?



## Organizations are hopeful of more collaborative working post-pandemic — and also have a greater respect for the importance of human wellbeing in crisis management

Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe their organizations will have a more collaborative approach to crisis management post-pandemic, with the importance of good staff health and wellbeing taking second place

### Percentage of respondents rating how working practices will change in their organizations post-pandemic

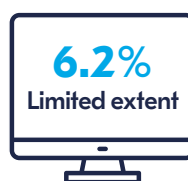


## Technology in a crisis

**More than 90% of respondents have found technology instrumental in facilitating their organization's response to COVID-19**

Nearly two-thirds of organizations (70.4%) say technology has facilitated their response to the pandemic to a "major extent" with a further 22.3% saying it had to "some extent"

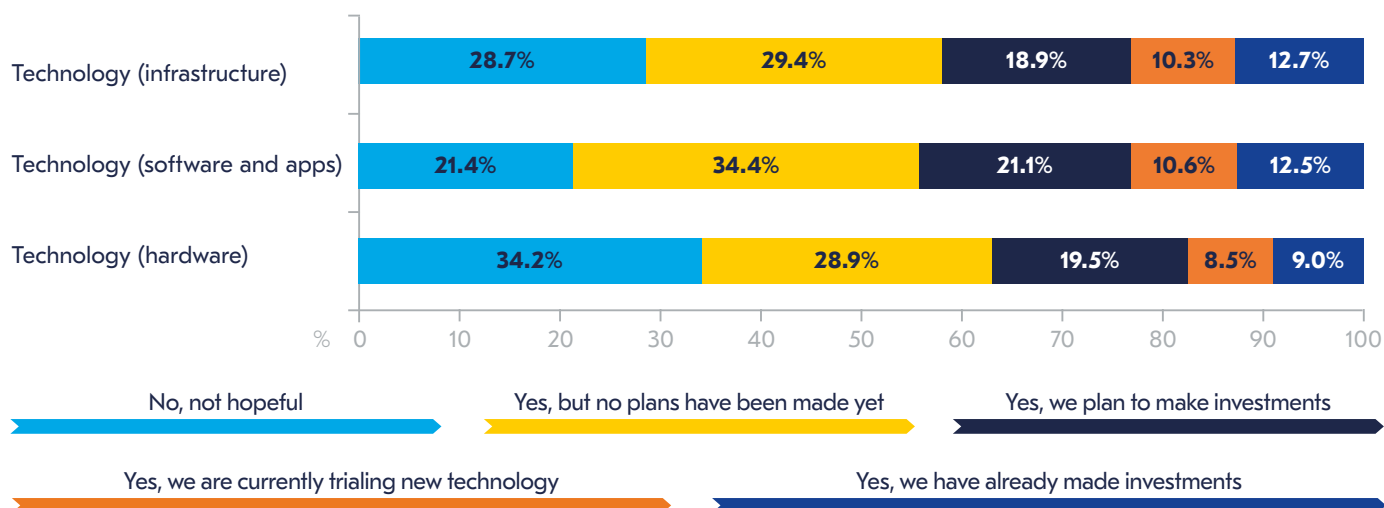
The extent to which technology has facilitated organizations' response to crises in the past 12 months



**Technology infrastructure — rather than hardware — is set to see most investment post-pandemic**

Many organizations made considerable investments in hardware during the pandemic to ensure staff could work remotely effectively during the pandemic. Now is the time to shore up infrastructure and purchase new software and applications.

Where are you likely to see investment in technology within your organization?



# Introduction

Crisis management is as a crucial part of achieving resilience for any modern-day organization: it ensures the organization is well prepared, is able to rapidly identify and respond to an emerging crisis, it has the right people involved, enables information to be absorbed and assessed to inform timely decision making and a collaborative environment is fostered.

Despite the importance of crisis management in ensuring an organization is resilient, modern day crisis management is widely believed to have started as a result of a medication crisis in September 1982: seven people died in the Chicago area as a result of taking over-the-counter capsules laced with cyanide. The organization's customer-centric response to the crisis enabled it to return to a near-similar market share a year after the incident receiving widespread acclaim for its management of the response<sup>1</sup>.



Such was the success of the response, it started to be mirrored by other organizations over the next few years until crisis management became a formalised approach in the majority of organizations leading to continuing best practice examples today. One example of an organization that exhibited exceptional crisis management during the COVID-19 crisis is that of the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi. The hospital in the United Arab Emirates was hit early in the COVID-19 crisis, and a crisis management team was formed containing staff from all levels in the organization. The hospital swiftly expanded its emergency capacity and set about coordinating with other local hospitals to maximise their emergency response. It also took extra steps for its own staff; encouraging them to talk honestly about their own problems, providing sleeping rooms, counselling services, childcare and wellbeing events.

Whilst some of the benefits of good crisis management are obvious — lives can be saved, organizations can continue to operate, poor customer sentiment can be mitigated, disruption can be kept to a minimum — some can even take advantage of the environment to introduce new products and services. In addition, it can also lead to tangible shareholder gain: research by PWC reveals companies who respond well to a crisis gain on average a 22% share premium over those who do not<sup>2</sup>. Such quantitative optimism means crisis management is something which boards and senior management are normally fully engaged with, although the data gathered for this report shows there is still significant work to be done.

Unfortunately, for a business continuity (BC) or resilience professional, a severe crisis is often needed in order to improve processes and procedures and instil an organization-wide appreciation of the importance of resilience. Indeed, the findings from our survey suggests that COVID-19 has helped to propel the discipline of crisis management into a much more collaborative, inclusive, and dynamic discipline.

1. Rehak, J. (2002). 'Tylenol made a hero of Johnson & Johnson: The recall that started them all'. International Herald Tribune (23 March 2002). Available at: [www.nytimes.com/2002/03/23/your-money/IHT-tylenol-made-a-hero-of-johnson-johnson-the-recall-that-started.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/23/your-money/IHT-tylenol-made-a-hero-of-johnson-johnson-the-recall-that-started.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)
2. Riviera, K & Stainback, D. 'Five ingredients to turn a corporate crisis into an opportunity'. PWC. Available at [www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/crisis-solutions/corporate-crisis-into-opportunity.html](http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/crisis-solutions/corporate-crisis-into-opportunity.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

# Crisis management structure







## Centralisation vs localisation

Operations within organizations have become more centralised as a result of the pandemic, and crisis management is no exception to this: 42.5% of respondents manage crisis management through a centralised process, with just 10.1% and 6.2% handling it through a regional- or business-unit approach respectively. A further 36.6% reported a hybrid approach was used. This typically saw regions given the autonomy to manage their own events, but with clear escalation policies and communication pathways established with the centralised crisis management team if required.

**"We have a centralised approach: where my team or I lead all of the operational level responses regardless of hazard, whether it's technology, cyber, natural disaster, protective security, safety issues. It means a lot of work, but the art has been in that orchestration of the individual responses to help them synchronise without taking a controlling hand. So, the business units know, when they come into this team, they're going to get a very consistently well-led response that will take them through the understanding of the issue, help them get the response underway and then give them a very strong escalation point for problems encountered — as well as coordination between the different areas that are also responding. It is something which is respected and valued."**

General Manager of Resilience, Financial Services, Australia

Increased centralisation of processes was not only noted within organizations over the past 18 months, but within governments as well. Some countries had a decentralised approach to vaccination which led to a disordered and ineffective response which, in many cases, was blamed on a loss of lives<sup>3</sup>. In one European country, a hybrid approach was followed during the pandemic, initially because of the requirement to present uniform COVID-19 statistics for each region. However, as the pandemic progressed and demands for centralisation increased, decentralised processes continued to cause issues with the national response. A call for tenders to produce a track and trace app was launched as a centralised campaign, for example, but the project was derailed as different organizations were all asked to produce apps in parallel with each other due to tenders being managed locally. As a result of the lack of coordination, the ad hoc effort failed, and the project restarted from scratch<sup>4</sup>.

3. Nicholson, E (2021). 'Germany Is Expected To Centralize Its COVID-19 Response. Some Fear It May Be Too Late'. GPB News (12 April 2021). Available at: [www.gpb.org/news/2021/04/12/germany-expected-centralize-its-covid-19-response-some-fear-it-may-be-too-late](https://www.gpb.org/news/2021/04/12/germany-expected-centralize-its-covid-19-response-some-fear-it-may-be-too-late) (accessed 14 July 2021)

4. Janssen, J & van der Voort H (2020). Agile and adaptive governance in crisis response: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Information Management (Elsevier).

Organizations which failed to coordinate crisis management centrally also suffered complications during the response and many have already made plans to ensure their processes are more centralised going forward. Effective governmental, non-governmental and corporate crisis management is a careful balancing act. It requires the centralisation of certain key strategic processes, along with the ability to delegate the execution of key decisions — all in an agile, dynamic and scalable way.

The classic layered crisis management structure for international organizations, including central, regional and country level teams remained relatively robust in face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The key to success being the interoperability and communication between those layers along with crisis management culture of the organization. Indeed, the effectiveness of a centralised or hybrid approach is echoed by survey respondents: 81.3% of those who adopted a centralised or hybrid approach reported that their crisis management capabilities within their organization were either “good” (51.7%) or “excellent” (29.7%) compared to 68.0% answering the same who adopt either a regionally- or business unit-approach. There was also a notable difference for those organizations reporting their approach was “excellent”: 29.7% for centralised and 13.3% for non-centralised.

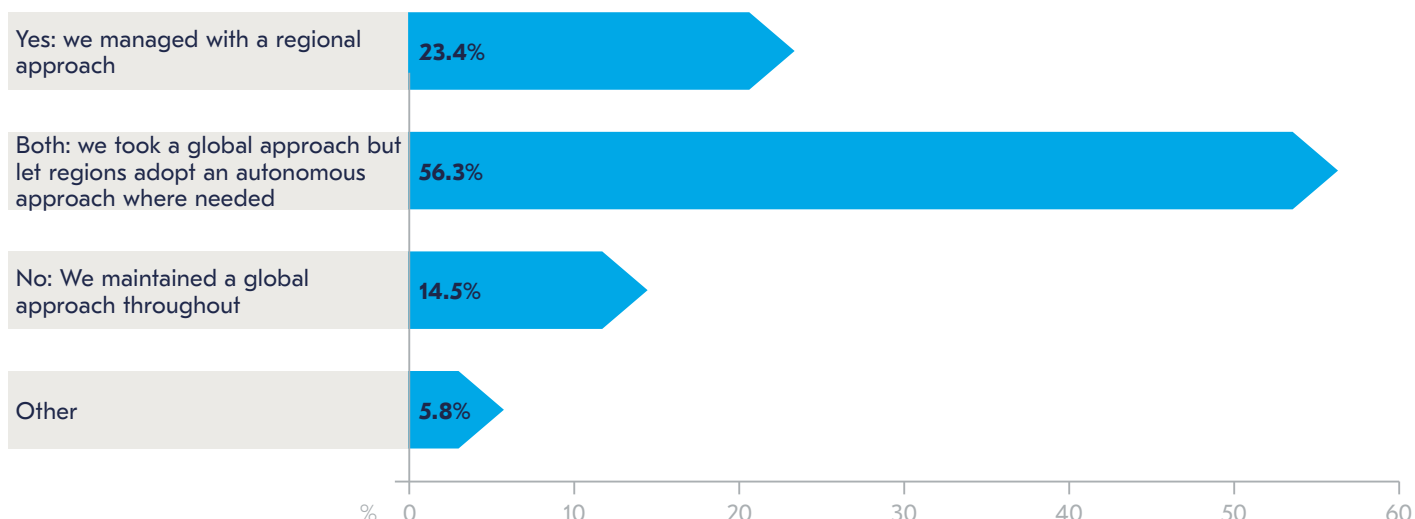
When examining the approach taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of respondents (56.3%) said they managed the crisis with a hybrid (managing from a centralised point but allowing a degree of autonomy to the organization's regions) approach. However, 23.4% managed with a regionally-led approach. For many, this was as a result of major differences in how governments managed situations within their own countries, coupled with different rates of virus progression between geographies. Despite this need for regional management — at least from an operational perspective — 14.5% of organizations still managed their response globally.

An interviewee described how cultural differences in the region his organization was based in made facilitating successful response more complex than it would have been elsewhere in the world. He commented that elsewhere in the world staff were used to regulatory environments and corporate structures where people knew the importance of following instructions. However, many staff within their region were very unaware about the importance of BC and a resilient working environment.

**“Many people in our region do not understand business continuity well, let alone know the importance of the relationship between BC and crisis management and how they play a role in it. In countries like the US and the UK, for example, people are used to regulations and are used to following instructions. But sometimes when you work in a culture where people don't care about instructions it is vital to instill the importance of it to the people. It is hard to talk to people in South Sudan, Nigeria or Tunisia about things that they are not used to doing. The influence of culture really needs to be taken in consideration when planning and giving instructions. Instructions and other material have to be presented in an appropriate way. In places like Tunisia the instructions may have to be tailored by region, as culture differs so much across the country.”**

Risk Manager, Professional Services, Tunisia

## Did you manage the COVID-19 crisis differently within your organization due to cultural sensitivities (regions, countries) or did you maintain a global approach?



**Figure 1.** Did you manage the COVID-19 crisis differently within your organization due to cultural sensitivities (regions, countries) or did you maintain a global approach?

It should be highlighted that best practice suggests that, in a resilient and robust crisis management structure, members of the team need to know how much autonomy is required. Taking on a purely centralised crisis management approach to a global crisis (such as COVID-19) is likely to fail in a global organization. The centralised team can apply consistency in their approach, it can centralise support and also help with streamlining and coordinating certain processes such as the post-incident review (PIR) (sometimes referred to in crisis management as the After-Action Review — AAR). It can also centralise otherwise expensive processes, such as global security operation centres, specialist software tools and consultancy services, or coordinate access to specialist expertise on particular crises<sup>5</sup>.

However, using local teams with a knowledge of regional laws, governance and business operating knowledge in tandem with a centralised team is the approach adopted by the most successful crisis management structures. In a fast-unfolding global crisis, some degree of autonomy is kept at a regional level to enable local teams to act quickly and appropriately. Such crises tend to be non-linear<sup>6</sup> and adopting a “one size fits all” is unlikely to be effective. Industry expert Sean Murphy tells how best-in-class crisis management structures should be able to “think globally yet act locally”.<sup>7</sup>

One interviewee explained how he considered their organization to have primarily followed a regional response to the pandemic with the centralised team providing oversight. This particular structure was very effective for his organization.

5. Murphy, S (2016). ‘Does a centralized crisis management structure make sense?’. LinkedIn (27 May 2016). Available at: [www.linkedin.com/pulse/does-centralized-crisis-management-structure-make-sense-sean-murphy/](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/does-centralized-crisis-management-structure-make-sense-sean-murphy/) (accessed 14 July 2021)

6. Ibid

7. Ibid



"We have a centralised, global crisis management function that is linked to several geographical zones around the world. Each zone has its own disruptive events management team. We've just had a meeting recently where these teams reported out on what the situation is on the ground. Generally, the zone leaders provide an update on the current situation on vaccinations, travel restrictions, operational impacts — all of those things — every other week. It's not necessarily real-time, but the crisis team is getting the information in terms of what is most critical at the moment. In short, our approach is based on leaving the day-to-day management of the COVID response to leadership on the ground at a regional level while the oversight of the processes and specific guidance is driven from the corporate level."

Director of Global Crisis Management, Oil & Gas, United States

Another interviewee explained how his organization had a very simplistic structure which was overseen on a regional level but primarily organized on a country level. However, collaboration tools made sure that any country could help in the response to a crisis if their expertise was required. This proved to be a very successful model and had contributed to a non-siloed approach to working.

"We try to keep it very simple with a country manager or the most senior person in the country leading the crisis team. We then have some "permanent chairs" from teams like legal, HR, finance, communications and other business units. If they're represented in that country, they have to be there. Sometimes we also add in experts such as security specialists, supply chain, sustainability, IT, real estate — whatever we need for the crisis. When a crisis hits, we will send emails, have Teams calls, source or write documentation and try to get written actions documented into a tool that can give us a useful report at the end of the day. This tool should keep us together in a crisis so we can then close the incident and have a good record of what happened. It could also help with potential litigations later on, or for a lessons learned report. We can also segment to the team; it's very flexible. When there was an attack in Mumbai a while ago, we had German, Finnish, Japanese and Indonesian people there. The system we have is a simplified model, it works very well. Our senior management is also very good and flexible when it comes to this. They do not allow people to go into silos and we really work as teams. Otherwise, it becomes a blame culture. You cannot do that. It's not a blame game, it's a way forward."

Head of Crisis Management APAC & MEA, Utilities, Hong Kong

One of the best-known examples where an entirely centralised response failed was in the L'Aquila earthquake in Italy in 2009. The earthquake proved to be the deadliest earthquake in almost 30 years in the country, and the "command and control" response to the incident meant entire local communities — including emergency services — were ignored and the town effectively became militarised. Ultimately, this led to locals leaving the town in fear with others moved to makeshift camps, which attendees likened prison camps. In fact, according to an article in the International Journal for Disaster Risk Reduction<sup>8</sup>, the crisis response contravened the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-Ordinator (UNDRO)'s guidelines in five distinct ways:

- Too much aid was given, mostly to the detriment of local people;
- Too many of the houses constructed were of an emergency or temporary type, with little consideration given to the reconstruction of local people's houses;
- Large numbers of external volunteers were used, leading to a sense of invasion, and suppressing the ability of local people to enact their own resilience;
- Too much was done under the guise of time pressure, without proper consultation with local people. This meant that the affected people became mere spectators of the work carried out rather than participants in the process of recovery and reconstruction. It also meant that many of the interventions were a failure and/or inadequate for local needs;
- A lot of work was undertaken without involving local people, which meant that opportunities for redevelopment were lost, many local businesses became bankrupt, and people felt excluded.

Whilst this disaster is unlikely to be repeated to such an extent within the confines of an organization, the learnings do demonstrate the importance of ensuring local and/or specialist knowledge on the ground is not ignored during a disaster.

**"You can manage these things globally, but I think you shouldn't necessarily always be doing it globally. With COVID, for example, if we'd have had someone in country in Asia-Pacific, the initial stages of COVID could have been managed much better on a regional level, but it had to be a corporate level for us. I think using a more regional approach and having a bit more specialist knowledge of what's going on in the region would be good. Likewise, I would say the same with what's going on in LatAm. It would be great for us to have a security/crisis manager based in LatAm so that you're picking up the nuances of what's going on and have got a much better idea in terms of regional horizon scanning."**

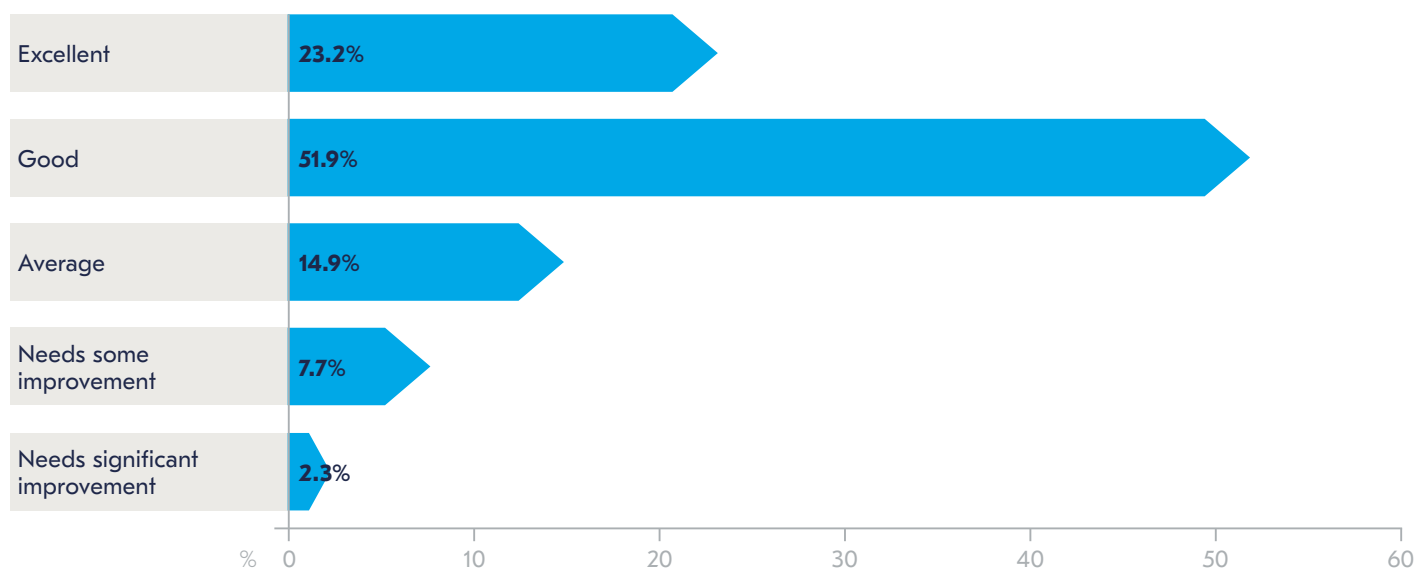
Head of Risk Management,  
Healthcare, United States



8. Imperiale, AJ & Vanclay, F (2019). 'Command-and-control, emergency powers, and the failure to observe United Nations disaster management principles following the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake.' International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. Elsevier, May 2019.'



## How effective are the crisis management capabilities within your organization?



**Figure 2.** How effective are the crisis management capabilities within your organization?



## The characteristics of the crisis management structure of 2021

When respondents were asked which “positive” attributes were considered within their crisis management teams, the attribute which placed highest was “staff mental health and wellbeing is a key consideration of the crisis management team”. 87.4% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that this was a consideration within their plans.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on staff mental health and welfare was something which was initially ignored by many organizations, and only came into wider consideration from around the middle of 2020: BCI research showed that just two-thirds of organizations were considering staff mental health and welfare in their COVID response in March 2020 and by May this had increased to 83%<sup>9</sup>; organizations realised that their most valued asset — their staff — needed appropriate support if the business were to get through the crisis. Furthermore, lack of wellbeing support can also lead to staff attrition — a factor which affected some 40.3% of organizations in 2020<sup>10</sup>.

**“I would say one of the greatest challenges was the mental one; the human factor. It’s meant we’ve added the mental wellness aspect to our plans. The challenge in the incident is not about the technology, because we have the technology. The challenge is not the plans, because the plans are there. We have the computers; we have the VPNs; all the security is there. But the human factor, having people working from home, lonely. We have created a human health task force to deal with the mental health side of things. Something else we do is have some meetings on open camera. A picture paints more than a thousand words. You can see if someone is not ok.”**

Crisis & BC Management Leader,  
Financial Services, Canada

**“The staff health and wellbeing part is more about coming to a recognition that pre-COVID, you had your human capital, they did their job, then they went back home. Just in and out, in and out. I’m not saying it’s not appreciated, but I do think that one of the things that people have realised in this pandemic is that there has to be greater appreciation for the humanity of the employees; remembering that employees all have lives, they have families, they have loved ones or they’re full-time caregivers in some cases. Without this support for employees during this pandemic, the organization cannot be resilient.”**

Director of Global Crisis Management,  
Oil & Gas, United States

The second highest criteria was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the requirement for crisis teams to be mobilised quickly (86.7% of respondents “agreed” or “agreed strongly” with this criterion). Enabling quick activation is vital in a fast-developing event alongside a well-defined and tested structure, having clearly defined roles within the team, using effective methods of communication (virtual and physical) and adopting a non-siloed approach.

Here again, anticipation through preparation and training (of crisis management teams and local stakeholders) is the key success factor of a rapid, proportionate and effective response. The simulation of five most probable scenarios (e.g. natural disaster, cyber-attack, pandemic, social unrest, missing person/kidnapping), without developing very detailed plans that would thwart an organization’s ability to adapt to a crisis, can help to build a holistic crisis management organization. Each situation will be unique, but the upstream work carried out by the teams will allow for a rapid response and prevent the crisis from contaminating other business activities.

9. Elliott, R (2020). BCI Organizational Preparedness Report; Editions 1-6 (March-June 2020). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/knowledge/search-knowledge.html](http://www.thebci.org/knowledge/search-knowledge.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

10. Elliott, R (2021). 2021 BCI Horizon Scan Report (March 2021). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

# The centrality of intelligence in crisis management

Successful navigation of crises requires timely decisions. To make these decisions, organizations need reliable intelligence. Crises are defined by working with incomplete and evolving information, often complicated by constrained, subjective or distorted sources. To meet this challenge, adept use of all phases of the Intelligence Cycle is critical and significantly increases the efficacy of a crisis management response.

At the start of the Intelligence Cycle comes Direction. At this stage, crisis managers outline their intelligence needs. What information do they require in order to take key decisions? For example, daily updates on the evolution of a security threat in a location, or the operational status of an aviation hub. This direction is then fed into the responsible team(s) for action.

These team(s) then enact the Collection of the required intelligence. Depending on the crisis and the location, this can take various forms but is likely to involve a number of distinct channels, digital and human, internal to the organization, as well as external to the organization. No programme of collection should ever rely on a single source and wherever possible, the collection should be done from as wide a variety of channels as possible to help minimise potential bias and help identify inconsistencies.

Once crisis intelligence has been collected, it must go through Processing. At this stage, the team(s) involved will examine the collected intelligence, sift for bias and inconsistency, and shape the raw intelligence to be analysed.

Analysis is arguably the most critical phase of the cycle. This is where the team(s) will examine the implications of the intelligence gathered for the organization and make a recommendation based on this analysis. This recommendation will have to balance organizational-specific factors such as its profile, nature of operations and risk appetite against the threat(s) posed by the crisis.

Once the analysis is complete, the finished intelligence then needs to go through a process of Dissemination to all the relevant decision makers within an organization. This could be in verbal or written form — or both, though for posterity and documentation purposes, a written recommendation detailing the 'why' behind the assessment and advice is critical.

Of course, given the dynamic nature of crises, these steps are often happening concurrently; as a situation evolves, new intelligence requirements will emerge, resulting in further direction and resultant downstream actions. Effective communications and prioritisation by members of the intelligence gathering and analysis functions are essential to the smooth running of this process.

So too is practice. As with other aspects of crisis management, if an organization does not typically exercise the Intelligence Cycle for the purposes of threat evaluation as part of their business-as-usual operations, then the members of the team should be regularly drilled on the processes and tools they will need to use in the event of a crisis.

An additional consideration is that of oversight and governance. Based on the scope and nature of the crisis an organization will need to decide on how best to extract the benefits of geographic proximity to the issue and familiarity with the local security and cultural environments at the various stages of the Intelligence Cycle, as well as how best to extract the benefits of the organization's global structure, if appropriate, when arriving at the overall recommendation.

Every organization will be different in structure; however, the tenets of a successful crisis management response are broadly consistent across organizations and industries, and the timely collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence to inform decision-making is chief amongst them.

**James Bird, Security Director — Intelligence & Assistance, International SOS**



Public relations (PR) and communications still remain a key element of the crisis response. As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of crisis management was developed from the importance of rapid response and effective communications. A lack of an effective PR and communications plan can be more detrimental to an organization than the initial incident in itself: the most extreme example of this is the Enron scandal, where a lack of communication coupled with dishonesty from senior management caused the total collapse of the business<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, the mantra “fail to prepare, then prepare to fail” should be at the back of every CEO’s mind. COVID-19 has helped to highlight the importance of a good communications strategy to management and have updated their plans accordingly.

**“The only element we have added to our crisis plan has been a media communications plan. We’ve worked out a very evolved media communications plan so that we know what we’re doing if suddenly we’re having to put people in front of TV cameras or similar. This is a structure which I believe should be in there and is one I’ve fought for, along with our communications director, for a number of years to actually get accepted and put in place.”**

Head of Risk Management, Healthcare, United States

Encouragingly, 80.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that crisis management was led by the board and/or senior leadership team. The support of the board, particularly in large organizations, lends legitimacy and helps to ensure that there is total organizational support for the programme and all staff are engaged in the process. An interviewee explained how their CEO had mandated that all staff within the organization take part in a training exercise once a year and, because of this, staff not only knew what to do within a crisis but were showcased the importance of having a good crisis management structure. Most critically, they appreciated the importance of their part to play in the process. Another interviewee explained how the board and senior management in his organization took part in training and exercising programmes and ensured the whole organization takes time out of their working days to take part. Another explained how the CEO had made a video watched by the entire organization on the importance of knowing what to do in a crisis.



11. Waugh, B (2018). '4 Internal Communication Fails... and the Fixes!'. Vevox (1 May 2018). Available at: [www.vevox.com/blog/4-internal-communication-fails-and-the-fixes](http://www.vevox.com/blog/4-internal-communication-fails-and-the-fixes) (accessed 14 July 2021)

**"And we get really good buy-in from the C-suite, the executives and the chairman of the board. We had a full crisis exercise in 2019 which simulated a global cyber-attack. We had the crisis management team, the major incident coordination team working below them, and all the regions taking part. And we've done a number of exercises and training sessions with the crisis management team and I think that held us in really good stead when COVID came along because everyone – including senior management – were familiar with the process, the tools and the plan. We had experienced, well-trained and exercised individuals who came into the real-life crisis having practised."**

Global Crisis Manager, Financial Services,  
United Kingdom

**"For Business Continuity Awareness Week, we put a lot of sessions on and our chief executive actually pushed them in a video message. He was really encouraging on these sessions as well as highlighting what's really important. And also, we are going to be reporting to the board regularly so they know what we're doing. They truly understand crisis management."**

Emergency Planning Lead,  
Healthcare, United Kingdom

Sometimes, however, senior management take very little interest in the importance of business continuity in crisis planning. One interviewee explained how it was very difficult to get information out of departments to define priority activities. They explained that although the chairs of the Crisis and Incident Management (CIM) team were directors in key areas and worked a successful roster, the environment in an educational establishment made it very difficult to instil the importance of BC within the organization. Although you could argue that the job of the business continuity manager is to "sell" the benefits of BC to management, after years of no interest it is something which is very difficult to turn around.

**"I undertook the first [Business Impact Analysis (BIA)] for the university back in 2019, and I really had to dumb it down. For instance we've determined important priorities as those that directly relate to the achievement of the organization's strategic objectives instead of local objectives of the business area, and used a Maximum Allowable Outage (how long is it before there's a major impact on the activity) period rather than trying to explain MTPD (maximum tolerable period of disruption) and RTO (recovery time objective). And then how did you manage to resolve it? Now, this was where it became very interesting. Despite the planning process, where they felt it would take more than a week for anything to actually have an impact. They thought they didn't need a business continuity plan because they'd have a week to sit around a table and work things out!"**

Business Continuity Manager, Education, Australia



The whole crisis strategy is rarely shared with the whole organization (this point was third from bottom of the graph in figure 3), but some professionals have made plans available to anyone in the organization who wishes to see them. As well as this, some additionally provide relevant communications and training to ensure all staff are not only aware of their role in an incident, but how the importance of a good crisis management structure leads to a more resilient organization.

**"We have a Business Continuity Hub on our intranet now which is a one-stop-shop of simple, clear information, and is tailored to provide value to all levels within the organization. Anybody who wants to know about our pandemic plan can have a look at the plan. We also explain why certain things are in the plan, we talk about exactly why an influenza plan is not very helpful for us now and how we've disengaged from strictly following the WHO. For me, one of the lessons was I needed to make our enterprise strategies (e.g. moving operations, pausing operations and changing operations) highly available to everyone. We're on a massive communication campaign now with Business Continuity Awareness Week and we're jumping off the back of that. We're trying to find a balance of not pestering staff but getting them involved in more face to face, top to bottom conversations. This has been driven by surveys we've carried out during COVID across the whole organization. We asked questions like 'Were you aware of the pandemic strategy in place pre-COVID?' And we can see which parts of the business knew or didn't know. Our executive team had a very good understanding however the awareness didn't penetrate down to all areas of our operational staff. The knowledge gained from surveys helped us focus on promoting resilience strategies to the whole organization."**

Group Head of BC, Financial Services, Australia

In some situations, professionals found that having the senior executive involved was actually detrimental in their organization. An interviewee from a further education establishment highlighted that senior management were typically academics. The interviewee explained that academics needed to know every detail before making a decision in a crisis which had the potential to stall the response. In their particular environment, just having operational staff on the crisis management team worked very well.

**"In our CIMT, there are no executives except one who is in as a rotational chair. We get a lot more done by not having an executive in the team because it would take time to fill them in on the finer operational detail where-as the guys that are in the team are operational, they know the business well and they've been there forever. They know everything. It's really, really good that way."**

Business Continuity Manager, Education, Australia

The statement which respondents felt they least agreed with was having multiple/very detailed plans for all or most scenarios: just 38.1% said that strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. The lowly position in the table, however, does show that most organizations are adhering to industry best practice: even the most detailed plan cannot cover every single intricacy of a crisis scenario and each needs to be adaptable to the specific incident that has taken place. Many respondents who reported their organization did have a very detailed pandemic plan at the start of the pandemic said it was not used as it did not consider the scenarios specific to COVID-19 (e.g. the majority of staff remaining well, but all staff needed to be shifted to homeworking overnight; work area recovery providers were unable to provide backup space for split working as it was not part of the contract; inadequate focus on recovery or long-term impact).

Those organizations with plans that considered the effects (e.g. homeworking, restricted travel, supply chain disruption) of a disruption rather than the cause (e.g. pandemic, fire, flood) reported greater success in their planning process. Many reported having short, incident-specific plans that could be read and easily digested in a crisis that could be read and tandem with more operational plans. This is something which is written into the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines:

**"Business continuity plans are not intended to cover every eventuality as all incidents are different. The plans need to be flexible enough to be adapted to the specific incident that has occurred and the opportunities it may have created. However, in some circumstances, incident specific plans are appropriate to address a significant threat or risk, for example, a pandemic plan, or a product recall plan."**

BCI Good Practice Guidelines<sup>12</sup>

During the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, many organizations found themselves swamped with information and contrasting opinions, often leading to inertia. Those which were swiftest to respond were often the ones that had already pre-planned suggested responses to some of the likely 'symptom' scenarios for a respiratory virus e.g. companies were able to enact contact tracing of their workforces swiftly when their local public health services were swamped or were able to set up workplace protections well in advance of government or WHO directives on issues such as mask usage or aerosol transmission. Here, the crisis is anticipated by treating the symptoms before treating the disease.

**"We don't want to plan our scenario-specific plans, or too detailed plans, because the important thing is acting in reflex to the current incident. It's the approach that's important; ensuring we have the right people on the team and getting the team together very quickly in the beginning. We then discuss what's happening and we get the feedback from the business units. So, for us, the approach is more important than the actual scenario. It doesn't matter what type of scenario it is, we know what to do, we know who's in charge and we know who to go to. We set the Guiding Principles."**

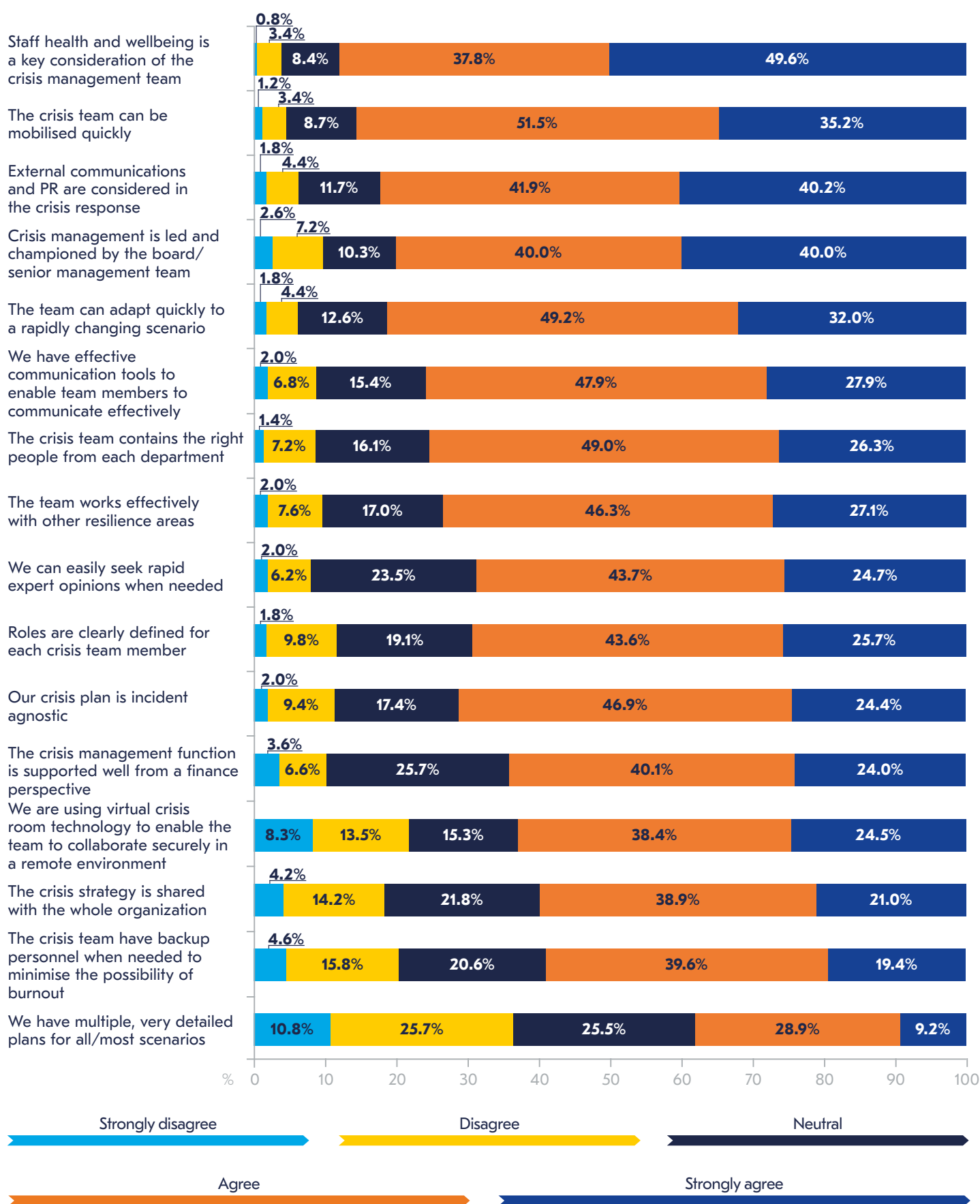
Crisis & BC Management Leader,  
Financial Services, Canada

**"At the start of the pandemic, the infrastructure was there to support the technology from middle school and up because the kids all had their own computers. The elementary school had nothing. They had team iPad sets in the classroom, but not to send home. We just didn't have the hardware. We had thought we were set up, and we clearly weren't, and it fell apart. To add to that, we then realised were some of the systems we were using on a regular day to day basis just did not work when it became the primary mode of teaching. So the software we'd planned for the elementary school was a failure. It did not allow for us to do things that teachers need to do to be able to do truly interact and provide the resources with their students. Our major problem was that we thought we had everything set up. And we were wrong. We thought COVID was the problem, and virtual learning was the answer. We thought we had virtually learning set up, but what we didn't plan for was the actual application. We didn't focus on that piece well enough. We focused on, 'Oh, we're prepared for a pandemic.' But we weren't prepared for the effects of it; the actual application."**

Director of Risk Management,  
International Education, Thailand

12. BCI, The (2018). The BCI Good Practice Guidelines (updated 2018). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/training-qualifications/good-practice-guidelines.html](http://www.thebci.org/training-qualifications/good-practice-guidelines.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

## How much do you agree/disagree with the following positive criteria applying to your crisis management processes?



**Figure 3.** How much do you agree/disagree with the following positive criteria applying to your crisis management processes?

When considering the negative attributes of crisis management in respondents' organizations, the statement seated at the top of the table was "we do not change crisis team members out often enough" with only 49.0% "disagreeing" or "strongly disagreeing" with the statement. Whilst many organizations boast crisis management team structures that contain the most appropriate people, are scalable, are collaborative and have good communication flow, some structures can become staid and do not adapt to the organization's changing shape, strategy and structure. Ideally, the team should be reviewed regularly to ensure the right roles remain on the team and are suited best to the contemporary challenges organizations face. An article by Richard Long (Practice Team Leader, MHA) goes so far as to say many structures do not contain the right people as frequently positions on the crisis management team are determined by job title and seniority rather than expertise. He suggests that individuals within the team should "not be managed by title, but by their ability to lead" and suggests using a competency-based leadership model to develop team members<sup>13</sup>. Fluidity within teams needs to be approached with care, however: many respondents commented that having the same members on the crisis team throughout the crisis was an important part of their successful response.

An interviewee described how their organization had structured the incident management team using a "co-chair" model which helped to instil continuity within the team and also create an environment where information was channelled quickly and efficiently throughout the team, fostering quick decision making.

**"We'd always imagined there might be up to three or four incident management team leads who would work shifts. But actually what we introduced — and it worked really well — was two of the incident management team leads co-chaired the incident management team. They both had complimentary skills: one is the head of IT and the other is our head of the legal. Very, very different people, different skills. They often came together to meetings, but if one couldn't, there was an absolute continuity which was created by the co-chairing. This is something I would really use again, particularly in an incident with a long timeframe. It was clear at the outset that this was not something that's going to be over in a week."**

Senior Risk Manager, Charity, United Kingdom

Continuing on the theme of agility, a quarter of respondents (26.1%) reported that plans were too focused on specific scenarios and could not be altered quickly. This again stems back to the view that in order for a plan to be effective, it needs to focus on the effect rather than the causes.


One interviewee explained how they would like to move to consequence-based planning but were tied into the guidance of their governing or regulatory body. This was a fairly common theme in a number of interviews.

**"I think that's sometimes the problem. If the scenario's not exactly what's written down in the plan, people panic and they can't necessarily invoke the plan because it's not what's written down. In terms of business continuity, I have tried to reinvigorate the business continuity programme and bring out a new template and which looks far more on the wider effects — if you've lost your building, what are you doing? It doesn't matter why you'd lost your building; you've lost it. Or you've lost your staff. It could be that they've all gone to Barbados because they've all won the lottery — or it could be because a pandemic. It doesn't matter. So I have tried to do that in business continuity but part of the issue for emergency planning is that we're guided by NHS England guidance and there's only so far we can deviate from it."**

Emergency Planning Lead,  
Healthcare, United Kingdom

Another interviewee explained how the consequence-based, incident-agnostic approach applied to both BC and crisis management, but there were differences in how it worked. In his organization, BC was essentially planning for the loss of key dependencies, whereas crisis management had to be a far less binary approach.

13. Long, R (2018). 'CMT 101: Crisis Management Team Roles'. MHT Consulting (9 May 2018). Available at: [www.mha-it.com/2018/05/09/crisis-management-team-roles/](http://www.mha-it.com/2018/05/09/crisis-management-team-roles/) (accessed 14 July 2021)



**"From a business continuity standpoint, we have an all hazards agnostic approach in that we look at the loss of key dependencies rather than preparing for a given event. So we look at four loss scenarios, essentially. A loss for people, loss for technology, loss of workspace location/facility and loss of third party vendors. So irrespective of what happens, we have key dependencies which underpin our critical business processes and if we lose those, there's an impact to our business. For crisis management, you can't just have a pre-determined black and white approach. So we have our CM teams trained in the methodology and understanding of the framework. We have a very structured and formal approach to those crisis management team meetings where we have a brief discuss/act approach. There's so much change, uncertainty and ambiguity in a crisis, but having that familiarity with what we need to do (and having teams well exercised is important). In advance of crisis events where possible and practical we have playbooks available and pre-prepared templates from a communications perspective to plug and play."**

Regional Resilience Lead, Technology, United States

Some organizations have now moved away from a rigid method of pandemic response (which was often based on WHO 'phases') and are now advocating a more fluid approach, with pre-prepared processes built for the common likely scenarios (such as avian flu, COVID-19 and Ebola) and an ability to quickly develop similar ones for novel pathogens based on best practices. This then evolves over time and is kept clinically updated as information comes to light. In this way, plans are available, can be modified easily and quickly and are kept in a digital format to be accessible to all as needed.

The problem of siloed working practices are further highlighted in question 4: "wider staff being unaware of crisis plans which could lead to confusion in a crisis scenario", "plans not being shared across the organization" and "the crisis team works in a siloed environment" form the second, third and fourth positions on the table which ties in with the answers in the figure 3. Whilst siloed working practices are something which many organizations have worked hard to break down, it is still an endemic practice in many organizations and can, at best, result in duplication of work and, at worst, cause a failed response to a crisis. With nearly a third of respondents reporting some degree of siloed working practices occurring within their crisis management structure, it is clearly something which many organizations still need to work on.

A final point worth noting is that over a quarter of organizations — 27.8% — felt they lacked technical expertise within their crisis team in order to be able to make decisions. This was also a frequent point of discussion in interviews. In larger organizations with a centralised structure, technical and knowledge experts are often included within the centralised team and their expertise shared with local teams where required. However, whilst this is implemented in some organizations, for those where resources cannot be shared, local teams can struggle to get the information required to elicit an effective response. In smaller organizations, expertise normally did not exist within the organization and they found themselves reliant on information gathering from multiple different sources — something which was time consuming and lacked consistency of approach. Some forward-thinking organizations have been able to collect knowledge and intelligence by collaborating with other sector peers, partners, external specialists or customers so expert knowledge can be shared for the greater good of the sector.



An interviewee explained that they had the fortune of having a director in their organization who also sat on the UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE). Having such a well-informed individual within the organization was instrumental in facilitating the organization's response — particularly as the individual was approachable and communicative. Whilst not organizations will have the benefit of an individual on a government advisory body within their own staff, it demonstrates the importance of having expert knowledge which can be tapped during a crisis — and ideally having a seat within the crisis management team.

**"We were ideally placed because our Director is on SAGE. He is one of the leading global infectious disease consultants and experts in the world. So we've been incredibly fortunate in that we've had that input into our thinking. We can always approach him and see what his input is on something. I can always contact him if I need to know anything. He's an incredibly accessible individual. And that has enormously informed our COVID response. We were also able to shut down our offices in a controlled manner ahead of when the government announced the lockdown due to having that input in advance."**

Senior Risk Manager, Charity, United Kingdom

Another point made by interviewees was the importance of using the correct terminology during a crisis. Many expressed that the use of the word "crisis" was seldom used within their own organizations and use of the word "incident" was encouraged. If the word "crisis" is used too liberally, staff may not react in the way they should if a major crisis situation should occur.

**"I also think that making sure that the terminology that you use in defining a crisis is measured, and that you're not just loosely throwing around the word "crisis" for any incident. For example, if there is a chemical spill, that is an incident and may be extremely important. Depending on a number of factors, it could ultimately escalate to a crisis — but at that moment of the spill, it's an incident or an emergency situation. This may seem like a minor point, but it's one that could derail a program if you're not careful."**

Director of Global Crisis Management, Oil & Gas, United States

# Managing employee health & wellbeing

Managing employee health has become a pressing business resilience concern. The pandemic has exposed the fragmented way health has been managed in many organizations. Aspects of health are often handled across a number of departments, including HR, health and safety, finance, security, risk and operations, but often with no overall “owner”. In response to this growing need, some organizations are increasing leaning on health expertise to help navigate the nuances and uncertainties of this health crisis.

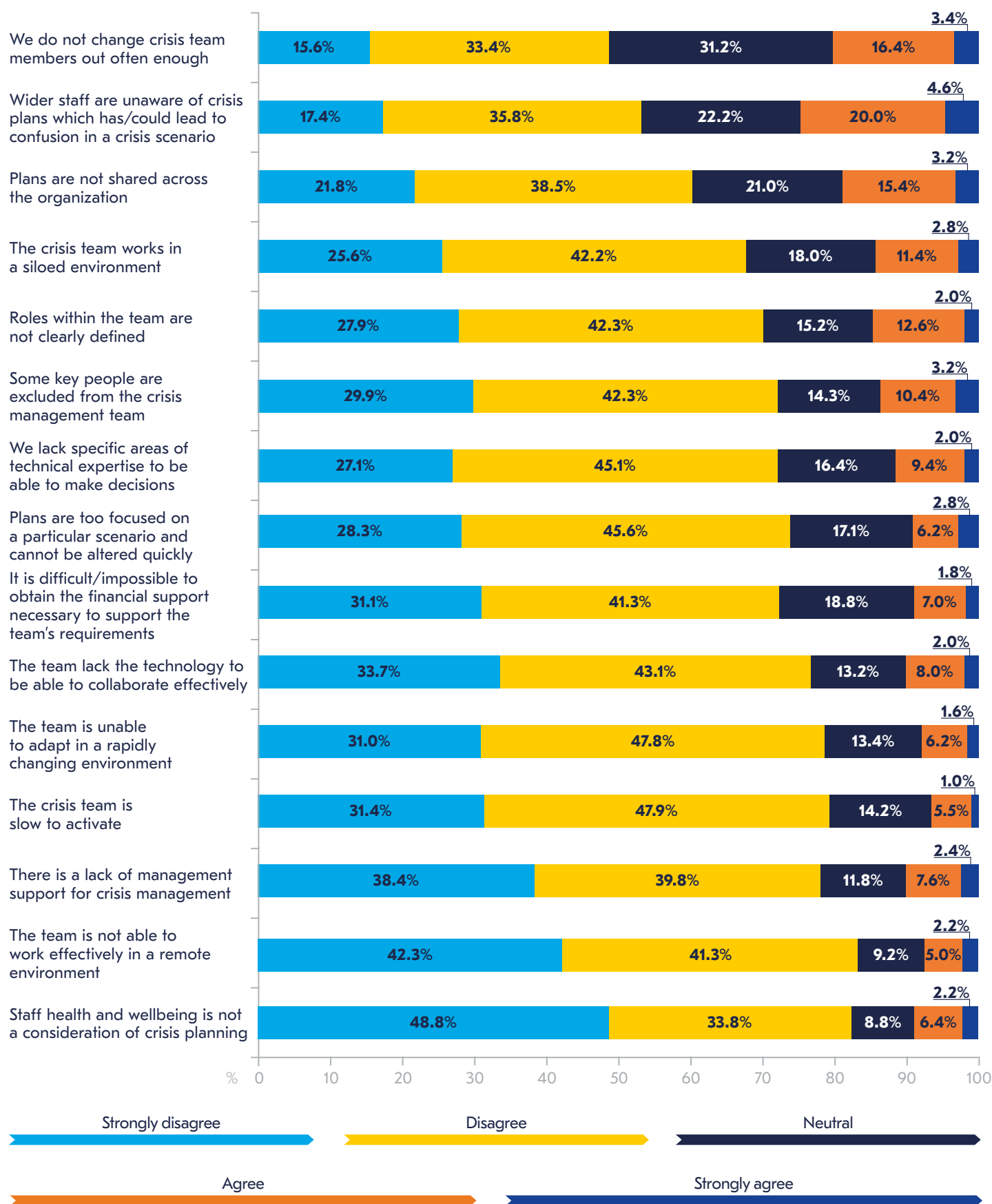
We are in a situation currently where many businesses are exploring implementation of vaccination programmes. For multinational organizations, monitoring this and supporting this across multiple jurisdictions is a major undertaking. We also know the impact that effective internal health communication can have on vaccine confidence; managing the complex supply chain and logistical challenges of vaccine rollouts in some countries is a substantial commitment. The complex questions of how to treat employees who are privy to different public health entitlements needs to be fully evaluated.

As evidenced in the report, having a dedicated expert on high-level medical issues can take some of the burden off management time and can address both current focus on COVID-19 and our future planning needs. Some organizations may have dedicated medical experts in-house, whereas other may turn to third parties for assistance. How should companies deal with the predicted increase in mental ill health or cardiovascular disease in their workforce in coming years? What role might the company play in bringing down rising malaria cases around their manufacturing plants? The scale of the pandemic, coupled with the continuously changing regulations and advice, has put many professionals under strain, unable to focus on the bigger picture. Health expertise can focus solely on these top-tier health concerns to leave crisis teams free for strategic business resilience decisions.

**Dr Anthony Renshaw, Regional Medical Director,  
International SOS**



## How much do you agree/disagree with the following negative criteria applying to your crisis management processes?



**Figure 4.** How much do you agree/disagree with the following negative criteria applying to your crisis management processes?

## Interaction and collaboration

Previous BCI reports have shown that the relationship between crisis management and business continuity has often been strained within organizations. Conflicts arise frequently due to a lack of collaboration between the two departments, a lack of agreement as to when crisis management should step aside to allow business continuity to begin the recovery process and ill-defined roles and responsibilities leading to work duplication and inefficiencies.

Furthermore, with business continuity frequently straying beyond its traditional realm of being a purely operational unit and being involved in the strategic response, more crossovers — and ultimately points of conflict — are likely to arise. It is therefore vital that a process is established to ensure which people/teams need to be involved at a particular point in a crisis and what their roles and responsibilities are.

**“There is a need to work out when different teams are invoked and where they sit in the organization — some teams view crisis management as operational, some as more strategic. You need to establish at the point when you invoke a certain level of response and who is involved in the response at that time.”**

Business Resilience Director, Consulting

Some organizations have appointed business continuity or resilience “champions” within the business who are called upon in a crisis scenario. Although most of these individuals’ permanent positions will be outside the resilience sphere, they will be trained and will be the first individuals within the organization to be informed in the early part of the response to make the necessary arrangements within their teams. Equally, such individuals are normally expected to be good communicators and collaborators who can share pertinent information with the crisis management team.

**“Whilst our executive general managers own their business continuity plan, we’ve got a number of part time business continuity coordinators across [the business] as our champion community. These coordinators are directly engaged when there’s a response to inform them what is happening, what is being done and which teams are being stood up. If they think their business will be impacted or they think they’ll have information to provide, there is the ability for them to opt in to the response.”**

General Manager of Resilience,  
Financial Services, Australia

One of the positive findings from research from this report and previous research carried out by the BCI in 2020 was that the two departments were now working more effectively together. One way of this is ensuring that a senior member of staff within the organization is assigned to managing both crisis management and business continuity (and frequently with the addition of security and/or emergency response). The dual oversight of crisis management and business continuity has helped many organizations to achieve harmonisation of crisis management and business continuity practises during an incident. Whilst this model was already present in some organizations pre-pandemic, the pandemic has seen other organizations reassign their structure to a similar model.

**“I have direct accountability for both business continuity and crisis management with a remit to have one conversation as much as possible with the business units. It is something I’m very proud of that recognition for that alignment, it avoids the tension that has existed before, that I have seen in other organizations and which my counterparts at other organizations are still facing: I see it and I heard it from some of them only yesterday. Instead we are now side by side and are very much aligned internally.**

**Some staff now are now utilising business continuity plans without even realising it. They’ll say ‘Oh, but we’ve never activated our plan.’ I’ll respond with ‘well, remember three weeks ago when you had this issue and you’re doing those workarounds? You’re actually using the insights and understanding gained in developing your plan. You were using your impact analysis. You were using your resource profiling and you were using the elements of your strategies.’”**

General Manager of Resilience, Financial Services, Australia

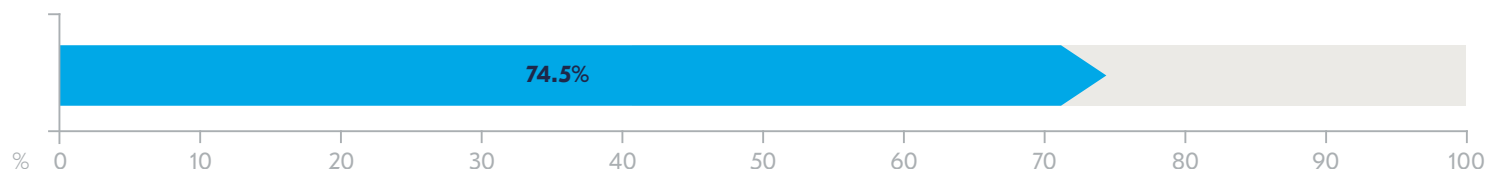


**“COVID-19 highlighted what many have been feeling for so many years. Many BC programmes focus so tightly on audit requirements that their practical application suffers. COVID-19 highlighted the need for teams to make decisions quickly and change operations in real time. I’ve found that many traditional BC programmes are not nimble enough, and COVID highlighted that weakness. Agility is not often reflected in BC Plans which has unfortunately created a divide between strategic management and business operations. I’ve also seen huge walls created between BC and crisis management for the same reason. One of the positive things to come out of COVID-19 is that it has forced various departments to work better together. The BC programmes often own important data that has been necessary for the quick decisions. BC programmes that were able to harness that valuable data were able to shine during the COVID response, but programmes that could not synthesise the data quickly unfortunately suffered.”**

Managing Director, Professional Services, United States

Encouragingly, nearly three quarters of respondents (74.5%) report that the relationship between business continuity and crisis management is effective, suggesting most organizations are not experiencing the traditional conflicts reported pre-COVID-19.

## How effective is the relationship between business continuity and crisis management within your organization?



**Figure 5.** How effective is the relationship between business continuity and crisis management within your organization?

In the previous question, it was discussed how conflicts can arise between the crisis management team due to business continuity starting to take on a more strategic role in crises. In traditional crisis team structures, senior management may be involved in the strategic response (often referred to as the “gold” team), followed by the tactical response team (“silver”) and the operational team — which would include business continuity — in the operational response (“bronze”). Some structures may include business continuity in other parts of their structure (typically within the tactical side of the response) whilst others may have smaller or more complex structures depending on company size.

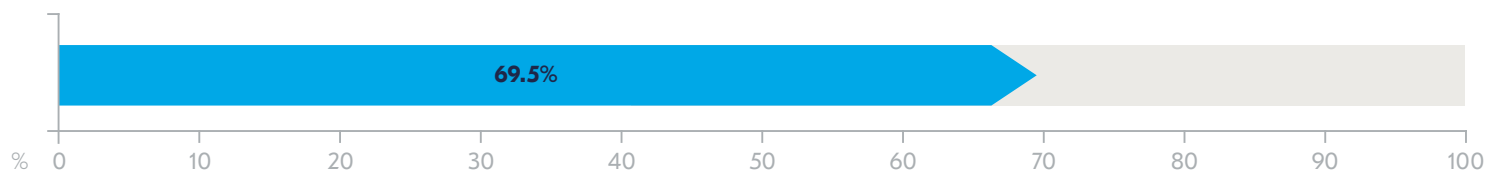
However, the board and/or senior leadership team are now realising the value that business continuity can play in terms of the strategic response: due to BC’s knowledge of the whole organization and, in many cases, a discernible organizational shift towards BC becoming more of an overall “resilience” function, management see the value of involving BC due to their intrinsic knowledge of the business and its potential points of failure. Furthermore, when management decides the organization should move in a new strategic direction — as many did during the pandemic — BC is brought in to advise whether this new direction will be effective and viable from a BC perspective.



There is clear demand from the BC community that this is a desirable process for organizations to include within their crisis management processes: the 2020 BCI Future of Business Continuity and Resilience<sup>14</sup> report showed that 60% of BC professionals felt their planning cycle needed to be reviewed to incorporate processes to ensure continued BC cover for priority business activities if circumstances dictate priorities change during a disruption. Indeed, the same report revealed 10% of professionals saw organizational priorities and working practices change during the pandemic – but there was no longer BC cover for them. On some occasions, professionals reported this ultimately caused the new strategic direction to fail which set the organization back from a recovery perspective.

In a further sign that BC is starting to move away from its previously entirely operational involvement in a crisis, the survey shows that BC's level of involvement in the strategic response averages at 69.5%, with 23.7% reporting BC is 100% involved in the strategic response. The larger the organization and the more complex the organizational structure results in BC being less likely to be involved in the strategic response. For organizations with over 50,000 employees, for example, BC's involvement in the strategic response is 63%. At the other end of the scale, organization employing under 50 members of staff reported BC's involvement in the strategic response is 82%. Smaller organizations tend to have a smaller, simpler crisis management structure which naturally leads to BC being involved more in the strategic part of the response whereas large organizations with a complex structure often keep BC within the confines of the operational response.

### To what extent does business continuity become involved in the strategic response in a crisis?



**Figure 6.** To what extent does business continuity become involved in the strategic response in a crisis?



14. Elliott, R (2020). The Future of Business Continuity and Resilience (September 2021). The BCI.  
Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-the-future-of-business-continuity---resilience.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-the-future-of-business-continuity---resilience.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

## COVID-19 has brought greater appreciation of the role of good organizational resilience in a crisis

The ISO 22316:2017 Organizational Resilience standard provides the industry standard definition of organizational resilience as “the ability of an organization to absorb and adapt in a changing environment to enable it to deliver its objectives and to survive and prosper<sup>15</sup>”. It further highlights that a management commitment to organizational resilience contributes to:

- An improved ability to anticipate and address risks and vulnerabilities;
- Increased coordination and integration of management disciplines to improve coherence and performance;
- A greater understanding of interested parties and dependencies that support strategic goals, and objectives.

Crudely, if an organization develops its crisis management structure around the principals of organizational resilience, it is better placed to weather a crisis. By adopting a culture of organizational resilience within an organization, communication is able to flow freely between different departments and levels, the organization is able to adapt and react quickly to a crisis and have a wider consideration that their organization is susceptible to crises and disruptive shocks.

An interviewee commented how they found adaptability had been an issue during the pandemic. They explained that when they made changes to working policies mid-pandemic as a result of feedback from one stakeholder group, another group expressed disappointment. When it was reverted, the original group were again not satisfied. Adaptability has been found to be a positive attribute in a response; particularly to one as elongated as COVID. However, care does need to be taken to ensure equilibrium is maintained between different stakeholder groups.



**“We have done a lot of surveys and feedback from the teachers and the parents to examine what worked well and what didn’t. What we’re now doing over this summer is looking at how we can adapt and adjust that teaching platform and that schedule. But how can we adapt that to meet the needs of the students and the families in the middle? Because we’re never going to make everybody happy. We did it one way and it made one group happy, but the other, no. Then we tried to go other way and it didn’t work. So, we have to find a way to hit dead centre in the middle.”**

Director of Risk Management,  
International Education, Thailand

15. ISO Technical Committee ISO TC/292 Security and Resilience (2017). ‘Security and resilience — Organizational resilience’. Available at: [www.iso.org/obp/ui#iso:std:iso:22316:ed-1:v1:en](http://www.iso.org/obp/ui#iso:std:iso:22316:ed-1:v1:en) (accessed 14 July 2021)

The BCI Horizon Scan Report<sup>16</sup> demonstrates each year that there is a disconnect in planning between events which are beyond the control of the organization (such as earthquakes or extreme weather events) and those where there is deemed to be a degree of organizational control (such as IT/telecom outages). For example, management intrinsically trust their IT department to manage IT, telecoms and cybersecurity issues and their focus diverts to disasters which are beyond organizational control such as earthquakes or extreme weather. This routinely leads to IT and telecom outages causing the most disruption to organizations most years.

It is therefore of some concern that only a third (34.1%) of respondents feel the board and/or senior leadership team understand the meaning and importance of “organizational resilience” when managing a crisis. Although a further third (35.9%) claim that management have understood the importance “somewhat”, over a quarter of organizations (26.7%) say that their management has little or no knowledge of its importance.

This was highlighted to an even greater extent in interviews: many professionals highlighted that siloing of information, a lack of collaboration opportunities, poor information pathways and an underappreciation of the importance of the different parts of the resilience jigsaw led to crises being managed in a disordered — and even chaotic — manner. An interviewee expressed how they believed that having the CEO being the champion of crisis management would be the wrong decision in their organization because they do not understand the importance of crisis management in the resilience jigsaw:

**“In our case, the CEO may be the wrong person to be the champion of crisis management because he just doesn’t understand it. I have an opportunity to report back to [senior management] now on a monthly basis and I do a situation report every month. When I highlight potential risks on the horizon, it’s just dead noise at the other end of the phone. Trying to get [the gravitas of the pandemic] across to somebody who really doesn’t understand what you do and the imperatives that are there for organizations is extremely difficult. The wrong person in place.”**

Head of Risk Management, Healthcare, United States

Encouragingly, however, it does appear that management have been educated into the importance of organizational resilience as a result of the pandemic: 85.6% of respondents said that senior management’s understanding and appreciation of the importance of organizational resilience had “very much” or “somewhat” increased as a result of the pandemic. Just 11.8% reported there had been no change or less appreciation of the concept.

As many interviewees commented, a crisis such as COVID-19 is what many organizations need to showcase the value of BC, crisis management and overall organizational resilience to senior management. The challenge is to ensure that appreciation remains when the impact of a crisis wanes.

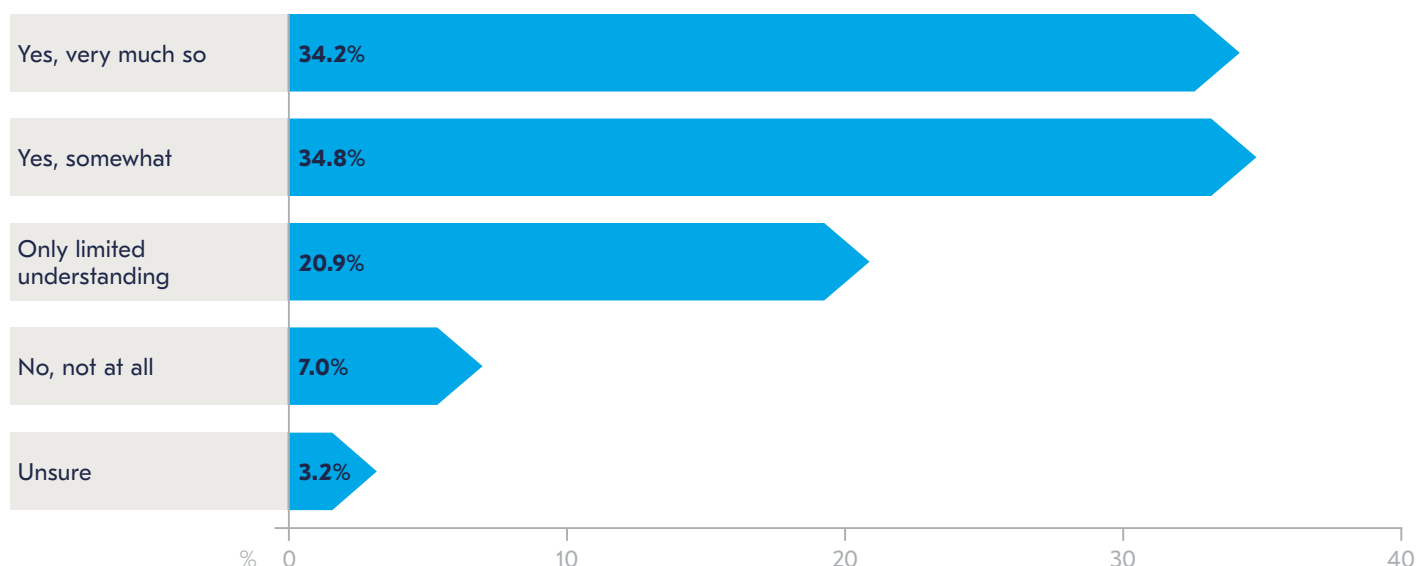


**“As far as engagement goes, the board are now highly engaged because of COVID. Before, their engagement was as per regulatory requirements e.g., policy approvals and major strategic changes. But right now, they’re engaged all the way down to simulation exercises. This is new for us: in the past the board were simply notified during exercises but there was no active role to play other than their normal role of oversight. So that positive change has happened because of COVID.”**

Group Head of BC, Financial Services, Australia

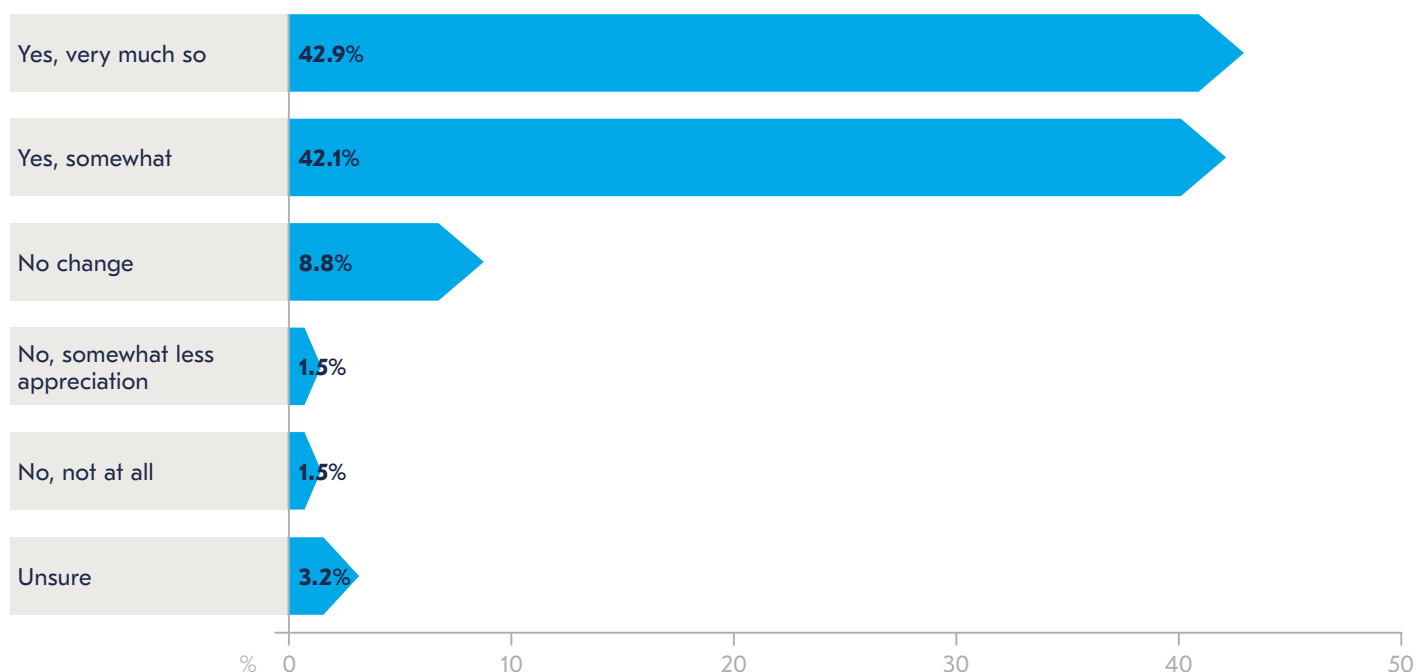
16. Elliott, R (2021). 2021 BCI Horizon Scan Report (March 2021). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

## Do you feel the board understand the meaning and importance of “organizational resilience” when managing a crisis?



**Figure 7.** Do you feel the board understand the meaning and importance of “organizational resilience” when managing a crisis?

## Do you feel the board’s understanding and appreciation of organizational resilience has increased because of the pandemic?



**Figure 8.** Do you feel the board’s understanding and appreciation of organizational resilience has increased because of the pandemic?



When considering the role of the board and/or the senior leadership team during a crisis, 39.2% of respondents said that senior leadership were involved throughout the decision-making process until the final decision was made. A further 41.7% reported they were involved at the end of the process and at varying points during the process. However, in a notable minority of organizations, a light touch approach from senior management was taken: 8.4% reported senior management were involved only at the start of the process (to share their vision) and at the end (for the final decision) and 6.5% only saw senior management being involved at the end.

Many organizations have a standardised approach to crisis management: whilst crises such as COVID-19 require regular input from senior management due to the strategic impact, other incidents which are operational in scope do not trigger such involvement. Interviewees reported varying degrees of input and trust from senior management: some reported that management had a high degree of trust in their tactical and operational teams and only requested to be informed of decisions made. Other had the opposite experience where senior management took on the role of making all decisions (strategic, tactical and operational) due to incumbent working practices and/or a lack of trust in the ability of individuals and departments to make their own decisions.

Indeed, whilst a good crisis management structure should have senior management at the top of the chart in overall strategic command, if it routinely becomes heavily involved in the operational response this can inhibit the response, particularly for larger organizations. This can give rise to trust issues and, crucially, would not have the specialist operational knowledge required for a response to be effective. One survey respondent put the matter succinctly: "we are more agile without [senior management] in the decision-making process."

Building a culture of trust is something which organizations need to work hard to develop and maintain. These can typically involve a significant amount of management time, so post-pandemic — when resilience is still top of mind — is a good time to consider trying to instil changes within an organization.

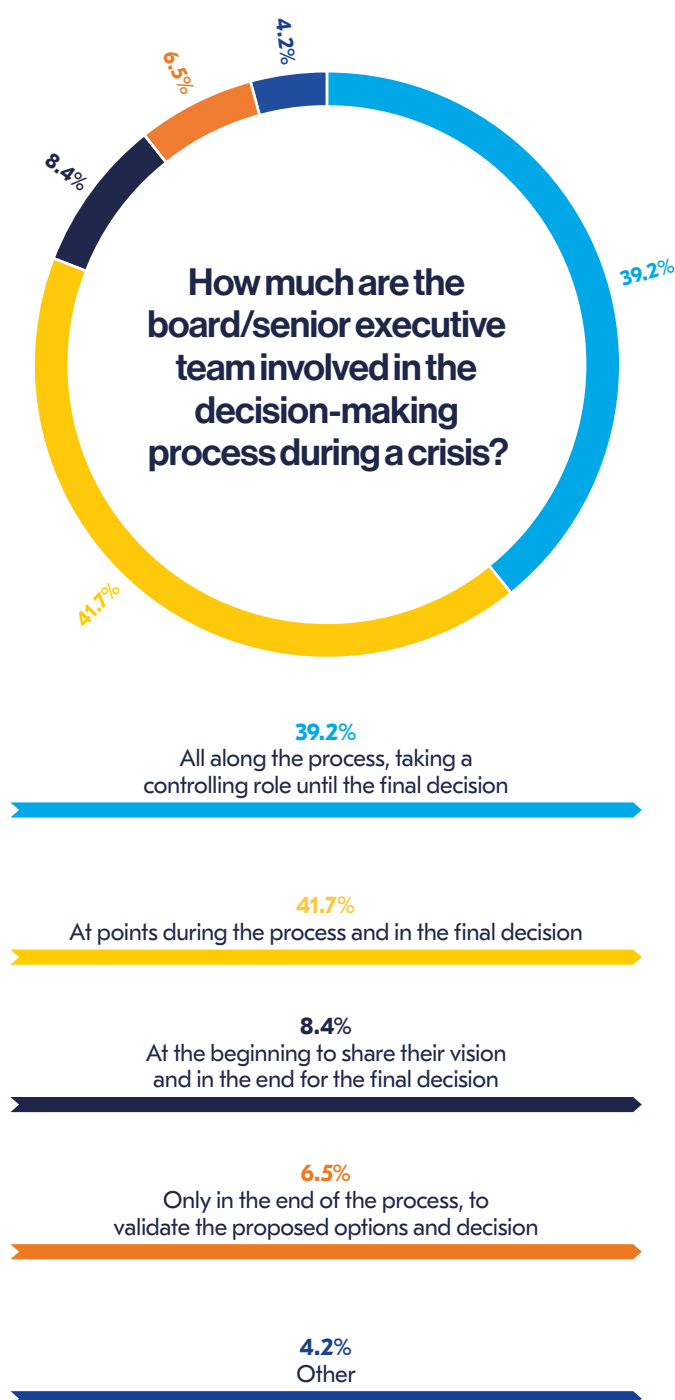
**"It's hard work. It's hundreds, hundreds, hundreds and hundreds of meetings that we've used to build that cultural approach, that shared accountability and mutual understanding. But it does work, it's given management a lot of confidence."**

General Manager of Resilience, Financial Services, Australia

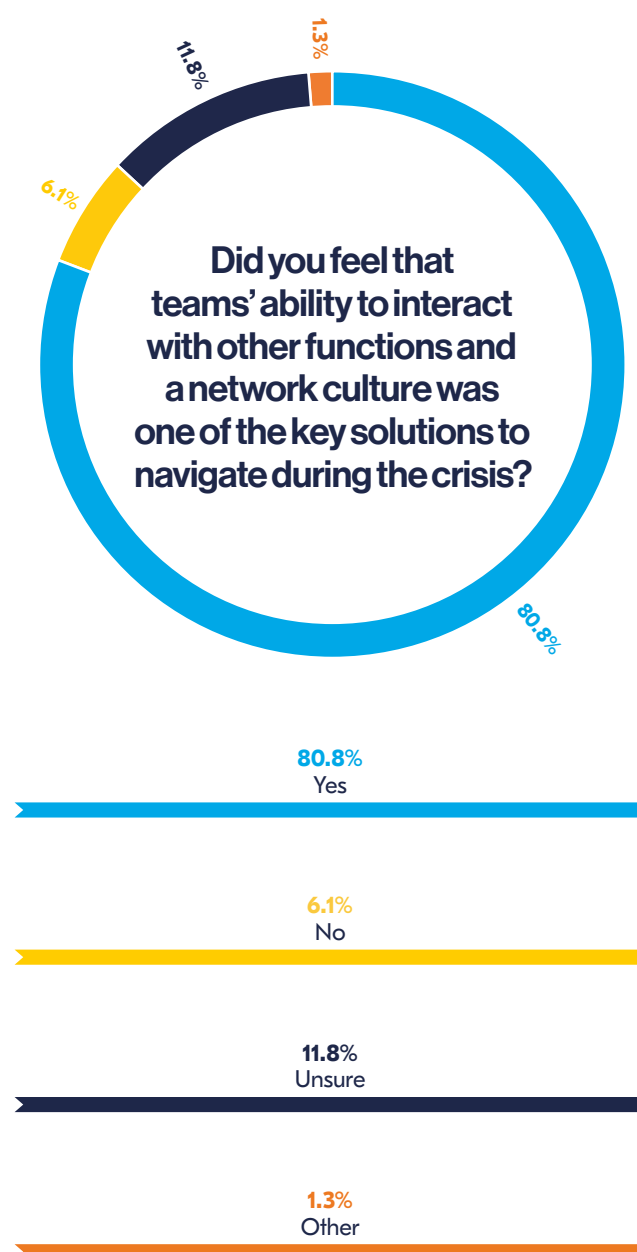
Another interviewee explained their experience from the opposite perspective — and can lead to the loss of talented resilience staff. They had managed to foresee the threat of COVID-19 in October 2019. When they expressed concern to senior management, they were accused of scaremongering when they warned a senior executive not to travel because the COVID situation was deteriorating in Asia. The senior executive still travelled and ended up being quarantined. The blame was then put on the interviewee who had tried to warn them of the situation before they departed. The interviewee left the organization as a result.

**"I started seeing the information coming through in around the latter part of October 2019. I started picking up that there was a worsening hotspot in China around a large city. Then I saw it was being identified initially as a migration of a pathogen from animal to human. I thought 'I've seen this before. We saw this for both bird flu and swine flu.' After seeing it was close to an airport, that was my real concern. [My former organization's] major function is based in the West Coast of the US and flights from China were nearly hourly. The infection zone leads down to Singapore where there was a major exhibition taking place which the UK MD wanted to attend. I considered it to be a significant risk of infection issue and I raised a flag and was told 'Don't worry about it. It'll never happen.' So I sent off a weekly report of exactly what was being reported, including infection rates and casualty figures. I was told not to antagonise people and not to scare them. The UK MD said, via the Security Leader 'Do not do these reports because we will find out from corporate, not from you.' Super. So off she went and was stopped and quarantined in Singapore, she couldn't attend the event, she came back and all I got from her was 'Why didn't you tell me?'" The business then did raise a COVID-19 group, without input from any BC or medical professional."**

Chair — Business Continuity Group, Industry Association, United Kingdom



**Figure 9.** How much are the board/senior executive team involved in the decision-making process during a crisis?



**Figure 10.** Did you feel that teams' ability to interact with other functions and a network culture was one of the key solutions to navigate during the crisis?

In a further nod to crisis management structures being more effective if different parts of the structure collaborate and communicate, 80.1% of respondents said that teams' ability to interact with other functions and a "network" culture was one of the key factors that enabled their organization to weather the crisis effectively. Whilst communication with senior management is one aspect of this, information needs to flow effectively in all directions around the crisis management structure.

# Planning for a crisis





The first section of this report noted how organizations are now moving away from scenario-specific planning to plans which are incident agnostic; focusing on the effect a crisis has to an organization's operations rather than the cause. Just like how the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines advocate the use of ensuring plans can be tailored quickly to the incident in hand, many organizations adopt an "all hazards" approach to crisis management.

BCI research during 2020 revealed that many business continuity plans (BCPs) were thrown aside in the early weeks of the pandemic because they were either too lengthy to digest and/or covered the intricacies of a previous pandemic or epidemic such as H1N1 or bird flu. Had plans been more adaptable, a more effective response to the pandemic could have been actioned more quickly than if an out-of-date and very lengthy pandemic plan were used as the basis of the plans. Although some organizations blamed agencies such as the World Economic Forum for failing to highlight that a global pandemic was not a risk in the preceding five years to 2020, it further highlights that multiple sources of information should be used when risk planning: the UK's 2017 National Risk Register, for example, cited "Pandemic" as the primary risk to the country for the next five years<sup>17</sup>.

In fact, just 48.8% of respondents reported they had a plan that was effective during the pandemic, a similar number reported ineffective plans: some had an ineffective plan (18.7%), others had a plan that could not be used due to being ineffective (14.3%) whilst some did not have a plan at all (10.3%). Many interviewees reported they were able to rewrite an effective plan in the early part of the pandemic, whilst others strictly kept their plans to a single page in order to ensure they could be quickly digested by everyone in the organization, including — most crucially — senior management. Whilst making plans more easily digestible can help with agility of planning, professionals should be careful to ensure that the right information is included within plans — even if only included in tactical or operational planning.

17. UK Cabinet Office (2017). National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/644968/UK\\_National\\_Risk\\_Register\\_2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/644968/UK_National_Risk_Register_2017.pdf) (Last accessed 26 July 2021)



“We had a really detailed pandemic plan which projected numbers in terms of sickness, absence and effects of the pandemic which was a bit of a waste of time: as soon as the ink was dry it was out of date. So the plan that we ran for a pandemic is very much focused on what the impact of a pandemic would be as opposed to a detailed analysis of the potential absence rates and potential impact on recovery time objectives (RTOs) etc. This is because your normal business continuity prepares you for a disruption and then you prioritise your most important people. That really wasn’t relevant for COVID. Clearly, we had to ensure we had the lead-in time and we prioritised the key areas where teams needed to be split. Thereafter, it was looking beyond that and changing RTOs. For example, something that had a three-day RTO would potentially cause us more impact than something that had a two-day RTO, because it had regulatory reporting, or because it required the customer or client reporting to some of our biggest funds. So, we have plans, but they are only really for our biggest threat, and we have local and major incident management plans which are very much agnostic around key actions and key things that the team need to consider regardless of which type of incident it is.”

Global Crisis Manager, Financial Services, United Kingdom

“We had a small pandemic plan which was to put PPE equipment onboard planes but was really generic as it was just around barrier protection. We had no plans around social distancing or similar. The plan was too generic to be of any use in this occasion.”

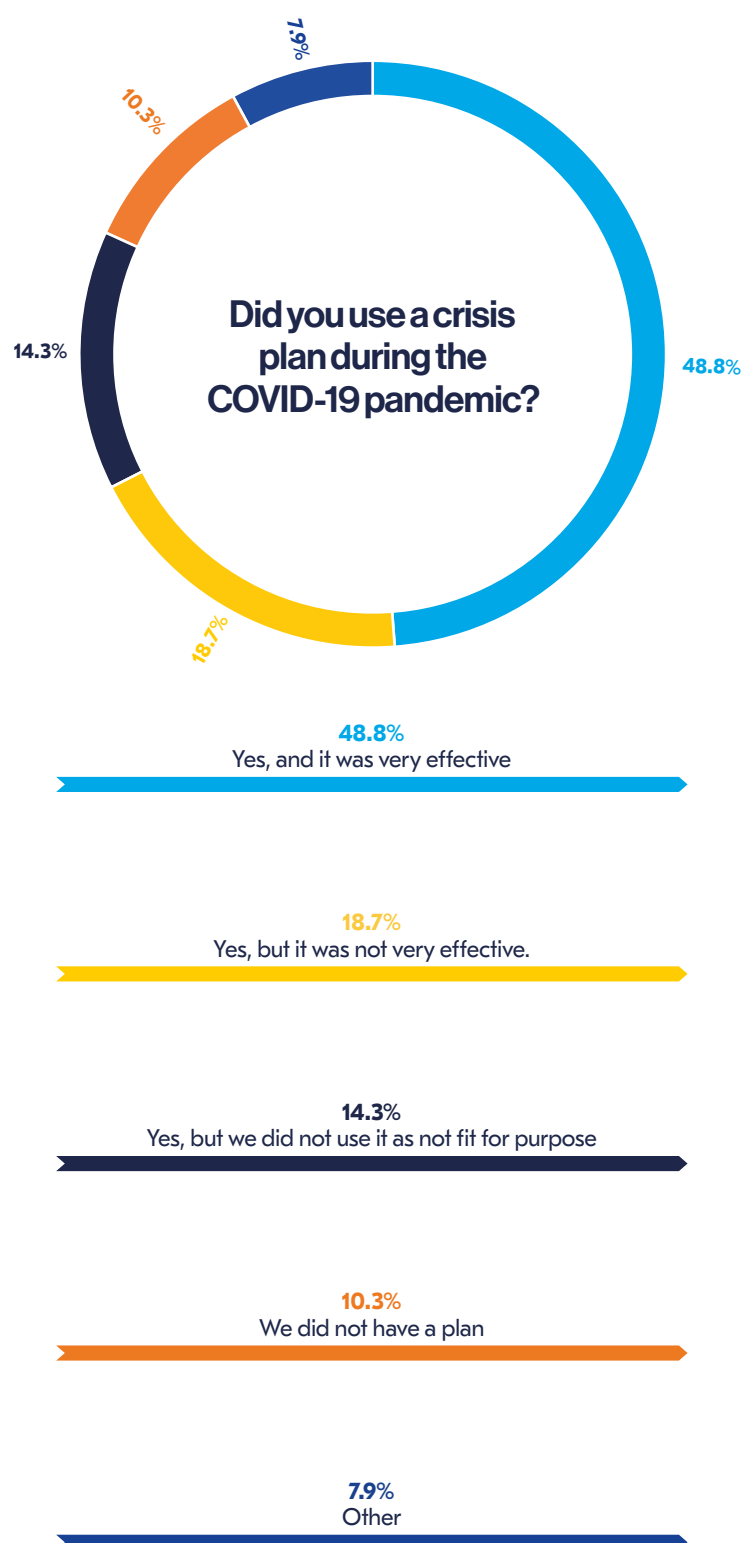
Emergency Response Manager, Aviation Industry, Italy

One interviewee highlighted how whilst incident-specific plans were useful for very specific events, they felt that the correct approach should be much broader.



“In terms of a pandemic plan, that didn’t exist. Hurricane plans existed, because of where we’re located geographically. My view is more event agnostic. You have an incident or a possible disruption that can either create a crisis or is a crisis in itself. The actual formal planning around the specifics is not something that I believe you must detail out in the crisis management plan. I believe a crisis management plan should be deliberately broad so that senior management can execute based on their knowledge and the specifics at the time of an event. In addition, the crisis management team, can leverage subject matter experts who understand toxic chemicals leaks, supply chain challenges, labour unrest, or whatever to provide deeper tactical understanding. In many cases, the subject matter experts may have specific plans (e.g., standard operating procedures) that are more incident response driven and refined.”

Director of Global Crisis Management, Oil & Gas, United States



**Figure 11.** Did you use a crisis plan during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Agility of planning

For those organizations who had an ineffective plan or one that was not fit for purpose, over three-quarters made new plans or altered existing ones: 19.9% wrote a new plan at the start of the pandemic, whilst a further 59.5% altered their existing plan to make it more relevant to COVID-19. For some, this meant adding detail to their all-hazards plan, others had to simplify plans to make them more readily accepted by senior management and some had to make changes to plans which were out of date or build entirely around previous pandemics or epidemics.

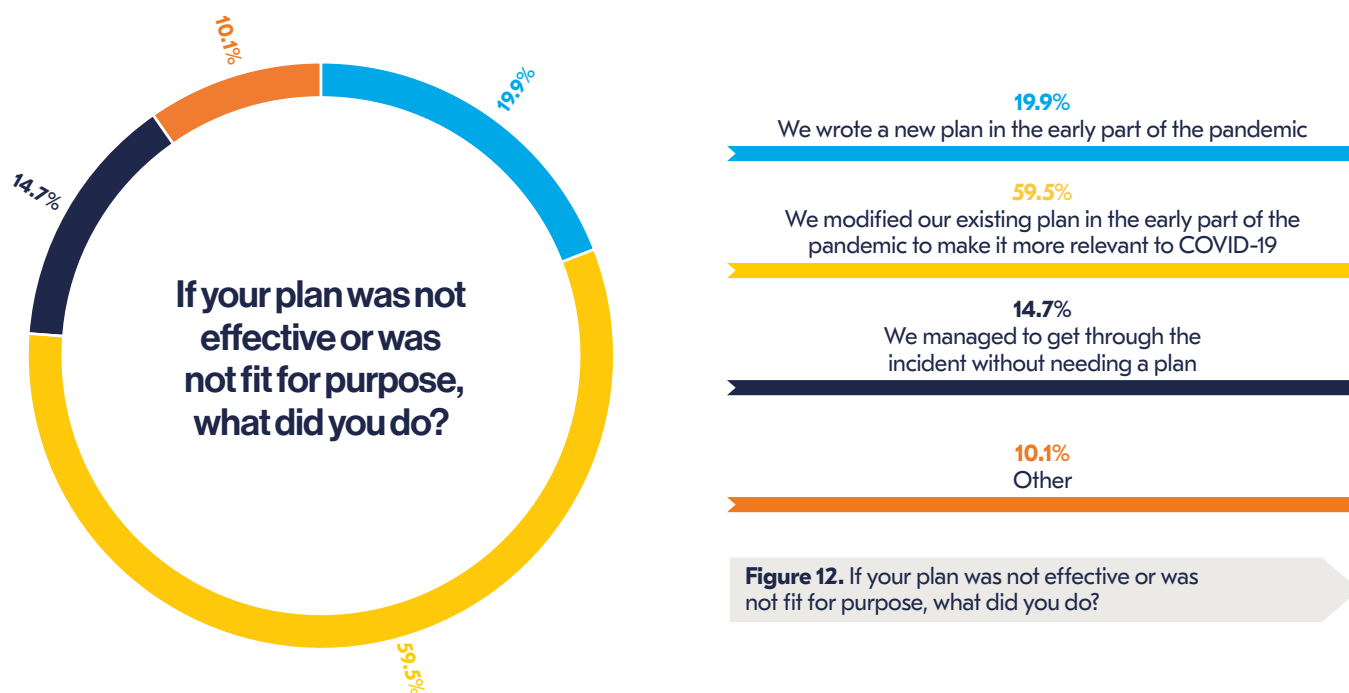
However, some respondents commented that whilst a plan was available, the parent company or the global centre of operation was slow to react to the pandemic; they admitted they had no choice but to follow their own, localised plans. Whilst this may have worked in the pandemic, such an approach should be avoided in future to avoid duplication of process, conflicting strategies and, ultimately, the failure in response. This further enforces the need to have clear flows of information throughout the crisis management structure, so such delays are identified and reported to senior management.

One respondent commented that plans had not been developed prior to COVID-19 due to not having the resource, and management expected new plans to be written overnight. Whilst the team were able to deliver this, the respondent noted that such a last-minute approach could have been avoided if management had been more open to creating a culture of resilience prior to the pandemic and allowed the team the resource required to write plans before the crisis hit.

**"We had planned to put in a pandemic plan — as a template to follow — into each location's business continuity plan in 2019, but we hadn't done that because we had no resource available. So we very quickly constructed a template, sent it out to all our business continuity teams globally, and said "you need to work off this template to develop a plan for a potential pandemic." That was in the last two weeks of January 2020. Our executive wasn't that interested until the beginning of March. When they did become interested, they wanted a corporate pandemic plan put together, which we managed to turn around in 72 hours."**

Head of Risk Management, Healthcare, United States

Although having to change plans at the start of an emerging crisis could be argued as an ineffective way of producing plans, it is also encouraging that so many organizations were able to make these changes. Ensuring plans are agile and adaptive is a crucial element to success, particularly for an elongated crisis such as COVID-19 where demands on organizations from governments, customers, suppliers and staff are changing so frequently. As Dwight D. Eisenhower said: "Plans are nothing, planning is everything". Whilst plans may struggle to withstand a serious incident in the early stages, the development of plans — the planning process — remains an essential activity in preparing an organization for times of crisis.



Despite some respondents reporting that plans had to be changed or modified at the last minute, the majority of organizations (84.0%) were able to activate their plans either on time (52.2%) or in advance by anticipating the problem ahead (31.8%). For the third of organizations who were able to anticipate the threat ahead, many did this by using horizon scanning techniques or by anticipating how the crisis would affect regional operations by monitoring the virus's progress as it spread throughout Asia.

**"I wrote to my risk management colleagues on 12 November 2019 after we had just had our first emerging risk workshop. It was run by risk management and included business heads from the UK and from the US. At the time, cyber was up there, as it has been for many years now, together with climate change and other potential threats. My note flagged that pandemic was the most likely of perceived hazards on the National Risk Register 2017 to be realised within the next five years... I believed we needed to get a greater weighting, not just for our own staff but all our stakeholders as well. It feels like I had a crystal ball. By the time the pandemic was on the radar, we'd already started to requisition additional laptops and to prepare staff to work remotely. So when we had to switch to remote working, it was a relatively seamless operation."**

Group Business Continuity Manager, Financial Services, United Kingdom

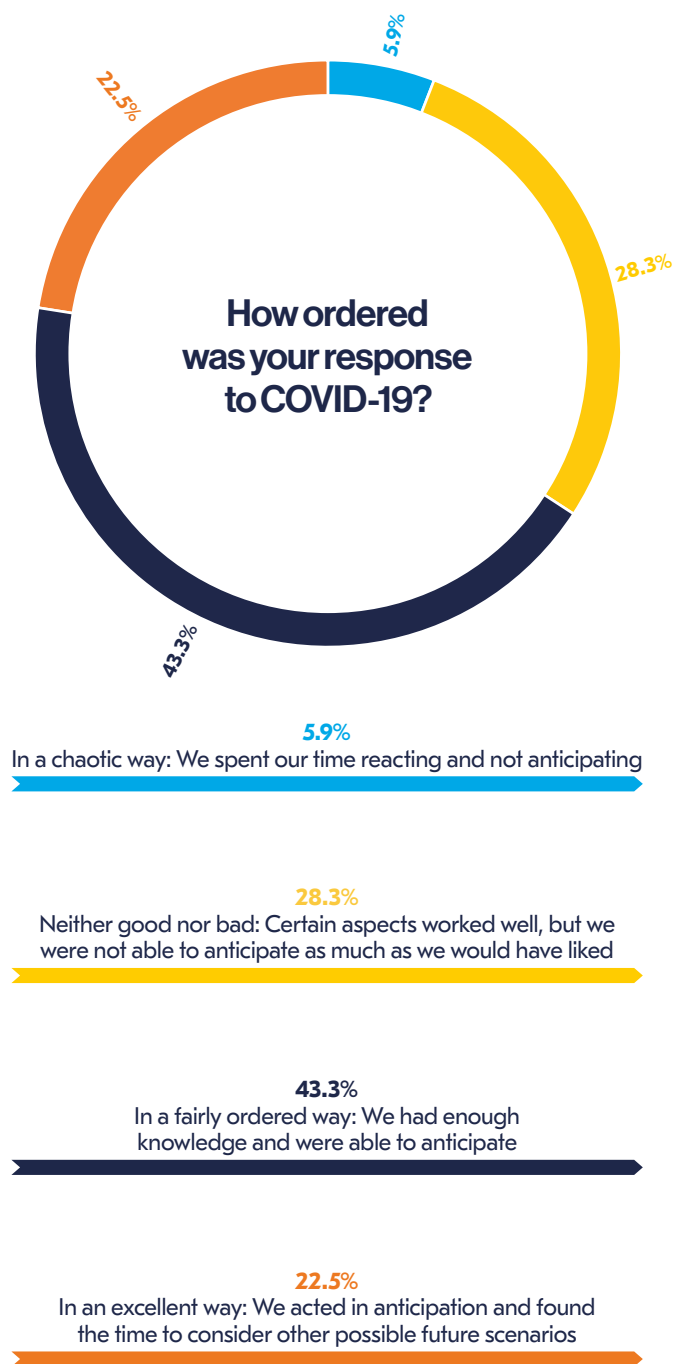
## Respondents identified a range of other factors which were instrumental in activating a timely response:

- **Good communication and collaboration:** Having seamless communication between other members of the crisis team, and the ability to share information about how the pandemic has affected operations, was highlighted as an enabling factor to a good response. Many cited having operations — or even customers or suppliers — in regions of the world that were “ahead” in the pandemic curve was instrumental to success.
- **Support from the top:** Some respondents said that the CEO’s direct involvement and/or senior management’s involvement from the start was instrumental to a fast response being initiated.
- **Strong leadership:** Some credited their response to having strong and clear leadership from the crisis management chair, whilst also allowing other members of the crisis management teams the autonomy to make quick regional announcements, adjustments and decisions if required.
- **Trust:** Many independently cited that a culture of trust is vital in the management of a crisis. Allowing members of the crisis team to make their own decisions within a framework of broad parameters helped decisions to be made quickly and implemented fast.
- **Having expert involvement from the start:** Many practitioners valued the input from “the right people” on the crisis management team. The input from health and safety, wellbeing, corporate affairs, communications and HR were cited as being particularly important, as were experts held within the “top”, a centralised team who were able to provide well-informed and time critical advice to teams on the ground. Having a clinician embedded advising the CMT has been an important contributor to achieving high levels of trust within this pandemic.
- **A measured approach:** Many governments were criticised for making quick decisions during the pandemic which had to be reversed quickly. The same was true in some organizations’ response to the pandemic. However, many individual respondents commented that their response to the pandemic was measured: decisions were made by the right people and the right data obtained. Some respondents further commented their approach was “led by science, rather than the Government/WHO”. Whilst this approach is more likely to invoke the “right” response, other decisions (such as sending staff home) still require quick decisions to be made.
- **Act now, worry later:** A rather contradictory approach to the one highlighted above, and this is not an advisable approach to take. However, a notable few respondents commented that when the threat of the pandemic was realised, they immediately sent staff home — and built a more detailed process around it.

The final two bullet points highlight the conflict which many organizations felt during the pandemic: at what point does an organization alter plans at the potential expense of jeopardising the measured planning process? The majority of organizations appear to have done things right — or mostly right. Nearly a quarter (22.5%) of organizations felt they approached the COVID-19 crisis in an excellent way; anticipating what was likely to happen and having enough time to consider multiple different scenarios. A further 43.3% considered their response to be “fairly ordered” with enough knowledge being available and some ability to anticipate. 28.3% said their response was “neither good or bad” and whilst certain aspects of planning worked well, it was difficult to anticipate what would happen.

Finally, 5.9% of organizations described their planning as chaotic and the response was reactionary, with teams firefighting to ensure the organization could get through the pandemic. The smaller the organization, the more likely this was the case: 12.9% of organizations employing less than 20 employees admitted a “chaotic” response compared to 2.4% in organizations employing 10,000 people or more. Whilst larger organizations do have more resource focused on crisis management and business continuity, smaller organizations can be more agile and able to react quickly. These statistics show, however, that even the smallest organizations do need to consider some degree of crisis planning within their organization. It would also be advisable for larger organizations to interrogate the plans of smaller organizations within their supply chain to ensure critical suppliers are going to be able to meet contractual requirements when faced with a crisis.





**Figure 13.** How ordered was your response to COVID-19?

## The post-incident review (PIR) – when should it happen?

As of July 2021, less than half (45.6%) of organizations have now moved out of crisis planning mode and are back to business as usual (BAU) whilst 36.3% still remain in crisis management mode. Those that were still in crisis management mode tended to be from countries where the pandemic hit later or are currently enduring second, third – or even fourth – waves. 18.2% of respondents admitted that they were unclear when the organization moved – or even if it had moved – out of crisis management mode.

Whilst it should be clear to the crisis team when an organization moves out of crisis mode, in some circumstances management have sought to move their organizations out of crisis mode in a stealth-like fashion to help create a degree of normality amongst staff and raise levels of productivity. The FT reports how the Global CEO of Accenture, Julie Sweet, retrained 37,000 staff to respond to a rapid increase in cloud computing demand and opportunities in the public sector; she saw the need to quickly refocus from opportunism to normalising. She halted “emergency” meetings and ensured a degree of normality could be reinvigorated in staff. Intense three-day strategy meetings became two-hour virtual events with a focus on a single topic, and strategies were redrawn quickly so as “not to waste a good crisis”.<sup>18</sup>

Interviewees also talked about how their teams had “made the most of a good crisis”. One explained how the team’s exceptional display of situational awareness had built the senior management’s confidence in the team which had helped to win the team additional support. Another highlighted that not only were senior management more supportive of crisis management and business continuity, but they appeared to be “sold” to the concept of the value of resilience.

18. Edgecliffe-Johnson, A (2020). ‘The challenges of moving a business out of crisis mode’. FT (6 September 2020). Available at: [www.ft.com/content/e9418a29-e939-47f0-9ccb-a0917197ca83](https://www.ft.com/content/e9418a29-e939-47f0-9ccb-a0917197ca83) (accessed 14 July 2021)

**"The key for the business continuity team to come out shining was that we were able to provide situational awareness to the exec and to the board across the key elements of the business; we were able to provide some level of clarity in a time of extreme ambiguity. If I had to pick the one thing that got us through the crisis it was the ability to continually inform the exec and the board of what the status of our response was when things were changing so quickly. From there it was just a launchpad for us. We had gained their confidence; resource and access issues were no longer a major problem."**

Group Head of BC, Financial Services, Australia

**"[Getting support from senior management has been one of] biggest challenges for anyone in our profession for many, many years. I'd be surprised if everyone hasn't said that COVID has, in some way, given them the opportunity to enhance that relationship. What COVID has done is provide us with a stage to demonstrate the value our profession brings. This opportunity has resulted in greater interest and support from key leaders across the company. The real test will come as COVID subsides. It's a case of "don't waste a good crisis". That's certainly what we've done in regard to rolling out of programmes: while the interest peaking, we are really pushing engagement and completion of deliverables. Pre-COVID, there was certainly support for our programmes, but there wasn't a deep understanding of the value that resilience is driving across the company. There's certainly more understanding of that now."**

Regional Resilience Lead, Technology, United States

It should be noted that the "making the most of a good crisis" has not been the case in some organizations. An interviewee explained how their organization had managed a good response to COVID with little input from BC, and there was now little need to invest in BC in future. Staff and senior management felt they had become very well versed in what to do during a major incident due to multiple lockdowns and felt there was little need to make any changes.

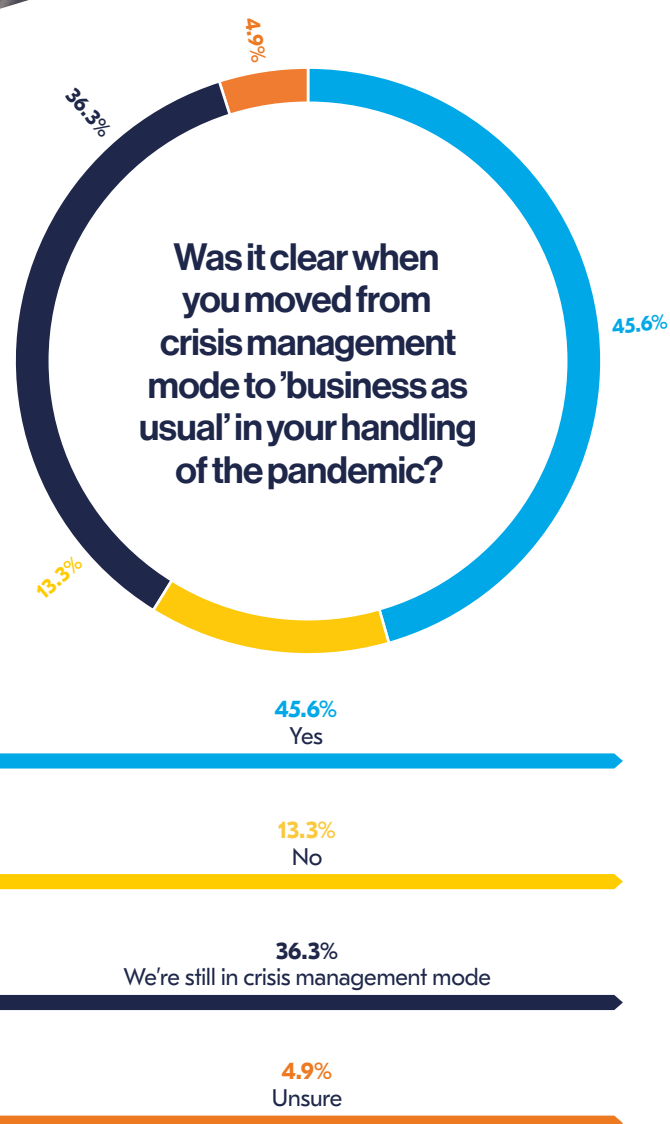
**"I think the problem is that we have handled everything very well. I can't say we haven't. This is because there's no data held to show that we haven't! Finance has felt that we have come through this well. We haven't lost as much money as we thought we would, etc. Going online wasn't as expensive as we felt. We're very much an onsite campus. We didn't have much of an online capability before this, so now we've got it. Because we've just dropped everything and put it into place, so they feel that they can do that. Because we've done it now, and we can do it again and again now and we're well practised with the lockdowns and reopening. This is why it's a hard sell to actually get a documented plan for things. They don't even want to write a plan for how to lockdown the university, because they feel it's part of an everyday process now. They've done it so many times, it's part a normal process. They don't seem to understand that the knowledge is only in one or a few person's heads and if they're not there tomorrow, that knowledge is lost and they'd have to start again and waste valuable time."**

Business Continuity Manager, Education, Australia

Another interviewee expressed that whilst the pandemic had been beneficial in highlighting the good work done by crisis management and business continuity, he believed this was something that happened with every crisis. This highlights the challenge ahead: ensuring the learnings from COVID-19 do not wane, and crisis management programmes can remain invigorated without the need for another “good crisis” to happen.

**“From a crisis management standpoint, our higher-level leaders are actually listening to the business continuity teams. But yes, it’s strictly as a result of COVID, and within a year that relationship may fall off or not be as positive because they’re not having daily or weekly conversations. It’s a shame that something has to happen to get that management support, but that’s been typical in my career field. That’s been my experience with this for many, many years as long as I’ve been in the business.”**

BC & Disaster Recovery Consultant,  
United States



**Figure 14.** Was it clear when you moved from crisis management mode to 'business as usual' in your handling of the pandemic?





Whilst some may be unsure if their organization has come out of crisis management mode, 45.9% have already conducted their PIR. This is a near-identical figure to the number of respondents who reported it was clear when their organization had come out of crisis management mode, so it suggests that the PIR is the characterising factor for moving out of crisis management mode for many professionals.

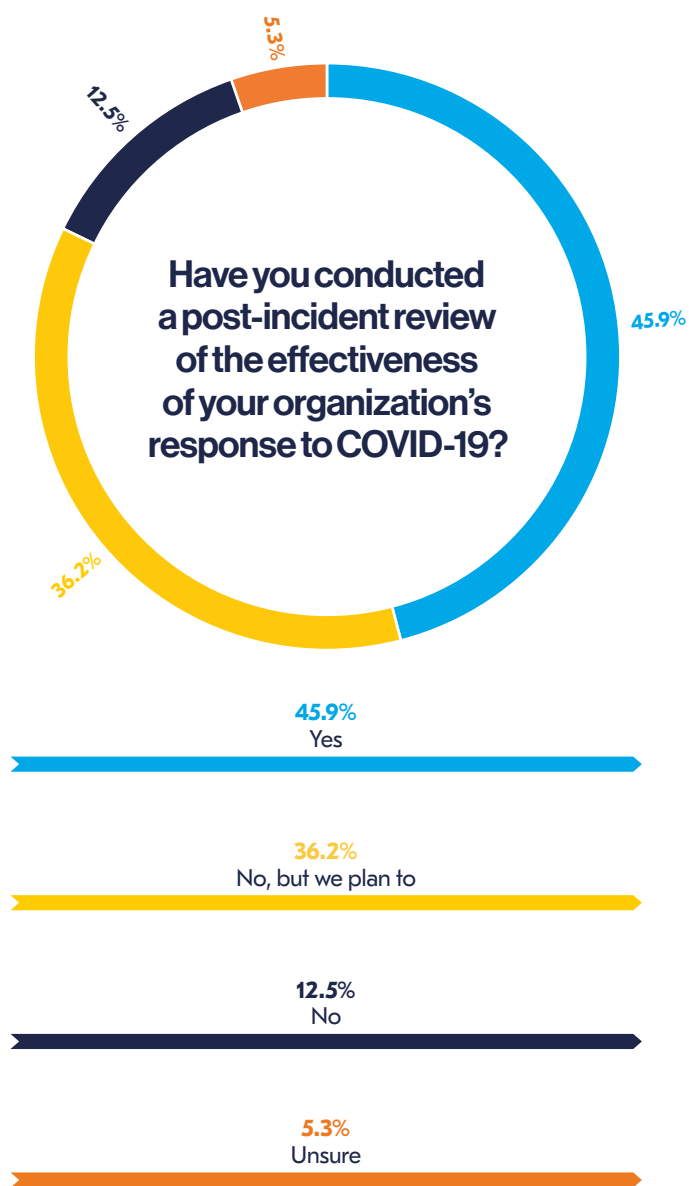
Good practice suggests that the post-incident review should be carried out between 24 and 72 hours after an incident. However, with COVID-19 the longevity of the crisis coupled with unravelling the strategic and operational impact of such a deep-hitting crisis means a standard review would not be at all sufficient to cover the issues raised, the learnings and the recommendations.

A further third (36.2%) of respondents said that a post-incident review had not been scheduled, but there would be one. A surprising 12.5% admitted that their organization would not be conducting a post-incident review. However, some reported that the longevity of the crisis had meant review meetings were carried out throughout with learnings introduced into the organization's crisis strategy whilst still in crisis mode. Some organizations may refer to interim reviews as "After Action Reviews", essentially reviewing a part of the process — an action — undertaken as part of the response to a crisis and ensuring detailed learnings can be made. Leaving the review until after the crisis would be, as one interviewee put it, "putting plans in place after the horse has bolted". Nevertheless, a post-incident review should still take place to ensure all the interim learnings can be translated into changes into crisis strategy going forward.

**"We started to do a running "lessons learned" list in January. It wasn't overly complex, it was a simple spreadsheet. It was simple feeds about either people, process, or tech related issues. We have kept that running ever since. We didn't do our first PIR until June. The timing was problematic for me because normally we would only conduct a PIR once the disruption was over. I've been trained that it's not over till it's over. However, it got to a point where we couldn't hold off anymore, so we conducted some interim PIRs, if you like. They're basically the same as a final PIR, but we make it very clear that this is not the final review. The incident is not over, and we present the results as lessons learned so far and explain how we expect more lessons from COVID."**

Group Head of BC,  
Financial Services, Australia





**Figure 15.** Have you conducted a post-incident review of the effectiveness of your organization's response to COVID-19?

## The post-incident review – who should be involved?

The PIR cannot and should not be a “one size fits all” approach for each incident affecting an organization. For example, for an IT outage that has had little impact on the organization and other stakeholders, a review team may be composed of the essential team members who could typically be the Incident Commander, the Primary Subject Matter Expert, the Customer Liaison and the Scribe<sup>19</sup>.

With an incident with the size and scope of COVID-19, some local or business unit reviews will normally be carried out before a larger, all stakeholder, meeting. Such meetings tend to focus on the operational learnings, although some will include tactical and strategic changes as well if appropriate. Additionally, or for organizations which only operate in a single geography, meetings may be held by individual departments and the results of which will be carried forward into the wider review process.

At this point, meetings tend to focus on what went wrong, what went right and the timeline of the incident process will also be revised. From this critical review, teams can make learnings such as how they could do things better next time, how the incident could have been resolved quicker, what they could do to stop the incident reoccurring or if processes need to be changed.

When the global post-incident review is carried out, a larger body of stakeholders will be involved. At this stage, it is likely to be all those involved in the incident in some way. Some respondents reported their organization also invited customers, suppliers or other external stakeholders to meetings as well.

19. IT Revolution (2021). ‘Building An Incident Management Response Team’. IT Revolution (9 June 2021). Available at: [itrevolution.com/building-an-incident-management-response-team/](https://itrevolution.com/building-an-incident-management-response-team/) (accessed 14 July 2021)

As COVID-19 directly affected organizational strategy for the majority of organizations, senior management's input is vital. Senior management not only provide valuable input, but they can also be the enabler in ensuring that information is shared ready between departments and a "no blame" culture instilled across the whole organization. Collating all the facts around a certain incident are crucial for the correct action to be taken and, without blame, individuals can act quickly in a crisis and are less likely to hide information. Furthermore, if individuals are rewarded for taking action and collaborating, then processes will improve going forward and stakeholders more satisfied.

When respondents were questioned about the composition of their crisis management team, there was little difference in the percentages of involvement for the top eight categories. Whilst it could be questioned that only 82.5% of organizations actually involved the crisis management team in the post-incident review, when interrogated further, these responses mostly originated from small organizations which did not have a formalised crisis management structure in place. Indeed, 67.8% of organizations employing under 250 staff involved crisis management in the post-incident review compared to 92.5% in organizations employing over 50,000 staff.

Business continuity was the second most likely department to be involved in the PIR process with 78.4% of respondents making this choice. Business continuity's role, whilst typically crucial within the tactical and operational parts of the review, was sometimes left out of final review meetings with business continuity input relayed from another member of the crisis management teams — frequently to the exasperation of BC. Many professionals who answered the survey felt this should not be the approach taken and were hopeful of being included in future after the reviews had been carried out. In smaller organizations, it was often business continuity's responsibility to hold review meetings with each department and condense the findings into an actionable report for senior management.

Other business units which are commonly involved in the PIR were HR (75.8% of organizations), operations (73.6%), risk management (68.8%), communications/PR (66.2%) and health and safety (64.0%). Other functions that had less involvement were security (58.3%), finance (53.0%) and legal (50.4%). Occupational health services were at the bottom of the table with 37.9%, although many respondents commented that such a department did not exist in their organizations. For those that did have a department, many brought in occupational health services for the first time in their COVID-19 PIR. Occupational health is a vital part of the process to oversee staff health matters in particular jurisdictions. In some cases, organizations may have to go a stage further and bring in external health expertise to guide in more strategic health decision-making. For multinationals this often requires knowledge of global health in different countries.

One of the main concerns highlighted by these statistics is that less than three-quarters of respondents (70.7%) report that senior management are involved in the PIR process. Although respondents and interviewees commented that senior management had become involved in the review process for the first time due to the hard-hitting nature of COVID-19, it was still difficult to get the senior executive involved in many organizations. Many respondents expressed anger at how they were unable to get the senior executive involved, with one claiming their only input was to "let them know when the money had run out"; hardly an environment in which learnings can be made from a crisis.

Whatever the statistics depict, the right involvement in the PIR should be every department and/or person who had some involvement in the organization's response. Different crises are also likely to have different people being part of the post-incident review. Furthermore, some organizations have different ways of organizing teams due to sectoral discrepancies: universities, for example, might seek input from facilities, research staff, academic deans, students and faculties whilst health providers may seek input from nursing, administration, medical and clinical staff. Others invited anyone in the organization to participate who had comments to make about the response, whilst including the views of external parties now appears to be fairly commonplace.

# Crisis management gap analysis

One of the recurrent actions an airplane or ship captain take before a flight or a major navigation, during a storm, and after a trip that may have challenged the resistance of the structure, is a check-up of the aircraft or vessel (the so-called 'pre-flight check' in the aviation industry). This procedure can have a decisive impact on how the machine will react in difficult times.

The parallel might sound too simple, but the same applies to the resilience of a company and its crisis organization. The ability to know and identify the strengths and weaknesses of a structure allows organizations to anticipate, prepare for, and respond appropriately to an incident, emergency or event that could lead to a slow burning, creeping or sudden crisis.

After the first year of COVID-19 crisis management, 46% of survey participants answered that they conducted a Post-Incident Review (PIR). This may also be termed an After-Action Review (AAR) in crisis management. 36% indicated that they wanted to conduct one but had not yet done so either due to lack of time, initiative, or expertise. For these 46% (and possibly for the 36% who will conduct a PIR/AAR), the participants to this critical debriefing were mainly represented by the crisis management team itself followed by the business continuity team. In addition, the presence of human resources, operations, board members and communications is seen in this process. This emphasises that crisis management is an agnostic activity for most organizations that must integrate all the strategic actors of the organization's activities. Conducting a structured review or debriefing to analyse what happened, why it happened, and how it can be done better by those responsible for the project or event helps the identification of areas for improvement and enables the optimization of key processes.

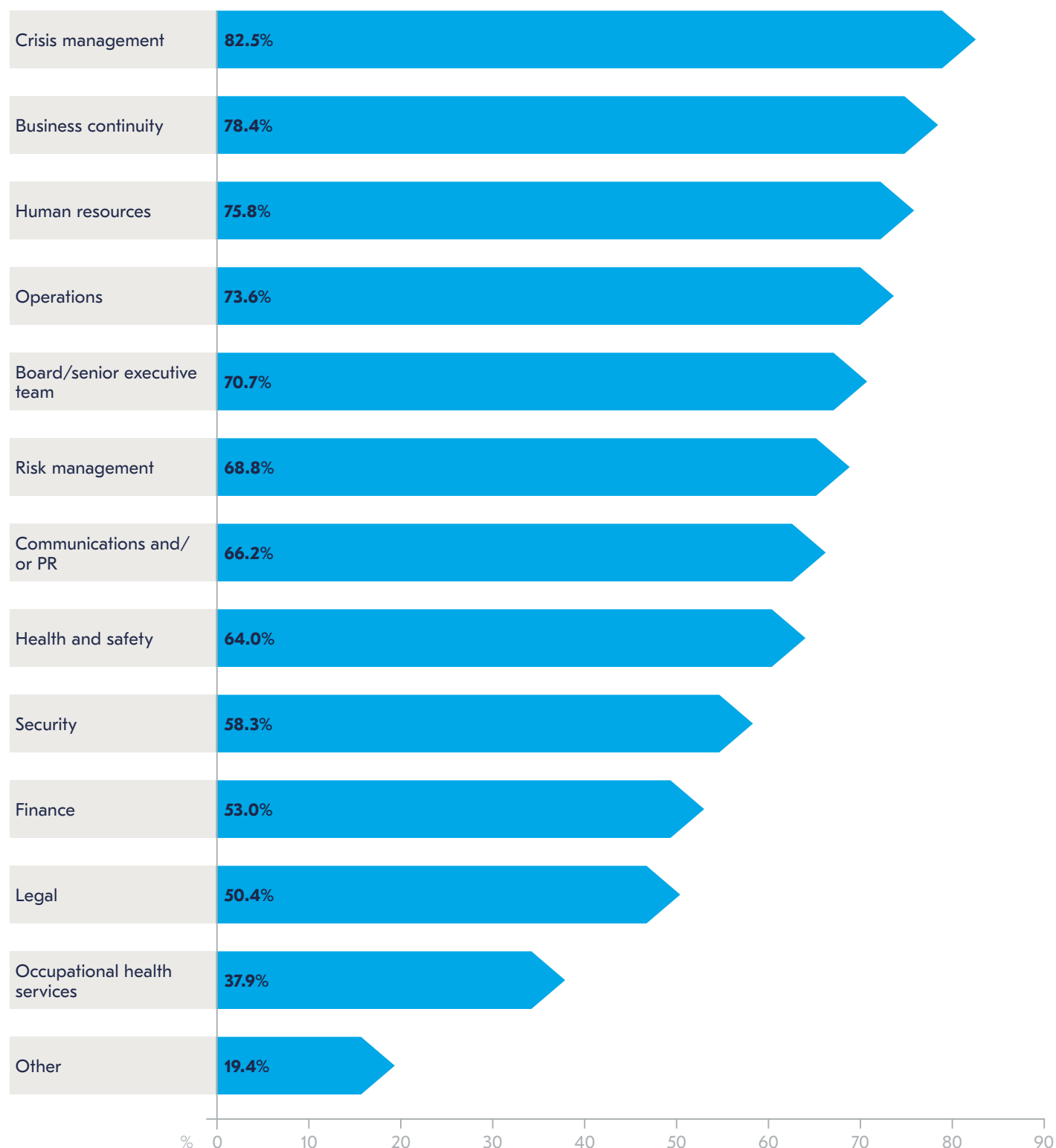
However, if one seeks to build a complete, reliable, and effective operational and organizational resilience programme, the PIR/AAR will not be enough. In this respect, conducting a gap analysis is the most pragmatic and holistic process that will generate the most visible return on investment and time. This silo-bridging and inclusive initiative provides organizations with three key elements: a full review of all critical areas, features, standard operating procedures and plans before, during and after a crisis; a visualization of the zones of robustness and fragility; and a tangible and granular action plan that will address all deltas and reinforce good practices. Some organizations may look to a third-party entity that will provide the necessary independence to allow organizations to take a fresh and unbiased look at their status quo.

Often, in times of crisis, some organizations still lock themselves away and centralize their exchanges and improvement processes internally with the idea that the crisis can be solved by their own team because "they know best." An objective view allows to perceive more details on how an organization handles a crisis. It also allows key support for the development of guidelines on changes and adaptations that an organization may need to implement as well as the integration of complementary management tools that could enable an organization to identify new opportunities where previously they would have only seen risk.

**Gautier Porot, Security Director,  
International SOS**



## Which departments are represented in a post-incident review?



**Figure 16.** Which departments are represented in a post-incident review?

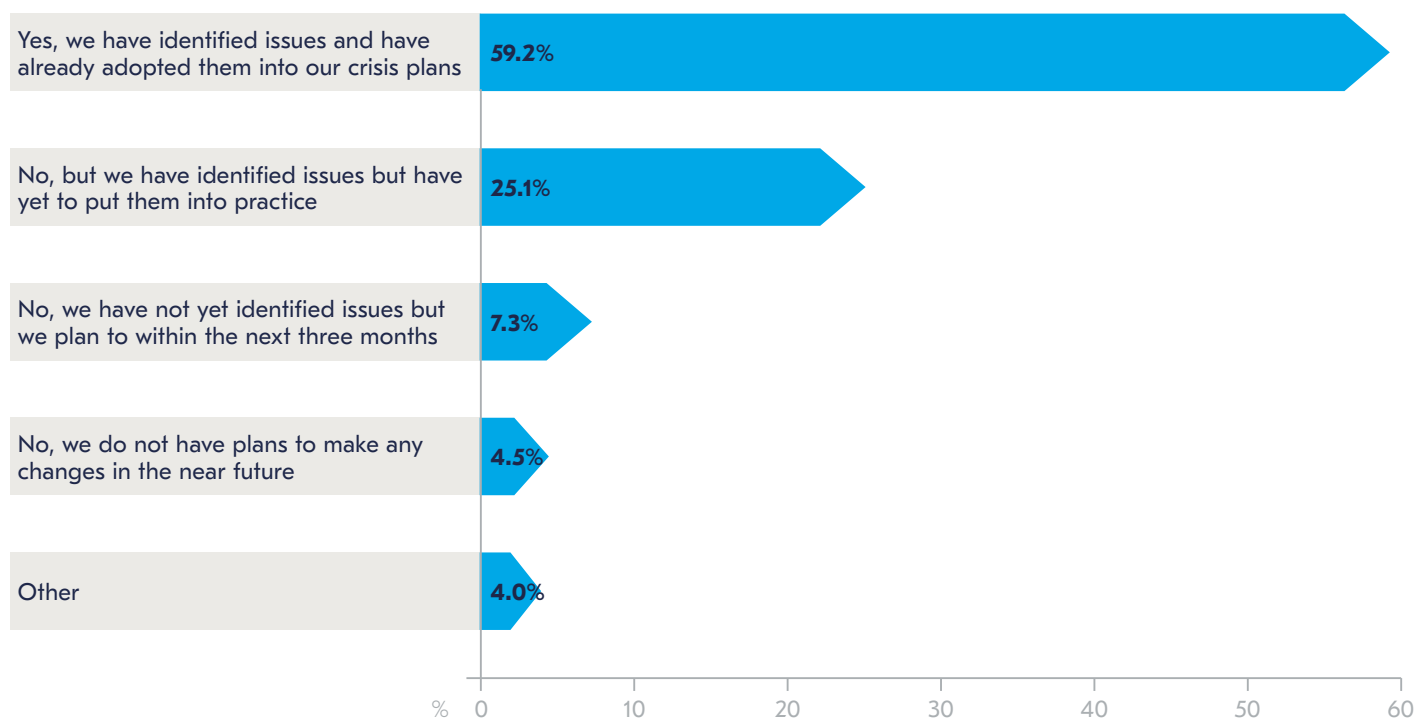


## Issues are already being identified – and rectified – ahead of the PIR

Whilst less than half of organizations may still not have carried out their PIR, nearly two-thirds (59.2%) admit having already identified issues and adopted them into plans, with a further quarter (25.1%) already identified issues but have yet to make the changes required to rectify the issues. 7.3% plan to identify the issues in the next three months (which will be at the point of PIR for many organizations). In fact, just 4.5% of respondents said that they do not plan to make any changes going forward.

Given so many organizations have already made appropriate changes to their plans, it appears that most organizations have already started their review process in earnest – even if the formalised PIR has yet to take place. Some reported that they had already made changes where critical processes were affected and will conduct a more thorough post-incident review which would incorporate strategic changes as well. Others said that “quick” changes had been made, but a deeper review was required in order to ensure their organization could be protected from a threat even greater than COVID-19.

### Have you acted on any issues, gaps or inconsistencies that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?



**Figure 17.** Have you acted on any issues, gaps or inconsistencies that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

## COVID-19 has triggered an investment surge in crisis management

Nearly half of respondents (47.2%) were confident their organization was going to invest more in crisis management and/or resilience as a result of the pandemic. 10.1% were confident of getting “significant” investment and 37.2% in “some” investment. In contrast, just 4.4% believed they were set for a “significant decrease” or “decrease” in investment. As Accenture’s CEO, Julie Sweet, eloquently put it, “never waste a good crisis; we’re going to come out of it stronger”. The company invested in new people and training, fast-forwarded new product and services strategies and restructured units and divisions<sup>20</sup>. Many of those interviewed reported the same within their own organizations, albeit on a much smaller scale.

### Areas which responders typically cited as getting additional investment were as follows:

- **Equipment and IT infrastructure:** COVID-19 is seeing organizations start to invest more in cloud technology and move away from a physical network infrastructure. Some are seeking to move to a more streamlined hardware environment and are investing in technologies such as virtual desktops (which also aids homeworking).
- **Investment in technology for homeworking:** As well as using tools such as virtual desktops, companies are continuing to invest in laptops and additional security procedures required to move to a more permanent hybrid working model.
- **Staff training:** Individuals cited that there was going to be more investment in staff training, particularly from a crisis management perspective. Others cited that they would be investing in cyber security training for all staff.
- **System resilience:** Many organizations suffered an increase in cyberattacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Criminals are becoming ever more creative with attacks, and most CEOs consider it the primary threat to their organization<sup>21</sup>. Investment in tools and technology — as well as additional staff — are some of the most popular areas for investment.
- **Crisis management tools:** The drive towards greater use of technology during the pandemic has seen organizations appreciate its importance as a primary enabler during a crisis. Many organizations moved to virtual communication platforms (such as Microsoft Teams) during the crisis and are now seeking to invest additionally in more enhanced crisis management tools (including Virtual Crisis Room technology).

“I did a business case for an additional member of staff just before COVID which was agreed on principle. However, it was not progressed due to COVID. So when we got through the worst of COVID, the key support and input that my team had provided to the response were recognised. So, this means I now have an additional member of staff, and we are looking at how we can potentially invest in crisis and incident management software as well. We’re also looking at an investment plan over the next two or three years.”

Global Crisis Manager, Financial Services, United Kingdom

“Some good things came from the pandemic; there’s definitely a silver lining. My team is almost twice the size now compared to pre-COVID. And as a result, we have improved our ability to provide value and advisory services to the business”

Group Head of BC, Financial Services, Australia

20. Edgecliffe-Johnson, A (2020). ‘The challenges of moving a business out of crisis mode’. FT (6 September 2020). Available at: [www.ft.com/content/e9418a29-e939-47f0-9ccb-a0917197ca83](http://www.ft.com/content/e9418a29-e939-47f0-9ccb-a0917197ca83) (accessed 14 July 2021)

21. Elliott, R (2021). 2021 BCI Horizon Scan Report (March 2021). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-horizon-scan-report-2021.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

- **Health and safety equipment:** Many organizations found their response was delayed or inhibited due to a lack of health and safety equipment (such as PPE) and the inability to acquire these goods quickly at the start of the pandemic. Many have now stockpiled such equipment in the event of a future crisis.
- **Mental health support:** Poor mental health has been a well-documented effect of the pandemic. Most organizations introduced new measures during the pandemic to safeguard mental health and are now looking to invest more in organization-wide support tools (such as employee assistance programmes). However, this is not a panacea, and simply responds to the symptoms, not the cause. Some companies are now looking to the future and investing in wider mental health programmes to examine this across workplaces, with chief health officers increasingly driving this important agenda.
- **Exercising:** Organizations have cited that a major reason for unpreparedness for the pandemic was insufficient exercises being carried out by all staff<sup>22</sup>. Prior to 2020, there was a managerial reluctance to allow staff time away from BAU activities to carry out exercising. Many business continuity professionals are now reporting a complete shift: senior management are now mandating that staff take part in exercising programmes regularly.
- **Reduced reliance on work area recovery (WAR) as a back-up solution:** Many organizations used WAR as a backup for when offices became unavailable. However, most were unable to use their WAR premises during the pandemic due to contracts not allowing the space to be used for split-team working or being prohibited access if the organization's main office remained open.
- **New business units and resilience-orientated staff:** Organizations are looking to put more dedicated staff into positions to ensure the organization is more resilient to crises going forward. One respondent highlighted that the organization was going to benefit from a new BC team being established as the pandemic had highlighted the value of such a function. Figure 19 further highlights this: just under a quarter of organizations (23.2%) report their organizations will now be taking on more staff in resilience-orientated functions.
- **Consultancy:** Some respondents mentioned that they are now seeking external guidance on how to foster a more resilient culture in their organization.



**"When we have an exercise, I go around taking photos and looking at things that don't work well. If it's not done well, I use those pictures and lessons learned from the real exercise and embed it in the crisis exercises we do in the afternoon with a local factory team. This is a quite interesting concept that has gone down very well. We get to see some of the immediate faults and then we can feed them into an exercise, discuss it and put them on the action list."**

Head of Crisis Management APAC & MEA, Utilities, Hong Kong

22. Elliott, R (2020). 'The Future of Business Continuity and Resilience (September 2021).' The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-the-future-of-business-continuity---resilience.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-the-future-of-business-continuity---resilience.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

# Essential tips for businesses looking to combat mental health issues

Safeguarding staff mental health has become a key consideration in crisis management during the pandemic. It is vital that businesses address the issue of mental health head-on, developing a sophisticated mental wellness strategy to fulfil duty of care responsibilities and help employees with their mental health resilience. Beyond the obvious positives of implementing these strategies would have for employees, businesses should also consider the benefits of investing in creating a mental wellness programme would have for their organization: according to data from International SOS' recent Risk Outlook 2021, a third of risk professionals believe that mental health issues will contribute significantly to declining productivity levels this year — something echoed by data from the BCI. A business that supports employees appropriately will therefore likely be in a better, more productive place than one that does not.

Below are some key strategies businesses should look to implement to promote resilience, helping their employees deal with any potential mental health issues:

## 1. Take steps to check in individually with every employee

This may appear an obvious first move to implement regarding maintaining a robust mental wellness strategy, but it is nonetheless an essential one. It is important for businesses to treat every employee as an individual; different people will be responding to the stress brought on by the pandemic in different ways and it will be potentially causing a range of mental health issues for many employees. The first step towards recognising these comes with actively checking in with employees in a one-to-one situation, as this can allow businesses to form a greater understanding of how they're coping through this particularly difficult period. This can also be done by carrying out Mental Health or Resilience Surveys with tools that have scientifically been validated and can uncover individual pain points.

## 2. Make sure people have and are aware of secure routes for reporting their mental health issues

Strategies which look to engage with employees and directly ask them about how they're doing should be accompanied by more subtle routes for people to gain help. Often people may feel intimidated to discuss their mental health with the colleagues and manager they work with on a day-to-day basis, as they may have anxiety about the way they're perceived. To counter this issue it is important that employees can discuss their mental health issues with people within a business away from their direct teams, preferably an HR manager or someone with mental wellness training. Removing the stigma to discussing mental health issues is an important part of creating a culture of health within an organization. Getting leaders to walk the talk is key.

## 3. Allow and encourage employees to take breaks

To be at our most productive, it is important to take regular breaks within the workday. One useful and easy to implement technique is the Pomodoro Technique. This involves using a timer (the 'Pomodoro' original or other timer) to break down work into intervals, separated by short breaks. The steps of the technique are: Decide on the task to be done and set a timer, usually to 25 minutes, and work on the task. When the timer rings, put a checkmark on a piece of paper and take a break. If you have fewer than four checkmarks, take a short break of three to five minutes and then reset the timer. After four checkmarks, take a longer break of 15–30 minutes. Then start the technique again, resetting your checkmark count to zero. This has been proven to help improve concentration and avoid procrastination, as well as providing a sense of achievement as tasks are completed.

## 4. Consider the information employees are receiving

People are bombarded in their daily, technology-filled, lives with more and more information and it is hard to get away from it. Some of the information around the Coronavirus is poor quality and factually inaccurate — feeding feelings of mass hysteria and paranoia. Both a lack of information and poor-quality information has been shown to increase irrational thinking. Checking in with employees on a personal level to make sure they are receiving information from legitimate sources is an important task for employers. It can help employees form an understanding of the situation in the world which counters many of the negative conspiratorial narratives we've seen come about as a result of the pandemic.

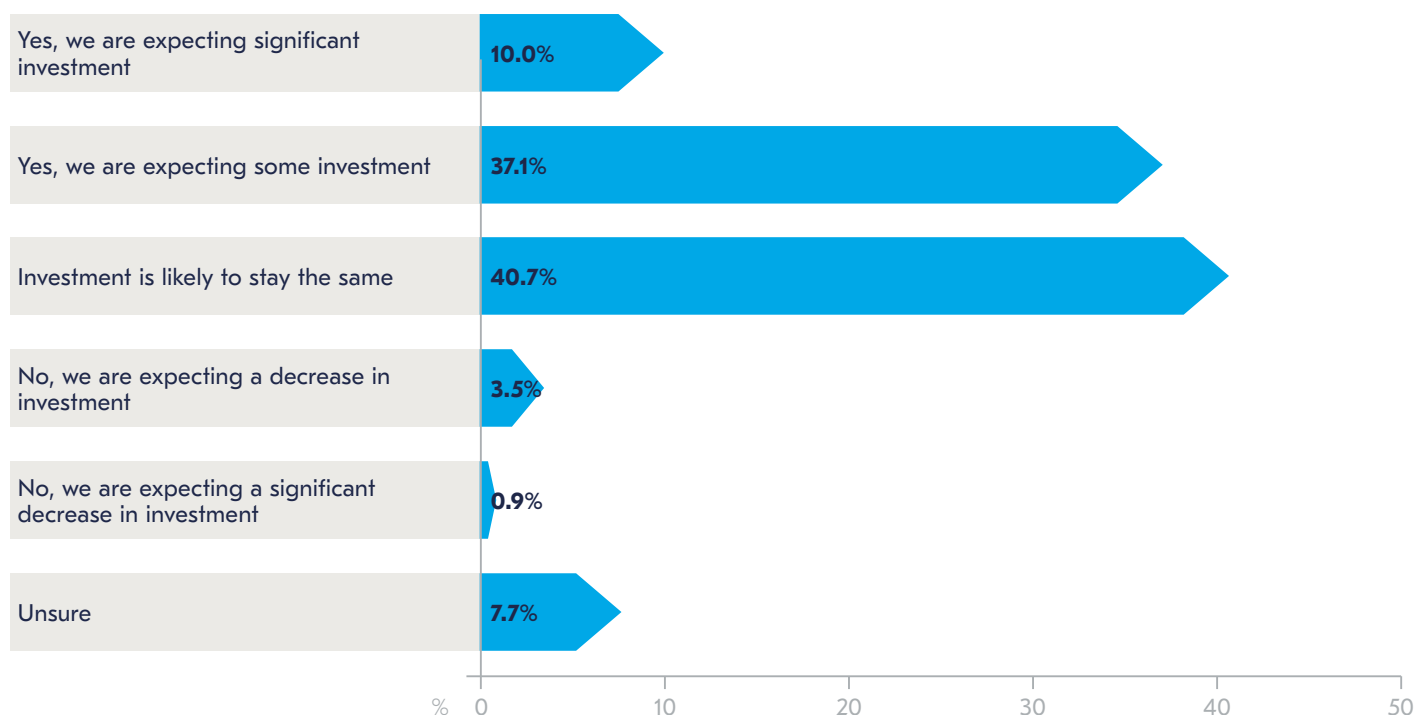
## 5. Provide employees with the tools to help them, understanding the level of personal responsibility which must be encouraged

Ultimately businesses need to be focused on creating the conditions in which an individual employee is able to take responsibility for their mental wellbeing, finding the particular strategies which work for them. This links fundamentally to the workplace culture businesses cultivate; a culture which promotes self-care and provides the tools for this can be invaluable for employees. If people feel like they have the option of going for a lunchtime walk to a local park, getting some much-needed fresh air and exercise, then they are far more likely to do so but the decision to go ahead with this still rests with them. With many employees working from home encouraging personal responsibility regarding mental wellness becomes an even more important task, as organizations in the current set up simply have a lot less direct oversight on employees.

**Dr Rodrigo Rodriguez-Fernandez, Medical Director, Health Consulting, NCD & Wellness Programmes, International SOS**



## Do you believe that investment will increase in crisis management and/or resilience because of the lessons learned during COVID-19?



**Figure 18.** Do you believe that investment will increase in crisis management and/or resilience because of the lessons learned during COVID-19?

## The pandemic is invoking positive organizational change

The problem with siloes building up within organizations has already been discussed in previous sections: siloed behaviours are created by teams working without proper communication lines between other teams and, without senior management helping to foster a collaborative environment, the siloing can become endemic. Siloing is normally created out of subconscious behaviours or, in some organizations, simply because staff are pressured on time and believe increased collaboration will result in more meetings which will take time away from their work.

This is not the case: working collaboratively can reduce team workload, can ensure the best people are used on tasks and ultimately ensure a better response in a crisis.

Encouragingly, nearly two-thirds of respondents (60.7%) believe their organization will become more collaborative post pandemic and more than half (53.6%) said that crisis management and business continuity will work better together going forward. Individuals reported a heightened appreciation of the work of business continuity during the pandemic which is likely to be a reason for this.

“We got early insight of the pandemic and by the beginning of January we had all of our platforms ready to use and everything was ready. We then introduced training sessions to our counterparts, who had a low level of technological knowledge. It worked very well. In March, we were tasked to help the government and to help states to conduct operations against the COVID such as disinfection. We took half of the municipalities in the country to equip them with the right equipment so that they can do their work. This meant buying half the country’s supplies! We also ensured we had four or five alternative vendors so if there was disruption in our products we have multiple vendors to fall back on. We were also the first donor to respond to the demands of the government as we were already very prepared. In 15 days we distributed more than 30,000 items to the municipalities to help them during the pandemic. So that was the fruit of the work that we did: we prepared the different teams together and worked on many scenarios during that period. It was a great example of collaborative work between the different departments. Also, there was a great amount of trust between myself and the senior management, especially the CEO. This helped a lot in conducting or collecting the results of training and making the right recommendations.”

Risk Manager, Professional Services, Tunisia

“The crisis team have become much more natural now and we are embedded in business meetings in a way we were not before. Prior to the pandemic I just came in and presented my brief to the regional level business meeting and left afterward. Now I join for the full four hours. I have regular questions as the business meeting goes on, whether that is about a factory, divestment or a merger or some other challenge in the supply chain. I think we have been more mature in our approach and that has been accepted into the business, which is really positive for both my security work but also for the whole organization. We’re bringing in business continuity, BCP and also the emergency response, we are truly looking at risk management in a way that risk management hadn’t before. It was too academic and there was too much focus on the financial part only. We deliver on the ground what is being decided in those meeting. This brings us close to the senior management in those meetings. I think it has helped us to become more effective in many ways.”

Head of Crisis Management APAC  
& MEA, Utilities, Hong Kong

In a further nod to better organizational resilience practice, just over half of respondents (50.9%) believe the board will now become better promoters of organizational resilience — a crucial part of the jigsaw to removing siloes and encouraging greater collaboration between teams.

However, it is not just inter-organizational relationships which look set to improve, better collaboration outside the organization looks set for similar advancement. Fostering stronger relationships with other organizations, local government, emergency services and other community groups helps to ensure a better response in crisis as clear information pathways can be drawn and the right people contacted when a crisis occurs. One of the most well-known examples of a complex case in community resilience during the pandemic was that of a cruise ship docking in Australia.

Another interviewee explained how the pandemic had resulted in crisis management becoming more embedded within organizations. He also said he now joined meetings for the full length, rather than only joining to provide an update on crisis management. Furthermore, the organization were now applying increased vigour to BC and making it an integral part of the crisis management process.

A series of misunderstandings between the Australian Border Force, the cruise ship company, the New South Wales Health Authority and law enforcement agencies meant hundreds of COVID-19 infected passengers were allowed to disembark the ship in Sydney. Ultimately, this led to more than 900 COVID-19 cases and 28 deaths making it the cause of Australia's largest COVID-19 cluster<sup>23</sup>. Thankfully, many respondents' organizations have clearly become aware of this and nearly a third (30.1%) are hopeful of improvement in this area going forward.

Some organizations already have good measures in place to ensure good levels of collaboration between external parties during an incident. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a particular interviewee cited how such relationships had been instrumental in the success of their company's response.

**"Firstly, we have an informal regional banking finance sector chat group with a number of participants from across the UK, Singapore, US, China, Indonesia, Malaysia. It's a really free-flowing group where one person may post up something they see emerging, and others will discuss it. In the early days of COVID it was invaluable to get a view on what each organization was doing as their responses mobilised. I think that helped us to build that internal awareness about what was occurring, particularly as it hit Hong Kong. Similarly on the domestic front with my counterparts from the major banks — we have really transparent engagement which was very helpful. People in my bank would be discussing things like 'I'm hearing that [a major bank] is closing down their buildings and doing temperature scanning on all floors. What are we going to do — should we be changing our response?' I was able to reach out to that network and either confirm or deny what was actually occurring in that other bank. It also enabled us to test ideas and get any rumours mythbusted straight away. It also helped by providing additional perspectives other than the media or from our own people."**

General Manager of Resilience,  
Financial Services, Australia

The same organization also takes part in other organizations' training programmes (and vice versa) on regular occasions so both intra-sectoral and cross-sectoral learnings can be made.

23. Thiessen, T (2020). 'Ruby Princess Inquiry Slams Health Officials Over Covid-19 Cruise: Australia US Deaths'. Forbes (14 August 2020). Available at: [www.forbes.com/sites/tamarathiessen/2020/08/14/ruby-princess-inquiry-health-covid-australia-us/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/tamarathiessen/2020/08/14/ruby-princess-inquiry-health-covid-australia-us/) (accessed 14 July 2021)







**"One of the things we do to improve our exercises is we leverage the external community. We've had counterparts from the energy and aviation sectors come and sit in on our exercises. It's very interesting because you get a new perspective on things you perceived as standard. For instance, we had some feedback that while the team was operating great — they obviously all know the business, they know their technology and they know their customers etc. But the external observer made the point that, as someone who might be new to this team, they immediate thought 'Where's the display boards? Where's the summary of running details? If I'm not taking notes, then it perishes as soon as I walk over the room.' It was a good challenge and we value these type of reflections quite a lot."**

General Manager of Resilience,  
Financial Services, Australia

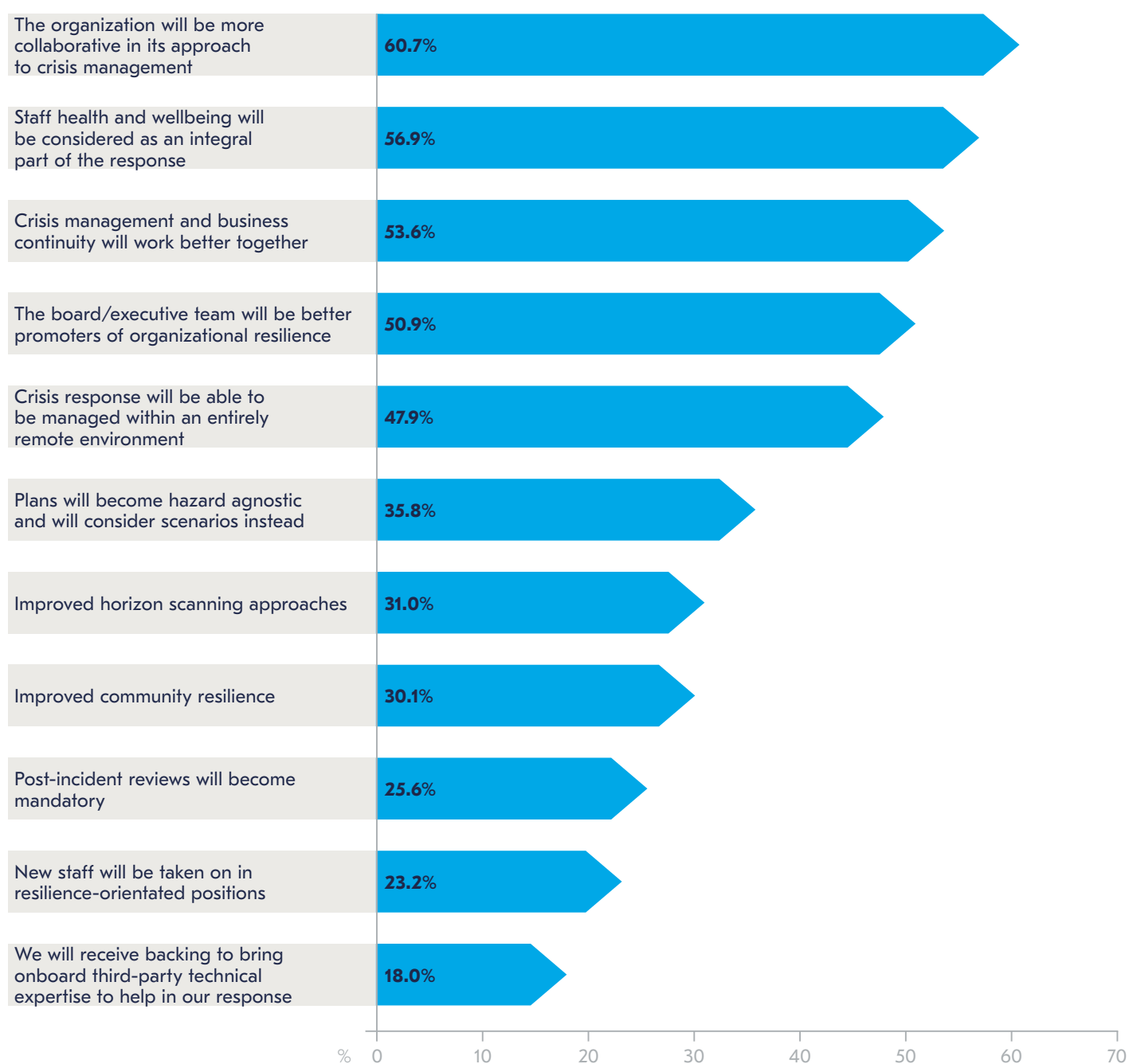
Second from top of the list is staff health and wellbeing, with 56.9% of respondents believing it will now be considered as an integral part of the response in future crises. This ties in with research carried out by the BCI in the early weeks of the pandemic which showed that 87.8% of organizations were going to ensure that the psychological impact of crises would be included in response plans<sup>24</sup>. This is because organizations became gravely aware of the impact of poor mental health on staff: the 2021 BCI Horizon Scan report showed that staff health and wellbeing was greatest consequence of disruption in 2020, with 61% of organizations reporting it — up by 20 percentage points on the previous year. However, whilst mental ill health following lockdowns is now widely understood by organizations, many organizations run the risk of ignoring the many other wider health impacts of this pandemic on the organization's performance, such as long COVID affecting productivity, or the rise in many non-communicable diseases such as cancers, some of which are preventable through workforce interventions. In countries where vector-borne disease is a significant risk, the breakdown in health services during the pandemic means there is a real risk of more significant disruption due to malaria or dengue outbreaks. For these reasons, many organizations have brought in health advisors to help navigate these complex issues. For smaller organizations, seeking help from business support networks and ensuring a good relationship is fostered with local and national health authorities can be an alternative route to take.

24. Elliott, R (2020). BCI Organizational Preparedness Report Edition 4. The BCI (1 May 2020). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-coronavirus-organizational-preparedness-report---4th-edition.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-coronavirus-organizational-preparedness-report---4th-edition.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)



In terms the planning process, a quarter of organizations will now make post-incident reviews a priority (25.6%), 35.8% will change their planning process to become more based around the symptom of a crisis rather than the cause. As discussed on page 27 such practice is considered good practice (as defined by the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines).

## How do you feel working practices will change post-COVID-19 with regard to crisis management in your organization. Please tick all that apply:



**Figure 19.** How do you feel working practices will change post-COVID-19 with regard to crisis management in your organization. Please tick all that apply:

Respondents who had managed their response well were asked what they felt the key success factors were in their response. Some themes formed out of the responses, and these are highlighted below:

## The keys to a successful response

- 1. Communication and collaboration:** This has been raised a number of times already in this report, but these two words are those which were used most by respondents when questioned why their response was successful. This was not only between teams, but with senior management, customers and other external stakeholders.
- 2. Carrying out regular reviews:** Respondents talked about carrying out regular reviews rather than waiting for the post-incident review. Teams would either involve relevant parties in the CMT and any findings would be shared with the wider team.
- 3. Good horizon scanning and information gathering processes:** Respondents talked about having well-ordered and timely information gathering processes to help the executive with clear decision-making.
- 4. Strong leadership from senior management:** Multiple respondents highlighted that having strong sponsorship from senior management and/or the board meant the crisis could be effectively managed through good data, collaborative working, scenario planning and leadership engagement.
- 5. Stable and mature crisis management teams:** Although it is desirable to bring in new members to the crisis management team (where appropriate), some credited their response to keeping the crisis team stable and not introducing new members to the team during the pandemic. One respondent cited that the crisis team being “one voice” and acting as the central hub for all intelligence, planning, direction and reporting was key to their effective response.
- 6. Technology:** Many reports have cited technology as the key factor which enabled them to get through the pandemic: collaborative technologies, specialist crisis management software, virtual crisis rooms, incident mapping technologies and large scale purchasing of new hardware are all examples of how technology has helped organizations to traverse the crisis.
- 7. Homeworking was already part of company culture:** Those organizations which already had a homeworking policy or were quick to enable it were able to carry on with BAU when organizations were mandated to allow staff to work from home.
- 8. Training and exercising:** Many praised the response of staff during the pandemic and how they were crucial to the successful response. The fact that staff knew what to do was testament to good training and exercising practices throughout the organization. Some reported that senior management had mandated staff to take part in exercising in the early part of the pandemic.
- 9. Allowing freedom of action:** Some commented that a lack of detailed plans was key to being able to elicit a fast and very specific response to the pandemic — providing these plans were built around tried and tested frameworks. This was frequently enabled by a management team who were open to new ideas, with many ensuring such practices will continue post-pandemic.
- 10. Early activation:** Respondents cited early activation of crisis management structures as a major factor in their successful response. Some praised senior management for the early involvement which helped to kickstart their processes before some of their peers had even identified the risk of COVID-19.
- 11. Good emergency communication practices:** Some reported that having a tried and testing emergency communications system helped to ensure that all staff/ stakeholders were kept informed of the situation and knew what to do at all times during the crisis. Some had worked to ensure all contact details were up to date in the early part of the pandemic as many staff were working from a different location during country and regional lockdowns. This was a particular issue within university environments where many students returned to their home countries.
- 12. Cash in the bank:** Unfortunately, cash was still king for some organizations during the pandemic. They found they were able to shoulder the cost of organizational changes, new technologies and new staff (where necessary) to ensure a successful response.

**“You could have the best emergency response plan out there, but if it hasn’t been practiced, it won’t work as nobody will learn how to use it. You can’t do exercising when it’s pristine conditions and you can’t run an evacuation when you know everybody’s in their own room. If you do it that way, when they’re at recess or when they’re at lunch, they’re not going to have any idea how to do it. So, that’s what I mean by practise, practise, practise. Play with it, make it fun, make it entertaining; but do it on a consistent basis because once they’re used to doing it in that format and if something happens, it’s fresh in their mind, they know what it is and they know what to do.”**

Director of Risk Management,  
International Education, Thailand

# Technology in a crisis





## 99% of organizations say technology has facilitated their organization's response to COVID-19

The increased use of technology in organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic has already been labelled as a crucial part of organizations' response. However, organizations used technology in very different ways during the pandemic. Some were able to adopt new technologies quickly and effectively, others were able to exploit existing tools, whereas some had the battle of trying to discover how legacy infrastructure could be used to support remote working.

When asked the extent of technology use during the pandemic, only 1.2% of respondents said that technology had played "no" role in facilitating their organization's response to COVID-19 whilst 6.2% said it had to a "limited" extent. Surprisingly, the majority of these responses came from larger organizations where use of technology would be expected to have been higher. Some interviewees commented that levels of technology usage within their organizations were already high before the pandemic and no changes were made during the pandemic which could suggest the high response rate in this area.

The bulk of responses, however, showed that technology had played some part in facilitating their organization's response to COVID-19: nearly three-quarters (71.7%) said it had played a part to a "major extent", 22.3% to "some extent" and a further 6.2% to a "limited extent". Indeed, if a similar pandemic had occurred twenty years ago, the technology used to support extensive remote working was not available, enterprise communications software was only in its embryonic stages and bespoke technology to manage crises was almost non-existent. Many organizations would have taken a greater financial hit and, with staff still having to come into offices, infection rates are likely to have been higher and the crisis elongated to an even greater timescale.

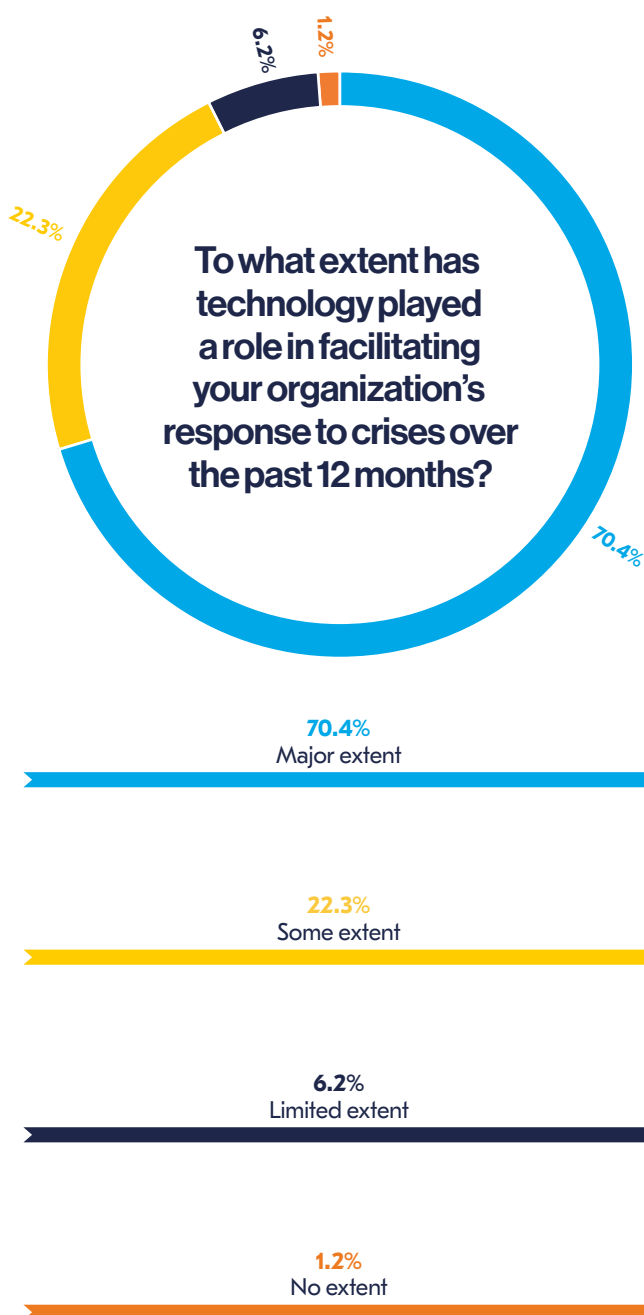


## Enterprise software has been the greatest enabler during the pandemic

When considering the types of technologies organizations have used to help them through their crisis response, the most widely used technology was enterprise communications software (such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom) with 82.6% saying it had been used as part of their crisis response. Interviewees also cited enterprise communications technology as invaluable to help them through crises — particularly during the pandemic. Many organizations used developers within their IT departments to fully exploit the options available in Microsoft Teams to make the application into a highly effective emergency communications tool in itself.

**"The introduction of Microsoft Teams into the organization in late April 2020 has been a revelation for the organization. Even 18 months ago, you would probably have sent someone to the office to come and speak to me — now there's no need. Prior to COVID, we were doing everything over conference call. However, the functionality and the increased ability to see people face-to-face that Microsoft Teams brings is quite a significant change. The options that Microsoft Teams brings to organizations, not just in terms of what we're speaking about, but the strategic opportunities of working effectively at any location, anytime, anywhere has been pretty exceptional. So, we've used the functionality of Microsoft Teams to develop the effectiveness of our meetings. We've even just run a virtual exercise with the UK major incident team where we used Microsoft Teams. It was all remote and it was evaluated as a very successful exercise."**

Global Crisis Manager, Financial Services,  
United Kingdom



**Figure 19.** To what extent has technology played a role in facilitating your organization's response to crises over the past 12 months?

**"From the point we were working remotely, the incident management team went virtual. We just used Microsoft Teams, which we'd already set up. We'd already started to document anything to do with the incident; that was all put into that Teams room. That was good, because we seamlessly moved from having already used Teams for people to partially dive into, to everyone using it. People use Teams all the time for other things so they're comfortable and familiar with it. Why would we use something else when we've got something they're comfortable and familiar with?"**

Senior Risk Manager, Charity, United Kingdom

Free messaging apps (such as WhatsApp and Messenger) also still had their place within crisis management teams' technology toolkit. Although some interviewees admitted they still had some reservations around security using free tools, the universal adoption and ease of use — particularly with management — meant it still had its place for fast information communication or less formalised "chat" during a crisis situation. Just over half (51.8%) of respondents admitted using a tool of this type. Interestingly, similar apps designed for business communications (such as Trello and Slack) did not have such widespread popularity, with just a fifth of respondents (20.3%) reporting this was a technology used during crises.

Social networking sites were used by just under a quarter of respondents (23.6%). Whilst social networking sites are known to be the cause of spreading fake news or causing hysteria, intelligent monitoring of social media (which is already including in some crisis management software solutions) can help provide up-to-the minute information about how an incident is unfolding — often before news sites are aware of it.

Specialist apps (such as those used for health security or travel security) were used by a fifth of respondents (20.5%). Interestingly, the use of such apps was only 10 percentage points lower than "free" apps (such as government tools for infection monitoring) demonstrating clear demand for informed and validated information during a crisis. Some interviewees discussed how travel applications and software were now being seen as crucial by management with budget being provided for the first time:

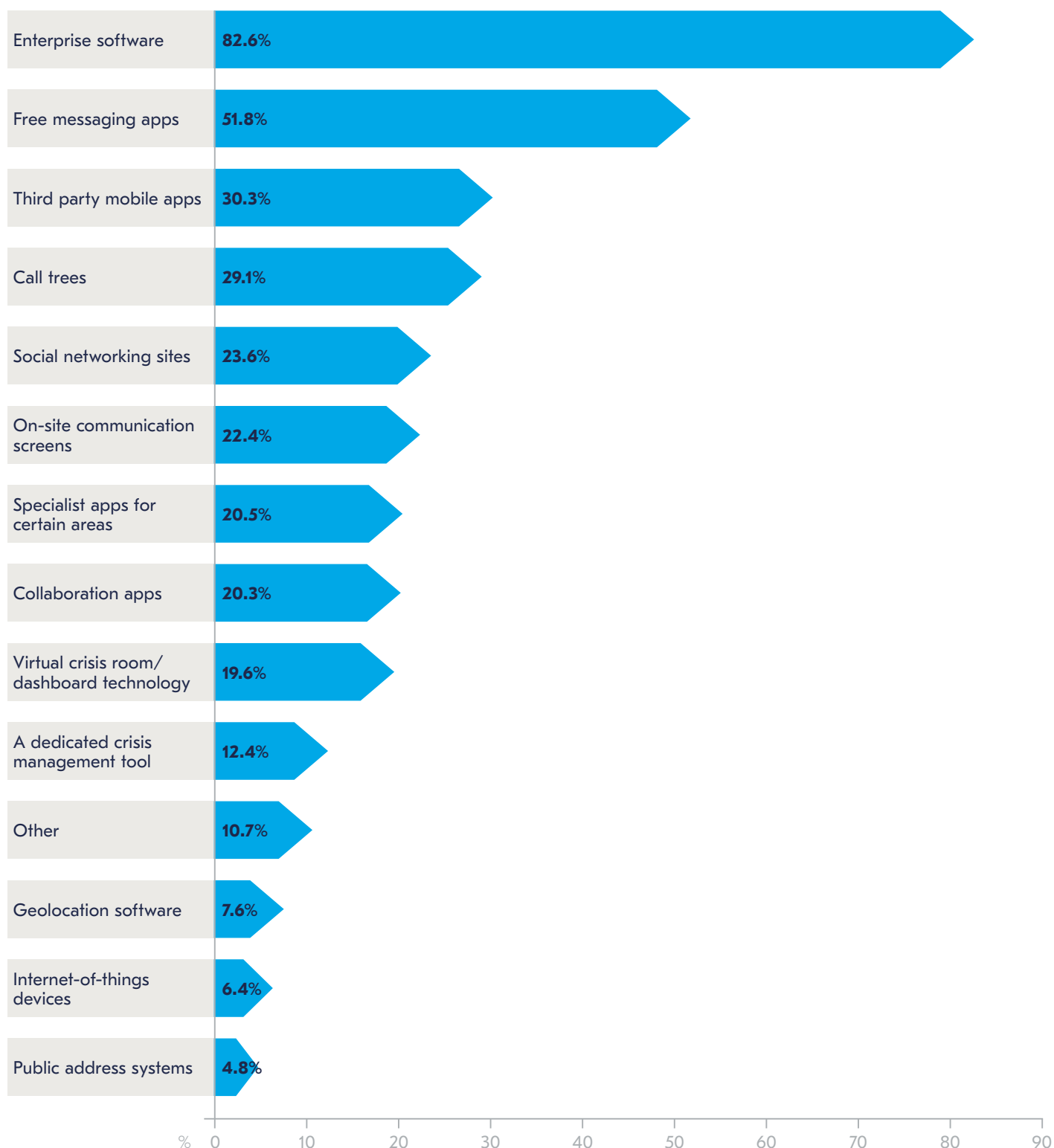
**"Because of the complexities of international travel, I put an amount in my budget last year to get a tool that would help us with travel approvals. We didn't initially get the budget but we then got told, "If you need the tool, we will support it if you can find the right tool — up to a certain amount." So this felt like an appreciation of the work we had been doing."**

Head of Risk Management,  
Healthcare, United States

Despite "new" technologies coming to the fore in crisis management during 2020, many organizations are still using tried and trusted "traditional" technology to manage crises: nearly a third (29.1%) continue to use call trees, 22.4% are using on-site communication screens and 4.8% public address (PA) systems. The 2021 BCI Emergency Communications Report<sup>25</sup> showed that the use of PA systems fell by 20 percentage points in 2020 and on-site communication screens fell by 10%. However, whilst organizations still continue to operate from physical sites (particularly those in sectors such as manufacturing and construction), there will still be a place for site-based emergency communications solutions.

25. Elliott, R (2021). 2021 BCI Emergency Communications Report (February 2021). The BCI. Available at: [www.thebci.org/resource/bci-emergency-communications-report-2021.html](http://www.thebci.org/resource/bci-emergency-communications-report-2021.html) (accessed 14 July 2021)

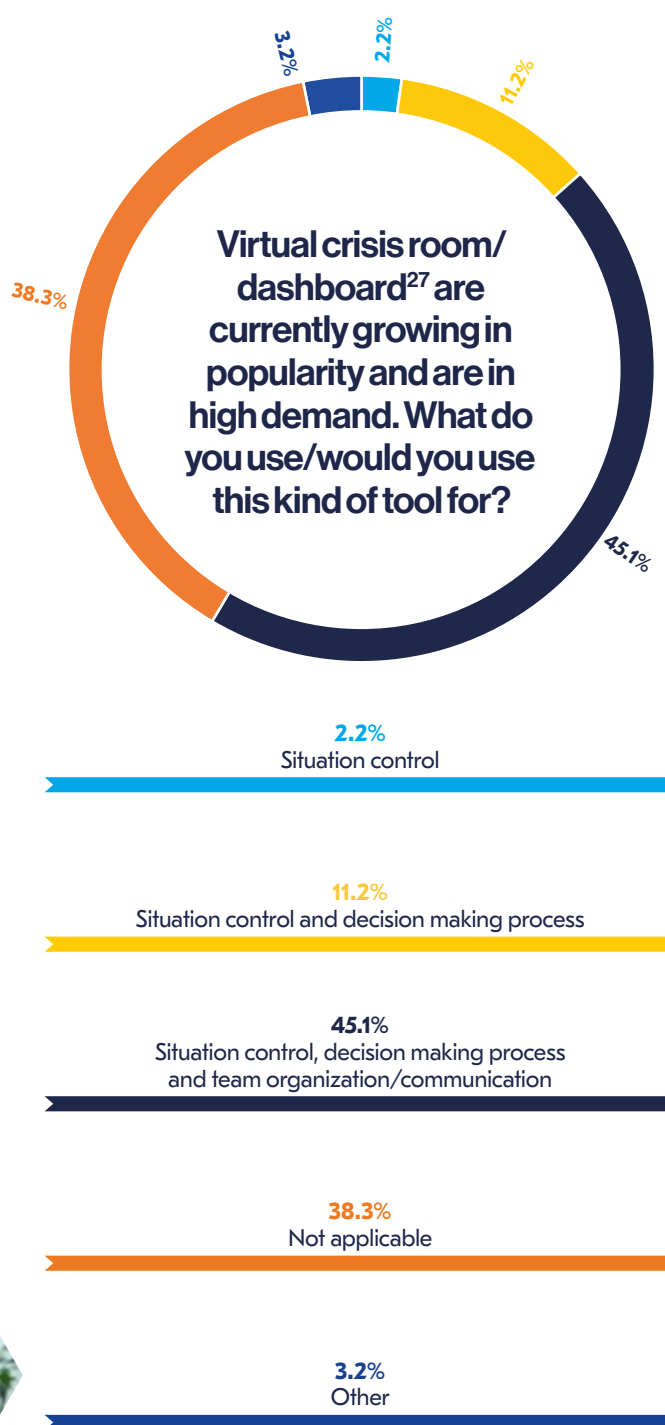
## Which tools and technology have you used within the past year as part of your crisis response?



**Figure 20.** Which tools and technology have you used within the past year as part of your crisis response?

New technologies are also starting to break into mainstream use within the crisis management sphere: 19.6% of organizations report using virtual crisis room or dashboard technology to help management their crisis. COVID-19 has driven some organizations to launch virtual crisis room technology onto the market for the first time. The 2021 BCI Emergency Communications Report<sup>26</sup> showed that 57.5% of organizations conducted their response to COVID-19 using virtual tools compared to 54.5% who reported using a physical crisis room. This drive to use virtual environments is set to continue with many organizations continuing with remote or hybrid working practices, and crisis teams becoming more dispersed.

It does appear that many organizations are open to the idea of using virtual crisis room technology within their organizations and, rather surprisingly, the majority of those who do use/would use the technology (77.2%) would like it to help with situation control, the decision-making process and team organization. Previous BCI reports have highlighted that human intervention is viewed as a critical part of the crisis management process by many professionals, with most considering machine-based decision making not yet advanced enough to make the right decisions in crises. The fact that so many would like to use technology to cover the majority of crisis room activity suggests that trust is building with new technologies, even if the three processes above are validated by a human before final decisions are made. A further 3.8% of those who would use a tool would consider it for situation control only, whilst 19.1% for situation control and decision making.



**Figure 21.** Virtual crisis room/dashboard<sup>27</sup> are currently growing in popularity and are in high demand. What do you use/would you use this kind of tool for?

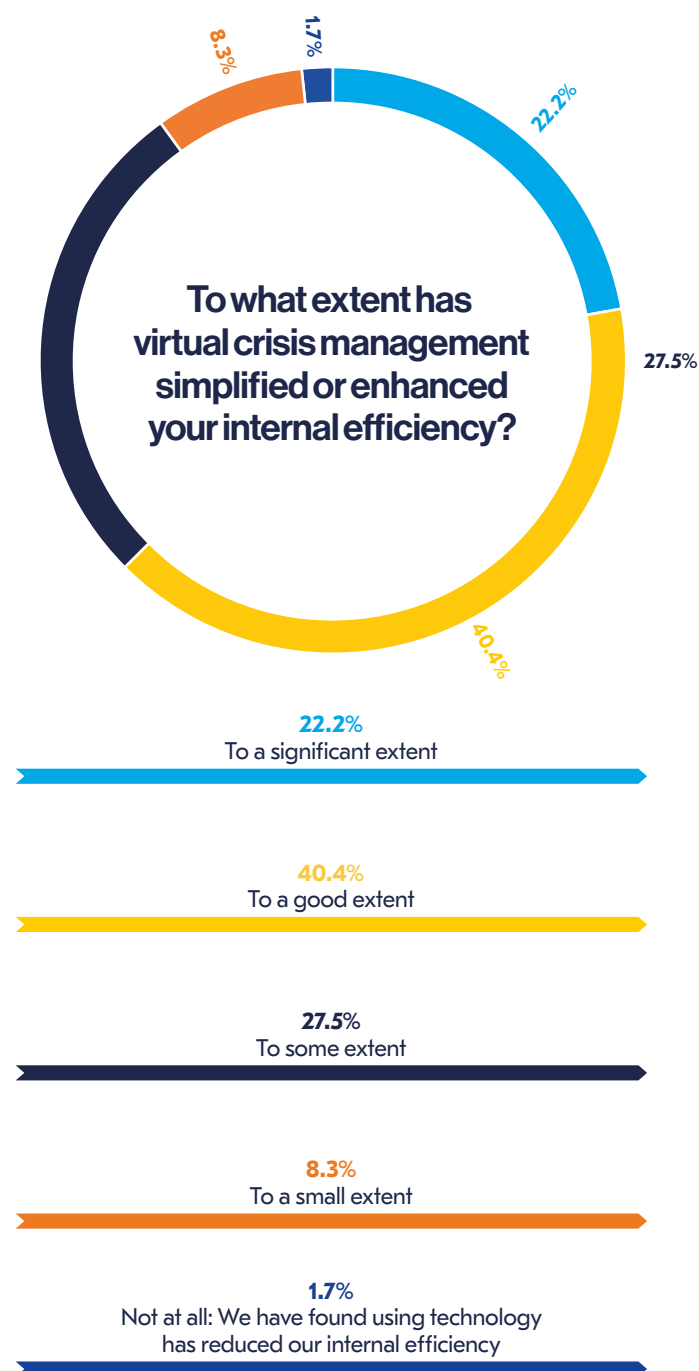
26. Ibid

27. Virtual crisis rooms can be built around existing enterprise software (such as the Google suite of products) but there are also dedicated virtual crisis room products (e.g. with enhanced security features or augmented reality options) now available on the market.



Although only a few organizations have already adopted bespoke virtual crisis room technologies, many did conduct their crisis management activities virtually in the past year. Just 1.7% of organizations who have used technology to manage crises over the past year said it has actually reduced their internal efficiency, with the majority reporting it had increased efficiencies by a significant extent (22.2%) or by a good extent (40.4%). A further 27.5% admitted it had improved efficiencies to some extent, whilst 8.3% reported just small efficiency improvements. The importance of physical collaboration is still regarded as crucial by many professions: whilst some aspects of the crisis can be managed in a virtual environment, the “control room” was an area where practitioners frequently cited as being more conducive to a physical environment.

Nevertheless, the comments provided by survey respondents and by interviewees such more will be looking towards adopting permanent virtual environments for crisis management given the demonstrable success during their response to COVID-19.



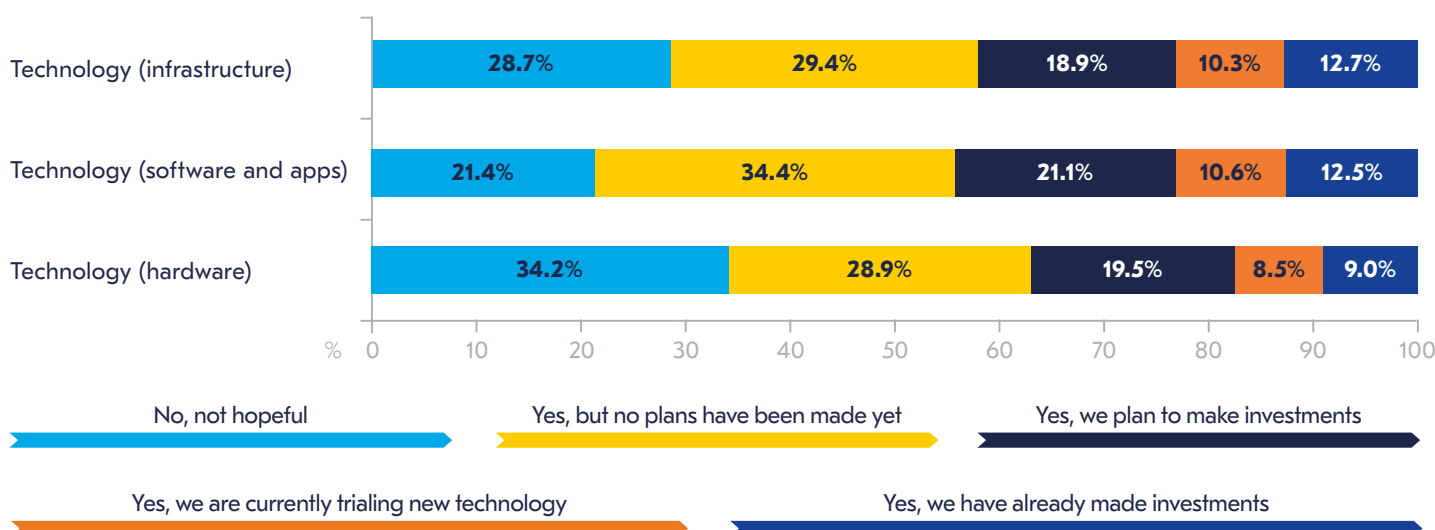
**Figure 22.** To what extent has virtual crisis management simplified or enhanced your internal efficiency?

The report has already discussed how organizations are actively looking to invest in technology to further improve their crisis management capabilities, but the area which practitioners consider there will be the greatest investment will be in software and applications. 78.6% of respondents reported their organization had either already invested in new software or applications, were trialling new solutions or were planning to make investments. Interviewees explained how they were now reconsidering purchasing emergency communications tools which were better suited for remote environments or were looking towards technology such as travel apps to enable staff to feel safe when travelling abroad. Others reported they were going to evaluate dedicated bespoke virtual crisis room technologies with some hopefully of exploiting virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) solutions to create an immersive and more realistic crisis room experience.

Technology infrastructure was an area for current or future investment for 71.3% organizations. With many organizations moving to a permanent or hybrid remote working model, ensuring the infrastructure is available to cope with this was considered to be crucial. Many organizations had “managed” with staff working from remote environments during the pandemic, but as this becomes the norm, they want to ensure remote working can be safe, secure and efficient — particularly if critical activities will be carried out within remote environments.

Hardware was considered the area for least investment. Indeed, with many organizations having already purchased laptops and other peripherals to enable remote working, it is perhaps not surprising that this area is considered the least likely for investment. However, with two-thirds of respondents (65.8%) saying investment in this area had already been made or will be made, there is clearly still room for greater investment within organizations’ crisis management teams.

## Are you hopeful of additional investment in technology for crisis management post-pandemic? Which areas are you likely to see this investment?



**Figure 23.** Are you hopeful of additional investment in technology for crisis management post-pandemic? Which areas are you likely to see this investment?

## Demographics

24 May 2021  
to  
18 June 2021

636

Respondents

76

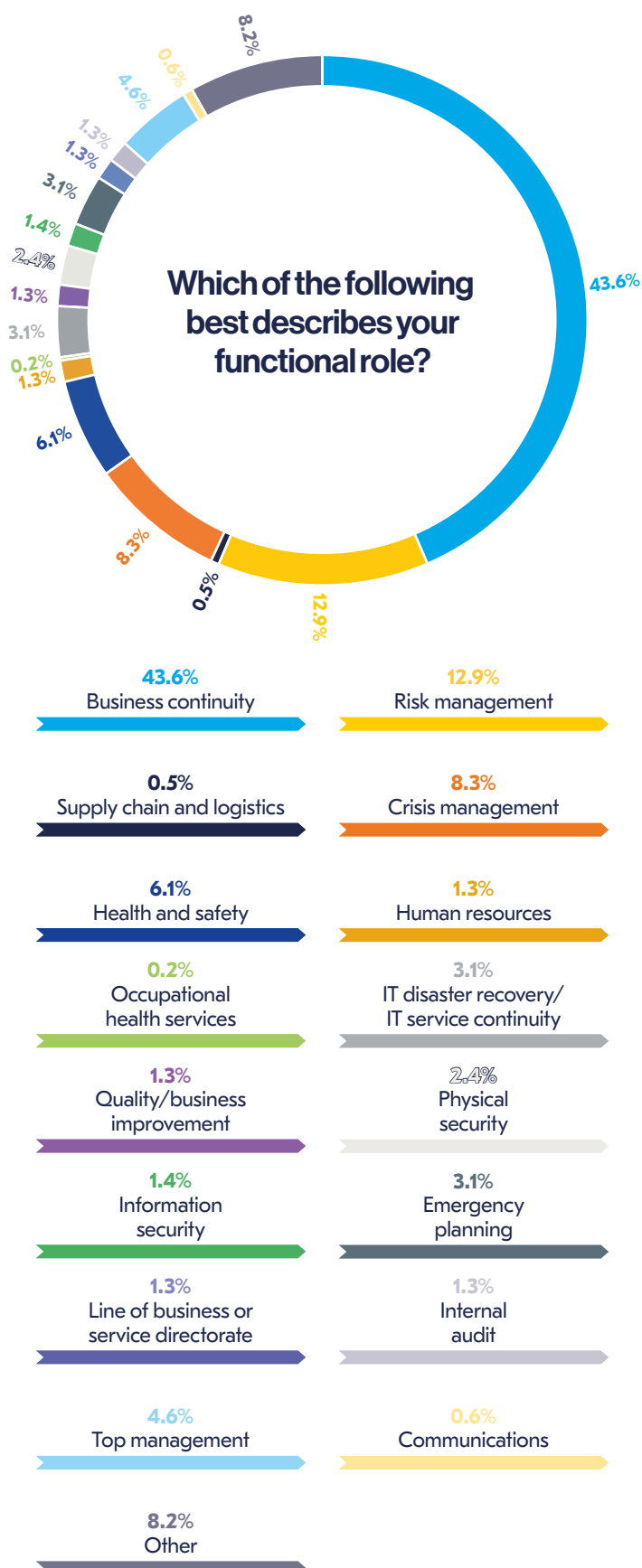
Countries

18

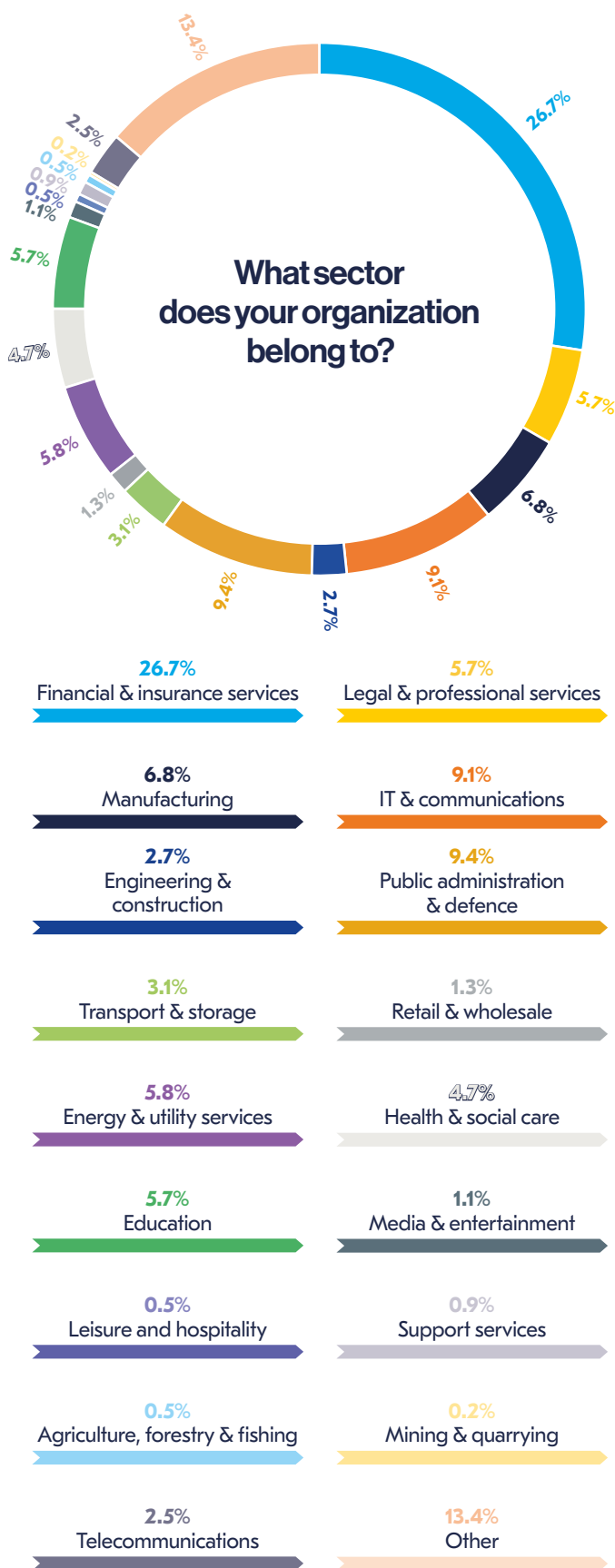
Sectors

18

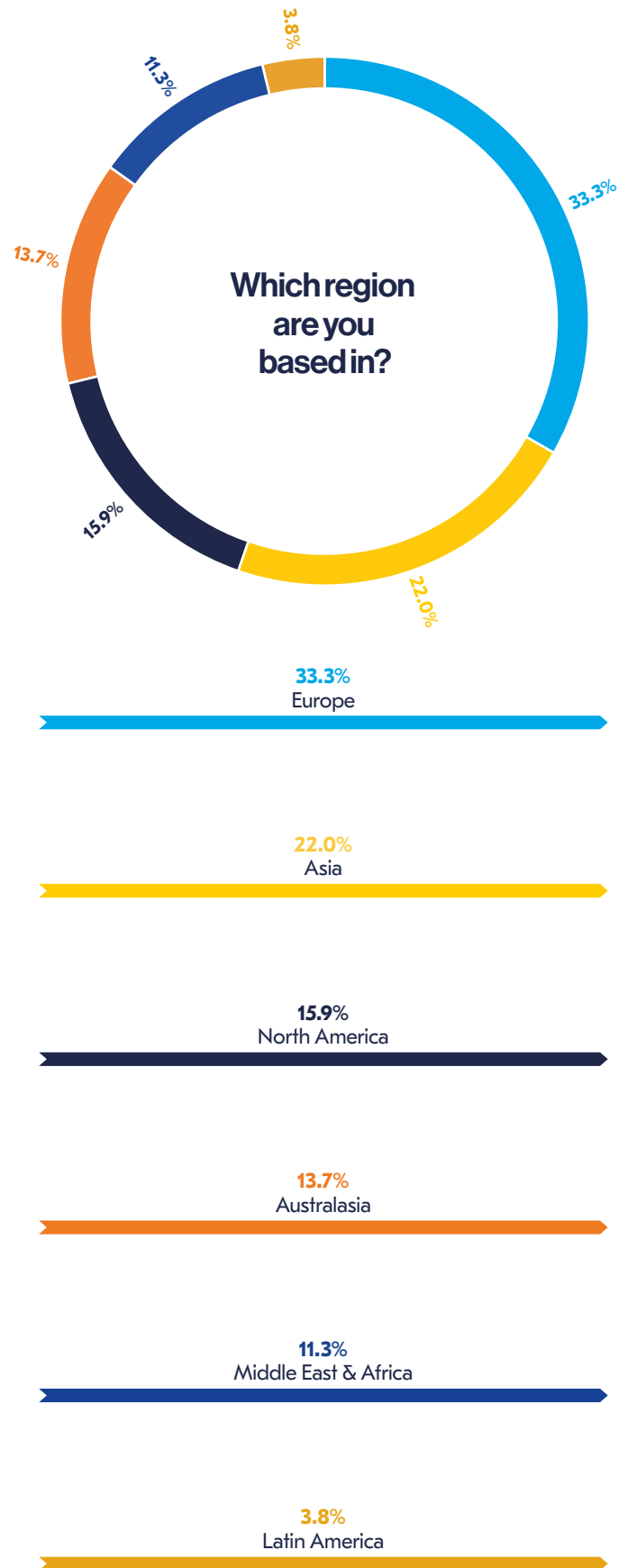
Respondent  
Interviews



**Figure 24.** Which of the following best describes your functional role?

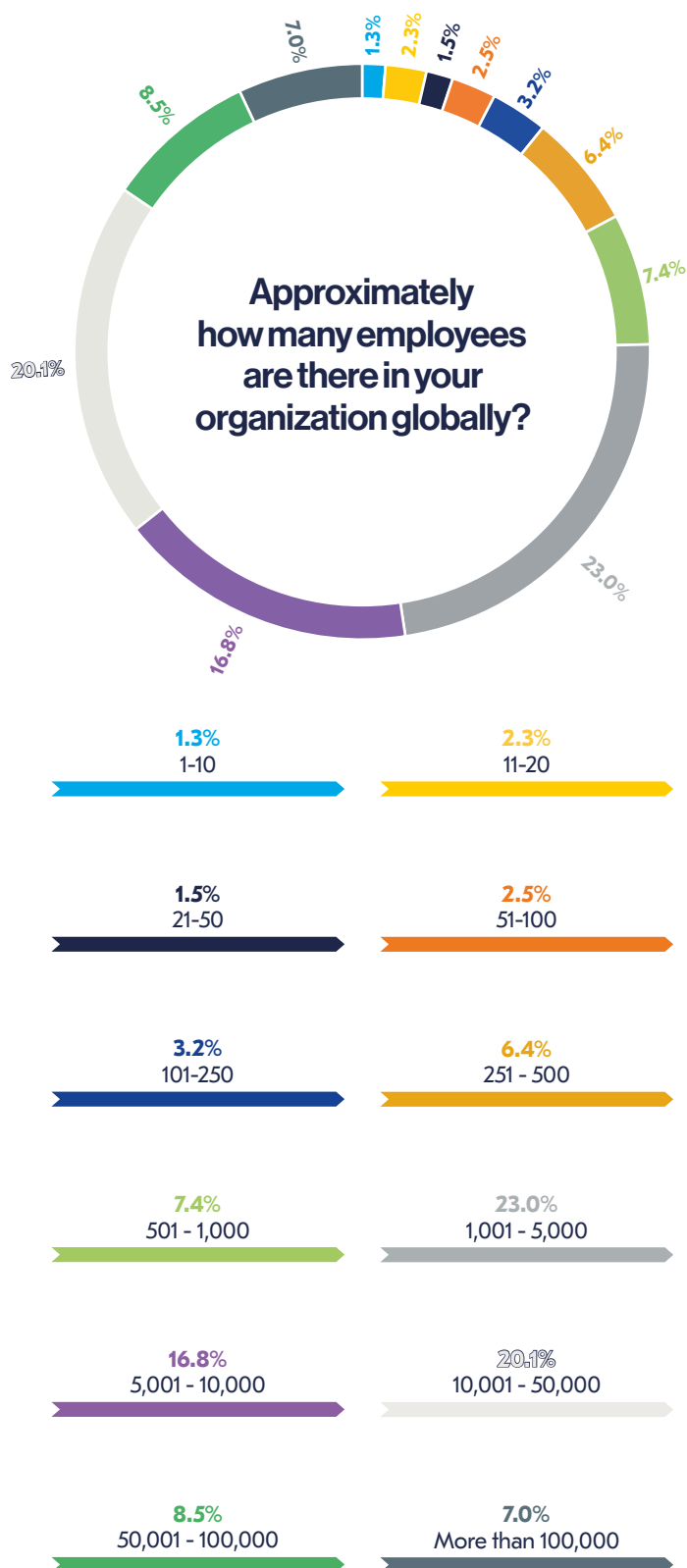


**Figure 25.** What sector does your organization belong to?

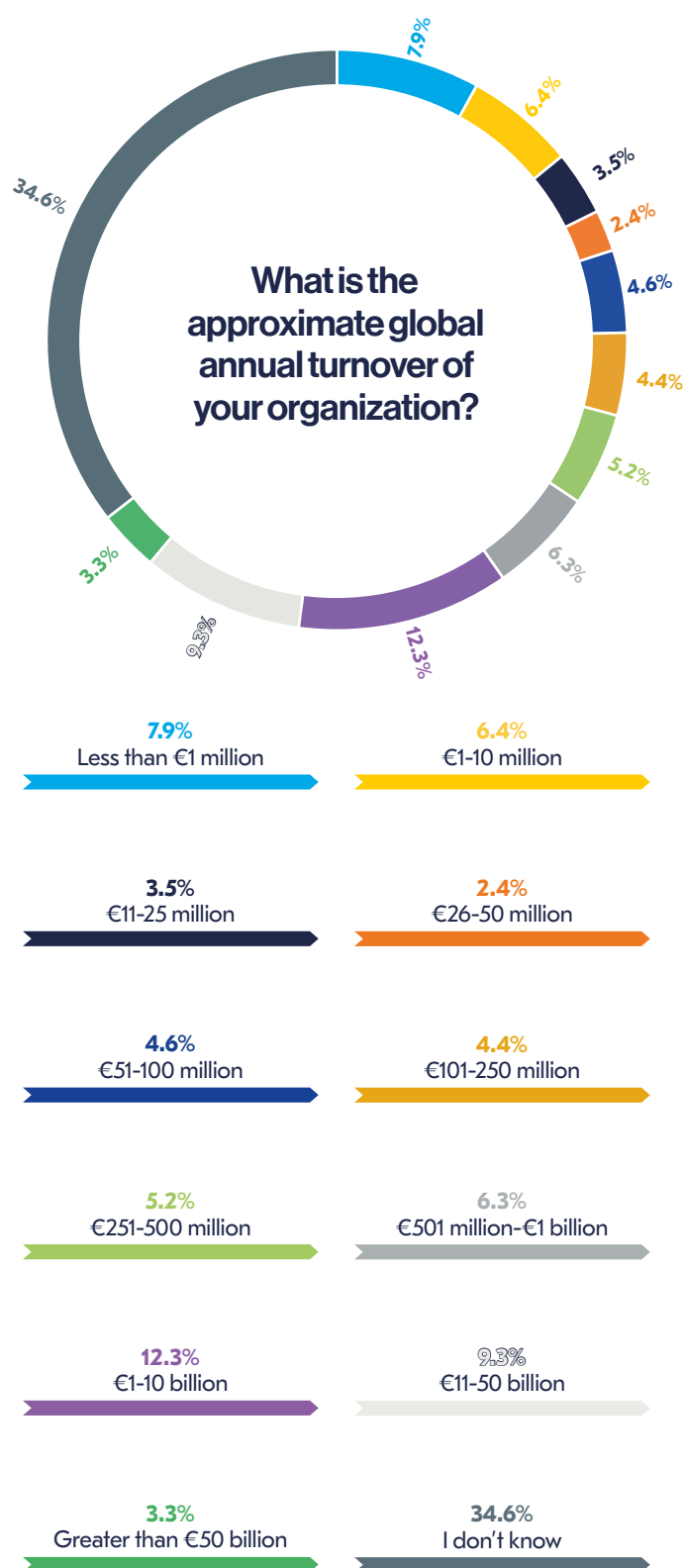


**Figure 26.** Which region are you based in?





**Figure 27.** Approximately how many employees are there in your organization globally?



**Figure 28.** What is the approximate global annual turnover of your organization?



## About the Author

### Rachael Elliott (Head of Thought Leadership)

Rachael has twenty years' experience leading commercial research within organizations such as HSBC, BDO LLP, Marakon Associates, CBRE and BCMS. She has particular expertise in the technology & telecoms, retail, manufacturing and real estate sectors. Her research has been used in Parliament to help develop government industrial strategy and the BDO High Street Sales Tracker, which Rachael was instrumental in developing, is still the UK's primary barometer for tracking high street sales performance. She maintains a keen interest in competitive intelligence and investigative research techniques. **She can be contacted at [rachael.elliott@thebci.org](mailto:rachael.elliott@thebci.org)**



## About the BCI

Founded in 1994 with the aim of promoting a more resilient world, the Business Continuity Institute BCI has established itself as the world's leading Institute for Business Continuity and Resilience. The BCI has become the membership and certifying organization of choice for Business Continuity and Resilience professionals globally with over 9,000 members in more than 100 countries, working in an estimated 3,000 organizations in the private, public and third sectors. The vast experience of the Institute's broad membership and partner network is built into its world class education, continuing professional development and networking activities. Every year, more than 1,500 people choose BCI training, with options ranging from short awareness raising tools to a full academic qualification, available online and in a classroom. The Institute stands for excellence in the Resilience profession and its globally recognised Certified grades provide assurance of technical and professional competency. The BCI offers a wide range of resources for professionals seeking to raise their organization's level of Resilience, and its extensive thought leadership and research programme helps drive the industry forward. With approximately 120 Partners worldwide, the BCI Partnership offers organizations the opportunity to work with the BCI in promoting best practice in Business Continuity and Resilience.

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