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bci Thought Leadership

BCI Crisis Management Report 2023

F24

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to introduce the BCI Crisis Management Report 2023. We are extremely grateful to have the sponsorship of F24 in producing this new report. As business continuity's wider involvement in the resilience of organizations becomes ever more apparent, its participation in crisis management programmes is crucial to creating and maintaining a resilient organization throughout a crisis situation.

With the advent of new technologies, new organizational structures, and new regulatory requirements, crisis management has come a long way since it became a formalised practice forty years ago. The pace of change in the industry is rapid and this report bears testament to that.

Over the two years since the last Crisis Management Report was published, the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic has eased and organizations have already made significant changes to the way crises are managed. However, now the dust is starting to settle on the learnings from the response to COVID-19, organizations are taking a more critical view of their crisis management practices and confidence levels in crisis management programmes, although still high, have declined slightly since 2021. less than two-thirds (61.1%) of respondents rate their organization's capabilities as good or higher; compared to more than three-quarters (75.1%) in 2021. Furthermore, hopes of crisis management becoming a more collaborative domain have still yet to fully materialise, with near a third of organizations (28.9%) considering silos to be a concern. Some hope was gleaned from interviews, however, which showed pockets of excellent practice developing in some organizations and industries.

There are still many positives to be taken. The report shows that organizations that adopt a hybrid model for managing crisis management (i.e. they have a centralised operation but provide a degree of local autonomy to different regions and/ or business units) are more successful in the crisis response. Now, 80% of practitioners have some degree of centralisation within their processes and are realising the benefits of more fluid teams, expert input, and technological enhancements to the process.

Once again 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. Senior management are now leading the crisis response in nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of organizations and, in turn, organizations are seeing an improvement in communication and efficiency as a result.

Although positive progress in crisis management may not have been as great as we could have hoped, there are areas of improvement and a clear desire expressed by many of those involved in the process to adopt a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Additionally, technology for crisis management has evolved significantly over the past two years and organizations are investing strongly in solutions to help streamline and improve the effectiveness of the function. Meanwhile, smaller organizations who may not have the means to invest in dedicated solutions are maximising the capabilities of enterprise software (such as Microsoft Teams or Google Meet) and pulling on internal resources to improve their own capabilities.

We hope you find that this new report serves as a useful benchmarking tool and provides valuable learnings for your own organization on crisis management. I would once again like to thank F24 for their valued support of this report.

Rachael Elliott
Head of Thought Leadership
The BCI

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Foreword

As we reflect on 2023, one phrase stands out: "the crises lasted much longer than expected". Multiple, prolonged crises varying in degree, severity or location have become a constant for many practitioners. For a growing number of organisations, crisis situations are no longer the exception but the rule. To adapt to a state of permacrisis, companies must strive for resilience to respond to any situation at any time, and on all levels.

It is encouraging to see more centralised and hybrid approaches to crisis management - as senior staff is getting more involved in the decision-making process, crisis teams are becoming more fluid, and the process of constant learning and adaption is gaining momentum. An indication of this process is seen in the increased collaboration between business continuity and crisis management. With an average score of 72.5, most practitioners now see BC in a more strategic position — an increase of three percentage points from 2021.

For me, the biggest insight from the BCI Crisis Management Report 2023 is that communication is key. It has become a top priority with 80% respondents, confirming they have integrated external communication and PR into their crisis response. Adaptability, cross-departmental collaboration, fluid crisis teams, centralised approaches can only be effective if supported by well-defined communication processes and reliable tools that allow for easy, fast, automated communication in both directions: sharing and listening. In fact, 95% of respondents agree that a team's ability to interact with other functions paired with a network culture is one of the key solutions to navigate during a crisis. In line with this observation, 50% said they revised their emergency communications systems to enable better collaboration during a crisis.

At the same time, communication is a key aspect in addressing some of the weaknesses pointed out by the report. In 2023, the main concern is the siloing of information. 28.9% of organizations say that their broader staff lacks awareness of crisis plans, marking a 9.1 percentage point increase from 2021 and highlighting the importance of addressing communication gaps. When it comes to communication tools and systems, we see that over 70% of respondents resort to incumbent enterprise software and free apps — a risky approach as these tools are not built to function in high-pressure environments and come with privacy, security, and governance concerns. Also, nearly a third of organizations are still using traditional methods like pen and paper to document the crisis management process, hindering their ability to review and adapt quickly.

But even though the universal adoption of smart crisis management technology is a work in progress, we see encouraging trends: 39.5% of companies work with a dedicated tool for alerting and internal communication, and 26.3% have invested in new technology.

We at F24 are committed to supporting businesses and government agencies on their road to resilience by delivering reliable and state-of-the-art software solutions. We are very grateful for the continued trusted partnership with the BCI, which enables us to contribute to this important resource for anyone looking to enhance their business resilience.

I hope the report will provide you with valuable insights.

Benjamin Jansen
Senior Vice President
Sales; Emergency Notification Software/Crisis Management
F24

Executive summary

Overall confidence in the effectiveness of organizational crisis management remains high, but challenges remain

Nearly two-thirds of organizations consider their crisis management function to be either excellent or good. Organizations incorporating a centralised approach to crisis management report higher levels of satisfaction than organizations with decentralised schemes.

19.5% Excellent

41.6% Good

Crisis management within organizations has become more centralised as a result of the pandemic

80% of practitioners report some degree of centralisation within their crisis management processes which helps to provide a better managed and coherent approach to crisis management. This centralised approach to crisis management has seen a slight increase of 1.2 percentage points since 2021, consolidating its upward trend.

Crisis management structures within organizations

44.9% Centralised

35.2% Combination/hybrid

16.3% Decentralised

The role of communications and PR in a crisis is considered to be the top factor in crisis response

80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that external communications and PR are integrated into their crisis response. This topic ranked in third place in 2021's report, showing how important a coordinated PR response is in an era of instant news generation and social media.

How much do you agree/disagree with the following **positive** criteria applied to your crisis management processes?
Top five answers (agree/strongly agree)

80.0%
External communications and PR are considered in the crisis response

77.3%
The crisis team can be mobilised quickly

76.5%
Staff health and wellbeing is a key consideration of the crisis management team

75.4%
The team can adapt quickly to a rapidly changing scenario

74.4%
Crisis management is led and championed by the board/ senior executive team

The siloing of information and lack of co-ordinated information control means organizational awareness of crisis plans is low

In 2023, the main concern (highlighted by 28.9% of respondents) is that staff lack awareness of crisis plans, marking a 9.1% increase from 2021. Other factors in this section also emphasise the importance of addressing communication gaps and isolated working practices.

How much do you agree/disagree with the following **negative** criteria applied to your crisis management processes?
Top five answers (agree/strongly agree)

28.9%
Wider staff are unaware of crisis plans which has/could lead to confusion in a crisis situation

28.9%
Plans are not shared across the organization

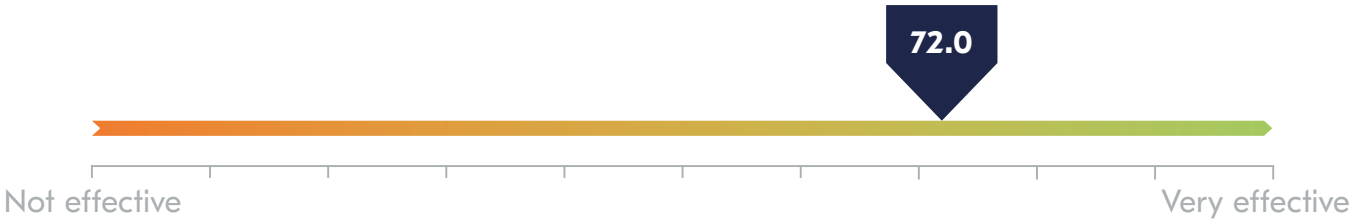
26.1%
We do not change crisis team members out often enough

23.0%
The crisis team works in a siloed environment

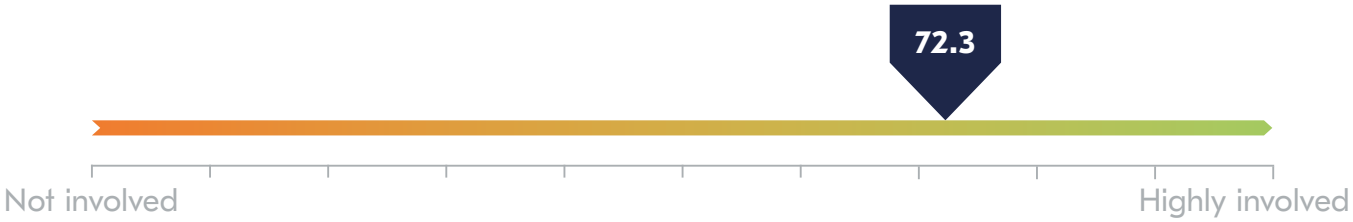
16.5%
The team lack the technology to be able to collaborate effectively

The relationship between business continuity (BC) and crisis management has improved in most organizations, with BC also being increasingly involved in the strategic aspect of crisis response

On a scale of 1-100, how effective is the relationship between business continuity and crisis management within your organization?



On a scale of 1-100, to what extent does business continuity become involved in the strategic response in a crisis?



Senior management are involved in the decision-making process throughout the crisis response in 77% of organizations

Almost 40% of respondents observed that senior management consistently participated throughout the crisis response decision-making process, up to the point of reaching a final decision. A further 37.4% reported that senior management was actively involved both during the process and when the final decision was being made.

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

39.6%
All along the process, taking a controlling role until the final decision

37.4%
At points during the process and in the final decision

9.5%
At the beginning to share their vision and in the end for the final decision

7.2%
Only in the end of the process, to validate the proposed options and decision

Participants report that their crisis management approaches have improved as a result of lessons learned during the pandemic

Based on a principle of continual improvement, many have tweaked their approach by working on communications, the involvement of senior members of staff, horizon scanning activities, and increased training and exercising.

Have you acted on any issues, gaps, or inconsistencies in your crisis response plans that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

66.0%
Yes, we identified issues and have already adopted changes into our crisis plans

17.0%
No, we have identified issues but have not yet put changes into practice

3.0%
No, we have not yet identified issues but we plan to within the next three months

9.5%
No, we do not have plans to make any changes in the near future

4.5%
Other

Adaptability and collaboration are the main lessons that organizations extracted from the COVID-19 pandemic experience

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of crisis plans that have the ability to be modified quickly to suit the crisis in hand, as well as moving the emphasis to outcome-based plans. The pandemic revealed shortcomings in communication systems, prompting organizations to improve their emergency communication protocols, including tools, platforms, and procedures for seamless collaboration among teams, both inside and outside the organization. In this regard, organizations have also increased training and exercising to better equip staff with the knowledge that they need to weather a crisis.

How has COVID-19 changed your approach to being better prepared for future crises? Top five responses

58.6%
We have ensured that plans are more adaptable to suit the intricacies of a crisis

50.0%
We have reviewed our emergency communications system to be able to better collaborate in a crisis

50.0%
We are ensuring that the board/ senior management are fully engaged in the crisis management process

47.0%
We have devoted more time to horizon scanning and risk mapping to spot emerging events before they reach mainstream media

42.4%
We are carrying out more training and exercising than previously

Almost 90% of organizations carry out a post-incident/after action review (PIR/AAR) to differing degrees

The review and careful assessment of an organization's response to a crisis are essential to continually improving the effectiveness of response. For crises with longevity, it also makes sense to carry out ongoing reviews to ensure that the response continues to be pertinent and efficient in addressing evolving challenges.

Do you conduct a post-incident/after action review (PIR/AAR)?

38.7% Yes, always

34.3% Yes, but only for major incidents

10.8% Yes, sometimes

5.4% Only occasionally

Senior management are becoming increasingly involved in the post-incident review process

The participation of senior management in the PIR process has seen a rise since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, there has been a general increase in the engagement of BC in the more strategic aspects of the response/recovery process, such as reviews.

Top five departments represented in a post-incident review within organizations.

72.0% Senior leadership

71.5% Business continuity

63.5% IT

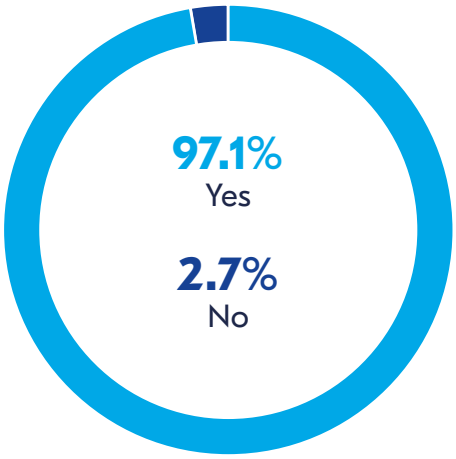
61.5% Health and safety

60.5% Risk management

Technology has become an enabler and true partner in crisis management scenarios. Organizations are increasingly leveraging technology to enable swift and effective crisis responses

Whether this consists of advanced tools such as dedicated emergency notification platforms and virtual rooms or more traditional solutions, most find that digital tools have improved internal efficiencies within crisis management. Tasks such as training, education, and exercising are pivotal to developing sound crisis management functions and enabling the correct use of virtual systems.

Has virtual crisis management simplified or enhanced your organization's internal efficiency?



Top five technology tools used by organizations as part of their crisis response in the past year.

73.7%
Enterprise software

46.8%
Free messaging apps

37.6%
Call trees

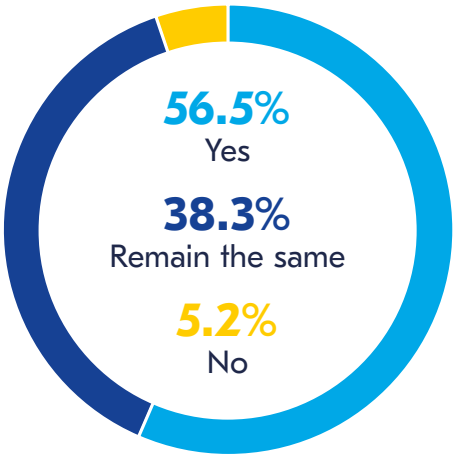
28.5%
On-site communication screens

27.4%
Virtual crisis room/ dashboard technology

Most respondents are expecting an increase in investment in crisis management/BC in the upcoming years, with the focus to be on investment in human resources and innovation

Survey participants anticipate that investment in crisis management and business continuity will either grow or stay steady in the coming years. Most believe that the majority of this investment will be allocated to personnel, software, and initiatives such as training, education, and exercises.

Do you believe that investment will increase in crisis management and/or resilience over the medium-term (next five years)?



Where will investment be directed (top three responses)?

79.2%
Education, training, and exercising

78.1%
Software

60.4%
Personnel/staff

Introduction

Crisis management is employed by individuals and organizations to plan for, respond to, and recover from significant and unexpected events or situations that have the potential to disrupt normal operations, cause harm, or damage reputation. These events, often referred to as crises, can take various forms, including pandemics, natural disasters, industrial accidents, public relations scandals, financial emergencies, cyber attacks, geopolitical events, and more. Crisis management plays a vital role in establishing resilience within organizations.

Key elements of crisis management include:

Preparedness: this involves developing strategies, plans, and resources in advance to anticipate and mitigate potential crises. It includes risk assessment, training, and the establishment of crisis management teams. It should also ensure that teams involved in the crisis are able to work together, with each part knowing how their involvement fits into the overall process.

Identification: recognising the signs and early warning indicators of a crisis is crucial to initiate a timely response. This includes monitoring internal and external factors that could lead to a crisis. For many organizations, this is an area which has been transformed over recent years through better availability of information to help with early warning of unfolding events, or analysis of patterns of previous events and using big data to help make projections.

Response: this is the point when a crisis occurs, organizations execute their crisis management plans. This often involves immediate actions to ensure safety, containment, and the protection of people, assets, and reputation. Typically, senior management will be involved at the very start of the process to ensure strong leadership and stewardship of the beginning of the response.

Communication: effective communication is essential during a crisis to keep stakeholders informed, maintain trust, and manage public perception. This involves both internal communication (within the organization) and external communication (involving the public, media, and authorities). Communication control has become increasingly important in an era where information can be written and released within seconds on social media. Ensuring staff know how to communicate in a crisis should be a vital part of a crisis management strategy.

Recovery: after the initial response, organizations must work on recovering from the crisis. This may involve restoring operations, assessing damage, implementing corrective measures, and learning from the experience to prevent future crises. Collaboration with other organizations, local authorities and emergency services is often done at this point to ensure the right learnings are taken from those involved in different parts of the process.

Evaluation: once the crisis is over, it is essential to review the response and identify areas for improvement. This is normally done through a post-incident review or after-action review. This helps organizations refine their crisis management plans and strategies for better preparedness in the future. For crises with significant longevity, some organizations hold interim reviews so learnings can be made and absorbed into the ongoing crisis situation

Crisis management is a term used in most organizations. However, the way organizations tackle it varies significantly depending on the type of organization and the nature of the crisis. This year, the research indicates that COVID-19 has propelled the field of crisis management into a notably more cooperative, all-encompassing, and adaptive discipline. This research report will delve into crisis management practices across organizations and how these have changed in recent years.

Crisis management within organizations

Crisis management within organizations

- More organizations are now centralising their approach to crisis management, with the most effective crisis responses coming from those organizations who also promote a degree of regional autonomy where required.
- The importance of a good PR/external communications strategy is now the top point of consideration in the crisis response, although siloing of information — hindering the effectiveness of the response — is still endemic.
- Crisis teams are becoming more fluid to ensure that the most suitable people for a particular event are on the team. Subject matter experts are increasingly being drawn upon, with digital tools negating the need to have such experts on site.

Centralisation vs localisation

Crisis management approaches can be broadly categorised into centralised, decentralised, and hybrid schemes, each with its own advantages and drawbacks. The 2021 BCI Crisis Management Report[1] analysed the response to the pandemic, presenting overall positive trends. Most organizations reported good capabilities as they were able to leverage a centralised or hybrid approach to involve both senior teams and other relevant departments (e.g. BC).

A trend mentioned in the 2021 report sees consolidation in the current edition: crisis management has become more centralised as a result of the pandemic. In the face of an evolving threat landscape (e.g. increasing severe weather incidents, new armed conflicts), almost 45% of practitioners reveal a preference for centralised crisis management arrangements, an increase of 1.2 percentage points on 2021. There are many advantages of such an arrangement: centralisation facilitates rapid responses as extensive coordination is not required, decisions can be made promptly, and there is a clear hierarchy as roles and responsibilities should be well-defined, reducing confusion about roles and responsibilities in the team. A centralised approach also ensures a uniform response across the organization, thus maintaining coherence in crisis management efforts. However, a purely centralised arrangement needs to be used with care: the requirement for local knowledge to elicit better decision-making cannot be disregarded, as well as local support aiding an overburdened central team. In the event of a large-scale crisis, the central team may become overwhelmed with the volume of tasks and responsibilities that it must handle, affecting the quality of the crisis response.

> **"Our crisis response is centralised. If there is a regional disaster or regional crisis that is happening somewhere, we will bring that team into the fold and ask for their input on the ground. They know better what is going on in the situation, but I think the strategic piece and the decision-making piece are still centralised within the core team in our organization."**
>
> Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

In a quest to achieve a centralised/regional balance, just over a third of organizations (35.2%) chose a hybrid approach. Hybrid crisis management approaches aim to strike a balance between the advantages of centralised control and the flexibility of decentralisation. Typically, a central coordinating body exists, but local units also retain a degree of autonomy. Essentially, an effective crisis management system requires vital strategic procedures to be centralised, but it also needs to enable the delegation of critical decisions to local units (where applicable). This all needs to be contained within a framework that is agile, adaptable, and capable of scaling as needed. Interviewees discussed how their own hybrid structures worked which demonstrate there is no single correct approach and they should be modelled according to the needs of the organization. However, many of these responses highlight how organizations changed their crisis response methods during the COVID-19 pandemic, often moving from an entirely centralised approach to a hybrid one. There was a heightened appreciation of the importance of ensuring local personnel were part of the response.

"In our organization, there are two levels of crisis response. If it was a crisis that affected all our campuses, then we would have a central crisis management body which would be chaired by our chief operations officer. However, we would have representation across all campuses to ensure that we are remaining consistent. We do also have local teams. If something happens in one campus, we have a local team who will just deal with that."

Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"My organization has a number of sites in South Africa and Mozambique. At each site we have tactical site responders. Then we have a second layer, which is made of operations managers, which we call an incident management team. These employees will respond to major events at sites. A situation where, for example, a terminal has a tank fire, they will activate the operations response team, but they will need support from the central team. The incident management team will support that response, they will coordinate the response in liaison with the authorities. Finally at the centre, if we have a major event, we activate what we call a country support team. The country support team consists of the executive team led by the vice president of the company. Normally they will respond to major events that are actually likely to affect the very survival of the business."

Crisis & business continuity manager, energy & utility services, South Africa

"Our business unit is set in place and empowered by the management board. It is led by the head of the crisis unit who would then nominate other members, either core members or extended members, and the extended members would be selected depending on the nature of a crisis. This is the localised version of the crisis unit. However, because we are part of an international company, the group also has its own crisis unit and whenever a local company declares a state of crisis then they need to inform the group. The takeover of the crisis management process would most often occur when several subsidiaries or a large part of a group is impacted by a crisis. However, the group functions would want to be kept informed in order to ensure local units manage the situation."

Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

"We followed a global approach initially. We said, okay, these are our guidelines, here you have the 10 directives, what to do in the pandemic. However, after this everyone started inquiring about different local rules and circumstances. We had to scan that and check all these issues. Monitoring local regulations on different federal states in Germany took a lot of time. We had to consider local regulations and personal circumstances throughout the crisis."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

Striking the right balance between centralised and decentralised decision-making is a challenge to achieve and requires attention. There is a potential development of conflict between central and local authorities over decision-making, and conflict resolutions mechanisms may need to be considered when adopting such an approach.

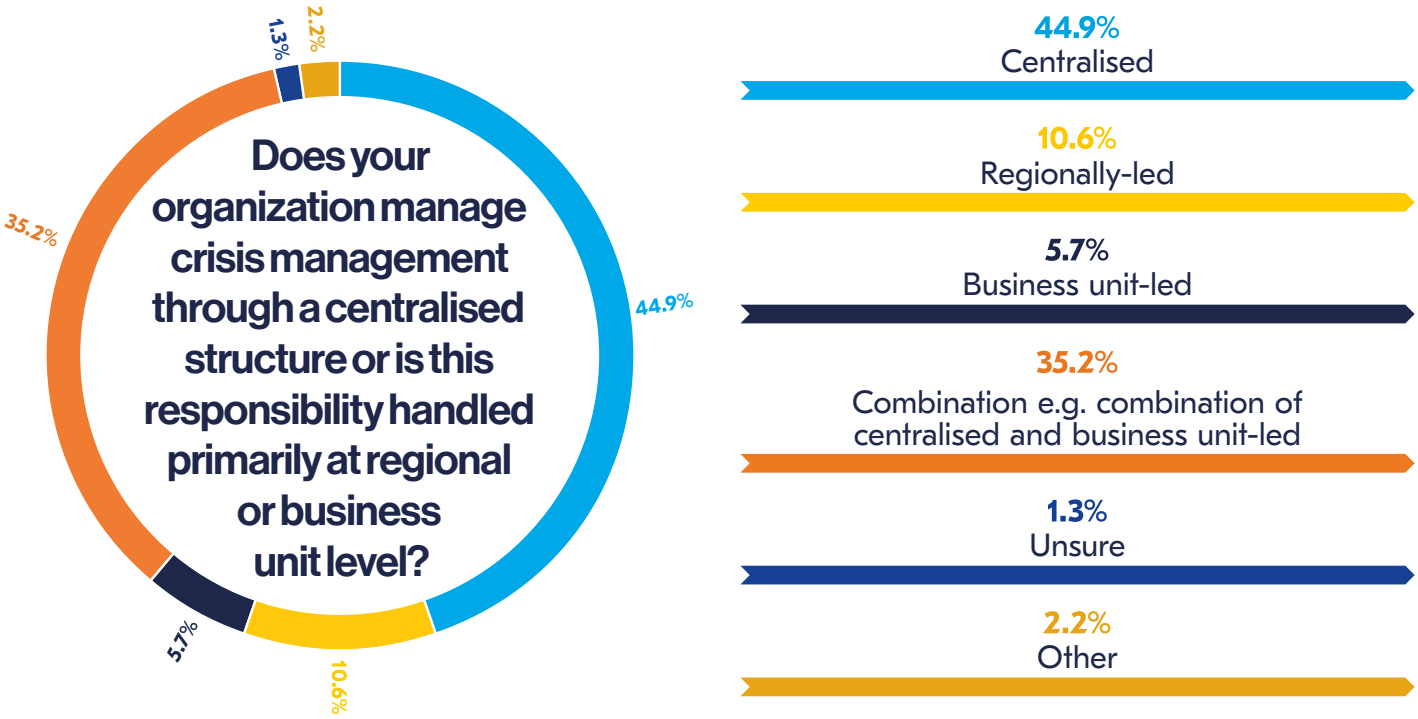


Figure 1. Does your organization manage crisis management through a centralised structure or is this responsibility handled primarily at regional or business unit level?

In the 2023 report, centralised and hybrid approaches show increased momentum, while the decentralised approach continues to be used by only a small percentage of organizations within the sample. Indeed, only 16.3% of organizations chose a decentralised approach to crisis management (regionally or business-led). Those adopting a decentralised approach to crisis management typically have specific characteristics or needs that make this approach a better fit for them (e.g. smaller organizations, those operating within a single region, or those with very distinct requirements for different business units). However, decentralisation can lead to inconsistencies or conflicts in response strategies across different regions or units, as well as lack of coordination — particularly if the approach is adopted in large organizations with matrix structures. Also, this type of crisis response tends to increase information silos: information may not flow seamlessly between local units and the central command, potentially resulting in gaps or duplication of efforts.

Discussions with BCI members show that crisis management teams are becoming more effective and more capable of addressing the complex challenges that organizations face. This is reflected in the survey data this year which shows that confidence in crisis response capabilities is still positive. The majority of respondents (61.1%) consider their crisis management function to be either excellent (19.5%) or good (41.6%). However, the data shows a drop of 14 percentage points compared to 2021, where this figure was 75.1%[2]. Part of this drop in confidence may be down to a resetting of what "good" and "excellent" mean: later findings in the report show a marked improvement in organizations' approach to crisis management, so ratings are likely to be made from this new, higher base. Crisis teams have evolved since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to be more adaptive, more interchangeable (e.g. using different people for different scenarios), and more driven by technology. This shifting benchmark may cause some practitioners to question the capabilities of their own teams.

Organizations incorporating a centralised approach to crisis management are more content with the effectiveness of their programme than organizations with decentralised schemes. Those choosing a centralised method report the effectiveness of their capabilities as being 'excellent' in 22.8% of cases, compared to only 16.8% for organizations with decentralised structures.

When analysing satisfaction with the crisis management function within different regions, professionals from the Middle East were the most confident about their organization's capabilities in this area, with 81.9% of respondents considering it either excellent or good, with Australasia (65.6%), Africa (65.6%), Europe (64.2%), and Asia (64.0%) also showing positive results. Interestingly, North America was an outlier, with only just over a third (39.1%) sharing a positive outlook.

Figure 2. How effective do you believe the crisis management capabilities are within your organization?

There could be several reasons why organizations' perceptions of their crisis management capabilities have decreased since the BCI's last report in 2021.

The pandemic strained resources across organizations, both in terms of finances and manpower. Many organizations had to divert resources to immediate crisis response, which could have impacted their ability to effectively manage this new, more complex, type of crisis, particularly given the longevity and evolutionary nature of COVID-19. This context underscores the need for organizations to consider not just a broader range of crises, but also to consider the challenges of managing longer-term incidents and those that evolve or change over the crisis period. The recognition of these evolving threats may have made organizations more critical of their crisis management capabilities.[3]

"The crisis lasted much longer than we expected. We thought that a pandemic would last a few months, and in the end, we have seen it stretching over years. That was also a big learning moment for us, to prepare for longer crises. We also had to do new risk analyses because of the possibility of having more than one crisis at the same time; we could have double failures which is not something we had traditionally prepared for. Now we had to do the risk assessments for double failures."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

The extended duration of the pandemic put significant stress on employees and crisis management teams with burnout, staffing shortages, and fatigue as consequences, undermining the effectiveness of crisis response efforts. An interviewee spoke about how they were getting around the issue in their organization by having alternative representatives at each level in the crisis team.

"Typically, a crisis management team is going to be a small group and I think it does create an impact, especially when you are trying to perform exercises and simulations because you are only getting a core group of people involved. So what we've been trying to do is expand that group to have alternates down two or three tiers so that we can also bring those folks into the know of how we operate, possibly participate in some of the exercises and simulations as well, so they can experience, in a safe environment, what it feels like when a crisis does happen."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

Characteristics of crisis management structures in 2023

Participants were queried about the 'positive' attributes taken into account within their crisis management teams and the highest-ranking attribute (based on respondents who 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed') were external communications and PR strategies (80.0%), a focus on staff health and wellbeing (76.5%), the ability to mobilise the team quickly (77.3%), the capability to adapt to different scenarios (75.4%), and the presence of champions and leaders at a senior or executive level (74.4%).

The highest-ranking attribute (agreed/strongly agreed) was 'external communications and PR are considered in the crisis response' with 80.0% of respondents. The very concept of crisis management evolved from the recognition of the crucial role played by rapid and well-coordinated communications. The communications around a crisis can ultimately result in the success or failure of an organization. The Johnson & Johnson Tylenol incident in 1982 is still used as a textbook example of 'PR done well'. Seven people died as a result of taking tablets laced with cyanide. Even though the most plausible reason was the poison being introduced in a store, J&J stopped all advertising, made clear and consistent communications from senior management with the media, and introduced a new tamper-resistant packaging for all its pills[4]. It is widely considered to be the best media response of all time. Meanwhile, United Airlines' management of an otherwise run-of-the-mill incident had the opposite reaction. A flight was overbooked and the airline had to make the decision to remove a passenger from the flight. They happened to pick on a doctor, who needed to return home to be with his patients. However, he was dragged off the plane by officials and severely injured as a result.

The response from the CEO was considered to be insincere resulting in a boycott of the airline and a significant drop in share price. As the saying goes: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" and this mantra should serve as a constant reminder for every CEO and organizational leader, highlighting the indispensable role of PR and communication strategies in effective crisis management and reputation protection.

'Staff health and wellbeing is a key consideration of the crisis management team' has dropped into second place from the top position in 2021. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic not only accelerated the adoption of remote and hybrid working arrangements but also reshaped the way that organizations view staff wellbeing in the new working environment. 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 of the same year this had increased to 83%[5]: Organizations have come to the realisation that their staff need appropriate support. Furthermore, lack of wellbeing support can also lead to staff attrition – a factor which affected some 40.3% of organizations in 2020[6]. Given this option's drop to second place, it could be that organizations are moving on from providing the support and guidance they were at the height of the pandemic. However, interviewees highlighted that mental health has become embedded as a central role in crisis management and needs to be kept at the top of the agenda.

The third most significant criterion is that 'the crisis team can be mobilised quickly', with 77.3% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this requirement. Facilitating rapid activation is crucial in a fast-evolving crisis, with many organizations choosing to assemble crisis management teams in online environments to ensure the right people can be involved without the need for them to travel. However, by moving online, organizations should be aware of the risks that come with it: those on the team need to be assured of network and power availability, attention needs to be given to the security of the virtual environment (e.g. disabling screenshot capabilities), crisis team members need to be trained to be able to use the specialist crisis room technology, and, if a standard enterprise tool such as Microsoft Teams is used, organizations must ensure that it has enough functionality to guarantee the effective management of a crisis. An interviewee explained how they exploited channels such as Microsoft Teams and Slack to ensure they could fully track, analyse, and engage people through a digital dashboard. Another highlighted how Microsoft Teams was the primary method of ensuring good communication through the crisis process, whilst another said that mobilising the team was not an issue – but ensuring they worked to tried and tested working practices was.

"We have a programme with the ability to create status updates and add notes. A lot of our task assignments and decision-making gets documented within that program. As we are working through a crisis, a lot of that information can also flow into Slack channels or other channels where maybe someone that is not in the room needs to have an update or know what is going on or access the information and track what is happening. We do not really do any more physical documentation or managing of tasks on whiteboards or flipboards in a room. We have incident workflows that we use, which help assign tasks to people; and we can track in a digital platform."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

"I think collaboration between the teams is a key component of a successful relationship. We have a good working relationship. If there is something that goes wrong, we are instantly at it, we have IT, communications, risk, ourselves, and the heads of the various departments all talking together. I think because we have got this good relationship across the board, it is easy to discuss and make decisions quite quickly. Teams is brilliant for that collaboration. We have got Teams set up with all the right people. Everybody has that instant message and can obviously put their comments in, their thoughts in, and then decisions are made together."

Resilience advisor,
legal & professional services, UK

The capability to adapt to different scenarios was in fourth place, with 75.4% of respondents able to make this adaption. Successful crisis management hinges on timely decision-making, which, in turn, relies on the availability of reliable situational intelligence. Crises are characterised by the challenge of working with incomplete, evolving, and often biased or distorted information sources. While organizational structures may vary, the core principles of successful crisis management, including the timely collection, analysis, and dissemination of situational intelligence for decision-making, remain consistent across industries and organizations. One of the key routes to success is in preparation and training, not only for crisis management teams, but also for other staff and, where appropriate, third-party stakeholders.

The board or senior management team now takes the helm in nearly three-quarters (74.4%) of organizations. Senior management's involvement in crisis programmes/activities helps to ensure organizational support and engagement from all staff. Where this is not the case, the crisis team may lack the authority to make quick decisions, confusion with roles may appear, and the organization's crisis management strategy might not be cascaded through the organization. Nevertheless, in many cases professionals make their plans accessible to staff members and provide relevant communication and training. This approach ensures that all employees understand their roles during incidents and grasp how an effective crisis management structure contributes to overall organizational resilience.

There are some differences between regions. Professionals from North America consider an incident-agnostic approach to crisis management and a team that can be mobilised quickly as the top two priorities (both at 75.0%) while their European counterparts prioritise external communications and PR (83.0%). The findings that emerge from figure 3 resonate with long-standing good practices in the resilience industry, as well as with the results of previous BCI reports. The 2022 BCI White Paper on Crisis Leadership[7], for example, shows how crisis management must be strategic in nature and involve professionals from the highest levels of the organization. In effect, those who have the adequate seniority to mobilise resources quickly according to the requirements of each crisis. Another key point that emerges across different analyses is that communication is a key aspect of addressing a highly disruptive event. Ensuring sound and consistent communications does not only benefit the organization during a crisis, but it also carries advantages in the long term. If this is not considered, it could ultimately threaten the survival of the business[8].

The statement that received the least agreement from respondents, as with the 2021 report, relates to the idea of having numerous highly detailed plans for various scenarios, with only 37.9% strongly agreeing or agreeing with this notion. However, the relatively lower agreement rate in this context underscores the importance of adhering to industry best practices. Even the most intricate plan cannot encompass every nuanced aspect of every possible crisis scenario. A rigid focus on highly detailed plans for specific scenarios can hinder an organization's ability to respond effectively to unforeseen events. An agnostic approach emphasises adaptability, ensuring that crisis management strategies can be customised to suit the unique characteristics and challenges of each crisis, ultimately enhancing an organization's resilience. This approach is described in the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines (2018)[9].

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

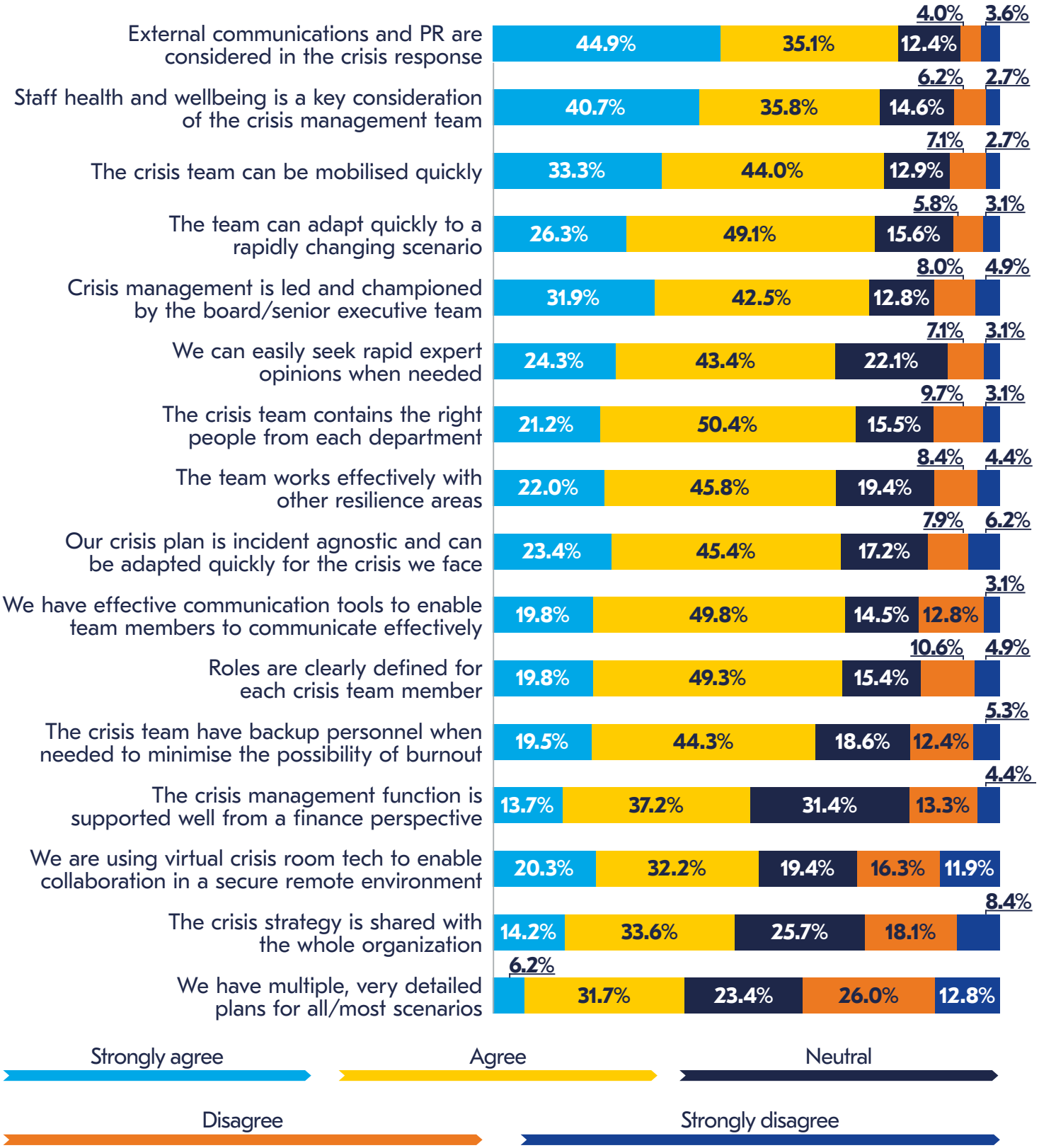


Figure 3. How much do you agree/disagree with the following positive criteria applying to your crisis management processes?

Staff are unaware of crisis plans in a third of organizations, increasing the chance of confusion in a crisis event

Respondents were asked about the main shortcomings of crisis management functions within their organizations. The most selected option was 'wider staff are unaware of crisis plans which has led/could lead to confusion in a crisis scenario', with 28.9% of organizations agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and placing it as the organization's main concern in 2023. In the 2021 edition of this report, this was the second lowest point for practitioners with 19.8% of organizations agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. This shows that further work needs to be done to ensure the transparency of plans.

The concern over lack of communication and siloed working practices is further emphasised through various criteria mentioned in this section. Specific topics needing addressing within the top five options are 'plans are not shared across the organization' (28.9%) and 'the crisis team works in a siloed environment' (23%). Despite concerted efforts by numerous organizations to dismantle siloed working practices, this problem remains deeply ingrained in many of them. Effective crisis response demands seamless collaboration and information flow across all levels of an organization. Siloed working practices can lead to critical information gaps, delays in decision-making, and redundant efforts. Interviewees spoke freely about the problems of siloing in their own organizations, although encouragingly, most were aware of the problems siloing can cause and many were working to improve their information sharing capabilities.

"I think the problem we have got is that we are still at an early stage. We are in the process of building a new SharePoint area to put all our resilience paperwork there. But now, the only people who have access to it are the people who are named in the plans. However, my goal is to make it more publicly available within the organization."

Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"I still think there could be some improvement in breaking down silos. The plans are not shared because typically either BCM, major incident response, or crisis management plans are sensitive and need to be kept within the people who need them, there is a need to know about them. There's still some work to be done in terms of sharing information. We need to lay the foundations, get the plans, get the teams in place, get them trained, and then as we progress and we find they are reasonably comfortable with what we have shared with them, then we would need to bring other areas into the crisis response."

Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

Other options elected within the top five concerns for organizations within their crisis management response were 'we do not change crisis team members out often enough' (26.1%) and 'the team lacks the technology to be able to collaborate effectively' (16.4%).

While most of these aspects have often been debated and international guidelines and industry discussions address the importance of an embedded and collaborative approach to crisis management, the idea of a lack of change among members of the team is not widely discussed. Nevertheless, the BCI Crisis Leadership Report 2022 highlighted the different approaches to structuring a crisis management unit[10]. Among the experts interviewed in that report, Hanna Tan from the BCI Australasia Chapter stated that: "A lot of the time, the crisis management function and the areas it supports are usually owned by the c-suite or the executive management area," while Michael Hayes, MBCI, CBCP (Arthur J. Gallagher & Co, USA) reported that top management: "Are engaged and involved depending on the level of severity of the incident,"[11].

Some organizations prefer to have the same senior members of staff on the crisis team, regardless of the incident in hand. This is normally because they hold the expertise and understanding of how to face such an event. Meanwhile, others stated that some members of the team might be more involved than others depending on the type of crisis — even though a core unit of senior leaders (e.g. the CEO) tends to stay on regardless. In this latter approach, the type of disruptive event determines whether there is a need for the involvement of personnel with expertise in specific scenarios, such as countering digital threats, legal matters, or logistics incidents. It also points to the good practice of ensuring that the composition of the crisis team undergoes regular assessments to ascertain that the right individuals with the most relevant skills are part of the team. For example, subject matter experts on meteorological weather patterns could be drafted in for hurricane season, whereas medical professionals could be offered a seat on the team in the case of a pandemic. Indeed, the 2021 edition of this report showed that some organizations employed the services of a chief medical officer during the pandemic to help guide the crisis team in their decision-making.

Richard Long, writing for MHA Consulting, recommends a shift from managing individuals based solely on their job titles to evaluating their leadership capabilities[12]. Long further advocates for the implementation of a competency-based leadership model to nurture the development of team members. Nevertheless, the introduction of flexibility within teams should be supported by stability and interviewees for this report emphasised the importance of retaining consistent team members throughout a crisis as it played a vital role in their successful response and helped to ensure that correct strategies were followed.

The need for technology as a key tool to enable collaboration and communication during a crisis moved up to fifth place this year from tenth in 2021. 16.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their teams lack the technology to be able to collaborate effectively. With the advent of widespread remote working, teams tend to be widely dispersed and crisis management teams could be slow – or even impossible – to assemble without using technology solutions. While interviewees spoke of exploiting their enterprise software (such as Microsoft Teams) to build virtual crisis management rooms, bespoke solutions – such as those employing augmented reality or enhanced security – can come at a price.

There was less regional discrepancy in this question, and respondents' different geographical areas mirrored these top three concerns, albeit in different orders. For instance, the primary negative criterion in both Europe (27.7%) and Australasia (31.3%) was the lack of change among the members of the crisis management team, whereas respondents from North America (50.0%) placed the lack of awareness of crisis management plans at the top of the chart. Also, the number of professionals complaining about an excessively siloed approach to their crisis management function has increased by 9 percentage points (23.0% in 2023, compared to 14.2% in 2021).

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

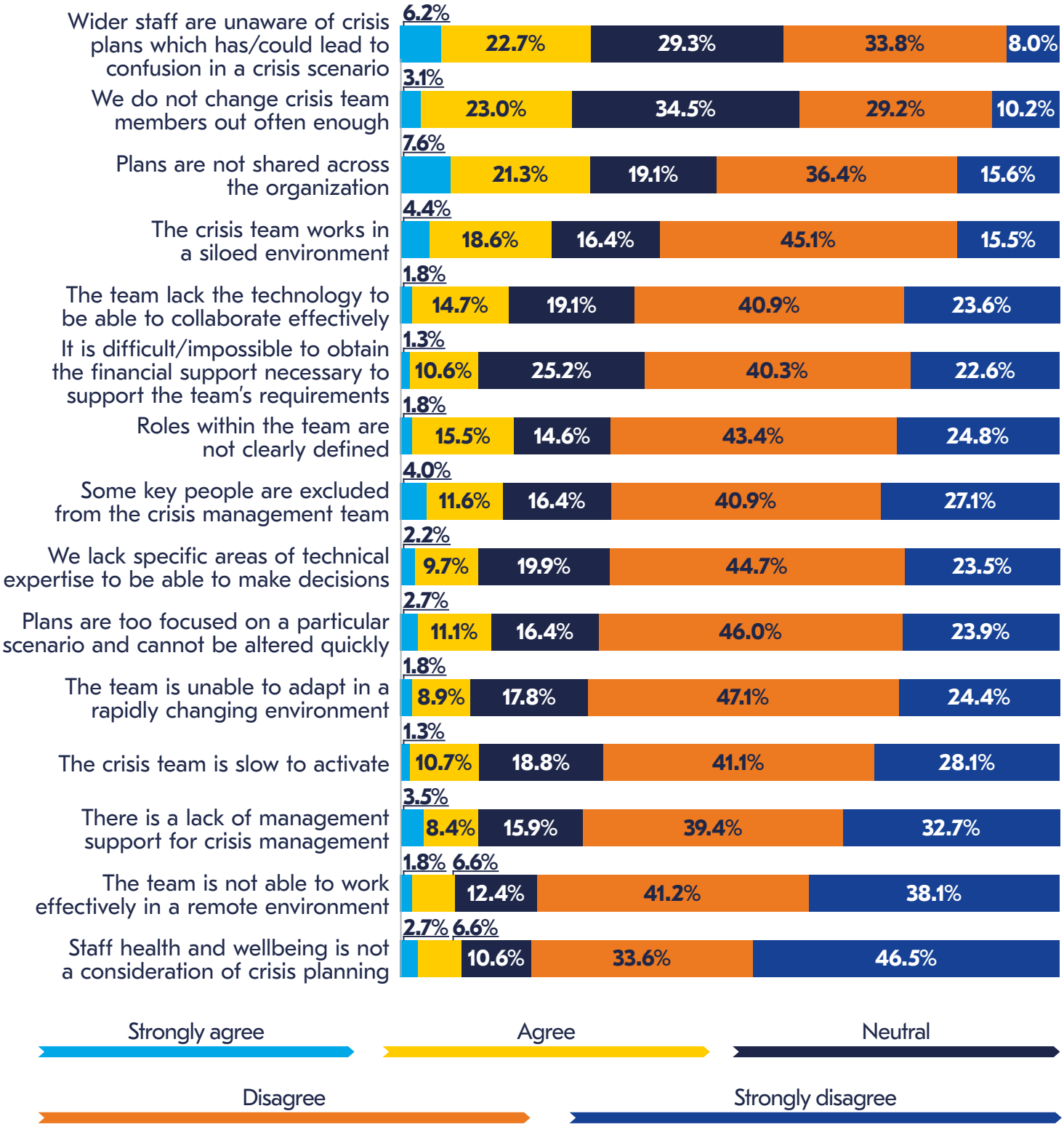


Figure 4. How much do you agree/disagree with the following negative criteria applying to your crisis management processes?

Collaboration in a crisis

Collaboration in a crisis

- BC and crisis management have traditionally had a strained relationship in many organizations. However, increased collaboration between BC and crisis management is now apparent, with roles being better defined.
- BC is no longer uniformly confined to the 'operational' (sometimes referred to as 'bronze') level of the crisis team. BC is increasingly seeing itself at the 'tactical' ('silver') level and, in rare cases, at the top of the tree at 'strategic' ('gold') level. This aligns with the increasingly strategic remit of BC practitioners.
- Over three-quarters of organizations report senior management involvement within the crisis team, with around half of those reporting their presence throughout the crisis.

Past BCI reports have highlighted the strained relationship between the crisis management and BC functions within organizations. This tension often stems from insufficient collaboration between these departments, disagreements regarding the appropriate timing for crisis management to transition to BC during the recovery phase, and vague delineations of roles and responsibilities that lead to redundancy and inefficiency. Moreover, as BC increasingly extends beyond its traditional operational boundaries and becomes intertwined with strategic responses, the potential for overlaps and resultant conflicts intensifies. It therefore becomes imperative to establish a well-defined process that clearly identifies the individuals or teams that should be involved at specific stages of a crisis and outlines their respective roles and responsibilities.

The BCI Good Practice Guidelines 2018 maintains that the crisis management structure is defined within the overall BCM programme, specifically in the implementation phase[13].

Several experts and thought leaders have remarked on the importance of the synergy between BC and crisis management. This includes the latest ISO 22361:2022 standard on the topic which states that: "An organization's crisis management capability will be influenced by its relationship with other interdependent areas such as risk management, BC, information security, physical security, safety, civil protection, incident response and emergency management,"[14]. The standard goes on to suggest that other such frameworks support the: "Implementation of a crisis management capability in a purposeful, consistent and rigorous manner,"[15].

While the language in the above guidelines provides a useful indication, it also allows for flexibility, as each organization has different needs. For instance, there are cases where members of the executive team direct crisis management efforts — which may represent the majority of cases — but there are also instances where someone from BC, security, or risk management might coordinate the response to a crisis, while the CEO remains informed but without a first-hand involvement. Also, certain organizations have designated individuals as 'champions' of BC or resilience within their operations. These individuals, despite holding primary roles outside the realm of resilience, are specially trained and primed to act as the initial point of contact during a crisis situation. Their primary responsibility is to swiftly receive information and coordinate the necessary actions within their respective teams during the early stages of the response. Additionally, these champions are typically selected for their strong communication and collaboration skills as they are expected to effectively relay pertinent information to the broader crisis management team.

One approach to achieving alignment between the BC and crisis management functions is by appointing a senior staff member within the organization to oversee both functions.

This dual responsibility has proven to be effective in many organizations, fostering synchronisation between crisis management and BC protocols when responding to incidents. While some organizations had already adopted this model before the pandemic, the global health crisis prompted others to reconfigure their structures along similar lines. Indeed, it is noticeable this year in the response base to this report that many practitioners have the dual role of 'BC and crisis management' in their job titles.

> **"The relationship between business continuity and crisis management is *us*. We are business continuity crisis management. If we must invoke our business continuity plan, we will facilitate that. So individually, the teams will have their meetings to obviously discuss the impact, etc, and then they will bring that to the crisis management team then we will facilitate and obviously help run it."**
>
> Resilience advisor,
> legal & professional services, UK

When asked to indicate the effectiveness of the relationship between BC and crisis management, in 2023 most respondents provide very encouraging values. On a scale from 1 to 100 (where 1=no effectiveness and 100=fully effective), the average value was 72, showing that within the organizations present in the sample there is a strong connection between these two functions. The figures from this edition show a marginal decline from the 2021 average (74.5), but it is only a minor difference and the figures show that the relationship between BC and crisis management is effective, suggesting that most organizations are not experiencing the traditional conflicts highlighted earlier. Furthermore, interviewees for the 2023 report spoke about how they were seeing tangible improvements in the relationship between BC and crisis management, which suggests the slight decline seen in the survey results could be due to respondent ratings responding to a new, more positive, baseline.

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

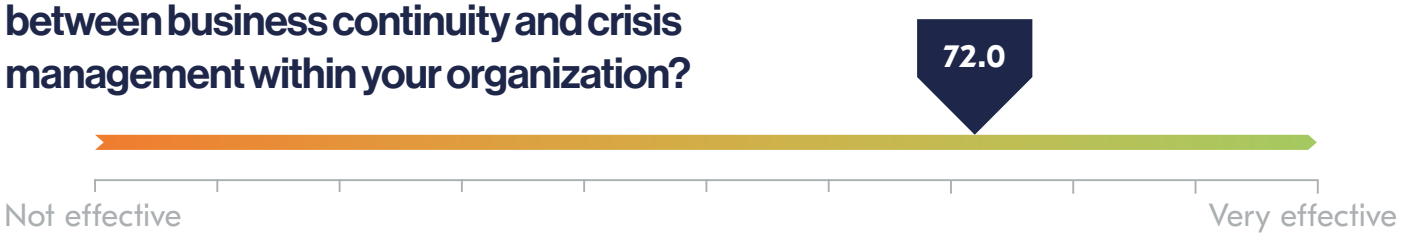


Figure 5. How effective is the relationship between business continuity and crisis management within your organization?

In conventional crisis team setups, senior management typically participates in the strategic response phase (sometimes designated as the 'gold' team, depending on geography), followed by the tactical response team ('silver') and, ultimately, the operational team, which encompasses BC, in the operational response phase ('bronze'). Certain organizational frameworks may incorporate BC within different segments of their structure, often within the tactical aspect of the response, while others may adopt more compact or intricate structures, taking into account the company's size and complexity. Respondents were also queried about the extent to which BC becomes involved in the strategic response in a crisis, again rating on a scale of 1-100. This year shows that BC is still moving towards becoming more of a strategic partner within the crisis response team. With an average score of 72.5, it is clear that most practitioners now see BC as having a more strategic position within crisis management — a three percentage point increase on 2021 (69.5).

"The way we have done business continuity is at a service level and business continuity would be a silver response. Each service has their business continuity response team, which is a silver; and then that will feed into the larger team, technically gold."

Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"Within our organization, BC is strategic within the crisis management structure; and then we go into tactical if it is deemed important to activate our business continuity plans. BC does have a seat at the crisis management table in our organization, but we are there to help the crisis managers until it is time to activate the business continuity plans."

Manager of global business continuity planning, mining & quarrying, United States

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

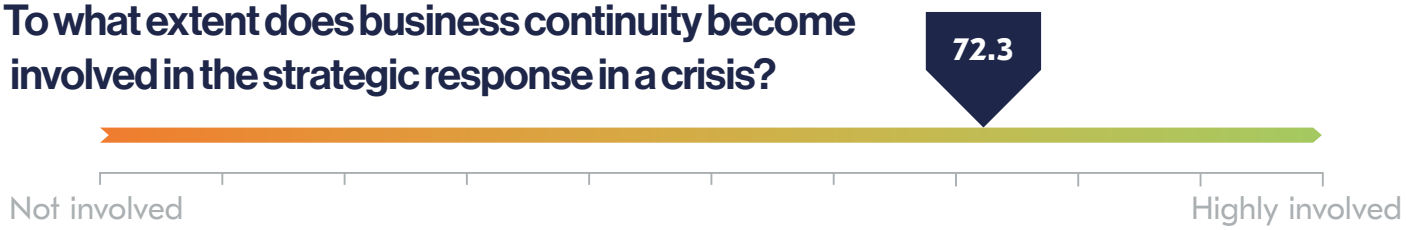


Figure 6. To what extent does business continuity become involved in the strategic response in a crisis?

The c-suite/senior management team are more aware of their leading role in a crisis, although they are also providing autonomy to managers where required

When examining the role of the c-suite and/or senior management in crisis scenarios, the survey reveals a mixed picture. 39.9% of respondents noted that senior management maintained their participation throughout the decision-making process, extending until the final decision was reached. Another 37.4% indicated that senior management were engaged at points during the process and when the final decision was being made. One interviewee made it clear that senior management's responsibility in leading from the start of an incident was integral to the effectiveness of the response. However, during the response itself, it was felt it was the core team's job to ensure the effectiveness of the response, with management stepping in only to give the go ahead at certain points in the response. However, a risk is that management can be slow to make decisions in crisis scenarios and, despite using tools and technology such as dashboards to facilitate the process, interviews revealed it is the human element which typically slows the process.

"I think the strategy piece is something that we like to keep a little closer to the core team and executive level. One of the things that we are trying to do is explain more of the expectation of leaders during a crisis, so employees know that they will hear first from their executives and team leaders when there is an update on the situation. The overall strategy still stays at the executive level and the senior leadership level. Our day-to-day independent contributors are not going to be involved in the strategy until we give them that overarching direction once we are in a crisis.

Typically, executives would be involved when major decision-making is happening because of the implications and reporting to regulators and government entities. However, the core team's job is to provide recommendations, suggestions, and get a green light from executives versus having them in those meetings and helping strategise from beginning to end. We want to make sure that we come to them with a solution so they only have to review and give us the go ahead."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

"Communication, communication, communication. That is a strong area of business continuity and crisis management. As long as you are telling people what is happening and giving them regular updates, they know what is going on, and they know when the next update is, it calms the situation."

Resilience advisor,
legal & professional services, UK

"If we have a disruptive event and that does not have a huge impact on our business, we will not necessarily have the executives involved as part of the response. We have a tiered structure. We have the tactical team, the incident management team, and what we call the country support team, which is made of executives. If it just a simple event and the incident management team can resolve that issue, we will inform them but tell them their input isn't needed at this time. However, if it is a big event, like we are not even able to supply, for example, some airlines with fuel, then we issue what we call force majeure letters to say 'this is beyond us', then we will involve the executives."

Crisis & business continuity manager,
energy & utility services, South Africa

Nevertheless, in a noteworthy minority of organizations, a more hands-off approach was observed from senior management. Specifically, 9.5% of respondents reported that senior management's involvement occurred solely at the outset of the process, primarily to communicate their vision; and then at the conclusion of the process to contribute to the final decision. Additionally, 7.2% stated that senior management's participation was limited to the final stages, where their role was to validate the proposed options and decisions.

Numerous organizations adopt a standardised crisis management approach, where the level of senior management involvement differs according to the nature of the crisis. For instance, crises like COVID-19 demand consistent input from senior management due to their profound strategic implications. Conversely, incidents of a strictly operational nature do not necessitate such high-level engagement.

In fact, a well-structured crisis management system typically places senior management at the apex for overarching strategic direction. However, when senior management becomes deeply involved in operational responses, especially in the case of larger organizations, it can hinder the effectiveness of the response. This situation may lead to trust issues and, more critically, could lack the specialised operational expertise essential for an efficient response.

The level of involvement of executives in crisis management can also change according to the type of relationship that exists with other members of staff. The advantages of having c-suite individuals at the decision table are numerous, as mentioned before, but they may also present some challenges. For instance, it would be a mistake to neglect the balance of power among staff with different ranks in the context of a life-threatening event for the organization. In other words, some employees might be afraid to truly speak their mind due to the fear of contradicting someone who holds a more senior position. It is for this reason that some crisis management teams are coordinated by other professional figures, while the CEO is kept in the loop and intervenes when necessary. This risk is what researchers refer to as groupthink and it consists of a collective mindset where, for loyalty reasons, individuals avoid raising any controversial issues[16]. There are several past examples, in politics as well as business, where organizations made bad decisions due to groupthink. For instance, large corporations launching products that turned out to be a failure, despite having all the necessary information to forecast such an outcome.

The above also stands true for several policy-making decisions during the pandemic, which were based on an emotional consensus rather than concrete evidence[17]. In this perspective, it makes sense that the overwhelming majority of participants (95.0%) feel that the ability to interact with other functions and develop a network culture is one of the key solutions to navigate a crisis. In the BCAW 2023 White Paper Organizational Resilience in the Workplace[18], experts elaborated on the importance of forming alliances within the organization through both formal and informal channels. Specifically, Margaret Millett used the importance of performance appraisals and internal endorsements as a way to deepen relationships with other professionals and earn support from different functions.

On a similar note, Charlie Maclean-Bristol revealed how training programmes can be an opportunity to raise awareness and make other colleagues familiar with the purpose and role of preparedness measures, including crisis management practices[19].

Figure 7. How much are the board/senior executive team involved in the decision-making process during a crisis?

The use of a senior management-driven 'network' culture in crisis management aids the effectiveness of an organization's response

Highlighting the importance of collaborative and communicative crisis management structures, 86.0% of respondents highlighted that their organization's ability to engage with other functions and cultivate a 'network' culture played a pivotal role in successfully navigating the crisis. While effective communication with senior management constitutes a part of this equation, it is essential for information to flow seamlessly in all directions throughout the crisis management structure. The above statistic reflects a notable 5.2 percentage point increase from 2021, underscoring the growing significance of communication and cross-functional interaction, while emphasising the need to break down organizational silos.

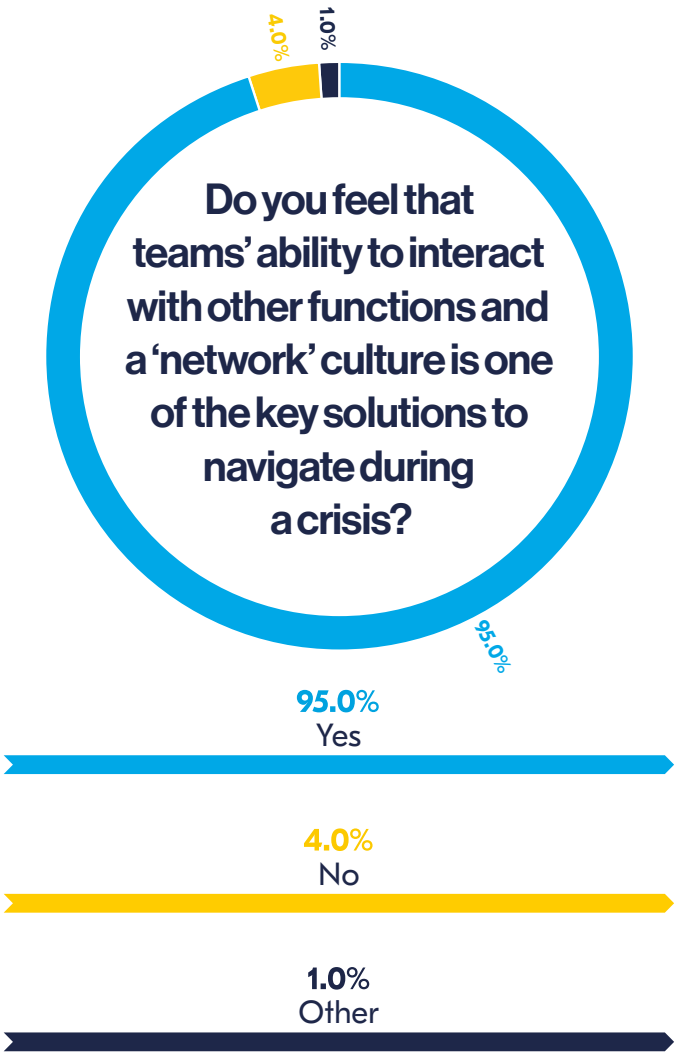


Figure 8. Do you feel that teams' ability to interact with other functions and a network culture is one of the key solutions to navigate during a crisis?

This finding highlights a crucial dimension of effective crisis management — the need for seamless collaboration and communication among various functions within an organization. Successful crisis response is not solely dependent on top-down directives from senior management, but thrives on the ability of different teams to work together harmoniously. The emergence of a 'network' culture, where information can flow freely in all directions across the crisis management structure, it is the enabler to an effective response in challenging situations. This not only ensures that decision-makers at all levels are well-informed but also taps into the collective expertise and insights of diverse teams. Moreover, the observed increase in the importance of this collaborative culture by 5.2 percentage points underscores the growing recognition that siloed approaches within organizations can be detrimental during crises. In essence, the capacity to interact and share knowledge across functions is pivotal in bolstering an organization's resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.

"What needs to be improved is not about crisis management, it's about the holistic approach between the different functions, the different pillars within the resilience area. All areas involved in navigating a crisis (crisis management, ITDR, cyber security, communications and BCM experts, for example) got enough on their plate without having to look after other people's work. However, all these people have got a slightly different perspective on the same crisis, and they need to work together, they need to talk, understand each other, and adapt. Flexibility is particularly important."

Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

Lessons learnt in the pandemic era

Lessons learnt in the pandemic era

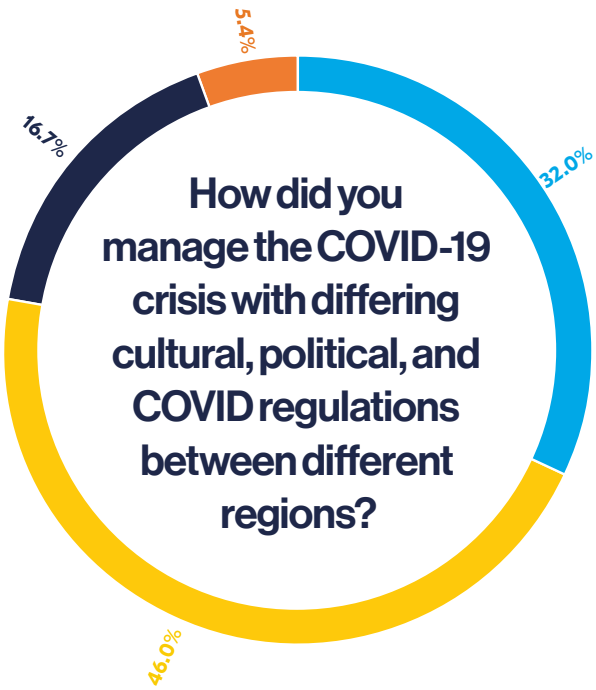
- Most organizations navigated the height of COVID-19 with either a localised or, more frequently, a hybrid global/localised response. Most have continued with the same strategy that they employed at the height of the pandemic, with only around one in seven changing their approach.
- For some, the lessons learnt during the height of COVID-19 have brought about changes in their approach to crisis management, with the importance of adaptability of plans, improved collaboration, and revised emergency communication systems all being highlighted as areas of change for 50% or more of organizations.
- The importance of the review process is highlighted by the fact that two-thirds of respondents made changes to their crisis management process as a result of lessons learnt during the height of the pandemic.

The top five areas where COVID-19 changed organizations' approaches to being better prepared for future crises are: 'ensuring plans are more adaptable to suit the intricacies of a crisis' (58.6%), 'revised emergency communications systems to enable better collaboration during a crisis' (50.0%), 'enhanced engagement of the board/senior management in the crisis management process', 'dedicating more time to horizon scanning and risk mapping to identify emerging issues' (47.0%), and the 'development of more training and exercising' (42.4%).

A notable finding of this report comes from the comparison between the period when organizations were fully immersed in responding to the pandemic compared to the current landscape. This leads to concern as to whether institutions have really absorbed the lessons from their recent experiences. During the height of the COVID-19 crisis, a notable 46.0% of organizations adopted a global strategy while allowing regional units a degree of autonomy. This aligns with the earlier findings in the report regarding the structure of crisis management teams. Such an approach was deemed necessary to navigate the complex landscape of political and cultural nuances, as well as varying regulations across different regions. A substantial but comparatively smaller portion of respondents, 32.0%, chose to manage the crisis primarily at a regional level. However, only a minority, 16.7%, opted for a purely global response throughout the entire duration of the crisis.

This comparison underscores the nuanced nature of crisis management, where organizations must balance global strategies with regional autonomy to effectively address multifaceted challenges. It also raises critical questions about the extent to which organizations have integrated pandemic lessons into their ongoing crisis preparedness and response strategies as they transition from pandemic response to more routine crisis management practices.

The majority of organizations seem to be quite content with the way they navigated through the several disruptions caused by COVID-19 as more than two-thirds (68.2%) have maintained the same approach since. A respondent stated that their COVID-19 structure worked well and they have used it to respond to other disruptions, such as the war in Ukraine. In this case, different countries reacted in different ways: some did not adopt sanctions whereas others did, meaning careful consideration had to be given when eliciting regional responses. Meanwhile, others stated that they had a balanced approach going into the pandemic that fared well, thus maintaining and possibly strengthening their capabilities.



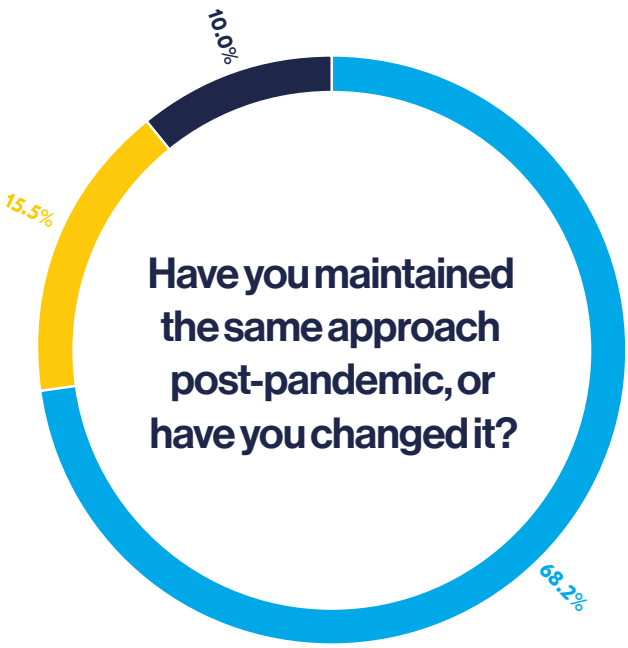
32.0%
We managed with a regional approach

46.0%
We took a global approach but let regions adopt an autonomous approach where needed

16.7%
We maintained a global approach throughout

5.4%
Other

Figure 9. How did you manage the COVID-19 crisis with differing cultural, political, and COVID regulations between different regions?



68.2%
Yes

15.5%
No

10.0%
Unsure

Figure 10. Have you maintained the same approach post-pandemic, or have you changed it?

The fact that 68.2% of organizations have retained the same crisis management approach they used during the COVID-19 disruptions is significant on several fronts. Firstly, it reflects a certain level of confidence in organizations' initial response strategies, indicating that these strategies were effective in navigating through the complexities of the pandemic. Secondly, the ability to adapt and apply the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis to other disruptions showcases a flexible and agile approach to crisis management. It suggests that organizations are leveraging their experiences to create a more versatile crisis response framework; one that can be tailored to specific regional nuances and evolving global circumstances. Lastly, the preservation and even strengthening of balanced approaches that served well during the pandemic indicates a commitment to maintaining resilience and preparedness. It implies that organizations are not being complacent and are actively refining their crisis management strategies to enhance their capacity to address a wide array of disruptions.

The qualitative responses that participants have provided on their experience with the pandemic reflect the statistical figures that recur through the report. While most organizations appear satisfied with their crisis management approaches thus far, this does not mean that they will not modify or improve them based on what occurred in the recent past.

Among those who did change their approach as a result of the pandemic, one respondent stated that: "COVID demonstrated that cultures and expectations, government direction and approaches, and timings of removal or introduction of certain restrictions, varied considerably across the globe. So, it was agreed that each group in each region should best prepare for a crisis on a local level." Another professional echoed this claim, reporting increased regional representation at the global level, with a series of smaller breakout groups to ensure timely reactions.

Other organizations focused more on the different skills to bring to the crisis management table, with a respondent describing how they had a working group that met to discuss the different rules and regulations, incorporating legal teams with relevant knowledge to write location-specific guidelines for the return to work. Similarly, other organizations began to consider different jurisdictional rules and their application, which were then included within risk assessments and reviewed regularly. Another important lesson learned from the pandemic was the purpose of horizon scanning and a wider visibility of the threat landscape, which some professionals decided to extend through early warning systems and the consultation of multiple sources. Furthermore, they started working on more rigorous plans, with increased and finetuned exercises, to demonstrate the readiness of each business unit in the face of a crisis at both global and regional levels.

"I think the most important aspect is the horizon scanning. COVID came out of nowhere, no one had a suitable pandemic plan. I think we have dedicated a lot more time in our scenario planning and looking at not just what I call fringe events, but also looking at those perfect storm scenarios where there's multiple crises or situations happening at the same time. And just sort of understanding what does that look like when we simulate that in an exercise; and then how can we improve our ability to collaborate and communicate cross functionally and cross regionally."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

A pivotal factor for organizations has been the reorganisation around remote work policies. One respondent remarked that they: "Did not change due to culture, political or regulatory reasons," but because they had: "Sections and departments that could not carry on [in the same way] they survived during pandemic." Specifically, arrangements that had worked during the most acute phases of the pandemic simply could not be sustained in the long term, such as broad remote work policies. On this note, some have now introduced teleworking at a limited level, while others have revised such policies so that flexible arrangements apply to all employees.

"Some lessons learned were directly related to the pandemic. Our plans always considered that if we have a pandemic, our biggest problem was going to be the lack of human resources because they are all sick and cannot work. However, the biggest challenge has actually been the decreasing amount of workspace, because we were not allowed to get them all on site. We were in an incredibly lucky position at that time because we had just had a big test with Teams and the IT department already used it, so it was pretty easy to do the rollout for all other employees."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

"I think the issues that we have obviously adopted and put into our crisis management plan after [the height of] COVID-19 is more around staffing levels, more so because the offices are not as important as they were pre-pandemic. Our attention it is on making sure that our staff are obviously well cared for, that we have staff awareness, we have plans in place for making sure that our staff are contacted on a regular basis to ensure their mental health, etcetera. That is where things have changed. I think companies have improved that interaction with staff now they are more remote."

Resilience advisor, legal & professional services, UK

There are several reasons why organizations might want to improve on their approach to crisis management, despite the fact that it proved effective during a past incident. For instance, a survey participant highlighted that while the initial management support was excellent, it is now dwindling, which led to the decision to intensify initiatives such as training and exercising. Interestingly, another professional highlighted how their crisis management approach has not changed and: "If anything, it has created an air of overconfidence, which has been detrimental to the program." This idea of excessive — and unjustified — confidence in the ability to get through any crisis without the necessary arrangements has also been discussed in the BCAW 2023 White Paper: Organizational Resilience in the Workplace[20]. In the white paper, experts point out how cases of past disruptions can be a double-edged sword, as they may lead some to be cautious and better prepared, while others might lean towards an 'It won't happen to me' mindset or a dangerous false sense of security[21].

How has COVID-19 changed your approach to being better prepared for future crises?

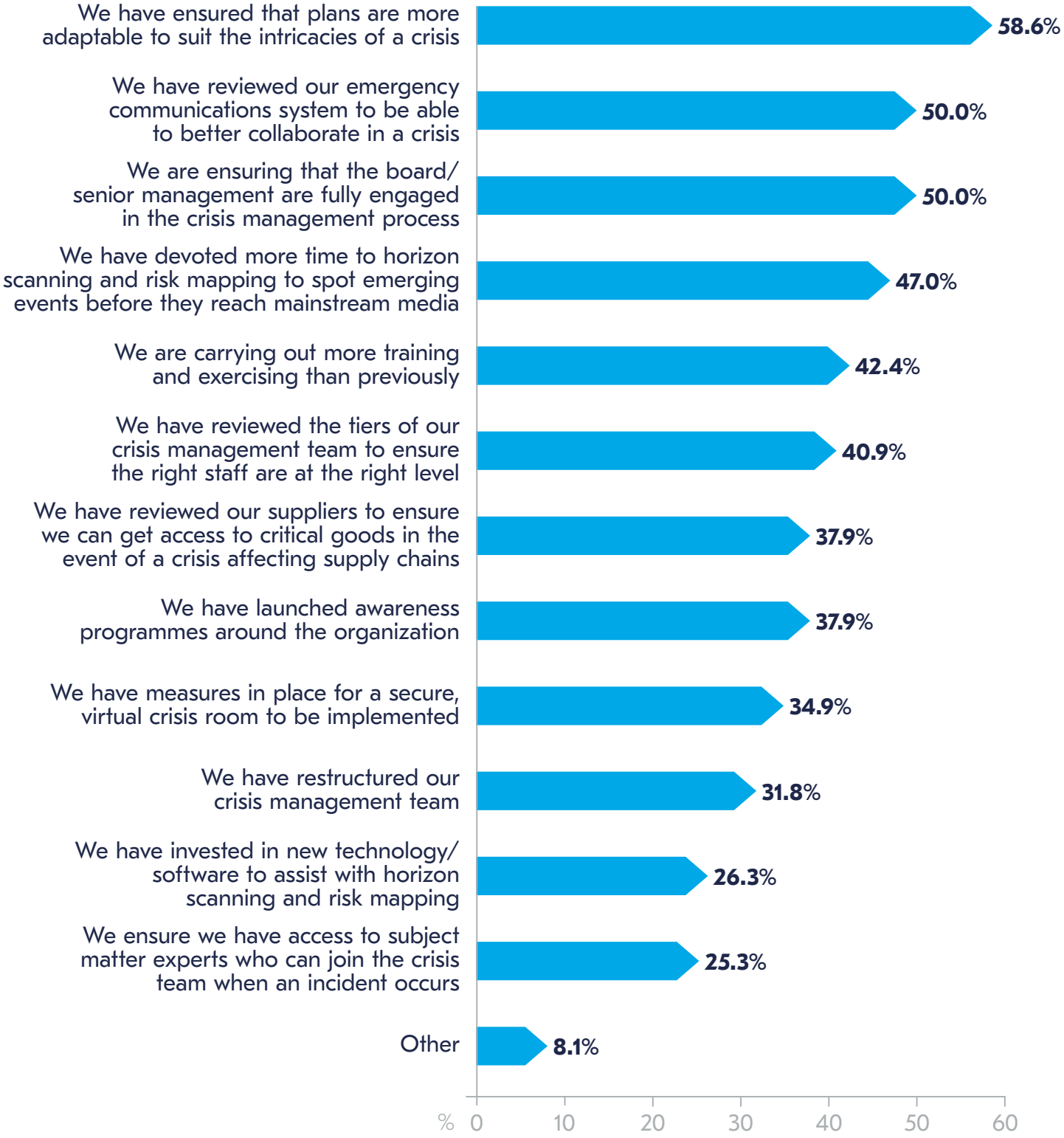


Figure 11. How has COVID-19 changed your approach to being better prepared for future crises?

Adaptability, collaboration, and improved communications are the areas organizations adjusted in crisis management strategies after the height of COVID

The top five areas where COVID-19 changed organizations' approaches to being better prepared for future crises are: 'ensuring plans are more adaptable to suit the intricacies of a crisis' (58.6%), 'revised emergency communications systems to enable better collaboration during a crisis' (50.0%), 'enhanced engagement of the board/senior management in the crisis management process', 'dedicating more time to horizon scanning and risk mapping to identify emerging issues' (47.0%), and the 'development of more training and exercising' (42.4%).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for flexibility in crisis plans. Respondents recognised that rigid plans may not adequately address the unique challenges of a crisis. By prioritising adaptability, organizations can change plans so that they better suit the incident in hand. Indeed, some organizations are now choosing to adopt one-page incident plans which can provide a framework for any scenario. This, when used in tandem with incident-based plans (e.g. planning for all workers to work remotely, whatever the cause), can provide an effective way of managing crises. Some organizations do still prefer having scenario-based plans for certain incidents, although interviews show that even in those cases, managers sometimes look to cross-pollinate the learnings from one plan into another.

"We work on strategic plans, not detailed operation plans that break as soon as something doesn't go as it's supposed to. We give a lot of space for different stakeholders to find a solution. We put much more effort into how to get to a solution/decision, than into describing every single step."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

"My focus has been more on an impact response, rather than the cause, because the cause is going to hit us regardless. We need to focus on what we can do to fix the impact."

Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"We've moved away from scenario-based training or testing. The only time we look at scenarios is because we have one of our data centres in one of our offices. That is obviously a big thing for us, but that is very well managed to ensure that we should not have any problems with our data."

Resilience advisor, legal & professional services, UK

"At the crisis level, we have a number of scenarios. We recently drafted about 10 of those, and from that 10 we are focusing on three to four, and we are building out more detailed playbooks so that we can action those plans a lot quicker knowing that those top three will help us build good habits to manage the rest of them."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

In the topic of crisis communications, effective communication is pivotal during an incident. The pandemic exposed gaps in communication systems, particularly when managing the new culture of remote working. Organizations had less of a need for one-way communications and on-site technologies (such as information screens) and chose to explore new options, such as tools allowing two-way communication, satellite technology, or even geolocation of staff[22].

"Geolocation software is important for us. We use a threat intelligence service, which provides us with information about what is happening in different areas for employees and also enables us to pinpoint where some of our assets are located. And then we also use an additional software that keeps track of our third parties and helps us understand what their connection is to different processes in the organization."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

The importance of having an engaged board and senior management team during crises and that of skilling up staff members to know how to react in a crisis has already been highlighted in detail in the report. However, another area which practitioners are seeing as increasingly important is that of proactive risk assessment. This is an area where practitioners are looking to increase both their scope and their skill. This involves dedicating more resources and attention to horizon scanning and identifying emerging issues and trends. This might require investment in new tools or technology, or it might be achieved through discussion with peer, or by reviewing other secondary resources such as national risk registers.

"We have seen growth in the use of technology. The processes are now being simplified to report on incidents as well as the responses. And there is also more training of staff that traditionally would not really be on the front line of responding like your security and risk people. We are now getting other roles to participate in responses and be trained to be ready to support responses. There is quite a lot of change that we are seeing within crisis response."

Crisis & business continuity manager, energy & utility services, South Africa

"We have increased our horizon scanning capabilities. We are all a little bit more observant of what is going on. We have signed up to various services, we also have regular meetings with our risk team, so they are obviously always on the end of the phone/Teams' chat if they have got anything that has been flagged."

Resilience advisor, legal & professional services, UK

The importance of the review process within crisis management

The first section of this report highlighted the shift in organizational planning from scenario-specific strategies to ones that are adaptable to various incidents, focusing on the impact of crises on an organization's operations rather than their specific causes. This is much like the recommendation in the BCI's Good Practice Guidelines that advocates an 'all hazards' approach to crisis management to ensure that plans can be swiftly customised for the current incident. In this aspect, the importance of performing reviews to check the performance of the crisis response is paramount.

Research conducted by the BCI at the height of the pandemic in 2020 revealed that numerous BC plans (BCPs) were disregarded in the early stages of the pandemic, primarily because they were either too lengthy and intricate to be quickly understood, or because they covered the intricacies of previous pandemics or epidemics that did not apply to the COVID-19 case. If the plans had been more flexible and adaptable a more efficient response to the pandemic could have been executed much sooner, rather than relying on outdated and overly lengthy pandemic plans as the basis for action. In this regard, the previous edition of this report[24] showed that nearly 45% of respondents believed that their plans were ineffective when the COVID-19 pandemic began. During that period, many interviewees mentioned that they were able to swiftly create effective plans in the early stages of the pandemic. Meanwhile, other practitioners opted for concise, one-page, plans to ensure they could be easily comprehended by all members of the organization, including senior management, which was crucial in eliciting an effective response. While reviewing plans and simplifying plans can enhance planning agility, professionals must exercise caution to ensure that the right information is included, even if it is only incorporated into tactical or operational planning.

The importance of the post-incident review process

Best practice recommends conducting a post-incident review within a 24 to 72-hour window following an incident. However, due to the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 crisis and the complex process of unravelling its strategic and operational implications, a standard review would prove inadequate in addressing the raised concerns, insights gained, and the subsequent recommendations.

Certain professionals have noted that the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 crisis led to ongoing review meetings, allowing for the incorporation of lessons learnt into the organization's crisis strategy while still managing the crisis. These interim reviews can essentially scrutinise specific actions taken during the crisis response to extract detailed insights. Delaying the review until after the crisis concludes could be a missed opportunity. Nevertheless, a PIR remains essential to ensure that all interim lessons are effectively integrated into future changes in the crisis strategy.

"During COVID-19, we tried to forecast how things would evolve and tried to adapt processes and build flexibility within plans so that we would be able to continue working whatever happened. This was a big part of regular reviews. However, as we progressed the reviews, the formal reviews, the meetings were more spaced out to once a month and then once every six months."

Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

"Post-incident or after-action review are not always needed because our crisis team is quickly adopting changes. If they see that something is not working as expected, they change it and they have short sessions afterwards to talk about it. Where we do this post-incident stuff is normally where there are lots of areas involved, or where there is something not working at all. It is a rare event on our side, and therefore it has not been done that often."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

It is important that organizations ensure that thorough reviews take place. Indeed, during the pandemic, nearly half of respondents (48.5%) did so quarterly. Somewhat similarly, other organizations reviewed their plans at change-points during the crisis (42.1%). Overall, it is encouraging to note that two-thirds of the survey participants identified issues in their response measures and embedded the necessary corrections into their crisis plans. Continual improvement is one of the foundations of crisis management and, indeed, every other management discipline that contributes towards organizational resilience.

COVID-19 was a crisis with significant longevity. How did you carry out the review process for such a long event?

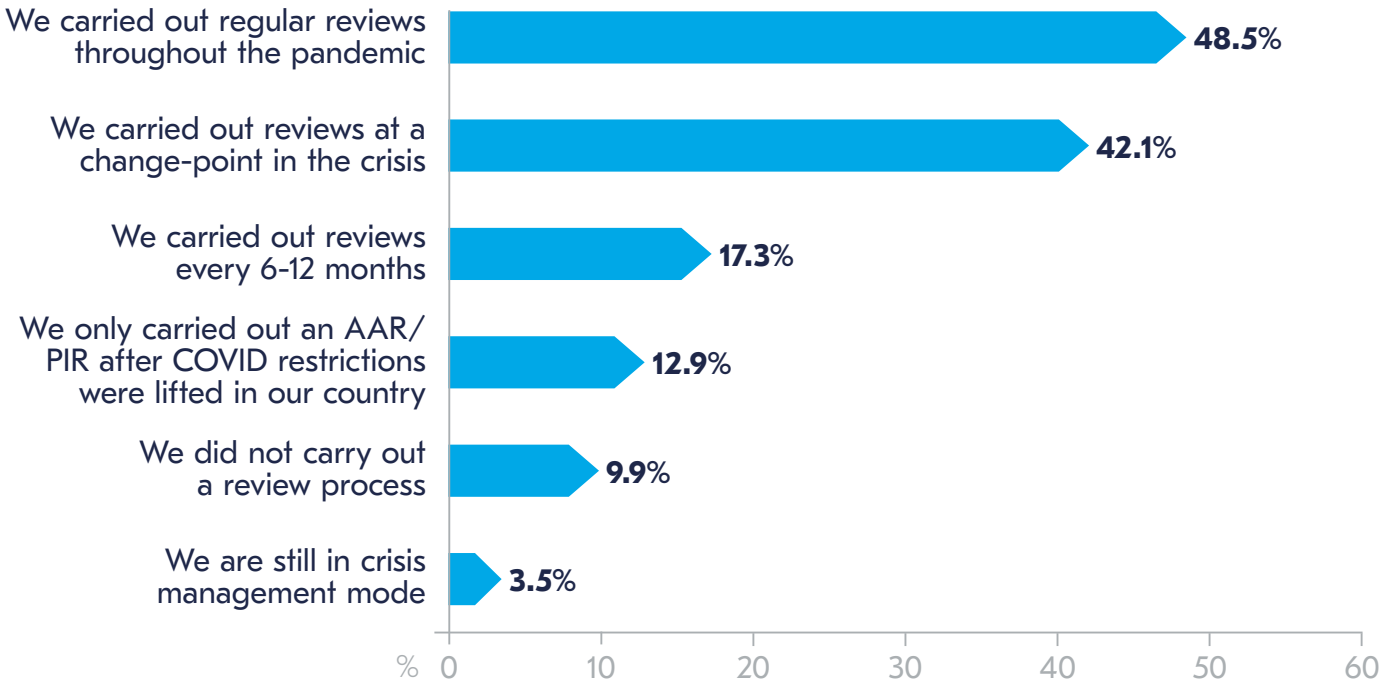


Figure 12. COVID-19 was a crisis with significant longevity. How did you carry out the review process for such a long event?

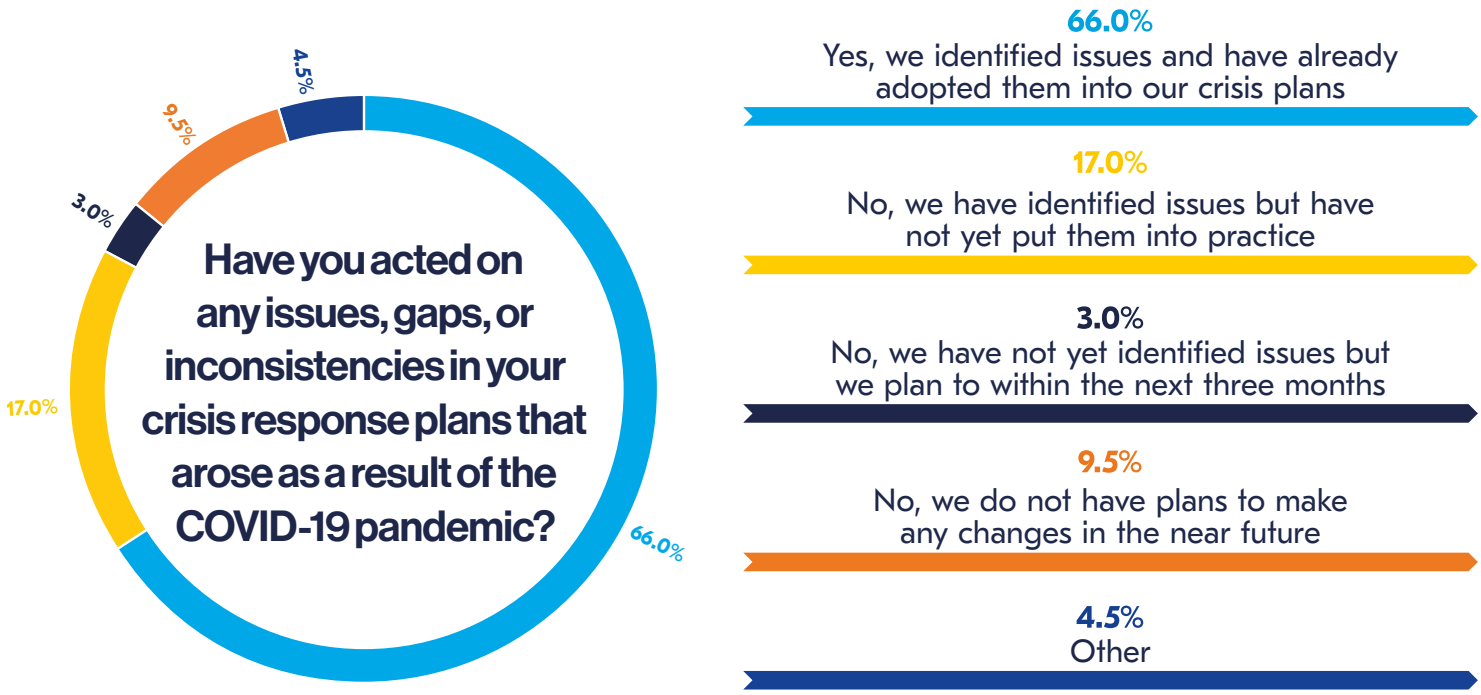


Figure 13. Have you acted on any issues, gaps, or inconsistencies in your crisis response plans that arose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

When respondents were asked about their current practices, almost four out of ten professionals (38.7%) stated that they always conduct post-incident or after-action reviews, while almost as many (34.3%) do so only for major incidents. Indeed, the need to perform a lengthy review process after every event may not be required, but capturing areas for improvement after every incident is good practice. However, with only 5.4% of respondents admitting they do not conduct reviews, it is clear that most organizations are now using the lessons learned from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure reviews do take place.

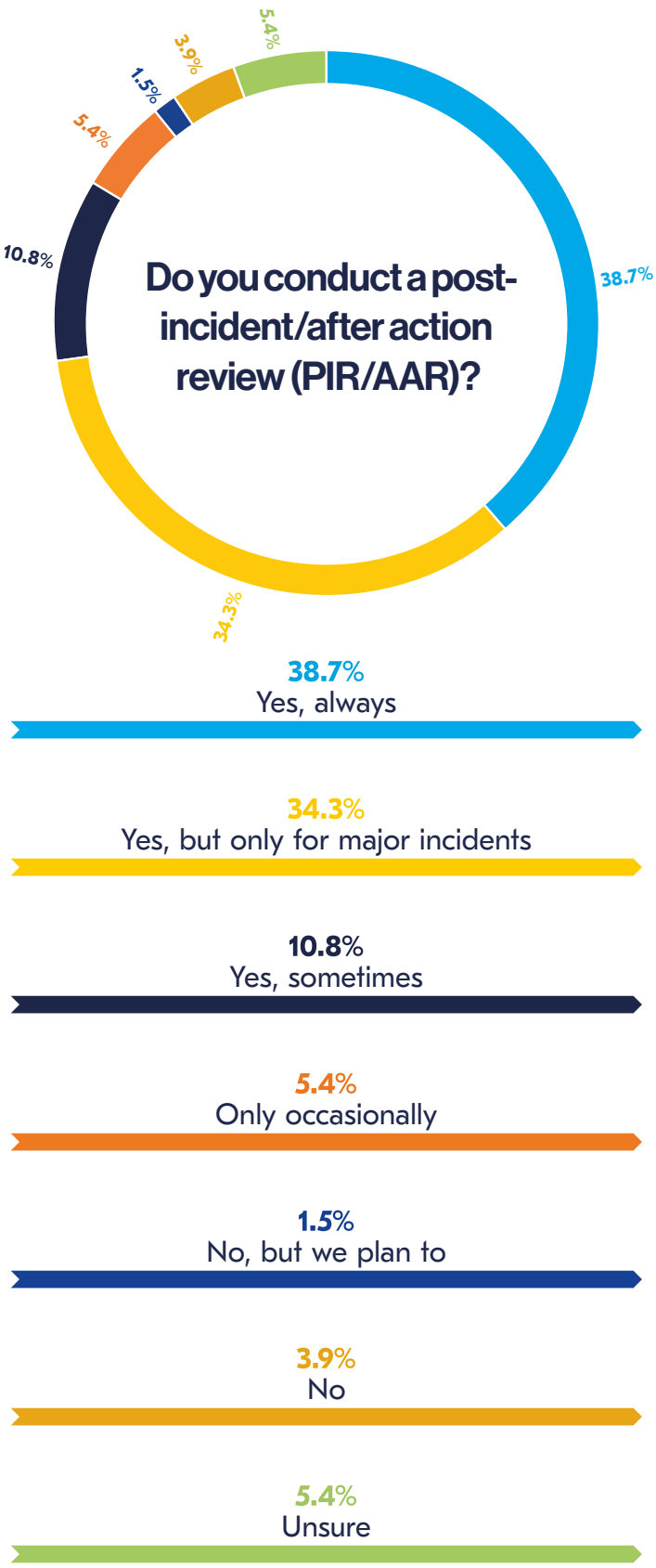


Figure 14. Do you conduct a post-incident/after action review (PIR/AAR)?

When conducting a PIR, a broader spectrum of stakeholders becomes involved. This stage often encompasses all individuals who had some form of involvement in the incident – whatever their level in the organization. In some instances, organizations have been reported to extend invitations to customers, suppliers, or other external stakeholders to participate in these meetings as well. Gathering all pertinent information regarding a specific incident is essential for making the right decisions and, in a blame-free environment, individuals can respond and be more transparent with the information that they provide about their actions. Additionally, when individuals see the benefits of their contributions leading to changes in organizational policies, it incentivises them and leads to continuous process enhancement and increased stakeholder satisfaction in the future.

"For any event that happens, we want to find out what went well during the response, and what did not go so well. We can capture those as actions and then talk about how we can improve it in future. We then conduct exercises to actually test the effectiveness of the contingency improvement initiative that will have been suggested by the team. For all our events we do a post-event review."

Crisis & business continuity manager, energy & utility services, South Africa

"As far as our suppliers are concerned, that is a whole new process that we are going through. We are looking at all our third-party critical suppliers across the board and ensuring that they have robust business continuity plans. That is something that I think has developed since the pandemic."

Resilience advisor, legal & professional services, UK

Survey participants revealed that the departments most involved in the PIR process are senior management (72.0%), BC (71.5%), IT (63.5%), health and safety (61.5%), and risk management (60.5%). These are all business units or functions that are integral to the resilience of an organization and, by extension, to the crisis management process. It is interesting to note comments from professionals that the type of departments involved in a PIR depend on the nature of the event itself. This is consistent with previous analysis in this report, which shows how some organizations involve different members of staff within their crisis management process based on the nature of the disruption.

Some respondents highlighted how debriefs can be broken down into thematic areas according to different roles and responsibilities, stating that involvement depends on the nature of the investigation and the departments that were impacted by the crisis. Also, depending on the incident, the crisis team may involve contractors or relevant subject matter experts, such as professionals with expertise in security, IT, or health and safety. In smaller organizations, the responsibility often falls to BC to conduct review meetings with various departments and consolidate the findings into a report for senior management.

"We have a key external service provider that responds to oil spills. Let's say we have had an oil spill, during a post-event review we want the contractor to be in the room as we review that event. That way we're able to talk about how the contractor responded because there are certain regulatory requirements."

Crisis & business continuity manager, energy & utility services, South Africa

Which departments are represented in a post-incident review?

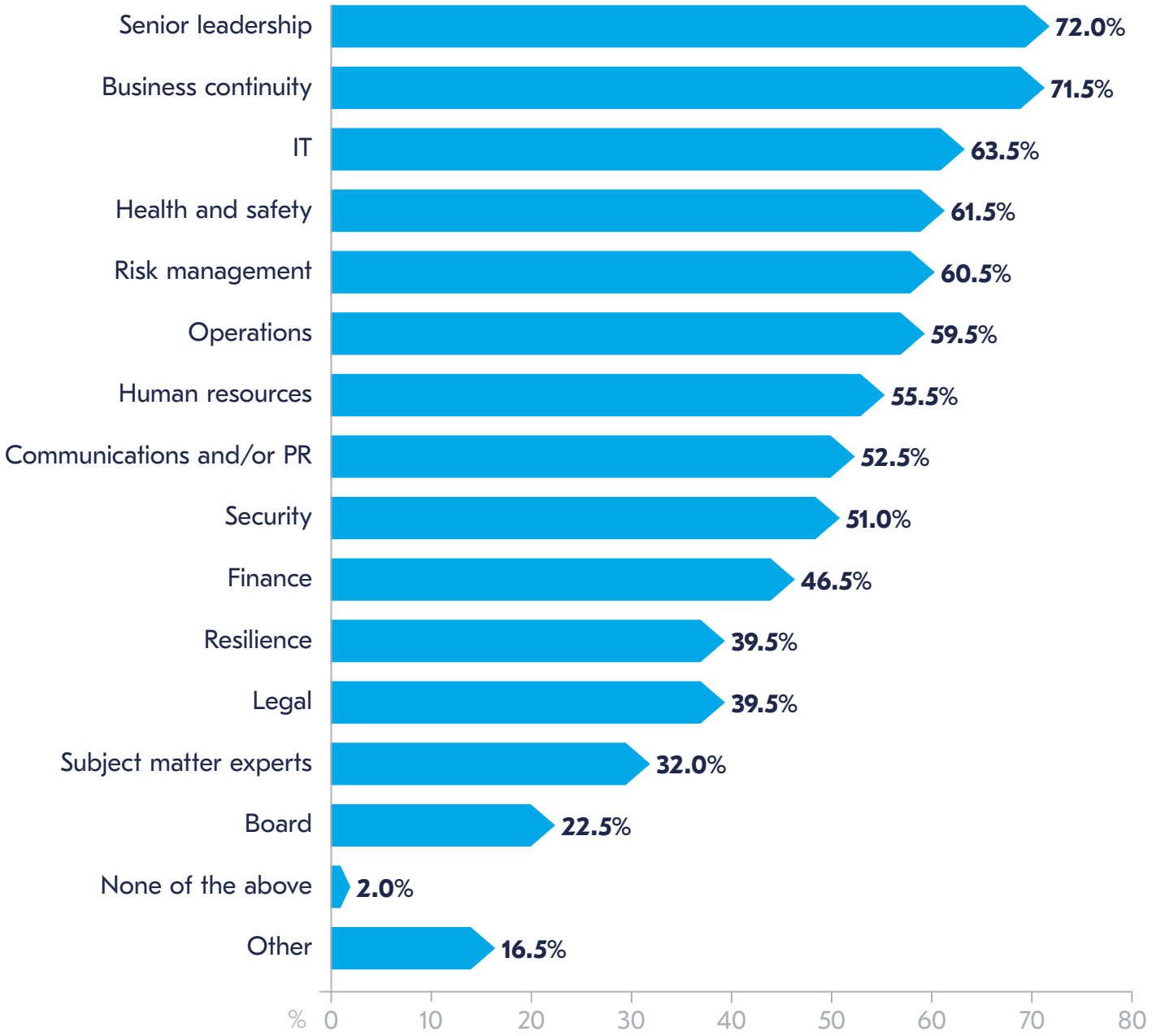


Figure 15. Which departments are represented in a post-incident review?

One of the key insights collected from these statistics is that senior management and BC are the two most actively engaged functions in the review process. The involvement of senior management in the PIR process is on the rise, with 72.0% of respondents indicating their participation. When comparing to the 2021 report, senior leadership involvement was in fifth place on the graph, with marginally less involvement (70.7%). While senior management's engagement in the review process has increased since the onset of COVID-19, it still remains far from universal and challenges remain in securing the direct involvement of senior executives.

BC typically plays a crucial role in the tactical and operational aspects of the review. However, in the past, BC has sometimes been excluded from the final review meeting, with BC's input conveyed through another member of the crisis management team. This practice was a point of frustration for professionals in the BC field as many believed it to be an inadequate approach and hoped for their direct inclusion in future review sessions. As discussed previously in this report, there is a notable increase in the involvement of BC in more strategic areas and the PIR is no exception.

Technology's role in crisis management

Technology's role in crisis management

- Incumbent enterprise software and free apps are the first tools reached for in a crisis, but organizations are increasingly using other applications (e.g. dedicated crisis management software is used by a quarter of respondents) to ensure a more holistic and data-driven approach to crisis management.
- Half of organizations now use virtual tools (such as virtual crisis room technology) to manage the crisis team. Virtual crisis rooms negate the need for all parties to be in the same room, meaning teams can be assembled at short notice with all parties in attendance.
- Nearly a third of organizations are still using traditional methods (e.g. paper and pen) to document the crisis management process, showing that universal adoption of technology is far from complete, potentially hindering the ability to conduct comprehensive and collaborative reviews.

Technology is not just an add-on to assist with crisis management, it is an intrinsic part of the crisis management process, allowing for faster, more interactive, and more personalised communications. Furthermore, with organizations now harvesting vast amounts of data — whether from internal sources (e.g. near misses) or from external sources (e.g. supply chain mapping and horizon scanning) — it would be difficult to find an organization that does not employ technology to some degree.

As a result of this, the uptake of technology solutions in crisis management has been receiving increasing attention through the years. Specifically, software-as-a-service (SaaS) solutions have shown growing appreciation[25] among organizations for emergency communications purposes as they provide a flexible system that can help professionals activate their plans quickly on a number of different devices. In the case of an emergency, SaaS can deliver notifications directly to multiple devices, increasing the chances of reaching all the interested parties. Nevertheless, most participants in this sample (73.7%) have resorted to enterprise software to coordinate their crisis management response. The familiarity with enterprise software and growing customisation functionality means that many organizations — particularly smaller ones without the budget to invest in specialist software — find it a good solution to managing crises. Larger organizations still prefer to use specialist software, which provides greater functionality suitable for use in crises (such as two-way communication, satellite communications, geolocation, and audit trails).

The growing uptake of automation in crisis communications is being increasingly seen by the general public as many national governments have been testing their alert notification systems. A greater awareness of the benefits of successful crisis communications (or, as in the case of the UK, a showcase of ensuring that learnings are made from the response[26]) is likely to push more organizations to reviewing their own technology and capabilities.

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

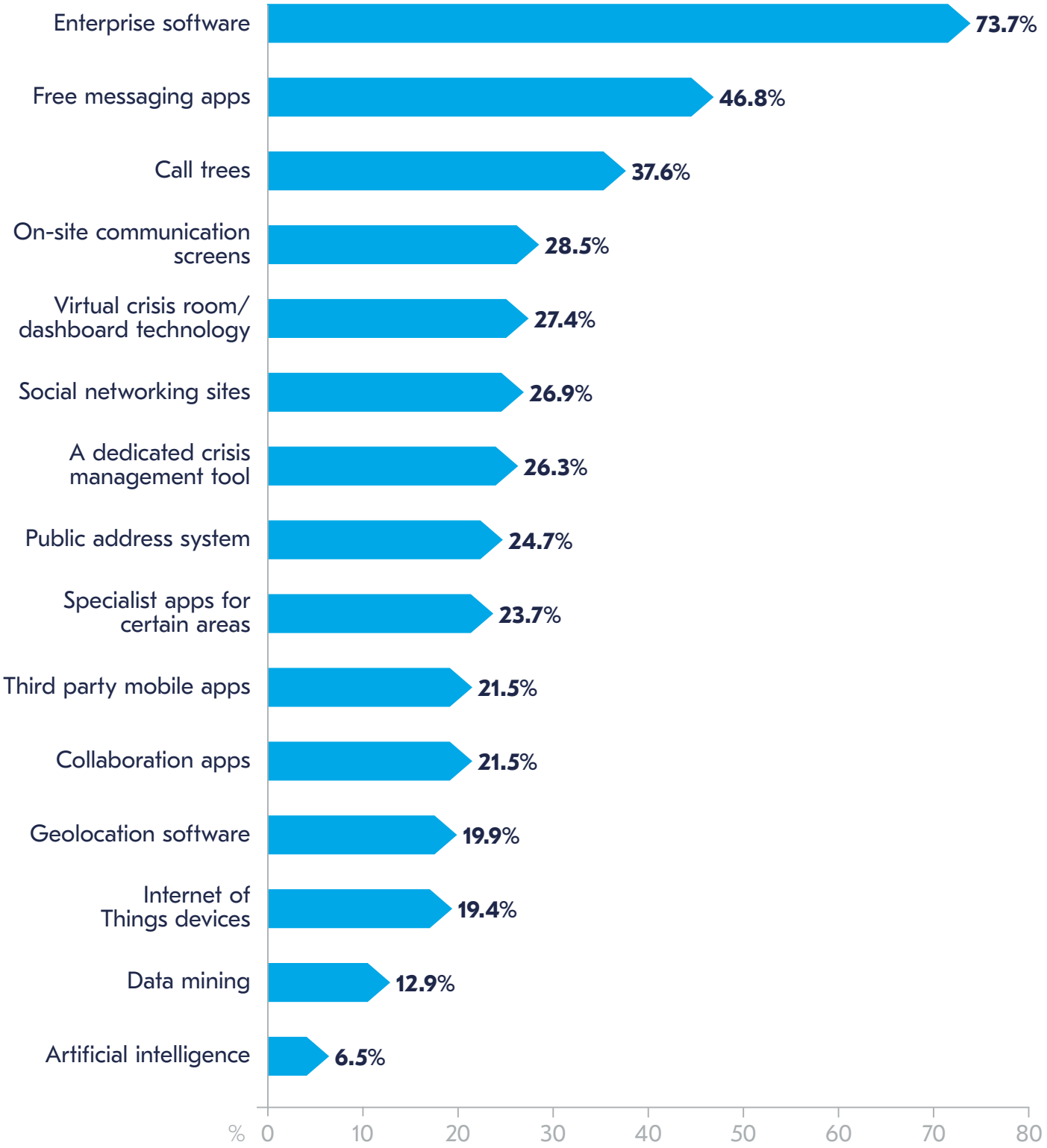


Figure 16. Which tools and technologies have you used within the past year as part of your crisis response?

The second most popular option amongst respondents is free messaging apps such as WhatsApp, which opens up a long-standing debate in crisis communications. For years, experts and international guidelines have been recommending the use of appropriate solutions to communicate during a crisis, since commercial apps are not built to function in high-pressure environments. Free messaging applications present several concerns, ranging from privacy and data collection to the risk of information overload, since organizations do not have centralised or exclusive control over the flow of information, which during a crisis may come from different sources, can be inaccurate, or deliberately false[27]. However, with products such as WhatsApp Business now being on the market, such tools can provide secure, valuable, communications support between staff when an organization is hit by a crisis.

> **"I believe there is not a big risk if you use WhatsApp to convey non-sensitive, non-personal information. We must admit that irrespective of its potential weaknesses, it is one of the most widespread communication tools."**
>
> Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

Nevertheless, the everyday reality is that professionals remain divided on the subject when it comes to the practical implementation of crisis communications solutions, as almost half of the respondents use such third-party channels to notify their staff of a crisis (44.2%) while nearly as many (39.5%) have a dedicated tool. Looking at different regions, it is interesting to observe that while professionals in Europe (53.7%), Asia (40.0%), and Australasia (34.5%) tend towards a greater use of free messaging apps, this is not the case for their counterparts in North America (11.7%) where more investment is made into secure, specialist, solutions.

Other solutions which are now fading in popularity include traditional methods such as call trees (37.6%) and solutions that include on-site communication screens (28.5%). However, as many organizations have now adopted hybrid, rather than fully remote, models and/or due to the nature of their work (e.g. manufacturing and construction), traditional methods such as call trees and on-site communication screens have seen a resurgence in popularity since the 2021 report, with usage increasing by 8.5 and 6.1 percentage points respectively. Indeed, in an era of increasingly complex crisis communication solutions, seeing call trees at third place in the table shows that some organizations are still relying on tried and tested solutions to ensure staff are fully informed. An interviewee spoke how in a university setting, information was still conveyed through more traditional means, although they were now looking to invest in new ways of communicating. Another interviewee spoke about how traditional communications — particularly radios — were used to communicate due to having many workers who were out of reception for standard communication.

> **"In case of a crisis, there will be a mass email to everyone. We have then also got our internal network SharePoint site, which we use for any news, and we put banners up and use digital screens that are dotted around the campuses to outline any messages that we need to do. And other than that, we use the old telephone tree. We have no quick and easy way to message all our students to say, for example, lock your doors, stay inside. We are, however, expecting some investment for a new emergency comms tool."**
>
> Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"Radios are an important tool for us on a normal basis. Many onsite communications are done by radio and managed by our onsite security team. Radios are assigned and issued when the employee starts their shift. We know who has which radio and we know where they are physically located onsite. They are given a territory or work area, so we can track them that way.

We also have loud alarms, a broadcast alarm system, we put announcements within our homepage, and have an outbound communication system that sends emails and texts. However, due to our remote locations, some of our employees do not have cell service."

Manager of global business continuity planning, mining & quarrying, United States

"COVID-19 has taught us that we can respond to a crisis from anywhere. We are now having to use software tools to be able to better collaborate in crisis responses. For example, most of our staff members are out visiting sites. If we were to have a disruptive event, then I will use a notification tool, communicate with them, and say we now have a disruptive event. Can we dial into Teams at such and such in time? We are now able to better respond and collaborate using software tools."

Crisis & business continuity manager, energy & utility services, South Africa

In fourth place this year, improving on the ninth place reached in 2021, is the usage of virtual crisis rooms/dashboard technology (27.4%). This technology has seen an increase in usage of 7.8 percentage points since the last edition of this report. The utilisation of virtual crisis rooms and dashboard technology in crisis management has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, these technologies offer real-time visibility into critical data, enabling rapid decision-making and enhanced situational awareness. They help to ensure seamless collaboration among geographically dispersed teams, allowing for efficient information sharing, coordination, and the input from individuals outside the organization's primary geography. Additionally, virtual crisis rooms and dashboards often come equipped with advanced analytics capabilities (such as aiding early threat detection and trend analysis) and advanced security tools (such as blocking the ability to take screenshots when in the virtual room).

However, there are also drawbacks to consider. Over-reliance on technology can sometimes lead to a disconnect from the human element of crisis management, potentially impeding empathetic and context-aware decision-making. Concerns about data security and cyber threats are ever-present as these virtual platforms handle sensitive information. Furthermore, not all organizations may have the resources or infrastructure to fully harness these technologies, potentially creating a digital divide in crisis response capabilities. Ultimately, while virtual crisis rooms and dashboards offer numerous benefits, their successful implementation requires a balanced approach that considers both their advantages and potential challenges. It should also be noted that for many organizations, 'virtual crisis rooms' are created by exploiting enterprise software such as Microsoft Teams.

> **"Our dashboard and virtual room capability is not fully mature yet. However, how we intend to use it is, as we pull people into a Zoom call or a conference call, for example, that [crisis room] dashboard is going to have information about our acceptable use policy, information about how we can trigger alerts for other teams and stakeholders, links to decision trees, playbooks or runbooks, and pre-drafted statements that we can quickly edit and send to the press or stakeholders. It is going to have a lot of those initial response resources that we need and it will just link out to a lot of our other resources and toolkits."**
>
> Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

As virtual crisis rooms have been gaining popularity in recent years, the survey asked professionals about their level of familiarity with them. The majority of respondents (63.6%) stated that they use/would use virtual rooms for different tasks in relation to situation control, decision-making processes, and team organization and communications. On the other hand, the uptake of virtual rooms is not universal yet, as 31.5% do not/would not use them within their crisis response.

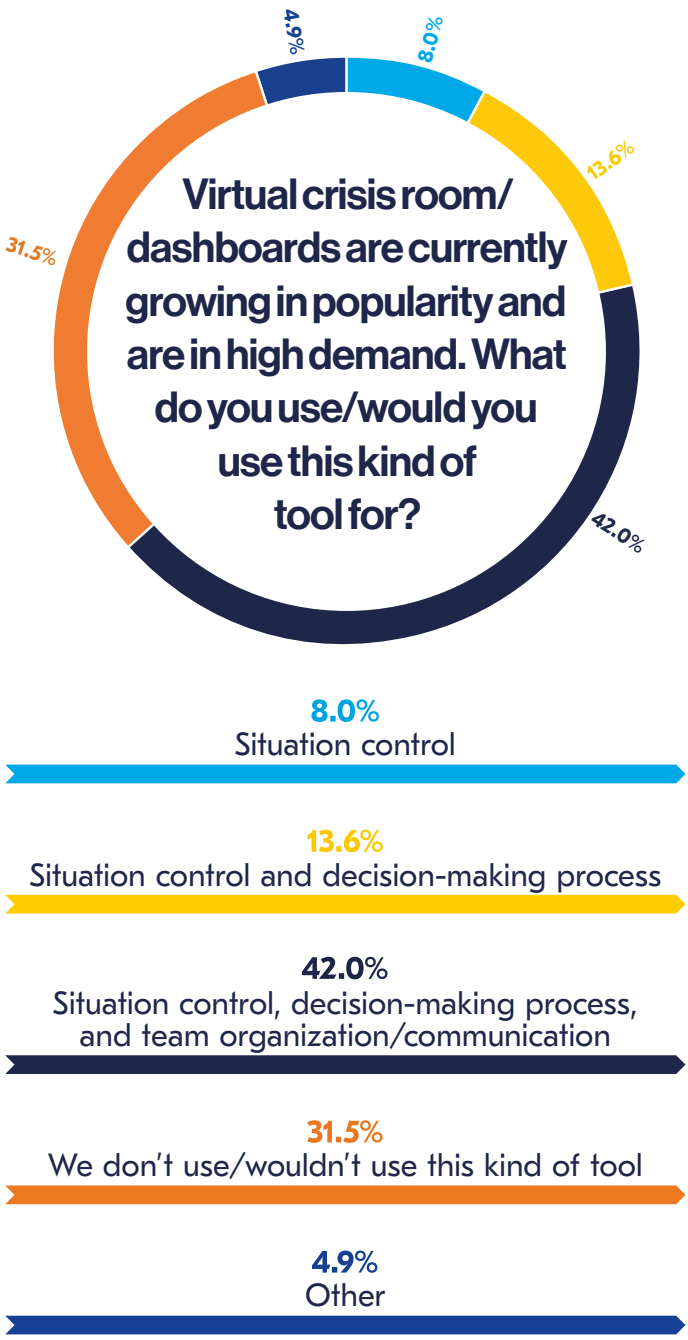


Figure 17. Virtual crisis room/dashboards are currently growing in popularity and are in high demand. What do you use/would you use this kind of tool for?

What happens when communication channels go down?

Respondents were also queried about the methods they use to communicate or alert staff when communication channels go down in a crisis. Again, the use of third-party tools came to the top of the table. Using third-party communication channels like Google Workspace (formerly G-Suite), WhatsApp, or Microsoft Teams as a fallback during a crisis when internal channels are down can be a double-edged sword. While it provides a lifeline for maintaining communication, there are significant drawbacks to consider, as highlighted previously, Moreover, reliance on third-party channels can complicate coordination efforts as different teams might be accustomed to using different tools, leading to confusion and inefficiency during a crisis. Additionally, these external platforms may not be designed for the specific needs of crisis management. They might lack key features, such as incident-specific protocols or integrations with internal systems, which can hinder a swift and effective response. Moreover, external platforms can be susceptible to the same disruptions as internal channels during large-scale crises, such as network congestion or outages. Lastly, there may be compliance and legal concerns when using third-party channels for crisis communication, particularly in regulated industries. Considering all these factors is therefore important while developing a comprehensive crisis communication strategy and ensures that third-party channels are employed with due consideration of their limitations and potential risks. For some organizations who are unable to purchase specialist tools, existing enterprise tools provide the opportunity to converse, although frequently the BC manager is aware that a better solution is desirable.

"If the IT infrastructure is down, it is hard for us to reach all our employees. On the other hand, we have offices for all of them on our sites, so they could come in and then can be informed during a crisis. Some sectors within the organization had set up WhatsApp groups or Signal groups to do that. We also tell everyone that they are responsible for having the phone numbers of their direct employees. But we are currently not in the position to have our own messenger at the moment because of a missing business case and low project priority within the organization."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

"We have WhatsApp groups for our crisis management teams, so silver and gold. And then each individual business unit has their own WhatsApp groups set up for their senior leadership teams. And then that cascades down to the team leaders to their direct reports as well. That is how we communicate. We have tried to get an emergency messaging system set up, but it is costly, and we have strict budgets."

Resilience advisor,
legal & professional services, UK

How do you communicate and/or ensure staff are notified/alerted in a crisis when all internal communication channels are down?

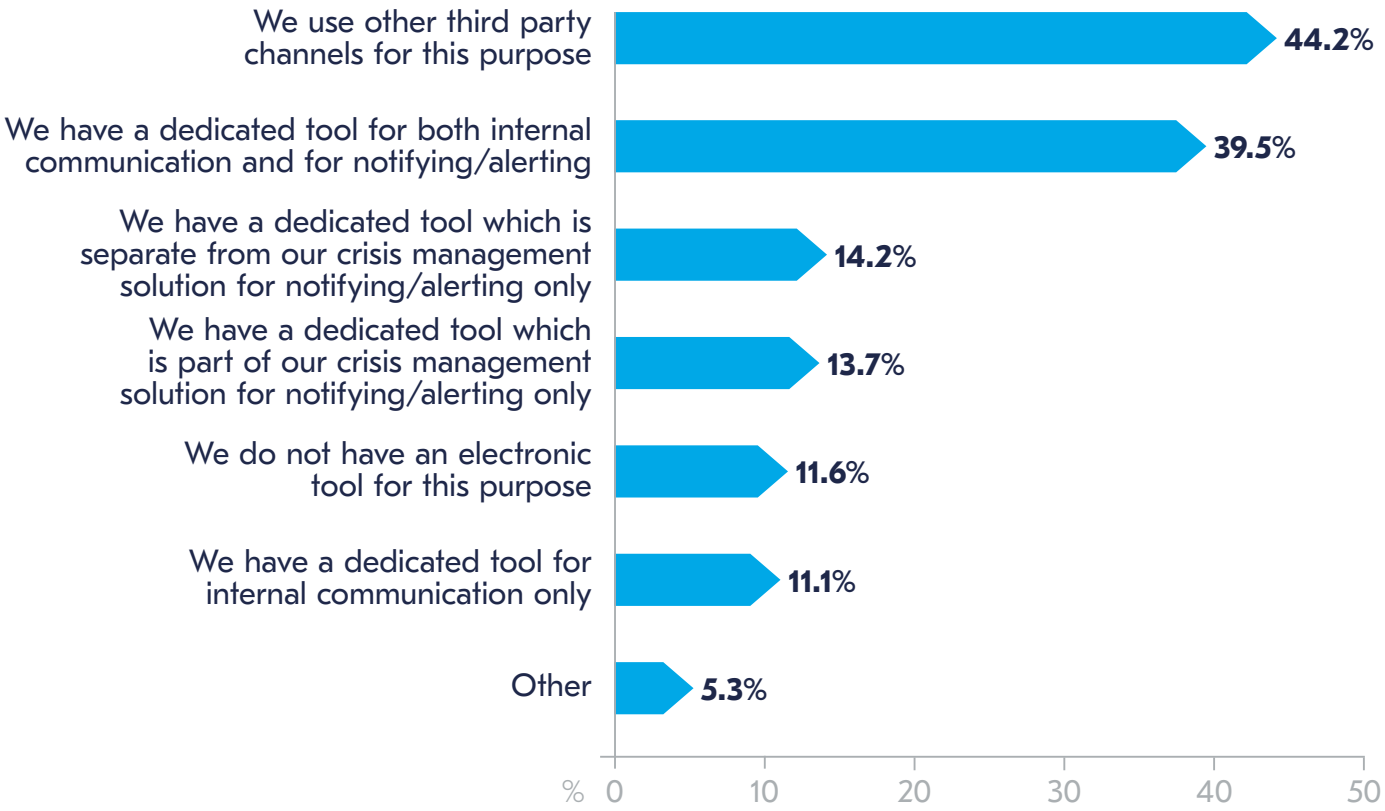


Figure 18. How do you communicate and/or ensure staff are notified/alerted in a crisis when all internal communication channels are down?

A good percentage of participating organizations also use dedicated tools for internal communication and/or alerting. Dedicated tools are often designed to streamline communication, making it quicker and more efficient. Most tools can also be tailored to an organization's specific needs, as well as offering heightened security, encryption, access controls, and compliance features. Most dedicated tools also have the functionality to integrate with other software and services commonly used in business, enhancing productivity and collaboration. Furthermore, if a tool is dedicated purely to crisis communication, staff are more likely to take note of messages through the tool. With most also offering data storage and alerting history, they can also provide a useful tool for analysing communication patterns.

After the analysis of technology use in the previous section, it is not surprising to see that nearly 90% of organizations use technology to also keep track of the development of a crisis. One in five (19.2%) of respondents use a dedicated software solution to document and report the nature, progress, and aftermath of a crisis, while an additional 41.8% employ more generic solutions, such as Excel spreadsheets. Documenting the crisis management plan should be a dynamic effort including elements such as roles and responsibilities, strategy, and good practices from relevant industry standards. Based on the response history of an organization, the plan should be monitored and reviewed to ensure continual improvement[28]. Nearly a third (30.2%) still carry out the process through manual solutions, typically via form filling.

Figure 19. Do you document and report the nature, progress and aftermath of a crisis/incident (including your team's actions in the process)?

Nearly a third of organizations still document and report the crisis management process via manual means

Different organizations document the steps of a crisis using differing methods and paces. Some document each step in real time (40.5%) while others do this in the PIR (32.1%). One respondent elaborated on this point, stating that they generate status reports at intervals that are subject to the cadence an incident requires. This can change during the course of an incident, requiring frequent reporting in the initial response phase and less often during the recovery phase. Other respondents indicated that they report updates on crises during periodic meetings of the risk committee and they include these in their risk reports. Despite the different approaches, it is good practice for organizations to track and review their performance during a disruptive event so that they can identify trends, patterns of behaviour, and gaps in preparedness. To guarantee the correct execution of this task, a good quality information management system should be prioritised in order to provide the necessary inputs for the improvement and maintenance of the existing plans[29].

How do you report the nature, progress, and aftermath of a crisis/incident (including your team's actions in the process)?

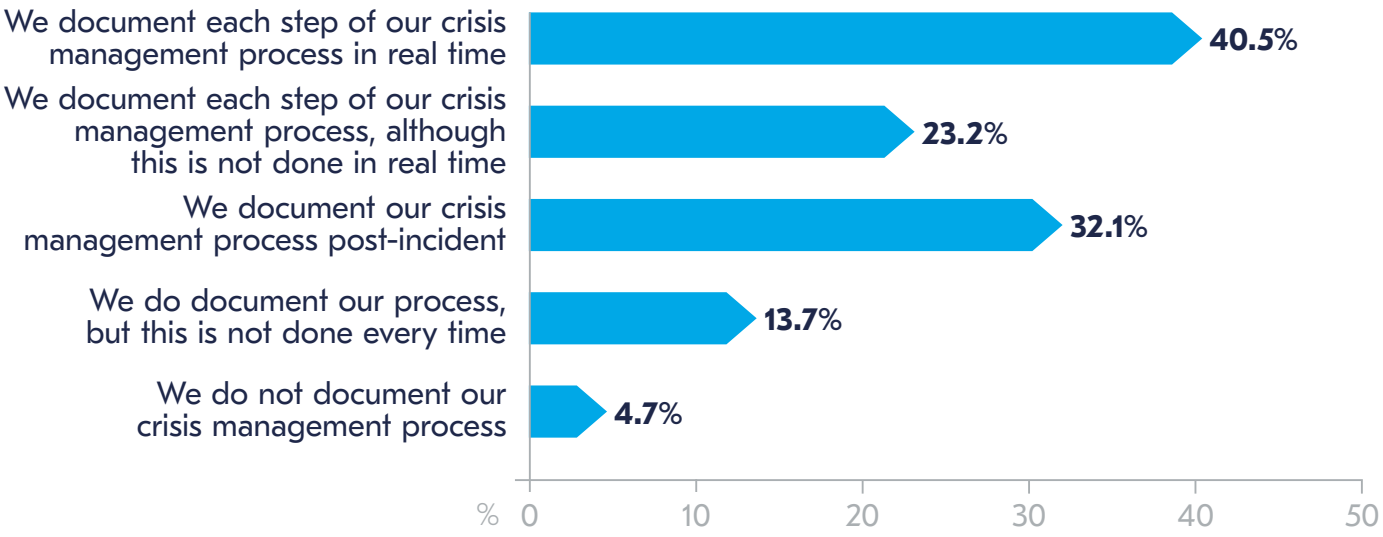


Figure 20. How do you report the nature, progress and aftermath of a crisis/incident (including your team's actions in the process)?

As the adoption of technology solutions grows, almost 90% of organizations consider that technology has enhanced or simplified their internal efficiency, to different degrees. Most professionals state that virtual crisis management has enhanced internal efficiency to a 'significant' (21.9%) or at least a 'good' (38%) extent. While 37.2% have only perceived such benefit to 'some' (29.2%) or to a 'small' (8.0%) extent, it is worth noting that only 2.9% found that using technology was a hindrance to efficiency. The solutions that organizations adopt are a combination of advanced platforms and more traditional tools, including enterprise software (57.4%), email (53.2%), documented steps in electronic or physical format (43.2%), and telephone (33.7%). One respondent elaborated on the technology aspect of crisis management, warning about over reliance on 'trendy' technology, which, while attractive on the surface, might create a machine to feed instead of offering a tool that helps coordinate teams for key decisions.

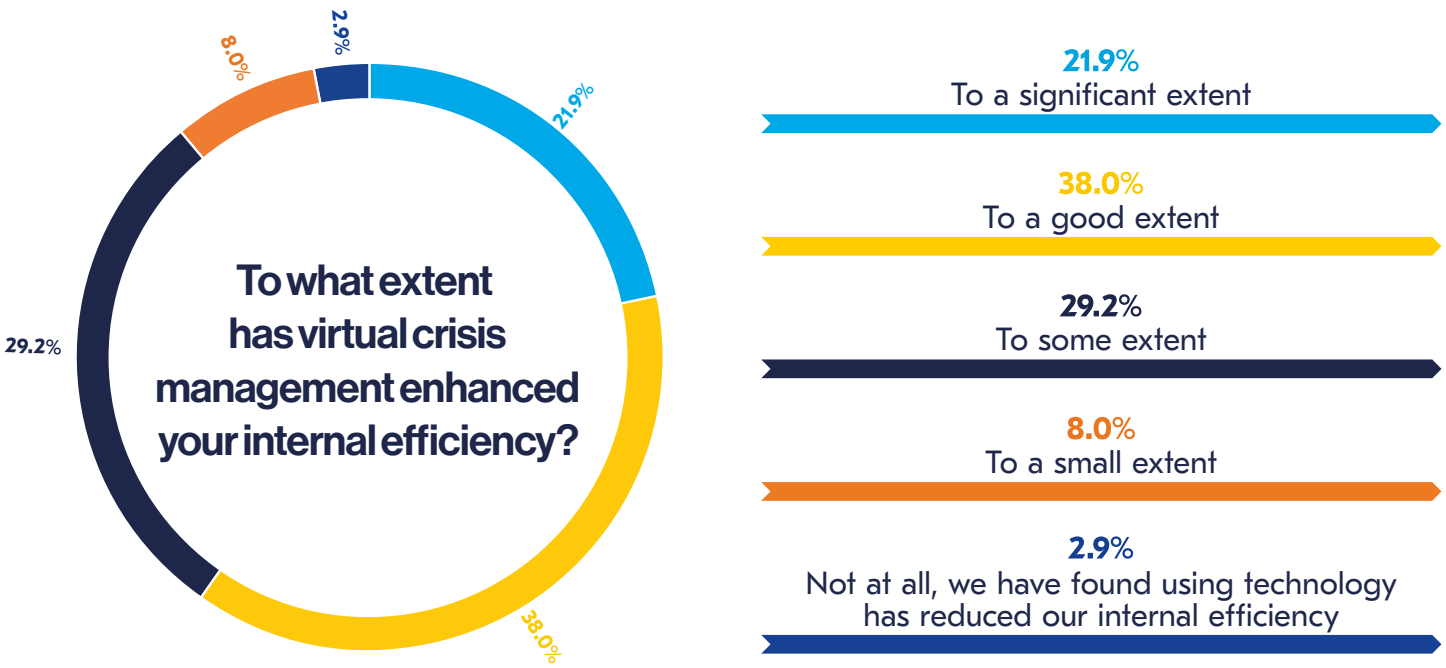


Figure 21. To what extent has virtual crisis management enhanced your internal efficiency?

How do you manage tasks during a crisis?

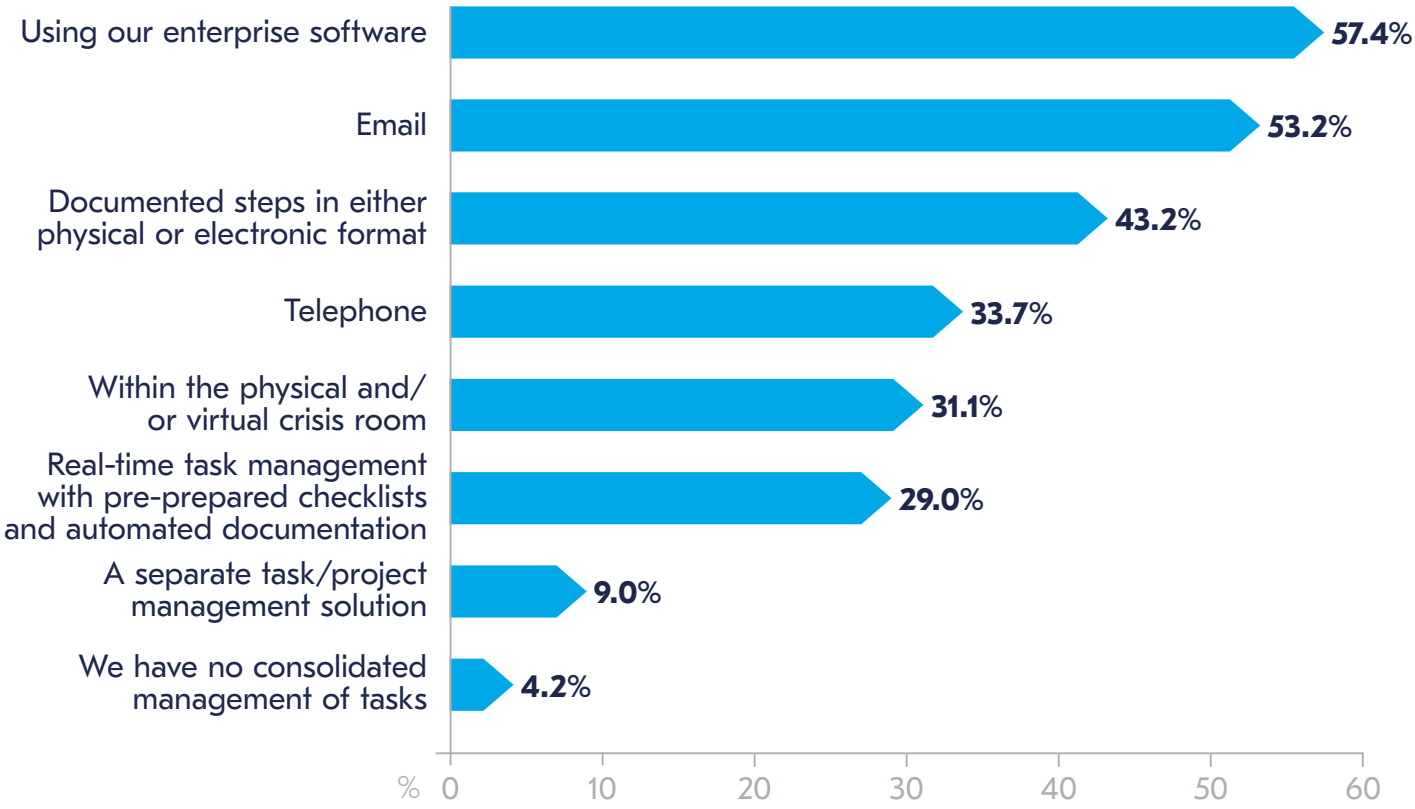


Figure 22. How do you manage tasks during a crisis?

Looking ahead: investment in crisis management

Looking ahead: investment in crisis management

- Defying inflationary pressures, just 7% of respondents see investment in crisis management decreasing in their organizations.
- Increased training and exercising and new software will be the primary sources for investment, with nearly 80% believing there will be investment in both these areas.

This report has demonstrated the importance of maintaining a vigilant eye on emerging trends and shifts. Continually adapting crisis management strategies to align with current best practices and keeping abreast of the new technologies available not only allows organizations to make informed decisions about resource allocation, but also provides insights into the changing nature of crisis management itself.

The majority of respondents believe that investment will increase in crisis management (52.7%), although to different degrees, while a smaller percentage (40.2%) believe that it will stay the same. These findings are even more encouraging considering that only 7.0% expect a decrease in investment. Interestingly, according to participants, investment will cover both the advancement in technology and the human aspect of crisis management as they believe that budget will be directed towards better education, training and exercising (79.2%), software (78.1%), and personnel (60.4%).

"We are looking at maybe getting a BC planning tool, and are working on getting an additional member of staff for the BC team. After that, the big push will be in terms of education, training, exercising. We are getting a third party in to support our crisis exercise next year, but also looking at further training online."

Business resilience manager, education sector, UK

"We'll invest in more remote capabilities to manage a crisis regardless of the time zone and location. However, I do not see us investing in more headcount or anything that would drive our overall dollar investment up. We would probably relocate assets or investments from other areas of the business."

Senior manager workplace and crisis response, IT & communications, USA

"I think investment will be around more headcount. Regulation is becoming stronger, and we will need more people to deal with it and to bring all requirements into the company up to the required level."

BCM expert, financial services, Germany

Looking deeper into the human aspect, one professional specified that: "In order for crisis management to be effective, there needs to be continuous planning and preparation, technology, and engagement among the key team players throughout the year. This will ensure that the team is able to coordinate seamlessly with the practical application of their responsibilities (e.g. checklists) with periodic check-ins, tabletop exercises, and awareness and training programs, which could be accomplished via the exercises." Thus, the integration of technology and organizational preparedness are two sides of the same coin: two invaluable and interdependent assets to address modern crises.

Modern software is very efficient in reducing time and effort during several tasks pertaining to organizational resilience, including crisis management, but there must be a foundational education to deploy new tools correctly. Rehearsing a crisis scenario is necessary to make sure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities, as well as becoming familiar with how to use technology solutions employed by the organization[30]. For instance, virtual crisis management software can speed up the flow of information and communications to both internal and external stakeholders; however, the key actors in charge must first receive training and education to better understand aspects such as the phrasing of a statement or understanding which parties need to receive information with the highest priority. On this subject, a respondent stated that: "Effective crisis management is all about the ability to scale up or down as needed, as well as having a depth of human resources available to support key subject matter expertise."

Others reported concerns about the lack of a strong corporate culture, stating that: "The sophistication of crisis management is to define different responsibility structures for different types of crises and establish and develop a document with guidelines for each." On a similar vein, one respondent provided further details on their experience with past crises, revealing that: "In my current role there is no crisis management plan, team or process. However, it is 'managed' as part of BC arrangements. In my previous role, they would not under any circumstances enact the crisis management plan, despite significant natural disasters affecting multiple locations and regions. There was a reluctance to do so because we were not in a 'crisis'. Perception was paramount. The other issue was decision inertia. Despite clear obligations and the expectations of the public and business areas, the crisis management team leader would not make a decision on any recommendations from moving supplies to relocating, nor allocating staff or following crisis management processes. The disaster was managed as a political opportunity to fast-track existing strategic priorities. Going so far as to stop the recovery team from meeting key objectives, while others had new locations set up within weeks. It was several months later before things were approved. The lack of money in recovery greatly impacted the region, where files quickly became mouldy and were unrecoverable."

13.0%
Yes, we are expecting significant investment

39.7%
Yes, we are expecting some investment

40.2%
Investment is likely to stay the same

5.4%
No, we are expecting a decrease in investment

1.6%
No, we are expecting a significant decrease in investment

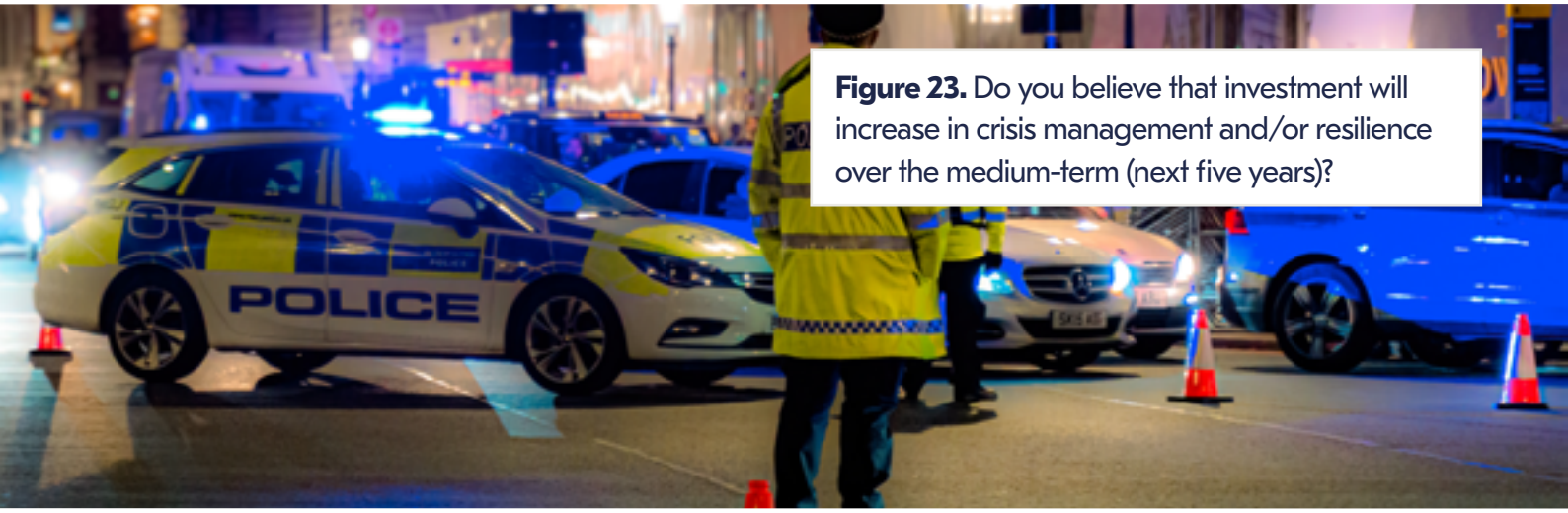


Figure 23. Do you believe that investment will increase in crisis management and/or resilience over the medium-term (next five years)?

Which areas are you likely to see investment?

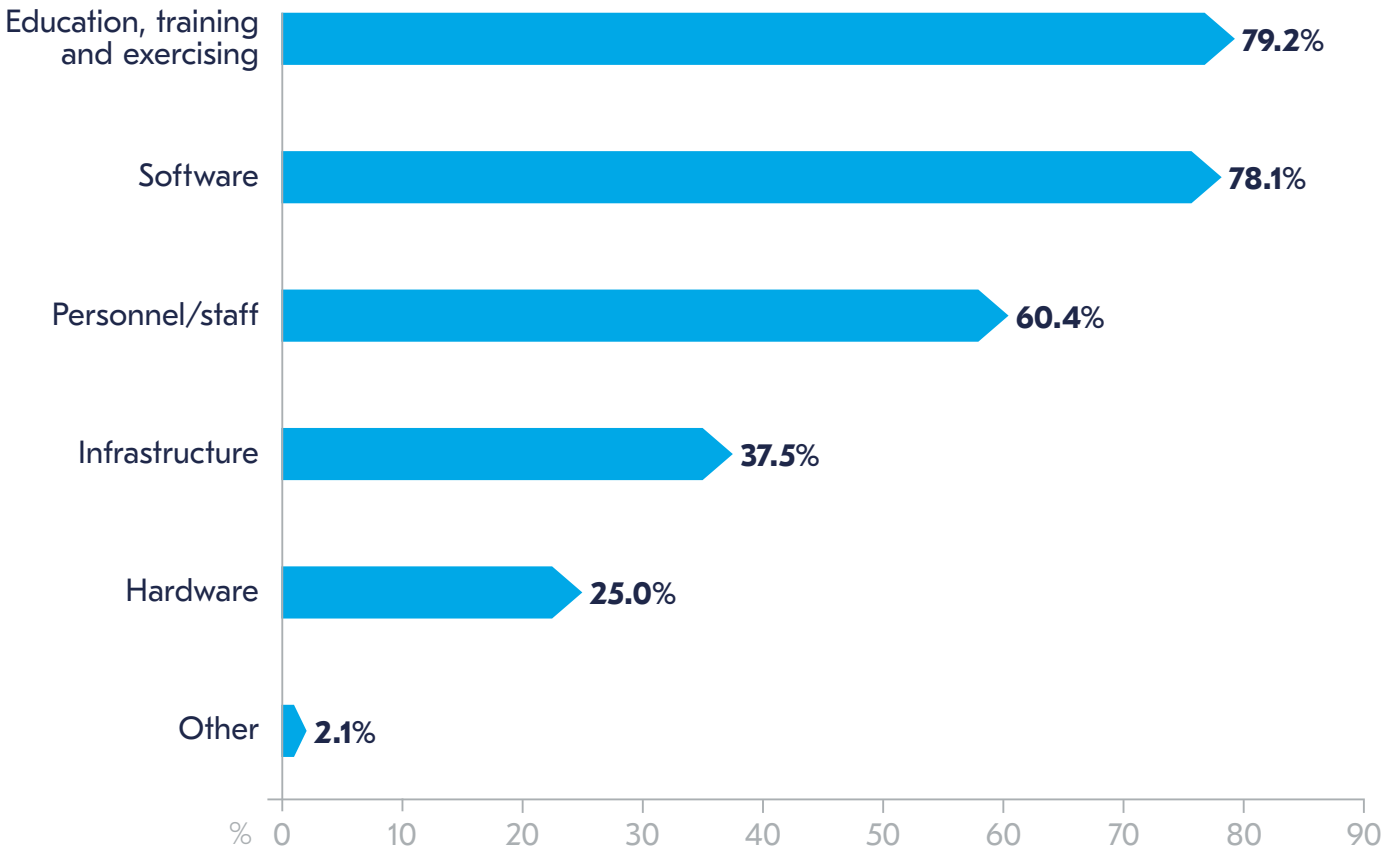


Figure 24. Which areas are you likely to see investment?

On a final note, nearly half the respondents believe that working practices within crisis management will change. The top-rated change was 'introducing new staff in resilience-orientated positions' (41%), with 'improved community resilience' in second place (40.5%). By building relationships with other organizations such as emergency services, local organizations, local authorities, and sector peers, a response to a crisis can be handled much better with all parties inputting into the response.

"When managing a crisis, we rely, in some instances, on external service providers like fire departments and local government. For us, ensuring that the communication with those authorities remains open becomes very key. We perform exercises with local authorities on an annual basis, and that allows the authorities to measure how they respond. Apart from us, measuring our own response capabilities, we also facilitate for authorities to measure themselves too. We have seen it to be highly effective because when we do these exercises with them, they are able to identify gaps and when we have real events, they are able to respond better."

Resilience manager, financial services, Mauritius

"There has been a renewal of interest in BCM and in some areas they have brought in additional people, consultants, and support people to improve it. Now management recognises that these are specialist functions."

Resilience, fraud strategy & operations manager, financial services, South Africa

"The Global Industry Standard of Tailings Management (GITSM)" was released in 2020 that includes crisis management guidelines. These guidelines recommend that crisis management exercises including participation with local emergency responders and community leaders. Our crisis management program is expanding to include these guidelines and exercises, broadening our local knowledge base."

Manager of global business continuity planning, mining & quarrying, United States

A slightly smaller subset also highlighted the possibility of investment in new technology (31.8%) and horizon scanning technology (27.8%). In particular, different practitioners stressed the importance of improved horizon scanning practices: the risk of multiple crises happening at the same time is already present and organizations need to implement horizon scanning for a variety of risks, to prepare for, and mitigate them. In this regard, the recognition of the interdependency among different risks is key, as also stressed across various ISO standards such as ISO 22301:2019 on BC management[31], while speed and agility of response will be essential for resilience and survival. Collating different themes together, another respondent stated that: "Preventing crises will be a priority involving better assessment of internal sentiment and customer engagement with corporate values. Horizon scanning will also be prevalent to tie back actions to investments in technology and training capabilities. There's greater risk in the social-political sphere since the pandemic created widescale disparities in societies and politics so bringing everything together with a risk avoidance mindset and risk-benefit analysis will be a driving force to stay out of the negative news cycle."

How do you feel working practices will change with regard to crisis management in your organization?

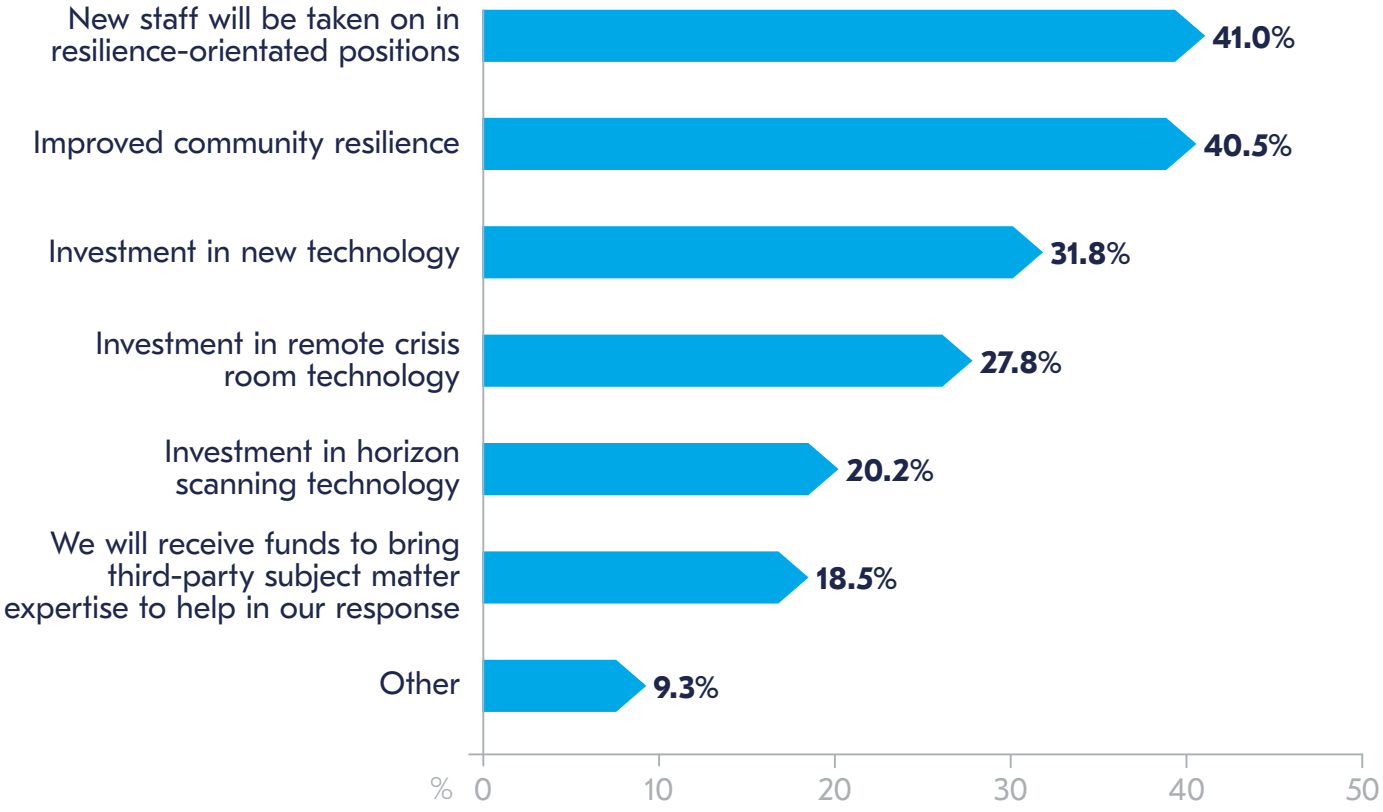


Figure 25. How do you feel working practices will change with regard to crisis management in your organization?

Annex

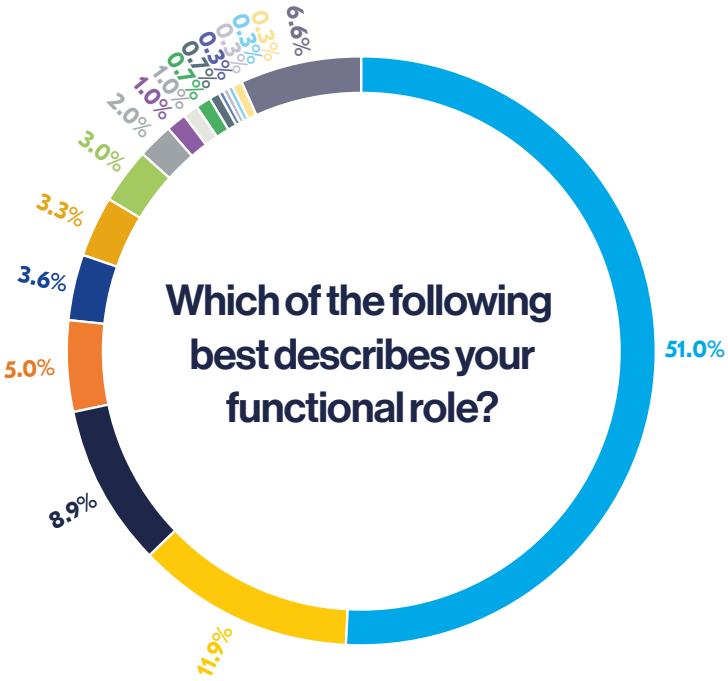
Survey dates

Respondents

Countries

Sectors

Respondent interviews



51.0% Business continuity

11.9% Risk management

8.9% Crisis management

5.0% Emergency planning

3.6% Health and safety

3.3% Top management

3.0% IT disaster recovery/ IT service continuity

2.0% Physical security

1.0% Information security

1.0% Internal audit

0.7% Supply chain and logistics

0.7% Quality/business improvement

0.3% Human resources

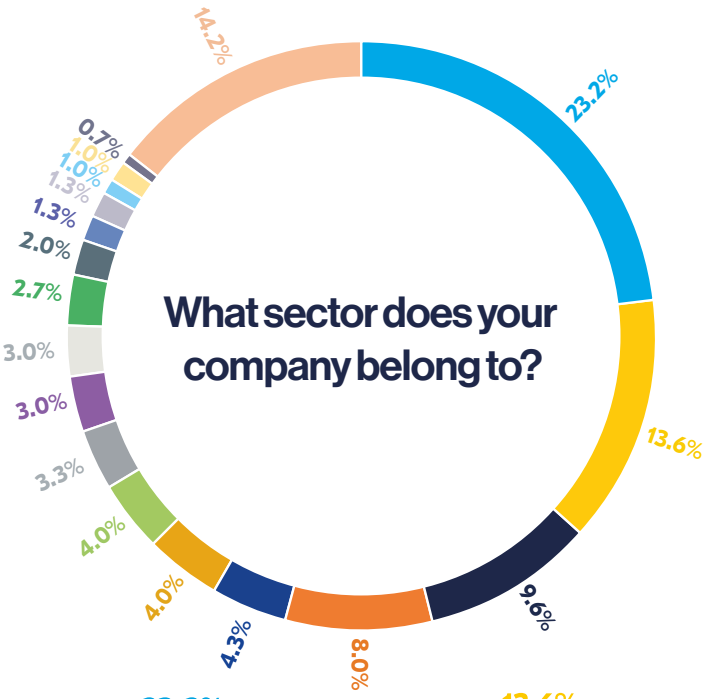
0.3% Occupational health services

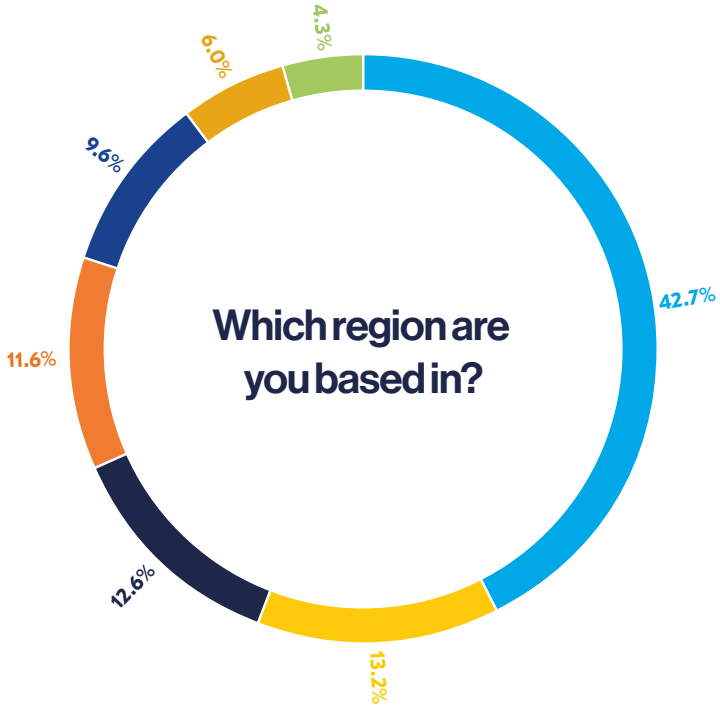
0.3% Line of business or service directorate

0.3% Communications

6.6% Other

Figure 26. Which of the following best describes your functional role?





23.2% Financial & insurance services

13.6% Public administration & defence

9.6% IT & communications

8.0% Energy & utility services

4.3% Education

4.0% Health & social care

4.0% Telecommunications

3.3% Legal & professional services

3.0% Manufacturing

3.0% Transport & storage

2.7% Retail & wholesale

2.0% Support services

1.3% Media & entertainment

1.3% Agriculture, forestry & fishing

1.0% Engineering & construction

1.0% Mining & quarrying

0.7% Leisure and hospitality

14.2% Other

42.7% Europe

13.2% Africa

12.6% Asia

11.6% Australasia

9.6% North America

6.0% Middle East

4.3% Latin America

Figure 27. What sector does your company belong to?

Figure 28. Which region are you based in?

How many countries do you operate in?

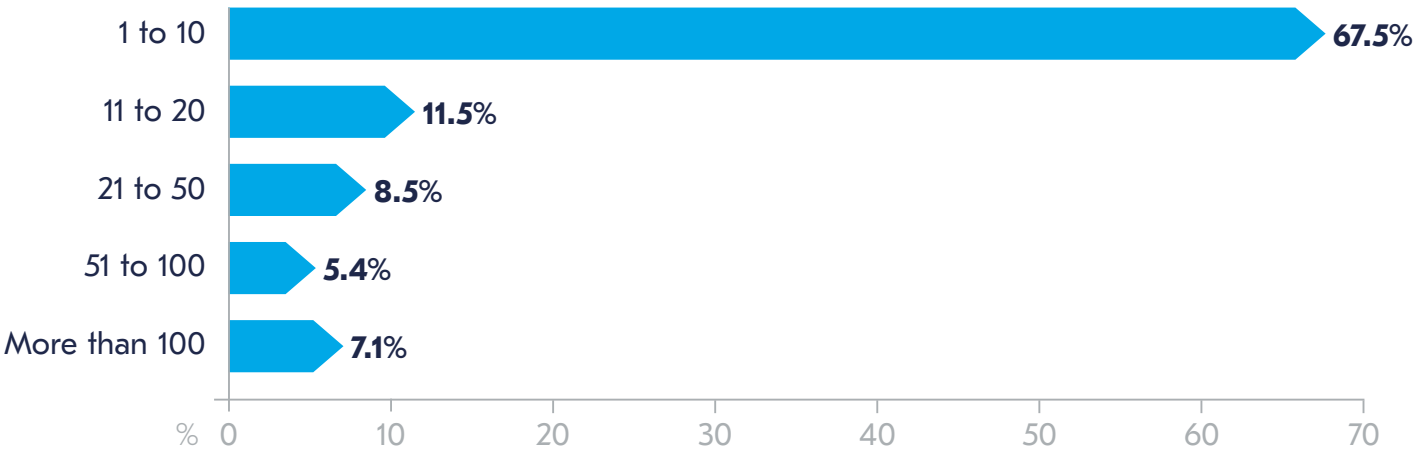


Figure 29. How many countries do you operate in?

Approximately how many employees are there in your organization globally?

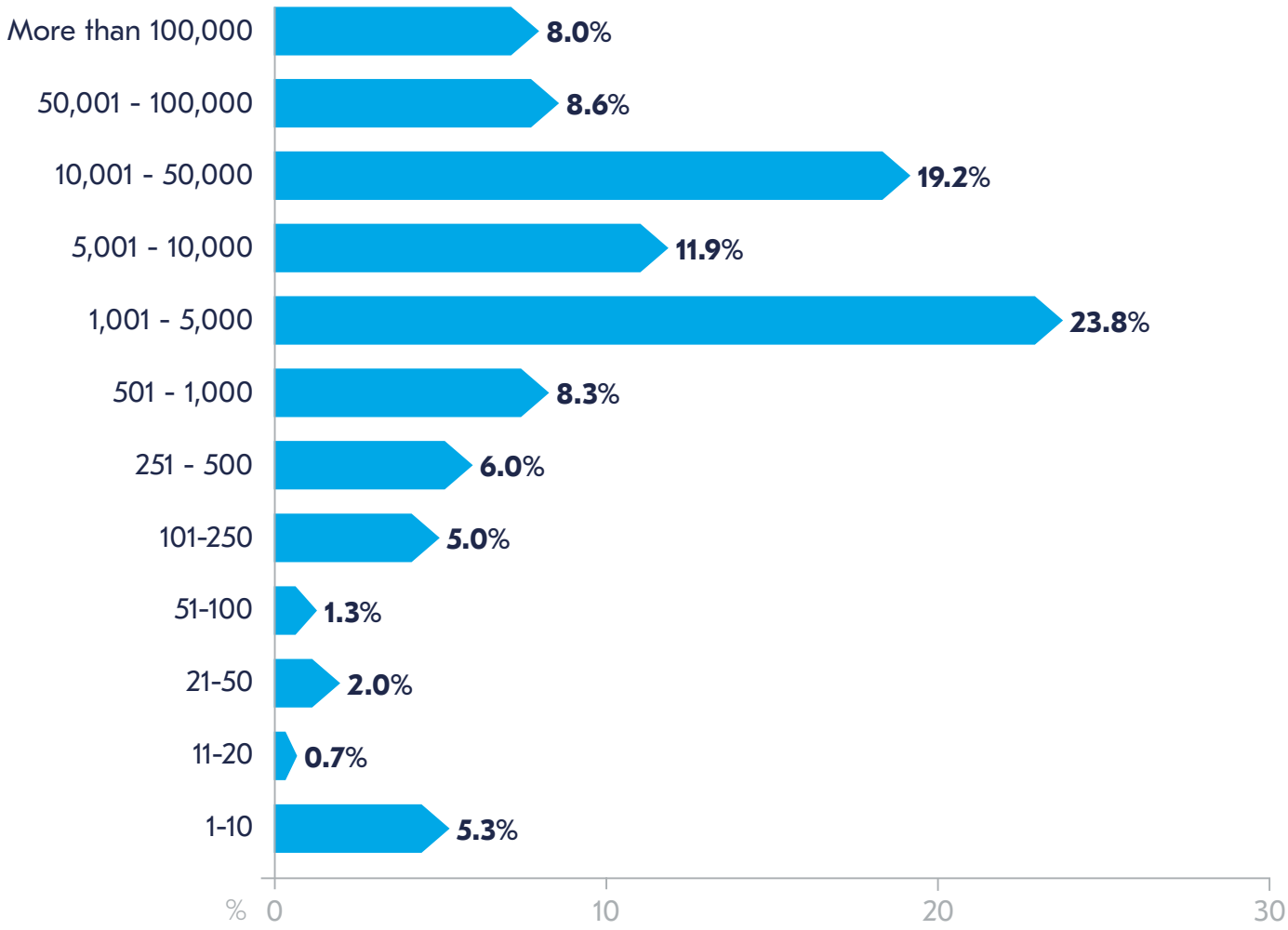


Figure 30. Approximately how many employees are there in your organization globally?

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About the BCI

Founded in 1994 with the aim of promoting a more resilient world, The 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 Corporate Membership offers organizations the opportunity to work with The BCI in promoting best practice in business continuity and resilience.

The BCI welcomes everyone with an interest in building resilient organizations from newcomers, experienced professionals, and organizations. Further information about The BCI is available at **www.thebci.org**.

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About F24

F24 is the leading software-as-a-service (SaaS) provider for business messaging, emergency notification as well as incident and crisis management in Europe. The highly innovative F24 solutions support customers through the whole value chain from high-volume communication in the corporate environment through governance, risk, and compliance (GRC) up to Emergency Notification and Smart Event Communication as well as Comprehensive Crisis Management. More than 3,000 customers worldwide rely on F24's solutions to manage their communication needs, as part of their day-to-day communication of critical or confidential content, or in the event of a crisis.

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