



*CRISIS MANAGEMENT AS A TOOL TO
AFFECT AN ECONOMIC DOWNFALL*

Capstone Dissertation



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Abstract

This comparative study will focus on the ‘property crash’ of 2008 and the coronavirus pandemic. The property crash was the cause of the major recession in Ireland between 2008 and 2012, leaving the hospitality industry in Ireland in a disastrous state. Similar to the effect that the coronavirus pandemic has had on the hospitality industry, making hotels in Ireland permanently closed for long periods of time. Which ultimately caused many hotels in Ireland being unable to reopen due to not having sufficient funds available to reopen. Comparisons can be made between the two periods of time as they have both affected hotels in Ireland in major ways.

The recession reduced the amount of tourism in Ireland and as Ireland was in recession Irish citizens saved their money instead of spending it as the Irish economy was struggling. While the forced closure of hotels due to the coronavirus pandemic in Ireland resulted in hotels being unable to operate for long periods of time and struggling to survive. The paper seeks to investigate how crisis management was used during these two significant periods of time in relation to hotels in Ireland, particularly the south Dublin and Wicklow region. By investigating a smaller area, it gave the author a more in-depth research and gave them the ability to extract the most from their interviews in providing the relevant data for the study. The study showcased that even in the literature review it was difficult to find any support that hotels in Ireland received during the ‘property crash’ as opposed to the mammoth support that hotels received during the coronavirus pandemic, such as grants and wage subsidy schemes. This gave hotels a greater opportunity to survive as opposed to during the ‘property crash’ which they were left to survive on their own.

Problems did arise in the study as there was very little research on supports the hotels received during the ‘property crash’ which made it challenging and also the research relied on the interview process to which this was put to the interviewee’s, this indicated that crisis management was not used effectively by the government during the property crash. Also, at the time of doing the interviews there were restrictions in place due to the continued effects of the coronavirus pandemic which made interview’s challenging. The interviews had to be done through a different medium such as email interviews, and over Microsoft teams as you could not meet up with people at the time.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The two biggest economic downfalls in Ireland up to now has been the property crash of 2008 and the recent and current coronavirus pandemic. These two significant events have caused major harm to the economy of Ireland and in particular the hospitality sector. The study will look at the impact that these two major events in Ireland's history have disrupted the hospitality industry and has had the industry on its knees at times. The research will look at how crisis management was used to help the hospitality industry to cope with the major economic downfall as a result of these events.

The intention of the study is to analyse two significant periods of economic downfall in Ireland in regard to how hotels in Ireland have dealt with the economic downfall in their sector. This will allow the author to answer the question in which the study will be formed around "*which major economic downfall was crisis management used more effectively, during the property crash of 2008 or during the coronavirus pandemic?*". The literature review will look at scholarly related articles and journals in relation to hotels during the two periods of times already discussed. The start of the Celtic tiger will be looked at it was one of the reasons as to why the property crash happened and looking at the coronavirus pandemic and the lasting consequences that it is having on the hospitality industry. While also investigating the impact, the government had on providing supports to Hotels in Ireland during the two periods and making a comparison.

One assumption that the author had at the beginning of the research was that hotels have been given numerous of supports from the government during the coronavirus pandemic, this may be because I might not have been old enough to be aware of the supports that were given to hotels in Ireland during the property crash, however we will find out during the duration of this comparative study.

The decision has been made to focus the study on hotels, as the hospitality sector is so big it wouldn't be sufficient to do the whole industry. By focusing on hotels, it will allow for more in-depth knowledge and give the author the ability to focus on one main key area of the hospitality industry. The research will also be refined to the south Dublin and Wicklow region to focus on a specific area. The research will look into medium and small hotels to gather extensive first-hand information on their own opinions during the interview process.

By using scholarly written research, I will find relevant theory on the two periods of time that are being studied to back up the research that is being done.

The interview questions can be located in the appendices and any other items that are referred to as “figure 1.1, 1.2” etc can all be located in the appendix section of this paper.

The hypothesis of this comparative study will be “crisis management was used effectively during the ‘property crash’ of 2008 by hotels in Ireland”. The study will either fail to reject this hypothesis or reject the hypothesis come the end of the research. There are also other aims of this research that will bring the whole study together, the other aims that will be investigated alongside the main proposal are what assistance did the government give hotels during the two periods of time, Where there any lessons that hotels and the government learned during the two periods of time, Was there any benefits of the economic downfall, and finally what could have been differently during the two periods of time (Ríain, S.Ó, 2014).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Pearson and Clair (1998) describe Crisis Management as “*a process by which a business or other organization deals with a sudden emergency situation*”. It is easy to suggest that if you have crisis management you can deal with any crisis or disaster if you follow the steps suggested in a timely manner. However, this is not the case, as every disaster and crisis are different in their own individual way. Research into crisis management plans shows there is often a large gap between what is planned and what happens in a disaster/ crisis in regard to the response. Thus, not all crisis management plans that the hotels put forward will work out, as they will have to improvise as they go through the crisis. It can work as a good guide for them during a crisis. If hotels had of identified a plan to follow prior to the downfall in 2008, they could have been better prepared to deal with the recession that followed from the property crash (Pearson and Clair, 1998).

2.1 History of the property crash in 2008

Donovan and Murphy (2013) identified the Celtic Tiger as a critical point in the Irish economy which showcased the rapid growth of the Irish economy from the late 1990’s to the early 2000’s. This was done through foreign direct investment mainly, due to our significant low corporation tax compared to other surrounding countries it made Ireland an attractive country for foreign companies to develop in. Also, tax incentives given by the government at the time gave developers the opportunity to build property, which they did. This would ultimately be the downfall as developers were building more houses than people were buying during this time (Donovan and Murphy, 2013).

According to John Fitzgerald (2014), In early 2000’s houses were being built at a rate of 100’000 houses a year, as opposed to 10’000 houses a year in 2014. This meant a large proportion of the economy was devoted to the construction and building industry. Which when the economy went bust a large amount of people were out of work which created pressure on the government as more expenditure through social welfare. The banks were also lending out far too much money without any proof of people being able to pay the money back. The article outlines how the rate of borrowing for the Irish government was around 5% on treasury bonds which was quite substantial and was a reason why the government’s fiscal response to aid the hospitality sector during this time was not the support which they

expected. The conclusion to draw from this is that in 2020 the treasury bonds interest in comparison is around 1% which will mean that it will be more feasible for the government to borrow which will be a lesson for them to take and try to help the Hospitality industry in future economic downfalls like they are experiencing now in the pandemic (Fitzgerald, J, 2014).

2.2 How did the property crash in 2008 affect the hospitality industry?

As reported in the Irish Times newspaper in Ireland, it highlighted the extreme effects of the property crash in Ireland. Ireland went into a severe recession which resulted in a decline in hotels profits by 25% in 2008 compared to the previous year in 2007. At this time Hotels in Ireland had its worst occupancy levels for 15 years, due to the decrease in demand. This period would have been extremely difficult for hotels, as they would have to come up with a plan to attract customers, while still trying to keep their operating costs low and operate at a profit (Carroll, 2009).

The figures above were discovered through an industry survey that was conducted to find out real data on the state of hotels during the property crash by the Irish hotels federation to gauge the impact the property crash was having on hotels. The survey was sent out to all hotels in the country to make a fair evaluation on what they were experiencing and looking at what difficulties each of them was having. This is the approach that the investigator took to try and gather the relevant information on how Hotels were doing during this period, while also discovering the impact of the economic downfall was having. This survey would have been done through sending it around to hotels all over the country to evaluate the impact that the current economic conditions were having on them. The survey showed that hotels that had been opened in the last 5 years due to the surge in property investment would be the first to close. Which would result in approximately 3000 job losses. Already many of the hotels that took part in the survey at the time showed that they had already reduced their staff to minimise their expenses.

2.3 What defines crisis management?

Crisis management was further looked into after World War II after extensive research into crisis studies, as people began to further investigate how to define a crisis. The studies which were of particular interest when crisis management was being discovered was behavioural science and disaster response. These areas of study explain how people behave, while in connection with an individual's response to a disaster to see how they react. Tony Jaques

(2009) commented that crisis has become an overused word. Which has become a burden with a variety of different meanings with a lot of them being imprecise, with the term crisis being thrown around a lot, Jaques believes that the term is being thrown around too loosely which causes confusion over its meaning. Many other scholars have described this term as being overused, as many saying that crisis has different meanings depending on the disciplinary background which it is set. This has caused a debate between scholars, regarding the meaning of what warrants being described as a crisis/ disaster. As scholars can't agree on a definite term for what should be described as a crisis/ disaster, there is no collective acceptance of the precise meaning of the term (Jaques, T, 2009).

The definition of crisis management can vary from country to country , and organisation to organisation due to the level of disaster in each situation that an organisation will encounter. Cultural dimensions and legal aspects of each country will need to be analysed before deciding on an appropriate action plan. Crisis derives from the Greek word “*Krisis*” which the English translation would be “choice” or “decision”. There is no one single solution to a crisis as “decision” and “choice” are involved, this will call for a trade-off between critical options and acting accordingly, strategic plans will be helpful in this instance. There is a right and wrong way of handling a crisis, therefore the handling process must be planned, to prevent speculation from individuals and other rivals spotting a potential weakness in the organisation. The ability of management to be flexible and the reliability of information are enhancing factors for crisis management. An organisation will need to gain trust in crisis situations, while having a well thought out and effective crisis management plan while keeping good public and community relations to support the organisations while it is in a crisis. An organisation should identify goals and objectives as these are essential for an organisation to be able to strive for something in a time of crisis. Identifying critical objectives with time allocations are vital in accomplishing management objectives while also giving the organisation a moral boost (Khodarahmi, 2009).

2.4 The benefits of a crisis management plan

Oh Haemoon (2009) describes communication as an integral part of managing a negative impact on an organization/ business. Crisis communication is described as critical in any crisis as there needs to be clear communication in a time of need. Crises leave a feeling of anxiety and uncertainty among an organization's members of staff. This can lead to negative rumours spreading within an organisation which could cause conflict. It's essential for an

organization to have an efficient method of producing clear and concrete information to its members of staff to ease their worries about the crisis. A method of doing this would be to have a PR strategy in place that can inform the members of staff in a timely manner of the situation at hand in all departments of the business (Haemoon, O, 2009).

As Haemoon discussed staff feel anxiety and stress during times of crisis, therefore if an organisation has a crisis management plan it can help them to ease their employee's anxiety and stress. Bilć and Pivčevic and Čevra (2017), discusses a five-stage crisis management plan, which will be adopted to suit the hospitality industry. They discuss how each pilar is important but preparation and ability for damage limitation is crucial. The plan will involve a five-stage framework to follow which will be outlined below,

1. Signal detection- This involves noticing signs in the economy which suggests that it is contracting when sales begin to decrease.
2. Preparation/ Prevention- The hotel will have to prepare to lower its operating costs to try preventing the hotel going into financial difficulty while revenue coming in is low.
3. Containment/ Damage limitation- This stage involves trying to minimise the amount of expenses the hotel will have during this period and holding onto what they have for as long as possible.
4. Recovery- Optimism begins as the economy seems to be growing once again after the contraction, and the Hotel begins to operate to a respectful level again.
5. Learning- The final stage looks back to what was learned through this crisis and what could have been done differently (Bilić et al, 2017).

These five stages can be implemented by the hotels using crisis management to determine what steps they should take and assign tasks to individuals for each stage of the process to implement to curb the economic downfall.

Racherla and Hu (2009) look at hotels in the hospitality sector which have numerous of stakeholders and when dealing with a crisis there needs to be a cooperative approach. This will involve them all coming together and working together and not fighting against one another. A crisis is a time when the organisation needs a leader that must take control and take everyone's input on board and decide on the best approach for the situation that they are in, which everyone must follow. This is important as during a time of crisis there needs to be a collective approach to have the best chance to succeed, they may devise a plan to help the business survive. Based on these findings it would be suitable for hotels to appoint a leader

who will communicate all decisions with its staff around the plans and processes when dealing with a crisis. If anyone has any questions or concerns, they should go to this person as this will leave less room for misinterpretation and miscommunication (Racherla and Hu, 2009).

2.5 Effects of the coronavirus pandemic on hotels in Ireland

On the 15th of March, the government instructed that all bars and pubs had to close until the 29th of March depending on further instruction, leaving thousands of people in the hospitality sector out of work. On the 27th of March, the government instructed that all non-essential businesses to close, which included hotels. The hospitality sector could reopen on the 29th of June, leaving many hotels in vulnerable situations as they struggle to keep their business eligible to reopen with months of forced closure due to the pandemic and no income. The start-up costs for hotels are extreme with food and beverages costing the most with the uncertainty of clientele because of the effect the pandemic is having on peoples comforts of leaving their home due to the deadly virus. Especially for hotels, as some hotels may only specialise in weddings and have very few guests apart from ones attending weddings. This had major implications for the hospitality industry as some businesses could not fund their reopening so had to wait a prolonged period of time before being able to reopen. Many of the hotels which hold weddings had to postpone the weddings as there was a limit on the amount being able to attend when the hospitality industry was able to reopen. As the numbers were quite small on how many were allowed to attend a wedding it put people off having them with only a select few allowed to attend (Beirne et al, 2020).

The government introduced a grant from between €2,000 to €10,000 to help with the start-up costs for businesses who needed help to restart their business after the initial lockdown. Due to the financial implications that some organisations found themselves in because of the pandemic and the financial issues which they faced of being closed for a long period of time. This will help with the loss of income due to the limit on the amount of people allowed into a business at one time, and particularly a limit on the time people can drink alcoholic beverages of 1 hour and 45 minutes. While they also must have a substantial meal with their drink. There was also a temporary wage subsidy that will pay up to 85% of staffs salaries which will free up cash for the business to spend on other expenses (RTE, 2020).

Anne- Marie Walsh (2020) outlines how hotels have described the difficulty of trying to get staff for the festive period as they have either secured more secure jobs in supermarkets or do

not see the point of coming off the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) for a few weeks employment. The PUP has worked out very well for some part time staff as they are getting more money on the PUP payment than what they got before when they had part time jobs. This is a reason why some people do not feel the need to go back to work for a few weeks for less money than what they are on now (Walsh, A.M, 2020).

2.6 Government introducing people back to work

Roche, Teague, Coughlan and Fahy (2011) discuss how the government in Ireland have tried to re- introduce people back into work after coming out of the economic crash in 2008. They did this by providing training schemes to get the recently unemployed back into work, this may be in another sector which they would have needed training for. This scheme was incorporated into their social welfare payment therefore people did not need to pay a substantial amount for this kind of training. This was done through the Solas programme, it was a successful bit of innovation from the government as it allowed people who are unemployed to get back into work (Roche, et al, 2011).

This benefitted the government as in time it would help get people off the social welfare payment which would lower their costs. This type of scheme could be used within the hospitality sector as hotels could re- train staff during an economic downfall. As when they open back up the staff will have more knowledge about their work and be able to perform to a higher standard to what they were performing to before the downfall which will draw the customers into the premises. This will in return improve the reputation and profits of the organization.

The government also introduced a wage subsidy scheme which helped hotels in Ireland when they did reopen as they only had to pay a small percentage of their employee's wages for a period of time as the government would pay majority. This lightened the burden on hotels across the country as they could focus their expenditure on other areas, while also minimising their expenditure on staff's wages.

Chapter 3

Research Question and Hypothesis

The study will evaluate the following research question “Was crisis management used more effectively during the economic downfall in 2008 due to the ‘crash’ or the economic downfall due to the coronavirus pandemic?” This question will form the basis of where the study will centre around throughout this project and be evaluated on from there. Crisis management is vital when it comes to withstanding an economic downfall. As there will be many factors which will need to be dealt with to be able to survive. Especially in the Hospitality industry where there is numerous of competitors. The question will be aimed towards hotels and their experience of using crisis management throughout the two significant periods of economic downfall. In regards to the property crash in 2008 and the coronavirus pandemic. These are two significant periods in Irish time and also globally, therefore it will be intriguing to find the difference in the level of support that hotels got throughout this time. While also evaluating how they implemented crisis management (Aslam and Emmanuel, 2010).

There are a number of factors that could contribute to the supports that the government have decided on giving hotels during these two periods of time. These factors will be looked at throughout this research paper with the aim as to finding the reasons as to why some supports weren’t as good as others.

Chapter 4

Methodology

The study focuses on the hospitality industry, in particular hotels in the south Dublin and Wicklow region, as this will allow the author to have a smaller scope when doing the research. The research question “Which major economic downfall was crisis management used more effectively, in hotels in Ireland” will be analysed throughout to investigate whether the economic downfall of the ‘property crash’ or the coronavirus pandemic used crisis management more effectively. The null hypothesis states that crisis management was used effectively during the ‘crash’ of 2008 in comparison to the economic downfall from the coronavirus pandemic. Where the alternate hypothesis will be that crisis management was used more effectively during the coronavirus pandemic as opposed to the ‘crash’ in 2008.

4.1 Assumptions of the study

The author has made three assumptions regarding the topic chosen the first being that the government could have helped the hospitality industry during the economic downfall in 2008. As there is minimal amount of information available about the support the hospitality industry was given from the government during the economic downfall. The second assumption was that it took hotels by surprise the ‘crash’ in 2008, as there was still a lot of money being invested into new builds such as property development prior to the ‘crash’. The final assumption of the study is that based off the information that was available hotels have received greater support during the coronavirus pandemic than during the ‘property crash’ in 2008. Another aspect to consider is that communication will be a big factor on minimising the impact of an economic downfall particularly in hotels as some hotels are large organisation with many stakeholders. By having a large company, it will mean many people will have opinions on the right method to curve an economic downfall.

Haemoon (2009) discussed how communication is an integral process of a crisis management plan for the Hospitality industry in dealing within a crisis. This assumption will be important for a business to have an effective line of communication to its staff in a time of crisis to ensure everyone is following the same steps to do their most to limit the expenses that a business will have in a time of crisis to give them the best possible chance of survival. Walsh (2020) makes the assumption that hotels in the hospitality industry would find it difficult to attract staff back to work as the PUP was actually giving them more income than what they

were originally on when they were working, this assumption shows that people are better off on the PUP than going back to work.

4.2 Philosophical Assumptions

The author will draw on the philosophical assumptions such as Ontological and Epistemological during this research. This will involve the author bringing in real data to enhance the evidence that supports the hypothesis. The author will first look at Ontological assumption and then move onto Epistemological assumption and evaluate how these assumptions fit into the study that is being developed. Ontology of the hospitality industry is how people understand the existence of actions, theories, concepts and words related to the Hospitality industry. Ontology seen in some texts is describing the ‘nature of reality’, Dredge et al, (2014) discuss how Franklin (2008) believed that the Hospitality academics do themselves an injustice of accepting an Ontology of hospitality which puts them at the margin of society. As hospitality textbooks start off with phrases such as “*hospitality is one of the fastest growing industries in the world*”, this is supposed to give credit to the topic, however it actually diminishes its credibility, it creates a reality where the matter is not at the centre rather it’s just an ‘industry’, not even the biggest one just a growing one. As a result of this textbooks have created a reality in which the being of hospitality is apologized for and downgraded to matters which people believe to be of higher importance such as income, employment or whatever it is being compared too. Franklin suggests that in fact Hospitality should be placed in the centre of the discussion as opposed to being a subordinate, as hospitality is a formidable socio- technical foundation. A different Ontology is discovered as other features of society are brought to light through their connection to the hospitality industry, not the hospitality industries connection to them (Dredge et al, 2014).

Epistemology can be traced to the Greek word “*epistēmē*” which means knowledge, while the Greek word “*epistanai*” means to understand. Epistemology looks at how knowledge is created in people’s minds and how its accepted in society. People refer to knowledge and truth as results of processes of negotiation carried out between people who are considered to be experts in that field of study. These are the knowledge and truths that people accept as it is backed up by people who are experts in that area. Items such as new discoveries, the development of old information are all ideas that are backed up by data or logic by these experts to come to a ‘correct’ conclusion about a matter. New interpretations of development in hospitality industries, showcase that different researchers have different perceptions of

reality in many different ways and by offering an explanation of their theory behind this reality is the creation of new knowledge (Brotherton, 2015).

Epistemology applies to the authors study as the knowledge that is given to people about the two significant events that are being looked into in this study are researched by scholars who are experts in this field of study. By these scholars doing research into these two events, it will give credit to their opinions which people will value as it is their area of speciality. The discussions about the events will be taken as factual knowledge given the scholars research on it. These scholars will have surveyed hotels in order to find data and they will analyse the data and interpret results to back up their views on the events. They are using knowledge available to them on the hospitality sector during the two periods to find results, this will be vital in this study as data will need to be collected to back up the authors views on the two events.

Academics will use a method such as a peer review that allows other experts to examine their theories to see if they reach an acceptable level from their peers. This will be incorporated into this study as interviews will be used to evaluate the theories that were found during the study, and the results of the interviews will be analysed, and a conclusion will be drawn to examine whether the discussions that took place were at an acceptable level which will ultimately bring the research to a conclusion.

Epistemology contains knowledge that is created from the description of previously accepted theories along with models of ‘real life’ cases that will improve a stakeholder’s practice. Practical applications will allow for Hospitality epistemology to further enhance as a result of applying these applications. An example of this would be how the Hospitality industry reacted to the economic downfall of the ‘crash’ in 2008 as opposed to how they reacted to the economic downfall due to the coronavirus pandemic. Analysing how the practical component such as the business in this case are the hotels across Ireland, changed their practices in some way and how these new ways of acting has led them to a better understanding of a functioning environment. Through the struggles of the ‘crash’ in 2008 Hotels across Ireland could have acted in a new manner during the next economic downfall caused by the coronavirus pandemic from their analysis of the last economic crash to gain a better understanding of a good functioning environment and what is needed to do so.

4.3 Research Paradigm

Research paradigm was defined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as a basic belief system that will guide the researcher not just in their choices but also of their ontology and epistemology ways. Paradigms will join a set of beliefs that set out a perspective that reflect a position in the world, similar to the interpretivism approach where researchers use knowledge and theory available to them to highlight their perspective on a position. This work is interpretivist in nature as people will have varying opinions on the two economic downfalls depending on the data that is collected. The data that is collected will be interpreted to come to a conclusion that will benefit the study and help the author come to a conclusive end to the research. The study into the hospitality industry during the timeframe already highlighted, can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on how the researcher will use the information available to them. Donovan and Murphy (2013) declared that the Celtic tiger was a critical point in the Irish economy where it further pushed Ireland's economic growth, however some authors have declared that this time was actually Irelands downfall, and their ignorance of the situation was their ultimate downfall which led to the significant period of recession. This example highlights how different people can have different perspectives on the same information, which is being provided, it's about how people will interpret the information. Some authors will interpret information to suit their own beliefs and theories while others will interpret information to try and bring a collective consensus to the situation with the factual information which they have. The research that will be displayed throughout will take into account all the factual information regarding the hospitality industry during the two periods of economic downfall and interpret the information to come to a conclusion on the proposed question. The view of the author on the research is that of a subjective view, as the research is constructed in a way that attempts to portray a different reality to what happened in these two significant events. The research will be interpretive in nature as many scholars have their own interpretations of the events that unfolded and using their own subjective view on the research to come to a conclusion.

The research design will investigate a qualitative approach to the study of the Hospitality industry. A qualitative approach will be chosen as real-life events are being studied to help in the development of a comparative study of the economic crash in 2008 and the coronavirus pandemic that has disrupted the Hospitality industry. The qualitative approach is suitable as the study will investigate real life events that have happened, with the qualitative approach

personal experience of key individuals will be invaluable as they will have experienced the crises first-hand and how they dealt with it (Duberley et al, 2012).

4.4 Research Design

Interviews will be conducted as they will be an ideal situation to grasp the full experience first-hand from the interviewee's regarding the events that took place in the Hospitality industry during these crises. The interview process would be like a traditional interview if restrictions would allow it, however different mediums will have to be found to complete the interview process. Interviewee's who have the experience in working in hotels during these two periods of crisis will be interviewed, as they can give their first-hand experience of how it was dealt with and what was done differently between the two periods of crisis. A variety of academic material will be analysed and interpreted regarding the two significant periods of economic downfall in Ireland in the hospitality industry which will look at their perspective of the events and critique their findings (Dodgson, J.E, 2017).

4.5 Interview Process

The data will be collected through multiple interviews which will give the relevant real data in regard to the study of the hospitality industry. Interviews were selected as it will give real life data of what people experienced through two significant periods of Irish history, and how they feel how well they were supported during this time.

The information that the author will look to gather through these interviews are as follows; A background to the interviewee's history in the hospitality industry to recognise the experience they have in it to prove their reputable information being provided. Identify their understanding of a crisis management plan and their opinion on how essential they believe a crisis management plan to be. Investigate the impact in which the current coronavirus pandemic has had on their business. What safety precautions have they integrated for their staff and customers during this time. Look into the difficulty in retaining their staff during this time, explore the support they have received and if they feel it is adequate enough. Look into which economic downfall they were supported better for, and do the interviewee's believe that the government have learned from the previous economic downfall to better combat the current economic downfall.

The data that will be collected through the interview process will support the study as it will bring evidence from people who are in the industry that have faced the crisis of the

coronavirus pandemic. This first-hand information data will be vital for the study as it will bring people's opinions on how well they were supported and how challenging this period of time is for them. While also highlighting the interviewee's experience in the hospitality industry it will bring credit to their opinion as their experience in the industry through this time will prove vital to the study. The interviews will look to link with the literature that has already been reviewed and bring a concise conclusion on the discussions that took place in the literature review. An example of this was the PUP scheme and whether or not the interviewee's have benefited or suffered because of this scheme in terms of retaining or attracting new staff.

The interview questions will be structured as they will have to be done through different mediums as opposed to the traditional face to face interviews as a result of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic that is happening. This will cause some difficulty as the interviewer won't be able to look at the interviewee's body language while they are answering the questions that are being put to them and seeing their different reactions to each question. While also looking at their expressions when answering questions to pick on any different motions that they make when answering some questions. It could take more time to conduct these interviews through different mediums now as there is some set up involved when conducting an interview through zoom as there will need to be a set up period as opposed to the traditional face to face ones where you show up and get straight into it. This will put more time onto the interviewee which they may not have available to them considering their roles and their day jobs to be taking too much time out. Which could reflect in their responses being rushed or blunt due to the time constraints. The structured approach to the interview will allow the researcher to evaluate the response to each question to gather an extensive analysis of the findings in the questions proposed to the interviewee. As the structured approach will ensure that each question is asked in the same order as it will allow each interview to flow in the exact same way as all the other interviews will. This is the most appropriate type of interview given the current circumstances that the world is in.

A phased approach will be used as it will help the author to build on the information that is collected from the study. This will aid the author in coming to the relevant conclusion on whether crisis management was used effectively during an economic downfall.

Purposeful sampling was the type of sampling that was selected when aiming to identify individuals to participate in the interview process. This sampling was chosen as the author

wanted experienced people in the hotel sector who could contribute their own experiences to the downfalls in the interview. This would provide critical and accurate information as these individuals went through both downfalls and would have first-hand experience for both of them. This would mean that the information that they would provide will be valuable to the study.

4.6 Data Analysis

The data will be analysed through a thematic approach, where transcripts of the interviews will be analysed to dissect the information that was obtained through the process. Professor Maria Reille B. Kalacas (2010) described data analysis as a process of asking questions such as “*what had happened?*” by asking this type of question in the study it is exploring the outcome of the events which have previously happened. This will be done as discussed above through open ended interview questions where the interviewee will give their version of the events that happened. The data that will be collected through these interviews will bring out themes that will be analysed and interpreted which will then be compared to investigate if the interviews all had a similar or different version of events. The process of organising the data collected into themes will help the author to organize and interpret the results of the interviews which will lead to a successful investigation into the study of the hospitality industry during the two periods of time that are being looked at in the study. By identifying the themes in the data, it will bring an efficient approach to analysing the data which will be vital. The themes that have been discovered in the data that was collected through the interview process are understanding of crisis management, evaluating importance of crisis management, impact of coronavirus pandemic, safety plan and retention of staff, difficulty of attracting staff due to PUP, support received from government, support comparison between property crash and coronavirus pandemic, reaction to coronavirus pandemic vs property crash, and governments learning experience.

4.7 Limitations to the study

There were many limitations to the study throughout the research time. Trying to conduct a study throughout the coronavirus pandemic proved challenging as hotels were closed for prolonged periods of time. Which proved challenging trying to get in contact with people associated with hotels to conduct interviews with them. While also social distancing prevented normal face to face interviews from taking place, therefore they had to be done through different mediums such as zoom, or Microsoft teams or other alternatives. This

limited the interview process as you would typically be able to note a person's body language when answering interview questions, however with the situation the world was in it was not possible to do the traditional interviews. There was also limited information on the support that hotels got during the property crash of 2008 which made it challenging to compare off previous literature. Therefore, the author had to rely on the interviewee's experience during this time for the information on the support that they were given.

Chapter 5

Analysis and Findings

The interviews were conducted over a medium such as Microsoft teams as the current pandemic restrictions prevented the typical face to face interview process. This may have altered some results slightly as the author wouldn't have been able to read the body language of the interviewee as they were answering the questions. Below will showcase the results of the interviews and the findings that were made during the interview process relating to crisis management in regard to the hospitality management during the two significant periods of economic downfall in Ireland. The analysis and findings aim to discover how hotels in Ireland used crisis management when dealing with the economic downfalls. While also discovering whether they believe they got more assistance from the government in the economic downfall due to the coronavirus pandemic or the 'property crash' in 2008.

This section will evaluate the results of the interviews that were conducted while looking into the findings from the interviews that were obtained. The findings from the interviews will aim to answer the main proposed question of the study "Which economic downfall were hotels in Ireland supported most by, the coronavirus pandemic or the economic property crash of 2008" while also looking at answering other questions which will help determine how crisis management was used and do hotels believe that the government have learned from previous economic downfalls, in connection with the support that they give the hospitality sector.

Interview findings and analysis

All the interviews started off with the simple question of identifying each participants experience in the hospitality industry to evaluate their credentials of discussing the topic. Each of the individuals that were interviewed had at least 10-15 years of experience in the hospitality industry. By the interviewees having this much experience in the hospitality sector they will have experienced many ups and downs and their use of crisis management will have been vital in keeping the hotel's operating successfully during this time.

5.1 Understanding of crisis management

The next question was asking about their opinions on a crisis management plan, all the interviewees had the same opinion that it was a safety plan in case of an emergency. Most notably two interviewees discussed how it would be enacted if there was a situation that

occurred, and it began to affect the profitability of the hotel or the inability for the hotel to operate at its highest potential. They believed that this crisis management plan would therefore be used to try and prevent this and get the hotel back up to its full working capacity “*to respond to any situation that can affect the profitability, ability to operate or to prevent reputational damage to a company*”. This is a direct quote from the transcript of one of the interviews when they were describing a crisis management plan. As discussed in the literature review about a crisis management plan, it is used to try and prevent the impact of a sudden emergency that will affect a business in any capacity. The crisis management plan will have to be flexible as you can’t plan for every emergency, but you can come up with a generic plan that can be altered to help combat each emergency that the hotel could face. Each of the interviewee’s recognised this and they all agreed that a crisis management plan is only a mere template of what steps to follow in a time of crisis so that the hotel has a direction to go in and can change their approach depending on the severity of the crisis at hand. An example would be the two very different approaches that the crisis management plan would have had on the coronavirus pandemic and the economic property crash of 2008. One of this being the forced closure of hotels during the coronavirus pandemic as it didn’t matter what crisis management plan hotels had nothing could have prepared them to be forced to close permanently.

5.2 Evaluating importance of crisis management

The next stage of the interview was discussing the importance of the crisis management plan and if the interviewee’s deemed it to be an essential aspect of a business. The results were a resounding conclusive agreement that a crisis management plan is an essential aspect of a business. The interviewee’s all made particular reference to the two major economic downfalls of the coronavirus pandemic and the property crash when discussing their answers. “*Over my short career in the hospitality sector it had 2 major crises. The hospitality sector went through the recession and now the coronavirus pandemic. Businesses have suffered as a consequence. Without any crisis management plan some businesses had to close for good.*”

In particular one interviewee identified how crisis management can help mitigate any potential severe problems a hotel may have that could result in its permanent closure. By mitigating some issues, it can help save the hotel and prevent it from closing. This is the purpose of a crisis management plan, as it can prevent serious damage to the hotel if it is being used correctly.

5.3 Impact of coronavirus pandemic

The next topic on the interview was discussing the impact the current pandemic has had on their current Hotels. All the hotels had been closed for in excess of 10 months, with some not being able to open back up over the Christmas period. As they didn't believe that it was worth their while as they are mainly a weddings hotel and have very few residents other than for weddings. As weddings were at a minimum number of 25 people, majority of people had postponed their weddings to another date. Another interviewee had gone into detail about how their hotel had to let majority of their staff go, and that they were struggling to stay afloat and even had to let go of their general manager who participated in the interview. He had to find work elsewhere and even had to move into a different sector completely due to the hospitality sector being in a standstill with the current restrictions at the time. This shows the serious impact the coronavirus pandemic had on hotels across Ireland as they were forced to let go even their senior staff and not just the part time staff. Another interviewee had discussed how in their peak during the summer months would have over 50 staff on payroll, however at the time of the interview they had only 7 staff on payroll, with the rest either let go or found jobs elsewhere.

5.4 Safety plan and retention of staff

The interview then led into discussing how they kept their staff safe and following the guidelines during the coronavirus pandemic. They all ensured me that they followed each of the guidelines set out by the government step by step. With one interviewee even giving me some insight into how the government contacted them over a potential resident having the coronavirus, and due to the contact tracing sheet, the hotel was able to pinpoint the areas in which this resident was in the hotel, as there are different sheets for different areas such as the bar and restaurant. As the HSE wouldn't give out any details of the individual due to data protection the hotel was able to see who it was due to it being a quiet night and also the person told the HSE that they didn't have dinner in the hotel, yet the contact tracing sheet said otherwise. This allowed the hotel to notify their own staff to let them be aware that they could have had a coronavirus case in the hotel and to restrict their movements until they had the results of the resident. Which it turned out to be not positive, but this showed the necessary steps that the hotel has to take. An interviewee also discussed how when they send out confirmation letters, they also attach a booklet containing information on the coronavirus

and the precautions that must be taken when in the hotel to ensure everyone is doing their utmost to prevent the spread of the virus.

5.5 Difficulty of attracting staff due to PUP

The next topic up for discussion in the interviews was the difficulty in attracting staff back and the consequence of staff being able to get the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). All the interviewee's discussed how they had lost staff during the closure of their respective hotels as their staff had sought work in other industries e.g supermarkets and shops. The staff that they had that were on the PUP majority came back to work and some were more inclined to put off coming back to work as they were making more money on the PUP. One of the interviewee's suggested that the PUP should have been done on a percentage of people's average pay to try and prevent this type of situation happening in the future. The interviewees went on to discuss how they found it very difficult to attract new staff as there were numerous reasons why they believe this was the case the main one that majority of the interviewee's agreed on was that people were earning too much on the PUP payment and they didn't want to be earning less when they went back to work. Recently, the government have announced that they will be reducing the PUP payment for people in an effort to get people back into work and to prevent people from declining job opportunities to stay on the PUP.

5.6 Support from Government

The interviewees all agreed that they got sufficient support from the government in relation to start up grants in order to give a helping hand in getting their business back up and running. Although the interviewee that manages the bigger hotel out of the interviewee's thought that when they were interviewed believed that the start-up grant wasn't sufficient enough as they would have a lot more costs than some of the smaller hotels. Each of the interviewee's believed that the wage subsidy was a big help in actually keeping staff on during the closure of the hotels. As they could get them to be doing tidying up around the hotel and do some changes that they had long been waiting to do, and during their forced closure they could finally get around to doing them.

5.7 Support comparison between the two economic downfalls

The main reason for the research was to discuss the support that hotels got between the property crash in 2008 and the coronavirus pandemic. The question was put to the interviewees, and they all concluded that there has been a lot more support in the hospitality sector during the coronavirus pandemic than what there was during the property crash of 2008. One interviewee doesn't even recall their hotel getting any support back in the property crash from the government, however they said that the banks got majority of the support. Another interviewee gave off the impression that hotels in 2008 were left to 'sink or swim' as they were forced into a permanent closure or else struggling through the difficult period and hope to pull through the other side. As opposed to in the coronavirus pandemic where a lot more grants were available to hotels to help them to survive the economic downfall.

5.8 Reaction to Coronavirus Pandemic vs Property Crash

The second last topic was discussing whether the coronavirus pandemic was dealt with better than the economic downfall because of the property crash in 2008. All the interviewee's agreed that the government reacted swiftly in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and they got sufficient support. One of the interviewee's noted a special mention of the staycations that the government introduced to help people to go on holidays around Ireland to help improve the economy and to get people to spend money in the hotels and different industries across Ireland. All of the interviewee's feel that they had got neglected during the property crash which can be shown by their response to how they feel they were supported during the economic downfall of 2008.

5.9 Governments learning experience

The final question focused on the interviewee's final opinion on whether they believe that the government have learned from their past experiences of economic downfalls. This got a mixed response from the interviewee's, some were satisfied with the initial support that they got but still believed that more could have been done in regards to providing more support to the hotel industry. A lot of the interviewees were unhappy with how the government handled the first and second lockdown as they had shut the hospitality sector yet left the airports open with no restrictions on people coming in which ultimately was the cause of majority of the spread of the virus. They also believe that if the lockdowns had of been implemented properly with the closure of airports it would have helped the hospitality industry and hotels as they could have been able to open a lot faster and have less closures. One of the

interviewee's made particular reference to the Fine Gael government and said that they believe that they had learned from previous economic downfalls as when they imposed the first lockdown, they had the correct supports in place to help hotels to survive and communicated the message to hotels in a clear and concise manner. As opposed to the second lockdown which has been led by the Fianna fail government as they believe that the communication to hotels has been abysmal and there's been a lot of uncertainty because of this.

Overall, the interviews brought out some answers that were expected such as the fact that hospitality sector has received greater support during the coronavirus pandemic than during the property crash in 2008 when hotels were really suffering due to the economic downfall. As there was very limited information being provided online regarding the support that the hospitality sector got during that time, which indicated that there was not much support being given out to them. There were a few surprises that some of the interviewees didn't feel that the government had learned from their mistakes of past economic downfall in regards to their support to the hospitality industry. Overall, the interviews were very insightful and provided the knowledge and expertise to bring the research to a conclusive ending with answering the key topics that the research was built around.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Overall, the study into the property crash of 2008 on hotels and the coronavirus pandemics impact on hotels brought to light some interesting facts. From the research that was showcased in this study and off other scholar's articles on the property crash of 2008 crisis management wasn't used effectively enough during this time, particularly in the hospitality sector. As the analysis has shown there was a consensus among the participants that showed that each interviewee didn't feel that the government had not done enough to support the industry during the time of the property crash. This would show a lack of crisis management from both parties as the government could have dealt with the situation better in hindsight and hotels could have been better prepared to deal with a crisis such as the property crash with better planning and management for such a situation. I believe from the research conducted the economic downfall caught the hospitality sector off guard as the economy had been doing relatively well up until then and they had been naive to believe that it would continue to do well. This shows that there was insufficient crisis management used during the economic downfall, as once hotels could see the economy contracting, they could have used crisis management to minimise the effect that it was having on their business.

The economic downfall due to the coronavirus pandemic was handled much better as opposed to the property crash, the government had many more supports for hotels in the hospitality sector as opposed to when the property crash happened. Even the interviewees believe that it was handled a lot better in a crisis management regard than when the property crash happened. The government seemed to have learned from their mistakes as they reacted in a more efficient manner, while this could also be down to the fact that the economy was in a better position at the start of the pandemic than it was at during the property crash which gave them the ability to react faster and better. But nonetheless they still reacted and brought out generous supports to hotels such as the grants to help them restart after the lockdown period and the wage subsidy scheme where they would pay up to 85% of employee's wages if the business applied for the wage subsidy. This helped many hotels to keep their operating costs relatively low when they reopened to help them to maximise their own profits.

During the interview stage findings were made in regard to some interviewee's undecided if the government have learned from past economic downfall's as they believe that the government could still have done more to support the hospitality industry. They suggested

that the government should have implemented price floors on hotels across the country, as some hotels who have a better financial backing would have been able to decrease their prices more than a hotel who was struggling to stay open. By having this price floor, it would ensure that hotels could not go below a certain point which would help other hotels to survive as they wouldn't have to worry about being undercut if other hotels couldn't go below a certain point. Another interviewee also noted that the government could and should have done more at the beginning of the lockdown phase, by shutting all travel into the country from foreign travel by shutting the airports and ports. They believe that this would have decreased the amount of time spent in lockdown, which therefore would mean hotels wouldn't have been closed for as long as they were. However, looking back in hindsight its easy to suggest this but the government have to think about every sector and not just the hospitality sector. As if they had of closed the airports, the airline sector would have been struggling a lot more than what they have been due to being unable to travel freely for over a year now.

The view of the author after the conclusion of the study is that crisis management was used more effectively during the coronavirus pandemic compared to the property crash in 2008. This would mean that the author would reject the hypothesis as they believe that crisis management was not used effectively during the property crash and that it was better utilised during the coronavirus pandemic. There have been relevant findings during the study that would indicate this as well such as the limited amount of information from scholars on the supports given to hotels across Ireland during the property crash, and the fact that less hotels were forced to close permanently during the coronavirus pandemic as was the case with the property crash. It was shown in the study that supports were paramount during the coronavirus pandemic which helped hotels to survive during the lockdown period and the reopening when some hotels weren't that busy due to people being sceptical due to the coronavirus. The aims of the research have been answered throughout the study, the government have made many of supports to hotels which have been discussed during the study already, the positives that came out of the forced lockdown period for hotels is that as was discussed during some of the interview's some hotels could use the time to refurbish their hotel and do some work that they had been putting off due to being unwilling to close for a period of time. Another aim which was what could have been done differently, on the governments side what they could have done differently was shutting the airports or having

stricter restrictions on people entering the country at the beginning however as this was an extraordinary situation, they couldn't have predicted how deadly the virus was.

To conclude the comparative study after analysing the two significant events the research and study shows that the coronavirus has been dealt with in a better way than the property crash was. With more supports given to businesses, businesses using crisis management more effectively due to their experience of the past economic downfalls. As after the conclusion of one of the interview's the interviewee disclosed that they have been working with a local wellness spa to include spa treatments in consumers stay at the hotel to help bring in more clientele. Overall, the study has been successful as the assumption that the author had at the beginning has been proven true, as they believed that the coronavirus had been dealt with better than the property crash, which has proven to be true. The research is important as it highlights the contrast of supports that were given to hotels during two significant periods of economic downfall in Ireland. There was a big contrast as shown through the interview process of the varied supports than hotels were given in the property crash and the coronavirus pandemic. Previous literature also supports this theory as there is very little information available about supports during the property crash. This shows how the government could have done more to help hotels survive during the property crash as opposed to letting them try to survive on their own. This research is needed as it shows how the government could have improved on their approach to dealing with the property crash, the evidence shows that they have improved on their approach as the supports were much greater during the coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendations for improving this research are to interview some people close to government who could comment on the position they took when deciding on the supports for hotels during the property crash. This could provide rationale for their reasonings for the limited support that hotels got during that time. Another recommendation that could help further develop this research is to interview people whose hotels had to close during the property crash and the resulting effects of this. The resulting effects could be such as continuing to pay for repayments on the hotel even though it was closed down could lead to them being in serious debt. Future avenues that could be explored are comparing the supports that Irish hotels got during these two periods of time to other country's supports when they have went through similar challenging events. This would allow for a comparison to see how different or similar the supports were.

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Appendix

Figure 1.1 Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. Can you give a brief background on your experience in the Hospitality Industry?
2. What is your understanding of a crisis management plan?
3. Do you believe a crisis management plan is essential to a business? If yes or no, explain?
4. What kind of impact has the current pandemic had on your business?
5. How have you ensured the safety of your staff and customers during the pandemic?
6. Have you found it difficult to attract staff back to work during the pandemic after the first lockdown when they were able to get the PUP?
7. What support has the government given your business? Do you feel that this is enough? If not, what could they do better?
8. Looking back to the property crash of 2008 when we were in another economic downfall, do you believe that there was more support now or back then for the hospitality industry?
9. Do you believe that the economic downfall due to the pandemic has been dealt better with than the economic downfall due to the property crash in 2008 in regard to the hospitality industry? E.g Staycation
10. Finally, do you believe that the government have learned from past economic downfalls when dealing with the current economic downfall?