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Leader Sensemaking from Compound Crisis Signals to Strategic Action in Indonesia

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Abstract

Background: Global polycrisis, defined as the simultaneous and interdependent occurrence of pandemic disruption, geopolitical instability, economic pressure, and institutional uncertainty, reveals a process gap in strategic management regarding how leaders transform ambiguous signals into collective strategic action. This issue is relevant in Indonesia, where 64.2 million MSMEs operate within founder-centric, relational, and institutionally complex environments.

Objective: This study aims to develop the Crisis Sensemaking-to-Strategy (CSS) Model as a theoretical framework explaining how leaders navigate polycrisis by transforming complex signals into strategic action while considering Indonesian contextual factors.

Methods: An integrative theory-building synthesis was conducted by combining sensemaking, upper echelons, sensegiving, organizational improvisation, and institutional-context perspectives. The study identifies stage mechanisms, contextual modifiers, and future empirical pathways.

Results: The CSS Model proposes four stages: Compound Signal Appraisal, Prospective Strategic Interpretation, Credibility-Preserving Sensegiving, and Legitimized Improvisational Execution. It generates six propositions and eight PLS-SEM hypotheses for future empirical testing.

Conclusion: The CSS Model contributes a process-based explanation connecting leader sensemaking to strategic action under polycrisis conditions. Its contribution is theoretical integration and mechanism specification, providing a roadmap for future validation rather than established empirical evidence.

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INTRODUCTION

Between March 2020 and the close of 2025, organizational leaders across Southeast Asia faced overlapping disruptions involving pandemic effects, geopolitical instability, monetary tightening, supply-chain disturbance, and regulatory uncertainty. These disruptions interacted rather than occurring as isolated events. The resulting condition can be understood as a polycrisis: multiple high-magnitude disruptions that are simultaneously active and mutually reinforcing, making single-crisis analytical frames less adequate for explaining strategic response (Bundy et al., 2017; Tooze, 2022).

Existing crisis and resilience research explains important organizational responses, resources, and strategy types (Duchek, 2020; Kumari et al., 2025; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Wenzel et al., 2020). However, those contributions are less explicit about the leader-level cognitive and social sequence that connects ambiguous, interdependent signals to collective strategic commitment. This limitation is important because structural resilience resources do not by themselves explain how a leader notices compound signals, interprets their implications,

communicates a credible account, and authorizes coordinated action. The interpretation-to-action mechanism—the cognitive and social journey from sensing polycrisis to mobilizing organizational strategy—therefore remains underspecified.

In Indonesia, the gap has practical significance because national statistics report approximately 64.2 million micro, small, and medium enterprises (UMKM), which contribute substantially to GDP and employment (Khasanah, 2023; M, 2021; Statistik, 2023). Many UMKM are founder-managed, concentrating strategic interpretation and action in a small leadership core. Panggabean (2020) and Khasanah (2023) also documented severe revenue disruption among UMKM during the pandemic. These conditions motivate closer attention to leader cognition and relational mobilization, while the article treats the reported figures as contextual evidence rather than proof that cognition alone explains divergent recovery trajectories.

Three features of the Indonesian organizational environment modify crisis leadership mechanisms in ways that existing predominantly Western, large-corporation-based theory does not address. First, decision authority in Indonesian UMKM is concentrated in founder-owners, intensifying the upper echelons effect Hambrick & Mason (1984) and Ma et al. (2022) to a degree theoretically distinctive from distributed TMT organizations. Second, Indonesian organizations operate within dense relational networks that serve as primary channels for environmental sensing and organizational mobilization, in ways that formal authority-based sensegiving frameworks do not capture (Hadiwidjaja et al., 2023; Panggabean & Prasetio, 2022). Third, Indonesia's regulatory environment creates what Khanna and Palepu (1997) and Ediagbonya and Tioluwani (2023) term institutional voids, adding a fourth signal stream (regulatory uncertainty) to the compound crisis signals that Indonesian leaders must simultaneously appraise, a feature absent from established crisis leadership models.

Upper Echelons Theory (UET; Hambrick and Mason (1984), Hambrick (2007) and Ma et al. (2022)) links strategic outcomes to senior leaders' cognitive bases but leaves the underlying cognitive sequence relatively open. Sensemaking theory Weick (1995), Kundra & Dwivedi (2023) and Maitlis and Christianson (2014) explains meaning construction from ambiguous stimuli, whereas sensegiving research specifies how interpretations are communicated to others (de Metz et al., 2024; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) . Organizational improvisation research then helps explain action under time pressure and incomplete information. The unresolved problem is therefore processual: how does an individual leader move from compound signal appraisal to a shared interpretation and then to legitimized strategic action?

This article develops the Crisis Sensemaking-to-Strategy (CSS) Model, a four-stage process framework grounded in Weick (1988, 1995) and Kundra and Dwivedi (2023) enacted sensemaking theory, UET (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Ma et al., 2022) , Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) sensegiving framework, and organizational improvisation research (Macpherson et al., 2022; Moorman & Miner, 1998). The CSS Model positions Indonesia not as a peripheral illustration but as a theoretical modifier, a context whose institutional, relational, and resource characteristics change the predicted mechanisms at each stage, generating Indonesian-specific propositions and hypotheses. Critically, the model is developed as a dual-pathway framework supporting both Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for qualitative exploration and PLS-SEM for quantitative structural testing, providing a complete empirical research architecture for future investigation.

The article makes four related contributions. First, it extends sensemaking toward prospective crisis interpretation by specifying how leaders construct forward-looking strategic meaning from still-unfolding signals rather than merely anticipating a single known event. Second, it provides a microfoundational process account connecting leader cognition to organizational outcomes within Upper Echelons Theory. Third, it specifies how Indonesian contextual features may modify sensegiving and improvisational execution, creating testable contextual propositions. Fourth, it translates the conceptual model into an empirical roadmap while keeping the theory-building contribution distinct from the future methods used to test it.

METHOD

This article employed an integrative theoretical synthesis for theory building (Kiyak & Grigoliene, 2023; MacInnis, 2011; Torraco, 2005) . The objective was not to estimate empirical effects or provide a systematic review count, but to combine established theoretical mechanisms

into a coherent process model. The synthesis was therefore evaluated based on conceptual fit, mechanism complementarity, internal consistency, explanatory scope, and the derivation of propositions that could be falsified in later empirical work.

The synthesis followed an auditable three-step procedure. First, source traditions were selected from foundational and review literature explicitly cited in the manuscript: sensemaking (Lee & Paik, 2023; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1988, 1995), Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Ma et al., 2022), sensegiving (Day et al., 2023; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007), organizational improvisation (Macpherson et al., 2022; Moorman & Miner, 1998; Vera & Crossan, 2005), and institutional context (Ediagbonya & Tioluwani, 2023; Johns, 2006; Khanna & Palepu, 1997). Second, each tradition was coded conceptually according to its focal mechanism, level of analysis, temporal orientation, and explanatory gap. Third, complementary mechanisms were ordered into a four-stage process and checked against the Indonesian contextual literature cited in the article. This procedure made the integration traceable from source theory to stage mechanism and proposition without claiming exhaustive bibliographic coverage.

At the mechanism-integration stage, individual cognition was treated as the microfoundation of organization-level response, following Felin et al. (2015) and Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2022). Compound Signal Appraisal drew primarily on sensemaking and attention; Prospective Strategic Interpretation linked sensemaking with upper-echelon cognitive orientation; Credibility-Preserving Sensegiving drew on sensegiving and relational trust; and Legitimized Improvisational Execution drew on improvisation and organizational authorization. The six conceptual propositions summarized stage-level theoretical claims, while the eight formal hypotheses translated selected construct relationships into a later PLS-SEM specification. The propositions and hypotheses were therefore linked but not interchangeable.

The integrated framework was then contextually specified for Indonesia using five dimensions discussed in the cited literature: founder-centricity, relational governance, institutional complexity, resource constraints, and digital ecosystem integration. These dimensions were treated as candidate modifying factors that could amplify, attenuate, or reshape particular CSS mechanisms. They were not assumed a priori to be universal boundary conditions; establishing boundary conditions would require comparative empirical evidence. This distinction allowed context to remain theoretically active without converting untested contextual observations into proven scope conditions.

The model was accompanied by two future empirical pathways. A qualitative pathway proposed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with founder-managers to examine the lived sequence of appraisal, interpretation, sensegiving, and improvisational execution. A quantitative pathway translated selected constructs and eight hypotheses into a PLS-SEM model for later structural testing after appropriate construct development and validation. These pathways were research designs proposed for future empirical work; no participants were recruited, and no hypotheses were tested in the present theory-building article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The CSS Model Architecture

The central result of this integrative theoretical synthesis is the Crisis Sensemaking-to-Strategy (CSS) Model, a four-stage process framework specifying the mechanisms through which individual leader cognition translates into collective organizational strategic action in polycrisis conditions. The model proposes a Dynamic Iterative Process with Sequential Bias: stages unfold in a generally forward direction (Stages 1 → 2 → 3 → 4) by default, but each stage carries specific recursion-triggering conditions that force re-entry into a preceding stage when the quality of a stage output is insufficient to sustain forward progression. This architectural choice is grounded in Weick (1988) and Kundra and Dwivedi (2023) enacted sensemaking logic: crisis actors alternate between acting and interpreting, with the direction of movement between stages determined by the adequacy of output generated at each stage, not by a predetermined sequential schedule.

Table 1 presents the complete stage architecture with Indonesian contextual modifiers and recursion triggers.

Table 1
CSS Model Stage Architecture with Indonesian Modifiers and Recursion Triggers

Stage	Core Mechanism	Indonesian Modifier	Quality Modulator	Recursion Trigger
Stage 1 Compound Signal Appraisal	Primary + secondary appraisal of simultaneous signals from health, economic, geopolitical, and regulatory domains.	Institutional voids add a 4th signal stream; single-node appraisal in founder-centric UMKM amplifies appraisal errors	Threat-Opportunity Ambidexterity (TOA)	New compound signal invalidates the current appraisal stance
Stage 2 Prospective Strategic Interpretation	Construction of a forward-facing strategic frame: interpretive scope × temporal horizon (prospective sensemaking).	No TMT to diversify scope; the founder's interpretive capacity is the sole determinant of scope quality	Temporal Bridging (TB)	Sensegiving failure forces reinterpretation of the strategic frame
Stage 3 Credibility-Preserving Sensegiving	Network-mediated translation of strategic frame into collective organizational commitment (calibrated transparency).	Relational network as the primary sensegiving channel; pre-crisis trust capital determines sensegiving capacity	Relational Sensegiving (RS)	Insufficient organizational commitment forces return to Stage 2 reinterpretation
Stage 4 Legitimized Improvisational Execution	Concurrent formulation-execution + explicit leader legitimization of organizational improvisation.	Resourcefulness logic (creative recombination of scarce assets) replaces organizational memory logic in resource-constrained UMKM	Strategic Improvisational Fluency (SIF)	Execution consequences generate new signals, initiating a new CSS cycle from Stage 1

Note. CSS = Crisis Sensemaking-to-Strategy; UMKM = Usaha Mikro Kecil dan Menengah (Indonesian SMEs); TOA, TB, RS, SIF = four CSS cognitive orientations.

Four Cognitive Orientations: Individual-Level Antecedents

Across all four stages, the quality of processing is modulated by four cognitive orientations relatively stable, individual-level cognitive-interpretive dispositions that can be theoretically distinguished from existing constructs and operationalized through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Table 2 presents their definitions and distinctions.

Table 2
CSS Cognitive Orientations: Definitions, Closest Constructs, and Key Distinctions

Orientation	Definition	Closest Existing Construct	Key Distinction
TOA (Threat-Opportunity Ambidexterity)	Capacity to simultaneously hold genuine threat and opportunity frames for the same crisis without premature frame resolution	Dutton and Jackson (1987) and Sinnaiah et al. (2023) threat vs. opportunity framing as mutually exclusive categories	TOA posits cognitive simultaneity: both frames are maintained concurrently rather than selecting between them. Generates integrative responses rather than purely defensive or purely expansive ones
TB (Temporal Bridging)	Capacity to simultaneously access past organizational identity, present crisis demands, and future strategic aspirations in guiding crisis-period decisions	Ancona (2012) and Kalkman et al. (2025): temporal leadership (behavioral time management); long-term orientation (cultural value preference)	TB is crisis-specific and cognitive active cross-temporal integration under pressure, distinct from behavioral time management or cultural preference. Grounded in Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and Vlassopoulos (2026) projective dimension of agency
RS (Relational Sensegiving)	Capacity to translate strategic interpretations into organizational commitment by leveraging pre-existing relational trust, shared identity narratives, and stakeholder-specific knowledge.	Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) and de Metz et al. (2024) sensegiving as a content-focused communication process.	RS focuses on relational conditions and network channels that determine whether sensegiving generates commitment or resistance, particularly important in Indonesian relational governance contexts where informal channels dominate formal ones.
SIF (Strategic Improvisational Fluency)	Capacity to formulate and execute strategic responses concurrently without complete information in resource-constrained conditions, while maintaining strategic coherence and organizational legitimacy.	Moorman & Miner (1998) and Macpherson et al. (2022) organizational improvisation as team/organizational behavior.	SIF is a leader-level attribute with two Indonesian-specific features: (1) a legitimization function, the leader explicitly sanctions organizational improvisation, and (2) a resourcefulness mechanism that replaces organizational memory logic in resource-constrained UMKM.

Note. TOA = Threat-Opportunity Ambidexterity; TB = Temporal Bridging; RS = Relational Sensegiving; SIF = Strategic Improvisational Fluency.

Indonesian Contextual Modifiers: Five Mechanism Changes

A core theoretical result of this study is the identification of five specific mechanism modifications that the Indonesian organizational context introduces into the CSS Model. These are not cultural descriptions but theoretically specified changes in predicted causal relationships:

1) Founder-centricity amplifies upper-echelons effects. In Indonesian UMKM, Stage 1 and Stage 2 operate through a single cognitive node (the founder), with no TMT diversity to compensate

for individual cognitive limitations. TOA and TB are therefore not supplementary leadership qualities but primary survival capacities, with effects stronger than those UET predicts for distributed decision-making organizations.

2) Relational networks are primary sensegiving infrastructure. Stage 3 sensegiving in Indonesian organizations operates primarily through informal relational channels family, community, trade association, and platform ecosystem networks rather than formal organizational communication structures. RS therefore functions as both a quality modulator and the primary infrastructure for collective mobilization.
3) Institutional complexity amplifies Stage 1. Indonesia's overlapping central-regional regulatory jurisdictions create a fourth signal stream in compound signal appraisal: regulatory/institutional uncertainty. This increases Stage 1 complexity beyond what Western frameworks anticipate and creates specific appraisal errors, particularly confusion of institutional with economic signals not modeled in existing crisis leadership theory.
4) Resourcefulness logic modifies Stage 4. Moorman and Miner (1998) and Macpherson et al. (2022) organizational memory mechanism for improvisation assumes deep experiential repertoires. In resource-constrained Indonesian UMKM, Stage 4 improvisation operates through Stevenson (1983) and Verver and Koning (2024) resourcefulness logic: creative recombination of immediately available scarce assets generating different SIF antecedents and different scale development requirements than established improvisation research anticipates.
5) Platform ecosystems create a recursive sub-process. Indonesia's major platform ecosystems (Gojek, Tokopedia, Shopee) functioned simultaneously as crisis-response vehicles (Stage 3 sensegiving channels) and execution constraints (Stage 4). This created a recursive feedback loop between Stages 3 and 4 that is Indonesia-specific and requires explicit modeling in empirical research designs.

Discussion

Theoretical Contributions

The CSS Model's first and most fundamental theoretical contribution is the extension of sensemaking theory from its retrospective orientation into prospective crisis contexts. Weick (1995) and Kundra and Dwivedi (2023) Retrospective formulation, “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" generates predictions unsuitable for polycrisis conditions where environmental change outstrips retrospective accumulation. The CSS Model theorizes prospective sensemaking as a distinct form of meaning-construction: the generation of sufficiently plausible forward-facing interpretations to enable action before the picture stabilizes. This is grounded in Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and Vlassopoulos (2026) projective dimension of agency and constitutes a genuine theoretical extension, not a relabeling, because it requires theorizing sensemaking as anticipatory rather than retrospective a difference with direct implications for how crisis strategy emerges and how it should be studied. This extension connects sensemaking theory to the strategy process literature's account of emergent strategy Mintzberg (1987) and Verver & Koning (2024) under genuine uncertainty, building a theoretical bridge that neither tradition has previously constructed.

The second contribution is a micro-foundational extension of Upper Echelons Theory. Hambrick (2007) and Ma et al. (2022) explicitly identifies the cognitive process between observable executive characteristics and strategic outcomes as the theory's most important remaining explanatory gap. The CSS Model fills this gap by specifying four cognitive orientations (TOA, TB, RS, SIF) as the latent mechanisms that observable upper echelons characteristics proxy, and by specifying the four-stage CSS process as the mechanism through which those orientations translate into organizational strategic action. This is consistent with Felin et al. (2015) and Bridoux and Stoelhorst (2022) program for microfoundational research in strategy and organization theory, and contributes to UET by providing the level of specificity about cognitive mechanisms that the theory has called for but not yet supplied.

The third contribution, and the one most distinctive to this article, is the positioning of Indonesia as a theoretical modifier rather than an empirical context. Johns (2006) and Pratidhina and Utami (2023) distinguishes context-as-ground (the empirical setting where research occurs) from context-as-figure (the theoretical variable that changes predicted relationships). The CSS

Model treats Indonesia as context-as-figure: the five mechanism modifications identified above generate predictions that are not derivable from global baseline models. This positions the model for comparative research contrasting Indonesian founder-centric organizations against distributed TMT firms, or relational-governance contexts against formal-authority organizations, extending the model's theoretical reach beyond Indonesian boundaries. The international implications are therefore not merely that Indonesian organizations can be studied using CSS but that Indonesian organizational conditions constitute a theoretically productive extreme case for identifying mechanisms that standard Western organizational models underspecify.

The fourth contribution is architectural: the CSS Model provides an early theoretically integrated qualitative-to-quantitative research program for crisis sensemaking investigation in Indonesian organizational contexts. This dual-pathway architecture addresses the methodological gap identified across the crisis leadership literature Williams et al. (2017),Bundy et al. (2017) and Capano and Toth (2025) where methodological approaches remain fragmented by specifying how IPA-based phenomenological discovery informs construct operationalization, which informs scale development, which enables PLS-SEM structural testing.

When positioned against comparable conceptual contributions in strategic management, the CSS Model most resembles Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) and de Metz et al. (2024) study of strategic change initiation, which also used sensemaking and sensegiving as primary theoretical lenses. However, differs in addressing a compound, polycrisis context rather than a planned change initiative, in specifying a formal process model rather than a conceptual narrative, and in generating a quantitatively testable structural model rather than grounded theoretical propositions. The CSS Model also differs from Wenzel et al. (2020) and Kumari et al. (2025) crisis response typology, which categorizes response strategies but does not model the cognitive leadership process that generates them, by addressing the mechanism behind the typology rather than the typology itself.

Dual-Pathway Research Architecture: Propositions and Hypotheses

The CSS Model's empirical architecture proceeds through three levels of specificity: conceptual propositions (for theory-building articles), qualitative research domains (for IPA investigation), and formal hypotheses (for PLS-SEM testing). Table 3 presents the full proposition-to-hypothesis mapping.

Table 3

Proposition-to-Hypothesis Mapping for Dual-Method CSS Research

No.	Conceptual Proposition (Theory-Building)	IPA Research Domain (Qualitative)	Formal Hypothesis (PLS-SEM)
P1/H1	Leaders exhibiting TOA during Stage 1 generate interpretations of greater scope and longer temporal horizon in Stage 2, because TOA prevents threat-rigidity-driven attentional narrowing.	"Describe what it was like to simultaneously see threats and opportunities in the same situation"	H1: TOA → Quality of Strategic Sensemaking (QSM) [β positive, sig.; effect amplified in founder-centric vs. TMT organizations]
P2/H2	Temporal Bridging is positively associated with long-term strategic coherence in crisis decisions and with Strategic Resilience through the prevention of strategic drift.	"How did you connect the decision you were making today to where you wanted your organization to be in three years?"	H2: TB → QSM [β positive]; TB → Strategic Resilience (SR) [direct path, controlling for QSM]
P3/H3	In Indonesian organizational contexts, Stage 3 sensegiving	"Through which relationships were you most able to get people to	H3: RS → Organizational Mobilization

No.	Conceptual Proposition (Theory-Building)	IPA Research Domain (Qualitative)	Formal Hypothesis (PLS-SEM)
	effectiveness is primarily mediated by relational trust capital rather than formal authority or communication quality.	commit to what you were doing? Why those relationships?"	Commitment (OMC); REL × RS → OMC [moderation, stronger in Indonesian relational contexts]
P4/H4	SIF generates organizational commitment to improvised actions through a resourcefulness mechanism in Indonesian UMKM, requiring distinct measurement instruments.	"Tell me about a decision you had to make and implement without an established procedure. How did you get your team to follow you?"	H4: SIF → Strategic Action Quality (SAQ); RSC × SIF → SAQ [moderation; effect stronger under higher resource constraints]
P5/H5	QSM → OMC → SAQ constitutes a full mediation chain connecting CSS cognitive orientations to Strategic Resilience.	Full CSS model narrative: "Walk me through the journey from first realizing the crisis was serious to executing your response"	H5: TOA/TB → QSM → OMC → SAQ → SR [full model path; mediation chain tested via bootstrapping]
P6/H6	The CSS recursive cycle produces improving appraisal accuracy across successive crisis waves, moderated by the quality of organizational learning routines.	"How did navigating an early wave change how you approached the second pandemic, then supply chain, then economic pressure?"	H6: Post-wave QSM > Pre-wave QSM [longitudinal design; moderated by learning routine quality]
P7/H7	The platform ecosystem feedback loop between Stages 3 and 4 constitutes a CSS sub-process specific to Indonesian digital-economy contexts.	"How did your relationships with digital platforms change how you communicated with stakeholders and executed your strategy?"	H7: Platform integration moderates RS → OMC and SIF → SAQ paths in Indonesian digital-economy UMKM [between-group]
P8/H8	The full CSS model exhibits stronger predictive validity for SR in Indonesian founder-centric UMKM than in non-founder-centric organizations.	Comparative purposive sampling: founder-owner UMKM vs. professional-manager organizations	H8: CSS R^2 for SR [founder-centric] > CSS R^2 for SR [non-founder-centric]; multigroup comparison [PLS-MGA]

Note. REL = Relational Trust Capital (moderator); RSC = Resource Constraints (moderator); IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PLS-SEM = Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling; PLS-MGA = PLS Multi-Group Analysis.

Table 4 presents the measurement framework for the quantitative research strand, specifying construct types, existing scale sources, and scale development requirements.

Table 4
Quantitative Measurement Framework for CSS PLS-SEM Model

Construct	Definition	Type / Role	Scale Source / Status
TOA	Simultaneous dual threat-opportunity framing capacity	Formative / IV	Dutton & Jackson (1987) items adapted; Knott et al. (2022) ambiguity scale Scale development required for simultaneity dimension
TB	Cross-temporal integration of past identity, present demands, and future aspiration	Reflective / IV	Emirbayer & Mische (1998) and Vlassopoulos (2026) and Ancona (2012) temporal items Partial adaptation feasible
RS	Relational-network-mediated strategic interpretation translation	Reflective / IV	Maitlis & Christianson (2014) and Day et al. (2023) sensegiving items; Dirks & Ferrin (2002) trust scale Crisis-context adaptation required
SIF	Leader-level improvisational fluency under resource constraint	Reflective / IV	Moorman & Miner (1998) and Macpherson et al. (2022) adapted Scale development required for leader-level and resourcefulness dimensions
QSM	Quality of prospective strategic sensemaking: scope × temporal horizon	Formative / Mediator	Thomas & McDaniel (1990) and Zhou et al. (2022) issue interpretation items Significant adaptation required
OMC	Organizational commitment to crisis response strategy	Reflective / Mediator	Allen & Meyer (1990) and Thakur et al. (2026) organizational commitment scale Crisis-context adaptation feasible
SAQ	Strategic action quality: coherence, timing, resource alignment	Formative / Mediator	Wenzel et al. (2020) and Kumari et al. (2025) response items Partial development required
SR	Strategic resilience: operational continuity + competitive position maintenance	Reflective / DV	Duchek (2020) Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) and Yu et al. (2022) Adaptation feasible
REL	Relational trust capital: pre-crisis network density and quality	Reflective / Moderator	Social capital scales adapted Indonesian network context adaptation required
RSC	Resource constraints: strategic slack availability	Reflective / Moderator	Bourgeois (1981) and Pei (2023) adapted Indonesian UMKM calibration required

Note. IV = Independent Variable; DV = Dependent Variable; TOA, TB, RS, SIF = CSS cognitive orientations; QSM = Quality of Strategic Sensemaking; OMC = Organizational Mobilization Commitment; SAQ = Strategic Action Quality; SR = Strategic Resilience; REL = Relational Trust Capital; RSC = Resource Constraints.

Recommended Empirical Settings in Indonesia

The CSS Model is most theoretically informative when investigated in Indonesian organizational settings where its boundary conditions and Indonesian modifiers are maximally active. Three settings are recommended:

1) Tourism and hospitality UMKM. This sector experienced simultaneous pandemic demand destruction, geopolitical supply chain disruption (European tourist market collapse), and regulatory volatility (shifting health protocols), making it the closest empirical approximation of the full polycrisis context theorized in the CSS Model. Founders in this sector navigated compound signals from all four streams simultaneously health, economic, geopolitical, and regulatory providing maximum variation for Stage 1 appraisal investigation.

2) Manufacturing UMKM with import dependencies. Indonesian manufacturers dependent on imported raw materials or components experienced particularly acute geopolitical supply chain disruption interacting with pandemic logistics shutdowns and currency volatility. This setting provides maximum activation of the institutional complexity modifier and the resourcefulness-logic SIF mechanism, as founders were forced to improvise supply chain alternatives with minimal organizational slack.
3) Digital-economy-integrated service businesses. Businesses that migrated onto platform ecosystems during the polycrisis provide the optimal setting for investigating the CSS platform ecosystem sub-process (P7/H7) and the digital transformation modifier to Stage 4. Comparing pre-digital and post-digital business models within the same organization provides natural longitudinal variation for investigating the CSS recursive learning loop (P5/H5, P6/H6).

Limitations

This article carries three limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a theory-building conceptual framework paper, the CSS Model represents theoretical propositions awaiting empirical validation, not empirical findings. The mechanisms specified at each stage, the existence of the recursive triggers, and the distinctiveness of the four cognitive orientations as measurable constructs are all claims that require IPA investigation and PLS-SEM testing to validate or revise. Second, the Indonesian contextual modifiers are derived from theoretical reasoning applied to documented contextual characteristics they have not been empirically tested in CSS-specific research. Empirical investigation may reveal that some modifiers are weaker than predicted or that additional modifiers operate in specific sectors or organizational types. Third, the scale development requirements for TOA and SIF constructs for which no validated instruments currently exist represent a significant empirical prerequisite for the quantitative research strand. Researchers should not attempt PLS-SEM testing of the full structural model before these scales have been developed and validated through the MacKenzie et al. (2011) and Lambert and Newman (2023) procedure.

CONCLUSION

This article develops the Crisis Sensemaking-to-Strategy (CSS) Model as a theoretically grounded and empirically testable framework addressing the interpretation-to-action gap in crisis leadership research. The model proposes four stages (Compound Signal Appraisal, Prospective Strategic Interpretation, Credibility-Preserving Sensegiving, and Legitimized Improvisational Execution) supported by four cognitive orientations and five Indonesian contextual modifiers that shape how leaders respond to polycrisis conditions. Its scholarly contribution lies in extending sensemaking theory toward prospective crisis interpretation, specifying cognitive mechanisms within upper echelons theory, positioning Indonesia as a potential theoretical modifier, and providing an integrated research pathway from qualitative exploration to quantitative validation.

The CSS Model also offers practical implications for organizational leaders by emphasizing the importance of balancing threat and opportunity perspectives, developing relational trust before crises occur, and establishing organizational legitimacy for improvisational action. Future research should validate the proposed mechanisms through phenomenological studies, construct development, PLS-SEM testing, and cross-national comparisons. The model provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how leaders transform complex crisis signals into collective strategic action, while recognizing that its propositions require further empirical examination.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Devi Aprianty: Conceptualization, theoretical framework development, literature synthesis, methodology design, analysis and interpretation of theoretical findings, manuscript drafting, critical revision, and final approval of the manuscript.

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