

Crisis management in the casino industry: Leadership, learning, and ISO 22361

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Abstract: Crisis management in the casino industry is critical given casinos' 24/7 operations, financial exposure, reputational sensitivity, and regulatory complexity. This study explores how casino leaders respond to crises through a qualitative analysis of four real-world events, including civil unrest, internal misconduct, mass trauma, and pandemic disruption, interpreted through the strategic framework of ISO 22361:2022. Drawing on executive interviews and thematic analysis, the research identifies patterns of transitional leadership, communications, and decision-making under pressure. The study reveals that effective crisis management in casinos exceeds transactional compliance, it demands cultural responsiveness, emotional intelligence, and long-term organizational learning. Findings suggest that ISO 22361 provides a relevant foundation but should be supplemented with industry-specific practices that address operational adaptivity and sustained resilience. Practical implications include the development of strategic decision-making groups, communication protocols, and scenario-based training. This work contributes to academic theory and applied practice, offering a roadmap for embedding empathetic resilience into a casino crisis management system.

Keywords: Casino, Crisis Management, ISO 22361, Qualitative.

1. Introduction

Crisis management in the casino industry is a critical yet underexplored area of academic research and practical application. Casinos face unique challenges due to their 24/7 nature, high cash volume, regulatory scrutiny, and reputational sensitivity. As highly public-facing institutions, they operate within environments vulnerable to both internal disruptions and external threats ranging from civil unrest to executive misconduct. These vulnerabilities make crisis preparedness and response essential for long-term resilience.

This article investigates crisis management strategies within the casino sector, drawing insight from executive-level perspectives. While broader hospitality literature has increasingly examined risk, resilience, and recovery, few studies have focused specifically on casinos, which face operational, reputational, and financial risk along with social and regulatory scrutiny. The research is structured around the principles outlined in International Organization for Standardization (2022) the international standard for strategic crisis management. This standard emphasizes leadership, decision-making under uncertainty, stakeholder communication, and continuous learning, which will be used as an analytical lens to evaluate casino responses.

By exploring real-world crisis scenarios through qualitative analysis, this study seeks to identify how leaders navigate uncertainty, communicate under pressure, and implement reactive and proactive measures to mitigate harm.

2. Review of Literature

The literature reviewed was divided into three sections: crisis management, casino, and ISO 22361. Understanding the historical and theoretical foundations of the casino industry and the origins of ISO is essential to contextualize crisis management within this unique sector, providing a macro-level view. Narrowing the lens, it is also necessary to understand the contemporary operational challenges casinos face. Focusing on a crisis management-centered topic, the emphasis is on the need for structured planning and foresight. Integrating leadership, organizational behavior, and strategic planning into the casino-specific crisis management framework.

2.1. Casino

Wagering on outcomes has been an activity for humans since recorded history. However, the concept of a house of odds where the public can walk in and play a game of chance against a house has only arrived in recent centuries. Looking at time compared to the development of the casino concept, there have been significant shifts in the casino gaming industry within the early years of this century alone. New technology and geopolitical landscapes have ruptured the gaming industry, pushing bets into new places and spaces. At this time, there is exponential growth in online bets, sports bets, and esports wagering. One platform, Kalshi, allows players to place a trade contract on a real-world outcome.

Gambling was re-legalized in the state of Nevada in 1931 after it had been banned since 1909. Making it the first state to legalize a casino. It was judged morally by outsiders while the federal government focused on containment. Eadington (1999) provides a background on Casino Development. The major shift for casino development came in 1969 with the Corporate Gaming Act that allowed corporations to own and operate casinos. This Act legitimized casinos as a respectable business within America and started a trend nationwide. New Jersey followed legalization in 1976. Then, in 1988, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was passed, allowing casinos to open on tribal land. South Dakota voted to have limited gaming, and in 1989, Iowa legalized casinos on riverboats. This growth led to the 90s boom of Casino development. Eadington also discussed this trend internationally in countries like Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The games themselves changed very little over this time. Las Vegas-style slot machines and Las Vegas-style table games of blackjack, roulette, and craps were commonly found inside casinos. In the 2000s, Southeast Asia began a new era of casino development in what became known as Integrated Resorts in Singapore and Macau. This growth and expansion continued until 2020, when the COVID pandemic closed the doors on casinos worldwide. The market shifted to online casinos, which made way for online casinos and other online digital gambling platforms.

During that timeline, Macomber (1984) suggested that the industry focus on management, HR, marketing, corporate onboarding, and the legitimacy of casinos. These factors are used through a development lens of the industry in its growth stage during the mid-80s. Although crisis management was not at the forefront, Macomber did have the foresight to plan stages for the issues that were important at the time. Macomber noted that benefits can be retrieved when possible liabilities and risks are exploited and discussed.

In 1995, the American Gaming Association was formed to deal with the crisis of problem gaming primarily. At the time, problem gambling was considered a risk through lawsuits, rollbacks, or prohibition (Bernhard, Green, & Lucas, 2008). The American Gaming Association's focus was on industry-wide problem gambling initiatives. When the industry came together collectively as a preventative measure, risk was addressed, and the crisis was diverted.

Shifting the focus to the property level, each property can be assessed on the management's leadership abilities. Is it transactional or transitional leadership? Goussak (2009) found that most Las Vegas Casino employees found their managers to be transactional in style. Goussak studied leadership effectiveness, suggesting that transactional styles benefit pre-crisis planning while transformational

styles are more effective during active crises. Goussak and Webber (2011) found that transitional leadership at a casino can lead to increased performance by motivating higher creativity and innovation.

Maintaining a holistic view of stakeholders is essential when studying a casino crisis. Ghaharian, Abarbanel, Soligo, and Bernhard (2021) used the term "gambling-related hospitality business stakeholders (GBS) as a description for those in the Casino industry affected by COVID-19. They used a three-phase framework of preparedness, response, and future when documenting COVID-19 crisis management on the GBS. Management can quickly oversee customers and staff, but a broader range must be set to define who is affected and how to prepare and respond to each stakeholder.

Casino Crises are not limited to the casino itself. Plog (2005) and Skolnick (1984) emphasized casino crises' social and economic ripple effects. Plog explored marketing's role in postcrisis recovery, while Skolnick focused on how casino operations impact surrounding communities. Skolnick concentrates on the issues that casinos bring to a community, explaining that customers and communities are vulnerable to the effects of a casino. Casinos are constantly deploying new technology. The benefits of these technologies also come with the risk of a crisis. Queiroz (2002) discusses the need for privacy of information. Using a privacy strategy as a pre-crisis component can protect intellectual capital and customer data in a casino. He suggested that a customer resource management system can provide the ability to budget privacy costs ahead of a crisis, reduce expenses from possible litigation or brand damage, and be used as a competitive advantage. Queiroz further added a technology dimension, addressing data security and the role of systems in predicting behavioral threats. Issues that became elevated by data breaches, such as MGM's in 2023 (McMillan & Sayre, 2024). Doyle (2009) discusses a Casino's customer relationship management software use. It is used to include hundreds of data points on a customer. By following trends and historical data points of past customers who invoked a crisis (activity shooter, problem gambler, theft, etc.), a casino can apply the data and highlight individuals who are high risk to the casino and take preventative measures before an incident can occur.

2.2. ISO: International Organization for Standardization

This research focuses on International Organization for Standardization (2022). The framework provides practices and principles to aid organizations in further developing their crisis management systems. Organizations are expected to develop their crisis management systems further using the ISO 22361 principles of governance, strategy, risk, decision-making, communication, ethics, and learning (ISO International Organization for Standardization, 2018).

The International Organization for Standardization has become a key pillar for industries forming commonality. As Murphy and Yates (2009) described, ISO started in 1946 and was derived from an earlier formation named the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) from 1906. The concept by the founders was to develop an international consensus of standards for participating countries to follow, a way for engineers to develop standardized products that can be usable and adaptable to participating countries worldwide. ISO remained limited in its member size and usage until the 1960s during a spike in international designs, where the process of taking an idea from concept to international shelves became realistic using standards found through ISO and ultimately increasing worldwide interest in ISO, its membership offerings, and the decision-making power within ISO selection committees.

ISO standards are voluntary standards within the membership countries that choose to adopt ISO standards. The ISO does not enforce or award any certifications. However, some companies have profited off of ISO by developing a system of certification for meeting ISO standards, especially in countries where ISO standards have become mandatory regulations. Capitalizing on ISO standards has created controversy amongst both members of ISO and the end users of ISO standards. Morikawa and Morrison (2004) recorded that after 60 years, ISO has 148 countries participating and is recognized by the World Trade Organization as a trade legal standard. Countries can use ISO standards to formalize and make industry standards a requirement.

ISO contributions can be found all around industrial practices today. One of the most used examples is shipping containers. Adapting to a voluntary, worldwide standard, logistics have been optimized through the ability to maximize used loading space. Ultimately saving costs, increasing revenue, and decreasing carbon footprints worldwide. Another popular standard is the worldwide use of the time and date information exchange format outlined in ISO 8601.

Furthermore, ISO's popularity has expanded into other sectors. ISO has expanded into quality management standards with the release of ISO 9000. Recent popular standards include ISO 14000 on environmental regulations and ISO 26000 on corporate social responsibility. ISO 22361 was developed for crisis management in 2022.

However, ISO is still not without controversy. Gleckman and Krut (2017) argue that emerging standards from ISO, such as ISO 14000, do not meet international agreements and lack detailed engineering, yet seek recognition as the environmental authority both politically and intellectually. Selvaseelan (2018) points out the lack of non-management roles in ISO. With a focus only on senior management, a line of separation is drawn that does not promote overall influence on the enforcing entity. ISO 22361 is not a catch-all for all crisis management. Lalonde and Boiral (2012) found that ISO is not just something to have on the shelf. Instead, managers must use it within their management strategy, which is performed daily. Furthermore, it is more than just a checklist of standards; it is a holistic approach to crises that must use resiliency for each crisis to adapt to the unexpected.

2.3. Crisis Management

Fener and Çevik (2015) define a crisis as "an unpredictable state that disrupts normal operations of the organization and that requires immediate action" (pg.700). While "crisis management" is defined as "the process where the indicators of crisis are obtained and assessed for the risk of potential crisis and where necessary measures are taken and applied in order to experience minimum loss in a state of crisis" (pg.697). International Organization for Standardization (2022) defines a crisis as an "abnormal or extraordinary event or situation that threatens an organization or community and requires a strategic, adaptive, and timely response in order to preserve its viability and integrity" (pg.2). Denizci Guillet and Chu (2021) discuss crisis management with the goal to stop a crisis from happening, "Identify warning signals and prepare an appropriate response" (pg.608) as the minimum way to detect inbound crises and prepare for their arrival to completely stop the crisis from happening. International Organization for Standardization (2022) describes crisis management simply as "coordinated activities to lead, direct, and control an organization with regard to crisis" (pg.2).

Crisis Management models in literature have varied opinions on the number of stages involved in the process. Despite various three, four, or six-stage models, most theories agree that crisis management should include at least three basic components: pre-incident, incident, and post-incident. Each stage has different practices while also serving its purpose. Pre-incident emphasizes planning and preparation for a crisis. The chances of the event occurring are examined for each crisis. The cost or damage that the crisis would have on the entity, the effort or cost to prepare and protect against the crisis, and the level of damage if nothing is done to prepare for a crisis. During an incident, crisis management focuses on containing or stopping the immediate crisis. It prevents further damage or cost to the entity. Then, post-incident deals with immediate and long-term actions to repair and fix damages with long-term solutions to ensure that type of crisis does not happen again.

The first example of the three-stage process in crisis management is by Glaesser (2004) who classified a crisis into three stages. The first stage is potential, potential being that the crisis effects are neither felt nor seen and are dormant, emphasizing early detection as critical for containment. The latent stage for when the crisis is visible but has yet to be understood or identified for reasonable response. The success of detection during the latent stage of a crisis is dependent on the speed of response. Last is the acute stage; the crisis is in full effect and is both felt and seen, which can be tangibly documented.

Early models in crisis management included the use of a fourth stage. Mitroff, Shrivastava, and Udwadia (1987) proposed a four-stage crisis management model. They exploited their basic crisis management model concept by separating proactive and reactive management within the detection, crisis, repair, and assessment cycle. Detection and early warnings, being the crisis, are both expected and unexpected. Followed by an assessment of planning. Then, action during a crisis, repairing what was damaged, followed by continuous assessment. The four parts can then be split into a proactive action before a crisis or a reactive action during and after a crisis. Furthermore, Mitroff, Shrivastava, and Udwadia say that crisis management should not ask if a crisis happens but rather when a crisis happens. When a crisis happens, who will be affected, and what shape will it take? This foundational framework is still relevant today.

The recovery process postcrisis can be as important as actions during a crisis. Stafford, Yu, and Armoo (2002) claim that there are two types of crises in hospitality: internal and external. Their research developed four phases of recovery. The first phase is information. Tourism groups in the area must work and coordinate together by sharing information. The second phase is community, looking at how the local community can get involved in recovery efforts. Next is the GM assurance. Managers should reach out to individuals and groups providing truthful updates and reassurance of operations. Last is message communication that deploys a marketing campaign to promote the quick and safe recovery of business.

Those communications play an essential role and are proven most effective when done transparently throughout a crisis. Plog (2005) mentions the importance of looking at the domino effect of each crisis. A crisis within an entity can cause false expectations. False expectations can lead to further postcrisis failures. Plog's article suggests that honest marketing campaigns that set accurate expectations will help the recovery of a destination postcrisis. Ghaharian et al. (2021) advanced Plog's work by proposing a stakeholder-inclusive model emphasizing preparedness and long-term planning. Using examples from the COVID-19 pandemic, Ghaharian underlined the importance of systemic thinking and adaptability in crisis management.

Ritchie and Jiang (2021) performed a narrative meta-study on published risk, crisis, and disaster management literature. Most articles researched in the meta-study focused on the last two stages of response and recovery rather than preparation. Ritchie and Jiang pointed to the need to identify the specific characteristics of the hospitality business, such as casinos. Recognizing that a crisis may differ based on individual markets and customer segments.

Community and communications play an important role during post-recovery efforts. Working alongside the local government is beneficial to a crisis management team. Jones and Comfort (2020) argued that working with the government when planning and during a crisis should be a top priority. Working with the community and customers, Harrington (2021) found that setting long-term goals toward customer satisfaction is important during a recovery phase. Additionally, communicating transparently with stakeholders can provide a positive postcrisis outlook.

Within those communications should include messaging to stakeholders. Braun-Latour, LaTour, and Loftus (2006) examined the importance of marketing efforts postcrisis. They pointed out that industry standards show that most companies tend not to advertise after a crisis to give the public time to heal. Any short-term savings or coupons do not help after a crisis because they do not return any trust, only financial incentives. However, positive or healing messaging provides trust through reinforcement of the company values that can be of greater support in postcrisis community healing over any financial incentive. No matter the model or framework used by an entity for crisis management, Racherla and Hu (2009) can find a common agreement, reporting that crisis management can be one of the most crucial segments that guide a property's future.

3. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative design to explore crisis management practices through the experiences of casino executives. It is cross-analyzed using the principles of ISO 22361 crisis

management guidelines. The approach is rooted in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) action research (Rossman & Rallis, 2016) and reflexive inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). These methods are chosen for their ability to produce rich, interpretive data and draw out deep meaning from real-world cases.

3.1 Qualitative

For this research, a qualitative study is used to explore casino crisis management through the perspective of casino industry experts. Perspectives are cross-analyzed with the themes of ISO 22361, the ISO standard on crisis management. It follows qualitative principles of research design, data collection, and analytical strategy. This approach is well-suited for exploring complex problems related to human and social topics (Creswell, 2013). The research utilizes thematic analysis as the primary analytical method, secondary data as the main data source, and action research as the overarching analytical strategy. Each component is discussed to ensure a trustworthy, rigorous, and reflective research design.

A qualitative research design is ideal for this study because it emphasizes an in-depth understanding of patterns, meanings, and processes within a defined social context. Creswell and Poth (2016) describe qualitative research as a methodological approach that investigates problems relating to human and social experiences by gathering rich, descriptive data. Qualitative research allows for exploring crises within the casino industry through in-depth interviews and analysis of casino management experiences.

Thematic analysis was used as a methodological tool to guide the research process. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79). More recently, Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2024) revised this definition, describing thematic analysis as "a qualitative method for developing and reporting patterns of meaning across a dataset" (p. 238). Ritchie and Jiang (2021) and Denizci Guillet and Chu (2021) advocated for qualitative methods in crisis management, noting that thematic synthesis reveals deeper organizational insights. Thematic analysis is flexible, making it accessible and adaptable for qualitative research questions while maintaining analytical rigor. Its ability to induct key themes from casino management data makes qualitative research suitable for this study.

As Rossman and Rallis (2016) described, action research supports this study's problem-solving focus. Action research involves iterative inquiry, learning, and reflection cycles aimed at real-world improvement. By analyzing actual crisis responses, the study provides actionable knowledge that can guide casino leadership. Triangulation was done by researching outside reports and documentation of the discussed crises with cross-analysis. From that analysis, knowledge is inducted and discussed in the research findings.

Within the qualitative framework, reflexivity is critical to ensure transparency and address potential biases. Creswell and Poth (2016) emphasize the importance of reflexivity as a mechanism for researchers to reflect on their paradigm and its influence on the research process. Reflexivity is incorporated to examine how personal experiences, beliefs, and assumptions may shape the interpretation of the data.

When approaching the growing concern of crises in the casino industry, a qualitative study was the best choice. Qualitative research offers several advantages, particularly its ability to gather rich, descriptive data that highlights the elements of human experiences. Creswell and Poth (2016) noted that qualitative research is flexible, allowing researchers to adapt their approach as new data emerges. This flexibility is advantageous when addressing complex, dynamic issues like crisis management, where situational factors evolve. Additionally, qualitative research excels at exploring "how" and "why" questions, enabling a deeper understanding of a phenomenon beyond numerical patterns (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan, 2017). The flexibility of qualitative research allowed this study to adapt to findings and explore the human dimensions of casino crisis elements that quantitative methods, constrained by numbers and statistics, could not. Qualitative studies also ensure researchers critically engage with their biases by emphasizing reflexivity, enhancing transparency, and rigor.

3.2. Data

The study utilizes secondary data from executive interviews on platforms like YouTube. These interviews were selected based on their relevance to crisis experiences, depth of content, and authenticity. Using Johnston (2014) definition, secondary data provides a means to analyze pre-existing sources that align closely with the study's inquiry. While it lacks direct researcher control, transparency in selection and transcription was maintained to preserve rigor and ethical integrity.

The foundation of a qualitative study begins with carefully selecting participants using purposeful sampling. Creswell and Poth (2016) emphasize the importance of choosing interviewees who provide valuable insight into the research problem. Using purposeful sampling ensured interviewees possessed relevant expertise, perspectives, or experiences aligning with the research goals. This study uses interviews of casino executives with firsthand experience managing crises. Their insights address the research questions by providing real-world accounts of crisis management within the casino industry.

Although secondary data offers significant advantages in accessibility, it also presents limitations. Orsini et al. (2020) caution that secondary data can pose challenges related to reliability and transparency, particularly when researchers lack control over the data collection process. Complete transparency in how the data is sourced, transcribed, and analyzed is ensured to address this. Providing a reason for its use and ensuring the study meets rigorous standards.

Open-ended questions were used to receive detailed narratives, providing in-depth data into the experiences and perspectives of the interviewee while allowing for new themes relevant to the research objectives to emerge. Additionally, a participant-observer method was integrated, where group discussions or questions posed by other attendees at the casino executive conference were observed. This approach captures a more robust spectrum of data and incorporates diverse viewpoints rather than a singular perspective.

3.3. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis used in this study follows Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase model: data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and write-up. Coding was facilitated using NVivo to identify repeated concepts. NVivo also supported visual organization and cross-case comparisons. Themes could be drawn inductively from the data and supported by systematic exploration of meaning across cases.

By integrating thematic analysis with reflexive practices, the study generated meaningful insights that were rigorous and relevant to the research problem. Reflexive journaling was employed to document researcher assumptions, decisions, and potential biases throughout the analytic process. Following Creswell and Poth (2016) reflexivity ensures transparency and enhances trustworthiness. Given the researcher's industry familiarity, ongoing self-awareness was maintained to avoid undue influence during theme interpretation.

Data cleaning was performed to review the data and ensure quality, consistency, and readiness for analysis. As Rossman and Rallis (2016) emphasize, this step is essential for mitigating errors and ensuring the integrity of the dataset. The transcripts were cleaned and formatted. Each transcript displayed the interviewer's questions and the interviewee's responses to ensure consistency.

Visualization serves as a powerful tool for presenting qualitative research findings in a way that is both accessible and meaningful. Burke et al. (2005) and Verdinelli and Scagnoli (2013) emphasize the importance of visualizations, such as boxed displays, in facilitating a deeper understanding of data. Visualization clarifies complex themes and serves as a valuable analytical tool that helps interpret the patterns and relationships within the data.

3.4. Conclusion of Methodology

This qualitative research design integrates thematic analysis, secondary data collection, and action research as the guiding analytical strategy. By employing casino executive interviews as the data source, the study ensures transparency, ethical integrity, and accessibility. Thematic analysis allowed for

systematically identifying patterns within the data, coding, and organization. Action research ensures the study is dynamic and transformative, contributing to scholarly research and practical problem-solving. Reflexivity further strengthens the study by fostering transparency and self-awareness, ensuring the findings are rigorous and trustworthy. The result is a narrative that addresses the research problem, identifies key themes, and offers suggestions for future research and casino industry practice.

4. Scenarios

The four interviews selected were chosen for their authenticity, crisis management relevance, and data quality. This article focuses on management studies and not the actual events. Maintaining the article's focus and following confidentiality guidelines, identities and names are safeguarded. Pseudonyms are used. Each crisis interview is titled Crisis A, B, C, and D. This section describes the four crisis scenarios and the key takeaways from management actions.

4.1. Four Interviews

4.1.1. Scenario of Crisis A

Crisis A is a casino business with multiple properties in urban settings impacted by widespread civil unrest. The casino executive faced pressures of employee safety and reputational management. Protest activity and street violence moved close to the casino property, which affected revenue, safety perceptions, and operational security.

However, what shifted the crisis response was a decision by the leadership to meet directly with frontline employees. The executive conducted listening tours and staff forums to understand staff fears and frustrations. Employees voiced concerns about personal safety and equality. Leadership reshaped internal policy, communicated directly to frontline employees, and acknowledged the sociopolitical context. Emphasis was put on the importance of a casino's ability to adjust to a crisis.

Key Takeaways:

Employee-Centric Leadership: Proactively sought input from staff during the crisis.

Adaptive Policy Adjustment: Made real-time changes to internal support.

Communication Framing: Internal communications validated emotions and clarified values.

Symbolic Acts: Leadership visibility signaled solidarity, reducing internal tension.

This response highlighted the importance of ethical visibility and listening during high-stakes public crises. Crisis A was not only focused on protecting the business, it worked to protect employee trust and internal stability. Aligning with ISO 22361's emphasis on anticipation, leadership, communication, and learning, even though the response was improvisational rather than formally standardized.

4.1.2. Scenario of Crisis B

Crisis B discusses a regional casino operator with multiple properties that experienced an internal crisis: a senior executive was accused of fostering a hostile workplace culture, particularly toward female staff. The crisis became public when allegations surfaced in the news, followed by further media coverage, and calls for accountability. Initially the company denied any wrongdoing. Exposing reputation, legal, and credibility risk through a single executive.

Soon after, independent audits took place that led to immediate executive departures, a board reconstruction emphasizing independence and diversity, strengthened internal policies, and acceptance of heavy regulatory fines and legal settlements. These moves aimed to restore trust with regulators, investors, employees, and the public.

Reforms discussed included leadership responsibility of reporting and accountability to maintain a safe work environment, mandatory leadership training, and investigation independence. Emphasis was put on the importance of owning the narrative and framing the crisis as a moment to rebuild credibility.

Key Takeaways:

Cultural Reform via Crisis: Crisis accelerated overdue cultural and policy changes.

Transparency as Strategy: Regular updates helped reclaim control of the narrative.

Third-Party Legitimacy: Independent audits increased employee buy-in.

Psychological Safety: Executive accountability creates a perception of safety.

Crisis B demonstrates how internal crises can become inflection points for systemic improvement. While initially reactive, the organization's pivot toward transparency and inclusion is consistent with ISO 22361's guidance on governance, stakeholder engagement, and organizational learning.

4.1.3. Scenario of Crisis C

Crisis C was directly impacted by a shooting, a catastrophic event requiring immediate, high-stakes crisis response. The executive described a multilayered strategy driven by compassion, agility, and decisive leadership. In the immediate aftermath, hotel staff, without instruction, stepped up. For instance, a pastry chef began preparing food for traumatized guests, exemplifying the spontaneous, purpose-driven behavior that crisis culture can invoke.

The property rapidly converted hospitality suites into triage and rest areas for evacuees and responders. A dedicated phone hotline was established, providing transportation, food, and hospital coordination. The emphasis was not only on survival but restoring dignity to those affected.

Legal counsel was engaged early to ensure compliance and limit liability while enabling fast action. Postcrisis, the leadership consciously decided to preserve the site's integrity by discouraging public gatherings near the scene, opting for a symbolic memorial placed off-site to support healing without disrupting investigations.

Operationally, the company implemented high-visibility uniforms for security to calm guests and improve crowd management. Internally, grief counselors were deployed, and collaboration with local and regional agencies helped establish a unified, emotionally resonant message adapted from other city-led recovery campaigns.

Key Takeaways:

Empowered Frontline Action: Staff took initiative without waiting for command.

Hospitality Infrastructure Repurposing: Rooms were transformed into aid centers overnight.

Symbolic and Strategic Communication: messaging on social media created a unifying public message.

Legal-Ethical Preparedness: Actions were coordinated with legal oversight to balance compassion with risk management.

Post-Trauma Navigation: Security redesign and off-site memorials supported emotional and operational recovery.

Crisis C embodies ISO 22361 principles: ethical leadership, stakeholder-centric communication, and adaptive decision-making under extreme duress. Integrating decentralized leadership initiative with structured coordination demonstrates a dual approach, bottom-up empowerment with top-down strategic framing.

4.1.4. Scenario of Crisis D

Crisis D is a large-scale integrated casino resort navigating the global COVID-19 pandemic. It was a sustained, high-pressure disruption impacting every business dimension, from operations and revenue to workforce morale and public trust. The executive described the crisis as a logistical challenge and a leadership stress test that demanded sustained focus, moral clarity, and deep empathy.

One of the defining moments was the decision to shut down operations before the state mandated closures voluntarily. The executive prioritized organizational integrity over short-term gains. This anticipatory posture exemplifies the ISO 22361 principle of strategic foresight.

To maintain morale, Crisis D relied heavily on internal culture tools like "storytelling pre-shifts," where employees shared real examples of guest or colleague care. These were collected and widely disseminated, helping to preserve a sense of purpose amid widespread uncertainty. The executive

discouraged false optimism, instead acknowledging the hard truth of the prolonged disruption, and focusing leadership efforts on transparency and morale.

Structurally, the executive carved out daily non-negotiable time blocks for executive thinking, allowing leadership to step back from reactive firefighting and focus on medium and long-term planning. Decision-making quality suffers when leaders are buried in non-stop meetings.

4.1.5. Key Takeaways

Proactive Shutdown: Chose to close before mandates, signaling ethical foresight.

Crisis Culture Engineering: Used storytelling rituals to sustain morale and purpose.

Trustworthy Communication: Refused to overpromise or sugarcoat timelines.

Leadership Discipline: Reserved time daily for reflection, not just reaction.

Decentralized Resilience: Empowered line-level leaders to make service decisions.

Crisis D demonstrates an advanced alignment with ISO 22361 across multiple pillars: leadership, anticipation, communication under uncertainty, and learning in action. As a non-technical but high-impact resilience strategy, cultural reinforcement mechanisms to maintain employee engagement and psychological safety are especially noteworthy.

4.2. ISO 22361 Approach to Casino Crisis Management

ISO 22361 outlines a framework that elevates crisis management beyond operational triage and into strategic leadership. Compared to the real-world responses from Crises A through D, distinct alignment patterns emerge across several ISO pillars: leadership, adaptability, structured decision-making, and postcrisis learning. Table 1 shows the details of the four pillars.

Table 1.
Four Pillars.

ISO 22361 Pillar	Crisis A	Crisis B	Crisis C	Crisis D
Anticipation	Staff forums captured unrest before escalation	Slow; reactive only after public backlash	Limited; crisis was external and sudden	High; shut down prior to government mandate
Responsiveness	Adjusted HR policies quickly	Implemented audits, anonymous feedback	Converted property into trauma support zones	Launched cultural and health-based responses
Leadership	CEO held direct staff engagement	Interim board-led reform	Compassionate, situational empowerment	Disciplined, proactive executive visibility
Decision-Making Under Stress	Real-time policy updates	Legal + HR combined for balanced decisions	Multi-layered decisions involving all ranks	Reserved strategic reflection blocks daily
Communication	Internal framing acknowledged emotion	Open internal updates and policy transparency	Symbolic messaging (#message)	Honest, unscripted executive briefings
Learning & Improvement	Staff trust-building post-event	Code of conduct reforms, training	Created new trauma-informed SOPs	Institutionalized storytelling & reflection

These managed crises demonstrate that ISO 22361 is not an abstract framework but an applicable reference for real-world casino environments. Each crisis mapped elements of the 22361 standards through intuition, improvisation, or structured strategy.

4.3. Summary of Results

Thematic analysis across all four crises revealed key patterns in crisis response that both validated ISO 22361's principles. Core themes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
Patterns.

ISO 22361 THEME	CRISIS	PATTERN DESCRIPTION
Ethical and Adaptive Leadership	A, C, D	Leaders gained credibility by being emotionally and physically present.
Structured but Flexible Process Framework	B, C, D	Cross-functional teams and empowered frontline managers increased agility.
Organizational Learning and Improvement	B, D	Internal crises led to overdue organizational reforms and cultural upgrades.
Stakeholder-Centric Communication	C, D	Communicating means through social media or honest briefings, helped stabilize public and internal morale.
Decision-Making Under Uncertainty	A,B,C,D	Uniquely modeled decision-making discipline under pressure.

Each crisis reinforced that effective casino crisis management is not reactive protectionism but strategic adaptation. Crises serve not only to expose vulnerabilities but to accelerate reforms and institutional learning, especially when executive leadership aligns with ISO 22361's core dimensions.

5. Discussion

The comparative analysis of four distinct crisis events ranging from social unrest and internal harassment to mass casualty and pandemic disruption illustrates the varied yet overlapping dynamics of crisis management within the casino industry. Each case reflects how leadership choices, organizational culture, and external pressures shape crisis response. The diversity in responses shows that while ISO 22361 provides a unifying strategic standard, real-world application must be context-sensitive and culturally grounded.

5.1. Crisis Typologies and Operational Contexts

Crisis A addressed a socio-political protest, a high-tension yet low-structure crisis requiring moral leadership and symbolic action. Crisis B recognized a reputational and HR governance crisis, highlighting the risks of internal neglect and the opportunities of cultural reset. Crisis C managed the aftershock of a mass shooting, a deeply traumatic external emergency with long-term emotional and operational ramifications. Crisis D faced a global, slow-burning pandemic that demanded sustained resilience and foresight.

These typologies- social unrest, reputational governance, mass trauma, and protracted global health risk- reveal casinos' need to prepare for internal and external disruptions that threaten continuity, safety, and public trust.

5.2. Thematic Insights Across Crises

Across the four cases, several cross-cutting themes emerged as shown below:

Proactive Leadership - Crisis A and D showed anticipatory action that aligned with ISO's focus on strategic foresight.

Moral Communication - Crises B, C, and D used transparency and emotionally intelligent messaging to rebuild credibility.

Culture as a Resilience Lever - In Crisis D, internal rituals like storytelling pre-shifts exemplified how culture can sustain morale.

Crisis-Induced Structural Change - Crisis B restructured leadership and HR policy as a result of reputational pressure.

Community-Rooted Response - Crisis C emphasized symbolic healing (e.g., #message), suggesting that successful crisis recovery is as much emotional as logistical.

5.3. ISO 22361: Application and Gaps

The ISO 22361 framework proved both comprehensive and adaptable. Its pillars, anticipation, responsiveness, ethical leadership, and postcrisis learning, were mirrored in real-time decisions across all crises. However, two potential gaps were noted. The first gap was operational real-time complexity. ISO's strategic-level orientation may underemphasize frontline improvisation, such as the spontaneous staff actions in Crisis C. The second is sustainability of response. ISO's guidance on continual improvement could be expanded to address long-crisis fatigue, as seen in Crisis D.

5.4. Industry-Specific Reflections

Casinos are complex, high-liquidity, high-security environments operating 24/7. Unlike traditional businesses, their crises often occur in highly public and emotionally charged contexts. The emotional labor of hospitality intersects with high-stakes financial oversight, regulatory scrutiny, and public perception management. As Crises C and D illustrate, the scale and agility of crises in casinos require unique protocols for grief, visibility, and long-term morale management.

5.5. Conclusion of Discussion

The cases examined validate ISO 22361 as a practical and aspirational benchmark for strategic crisis response. However, true organizational resilience in the casino industry is forged at the intersection of strategic frameworks and lived frontline experiences. When empowered by culture, ethics, and adaptive leadership, a crisis becomes survivable and transformative. Crises A through D provide blueprints for implementing ISO principles into a responsive, empathetic approach to crisis management.

6. Implications

The findings of this study hold significant implications for both theory and practice in the realm of casino crisis management. Drawing from real-world crises and cross-analyzed with ISO 22361 standards, this research points to actionable areas for enhancing preparedness, responsiveness, and resilience.

Crisis management must be recognized as a core executive function. Across all four crises analyzed, visible, decisive leadership was key to shaping effective responses. To institutionalize this, casinos should establish permanent Strategic Decision-Making Groups, guided by the principles of ISO 22361. Additionally, organizations must shift away from relying solely on technical manuals. A strong crisis planning culture involves immersive scenario training incorporating emotional labor, symbolic gestures, and morally grounded decision making. Crises C and D demonstrate that emotionally intelligent leadership can stabilize environments after traumatic events.

Culture itself must be operationalized. The rituals and storytelling practices observed in Crisis D highlight how organizational culture can be a powerful tool. Casinos should integrate value-based storytelling into everyday operations to promote preparedness and emotional unity. Equally important is the development of stakeholder communication protocols. The failures observed in Crises B underscore the reputational risks of inadequate or delayed communication. Proactive, transparent communication systems spanning multiple platforms must be established well before any crisis.

Finally, casinos must build continuous learning systems. The postcrisis evolutions seen in Crises A and D illustrate how short-term responses can become long-term improvements. Institutions should conduct regular learning reviews, facilitate anonymous feedback, and run iterative crisis drills. Together, these practices foster a resilient, responsive organization. These recommendations ensure a strong crises management culture, and an ethically driven crisis management model. A model that prepares for the next disruption and actively learns from the last.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand on the themes identified in this study to develop a theory of crisis resilience specific to the casino and broader hospitality sectors. First, more longitudinal studies could

track how crisis responses evolve within the same organization, allowing scholars to better understand postcrisis sustainability.

Second, quantitative studies that measure the correlation between leadership strategies and organizational performance metrics postcrisis could add valuable empirical weight to qualitative insights. Survey-based studies could also gauge employee perceptions of crisis preparedness across different casino tiers (e.g., front-of-house, back-of-house, executive).

Third, comparative international research would shed light on cultural factors influencing crisis management approaches. The applicability of ISO 22361 in non-Western contexts remains underexplored and warrants localized adaptation frameworks.

Fourth, future research might explore digital transformation as a resilience tool. From CRM systems to AI-driven early warning systems, there is potential for integrating technology with crisis response strategies.

Lastly, deeper psychological studies on burnout, psychological injury, and post-traumatic stress among frontline and executive casino staff could improve trauma leadership models. With increasing exposure to mass trauma and long-term stress, casino workers represent a unique population for organizational psychology research.

Future research should translate these findings into predictive models, scalable interventions, and tailored educational programs that help institutionalize crisis resilience across the global gaming industry.

8. Conclusion

This study explored the crisis management strategies of four casino operators facing drastically different yet equally disruptive events. Using a qualitative research design grounded in thematic analysis and aligned with ISO 22361, the study revealed cross-cutting leadership practices, communication challenges, and adaptive strategies. It showed that strategic crisis management is not only about processes, but also about people, culture, and ethics.

The findings validate ISO 22361's principles while exposing areas for practical improvement. The study's contribution is in two parts. First, it enriches academic understanding of strategic crisis response and offers real-world applications for the casino sector. Second, it reinforces that resilience is not only transactional, but from a transitional leadership culture, ethically led, and a continuously learning mindset.

This study bridges theory and practice by analyzing real events through the lens of executive leadership and ISO compliance. It offers a roadmap for casino operators to elevate their crisis management capabilities. Turning disruption into improvement and ensuring that preparedness and resilience are defining traits of the modern casino.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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